

## MARTIN LUTHER'S UNDERSTANDING OF FAITH IN RELATION TO INFANT BAPTISM

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### *Abstract*

This article explores Martin Luther's understanding of faith as a means to reconcile the seeming tension between his emphasis on faith in baptism against Roman Catholicism and his de-emphasis on faith against Anabaptism. This tension is most evident in his support of infant baptism despite his belief in *sola fide*. It is proposed that Luther's predestinarian understanding of the sovereignty of God influences his perception of the role of faith in baptism, which emphasizes God's role and de-emphasizes human acts in the ceremony. Luther argues that human faith, while important for the daily application of baptism, cannot be the basis of the sacrament, and therefore, cannot be considered a prerequisite. God's command and promise alone make baptism valid, even for infants, while human faith makes it efficacious. Hence, in Luther's thinking, infant baptism is valid. After a descriptive presentation of Luther's theology, some weaknesses of his position are outlined, specifically (1) that his defense of infant baptism is mainly based on philosophical argumentation, (2) that his emphasis on the validity of the sacrament consequently constitutes an *ex opere operato* understanding, and (3) that his emphasis on the necessity of both faith and baptism for salvation (for infants and adults) contradicts his teaching of *sola fide*.

### *Introduction*

Protestants are indebted to Martin Luther, who proclaimed salvation as *sola fide*, the de facto rallying cry of the Reformation.<sup>1</sup> Luther strongly empha-

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<sup>1</sup> In contrast to medieval theology that elevated love (an inner quality) over faith (a cognitive quality), Luther assimilated love into faith, turning it into a relational experience and thereby giving it a central place in his soteriology. See Berndt Hamm, *The Early Luther: Stages in a Reformation Reorientation*, trans. Martin J. Lohrmann (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 59–84; Bernd Wannewetsch, "Luther's Moral Theology," in *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 128–29.

sized the central role of faith in the Christian life.<sup>2</sup> This faith is arguably most dramatically seen during the conversion experience but is also necessary for spiritual growth. Faith certainly is inseparable from the salvation experience.

Yet, what relationship should faith have with baptism? For many Christians, and Martin Luther, baptism is “indissolubly bound with faith.”<sup>3</sup> Should faith, then, be a prerequisite for baptism? Is the ritual validated by the presence of faith and invalidated by its absence? These questions become critical in Luther’s defense of infant baptism, particularly in the debate on whether infants can or cannot possess faith. Luther’s teaching of both *sola fide* and infant baptism, a seeming contradiction, can be baffling to many, particularly based on the common notion that infants do not possess faith. To answer these questions, it is helpful to study the progression of Luther’s theology and the theological context in which his teaching on infant baptism emerges.

#### The Progression of Luther’s Theology

Luther’s theology was not static, but instead changed and developed over his lifetime, particularly in response to the issues he was facing.<sup>4</sup> Robert Kolb observes that before 1519, Luther’s lectures and sermons rarely discussed baptism, and when they did, it was not in-depth.<sup>5</sup> After 1519, however, things began to change with his Sermon on Baptism marking “the beginning of a new emphasis in his thinking.”<sup>6</sup> It is likely that the passage of time, the natural progression of spiritual growth, and the changing theological landscape led to the transformations in Luther’s baptism theology.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the baptismal theology of an older Luther was quite different from the theology of his younger self, as David P. Scaer describes with a degree of exaggeration:

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<sup>2</sup> “Luther’s term *Glaube* covers both the belief in historical facts and the personal relationship of man to God.” H. H. Kramm, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (London: James Clarke & Co., 1947), 49.

<sup>3</sup> Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought: From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 3:64.

<sup>4</sup> Luther is described less as a systematic theologian and more as a “polemical” or “irregular” theologian, whose theological writings are in direct response to specific theological controversies. Hans J. Hillerbrand, “The Legacy of Martin Luther,” in McKim, *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, 230.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Kolb, “The Lutheran Theology of Baptism,” in *Baptism: Historical, Theological and Pastoral Perspectives*, ed. Gordon L. Heath and James D. Dvorak (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 53–54.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>7</sup> Bernhard Lohse emphasizes the continuity in the development of Luther’s theology instead of placing a boundary between the “young Luther” and the “old Luther.” Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Work*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 144.

The typical caricature is that the younger persona was the vibrant protestant whose battle cry of sola fide was his theological engine against Rome. True! The older version suffered from a sacramental clogging of the theological arteries. Luther's immunity against a latent medieval virus broke down, and a degenerative, sclerotic Catholicism surged forth. Remove the hyperbole and this is also true.<sup>8</sup>

Early in his ministry, Luther tended to emphasize the importance of faith in baptism, especially against the sacramental Catholic view. In 1520 Luther wrote *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, partially for the purpose of attacking how Catholicism had turned the sacraments into empty rituals devoid of faith. He claimed that, "It is not baptism that justifies or benefits anyone, but it is faith in that word of promise to which baptism is added. This faith justifies, and fulfills that which baptism signifies."<sup>9</sup> As late as 1522, Luther preached on the centrality of faith and baptism as merely a sign pointing to Christ.<sup>10</sup> Luther argued that human faith is necessary for baptism to be profitable, even to the point of arguing that faith without the sacrament could still be salvific.<sup>11</sup> Basing his argument on Mark 16:16, "the one who believes and is baptized will be saved," Luther claimed, "Where there is a divine promise, there everyone must stand on his own feet; his own personal faith is demanded."<sup>12</sup> He declared, "It is not the sacrament but faith in the sacrament that justifies," and then quoted Augustine, "It justifies not because it is performed but because it is believed."<sup>13</sup> The younger Luther clearly saw faith as necessary for baptism.

Several years later, a different threat—the Anabaptist movement—appeared. Luther again felt the need to publicly counter a theology he deemed false. Luther likely had very little understanding of the views of Anabaptists, and even "may never actually have seen a genuine Anabaptist face to face."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> David P. Scaer, "Luther, Baptism, and the Church Today," *CTQ* 62.4 (1998): 252.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in Abdel Ross Wentz and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 36:66.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Byung-doo Nam, "A Comparative Study of the Baptismal Understanding of Augustine, Luther, Zwingli, and Hubmaier" (Ph.D. diss., Southwest Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002), 80.

<sup>11</sup> Bryan D. Spinks, *Reformation and Modern Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From Luther to Contemporary Practices* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 6.

<sup>12</sup> Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 36:49.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther, *Lectures on Hebrews*, in Jaroslav Pelikan and Walter A. Hansen, eds., *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1968), 29:172.

<sup>14</sup> Jaroslav J. Pelikan, "Luther's Defense of Infant Baptism," in *Luther for an Ecumenical Age: Essays in Commemoration of the 450th Anniversary of the Reformation*,

Instead, he was satisfied with formulating arguments against them based on rumors and his own conjecture concerning what they believed.<sup>15</sup>

To defend infant baptism, Luther published *Concerning Rebaptism* in 1528, which was “hurriedly written, repetitious and disorganized.”<sup>16</sup> In the tract, Luther mainly attacked what he perceived to be Anabaptist theology, without providing a clear and systematic presentation concerning his own theology of baptism.<sup>17</sup> Yet, it is here that we find most of Luther’s theology of baptism, specifically in the case of infants. We can observe a significant shift in emphasis from his previous view. *Concerning Rebaptism* has a more sacramental tone, considering baptism a “bath of the soul” that recreated the sinner.<sup>18</sup> The Anabaptists believed that faith is required prior to baptism and that because infants could not have faith, then all adults who were baptized as infants had to be rebaptized.<sup>19</sup> Luther countered that it is impossible to know whether a person truly has faith or not: “Even if you baptize a person a hundred times a day, you would not at all know if he believes,” and therefore, “neither the baptizer nor the baptized can base baptism on a certain faith.”<sup>20</sup> In fact, while an adult could pretend to have faith and deceive the baptizer, an infant never could, and consequently, child baptism is “the most certain form of baptism.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, according to an older Luther, faith should not be a prerequisite for baptism.

#### The Dilemma

When comparing Luther’s arguments against Catholicism and against Anabaptism, one can immediately notice the apparent inconsistency in

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ed. Carl S. Meyer (St. Louis: Concordia, 1967), 202.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 202–203.

<sup>16</sup> Denis R. Janz, *The Westminster Handbook to Martin Luther*, The Westminster Handbooks to Christian Theology (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 12. Even Luther admits he undertook the subject “briefly and hastily.” Martin Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, in Conrad Bergendoff and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), 40:261.

<sup>17</sup> John S. Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers against Anabaptists: Luther, Melancthon and Menius and the Anabaptists of Central Germany* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 118.

<sup>18</sup> E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 448.

<sup>19</sup> Ironically, it may have been Luther’s early view on the necessity of faith for baptism that became the foundation of early Anabaptist theology. Brian C. Brewer, “Radicalizing Luther: How Balthasar Hubmaier (Mis)Read the ‘Father of the Reformation,’” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 84.1 (2010): 95–115.

<sup>20</sup> Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, 40:240–41.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 40:244.

Luther's understanding of the role of faith in baptism. Luther believed that the sacramental *ex opere operato* theology of Catholics had "turned the sacraments into the most widespread form of dependence on outward human action rather than God's grace."<sup>22</sup> The entire medieval system was an attempt to "save by other means people whose baptism had become wrecked and meaningless."<sup>23</sup> Luther lamented the lack of faith he saw in the medieval church. Against the Anabaptists, however, Luther seemed to minimize the importance of faith in favor of the validity of the sign itself. In order to defend infant baptism, Luther appears to move away from his earlier position. Against Catholicism, Luther emphasized faith over the sign, but against Anabaptists, Luther emphasized the sign over faith.

Luther's theology consequently faces a dilemma. If human faith is necessary, then infant baptism is invalid. Although Luther admitted that the question of whether infants have faith or not is indeterminable, he placed the burden of proof on the Anabaptists.<sup>24</sup> Early on, he believed that it is possible for *fides aliena*, ("alien faith") to be infused into the infant during baptism.<sup>25</sup> Later, he went even further, claiming that the validity of baptism means God Himself creates and grants faith to infants (*fides infantium*).<sup>26</sup> He declared that "in baptism, the child receives the 'strength of baptism.' This 'absorbs' the child's whole body and soul and grants him/her a real share in God's grace."<sup>27</sup> If, however, human faith is unnecessary, then his argument against Catholicism that "a sign without faith is without effect" would be invalid. While early on Luther rejected the Catholic *ex opere operato* understanding

<sup>22</sup> Kolb, "The Lutheran Theology of Baptism," 54.

<sup>23</sup> Kramm, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 56.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan D. Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 103.

<sup>25</sup> Janz, *The Westminster Handbook to Martin Luther*, 11. Initially, Luther argued that the intercession of parents or the church could bring about the faith of the infant. He later moved away from this position.

<sup>26</sup> Greg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 624. "This ought not to be misunderstood in the sense of someone who acts as a trustee or in the sense of a healing and salvation that takes place automatically; it comes from the insight that faith always comes to me through other people, who stand in on my behalf and make intercession." Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 267. "Baptism leads to a process of socialization within the Christian community that can and should contribute to the instigation of faith in individuals." Hans-Martin Barth, *The Theology of Martin Luther: A Critical Assessment* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 230.

<sup>27</sup> Eeva Martikainen, "Baptism," in *Engaging Luther: A (New) Theological Assessment*, ed. Olli-Pekka Vainio (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 106.

of baptism and emphasized faith, in his later opposition to Anabaptists he emphasized the necessity of the ceremony of baptism for salvation, seemingly taking on the same position he had previously opposed.<sup>28</sup>

This is the apparent inconsistency in Luther's understanding of faith in relation to infant baptism. Why does Luther seem to emphasize faith over sign against Catholicism, but then emphasize sign over faith against Anabaptism? Can this tension be resolved? This article attempts to answer these questions, focusing on the meaning of faith in the theology of Martin Luther.

### *Luther's Understanding of Faith*

#### A Description

Some of the apparent tension can be resolved by examining what Luther meant by "faith." In his understanding, faith is not merely a subjective rational assent that a person brings before God. A sinner cannot "gather together their crumbs of belief and offer them to God who in turn makes their baptism efficacious."<sup>29</sup> Instead, faith is a "trusting relationship with the living God" that comes from hearing His Word.<sup>30</sup> But even this trust, in and of itself, does not come from sinful human beings. Faith is created by God in the heart of the recipient. On its own, a mental acknowledgment of God is meaningless because faith needs something to stand upon. "Faith must have something to believe—something to which it may cling and upon which it may stand."<sup>31</sup> If faith is built on anything other than God, it is useless. Faith, in Luther's eyes, is God-centered, not man-centered. Faith is uncertain in the sense that humans are frail and doubting.<sup>32</sup> But it is also sure and certain when it is focused away from self and toward God and the signs that He commanded.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Russell Haitch, *From Exorcism to Ecstasy: Eight Views of Baptism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 78; D. Patrick Ramsey, "Sola Fide Compromised? Martin Luther and the Doctrine of Baptism," *Themelios* 34.2 (2009): 188.

<sup>29</sup> Mark D. Tranvik, "Luther on Baptism," *LQ* 13.1 (1990): 77.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. "Faith, for Luther, has the three ingredients of understanding, assent, and trust (*notitia, assensus, fiducia*), but it is *fiducia* or trust that is properly definitive, and its object is always a person. Assent can be assent to an abstract truth; assent to the truth of the gospel is presupposed in trust, yet there is no faith, properly speaking, without trust in a person." Victor Shepherd, *Interpreting Martin Luther: An Introduction to His Life and Thought* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 2008), 160.

<sup>31</sup> Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, eds., *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Charles Arand et al. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 460.

<sup>32</sup> Tranvik, "Luther on Baptism," 83.

<sup>33</sup> Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther*, 87.

It is evident that Luther's predestinarian theology of God's sovereignty and the absence of human free will with regard to salvation comes into play here.<sup>34</sup> Because God is sovereign, no human component, including faith, can be brought before God for salvation. It is up to God to produce faith in those whom He chooses. Human beings are expected to have faith in baptism, but this is mere "acceptance that God will grant justification and salvation through this strange ritual with water which is performed in his name."<sup>35</sup> Faith is receiving the baptism and not the making of it.<sup>36</sup> This acceptance or trust is based on God's objective divine promise, not on human ability.

From Luther's point of view, both Catholics and Anabaptists were works-oriented. Catholics turned the ceremony of baptism into a meritorious act, performing the ritual without the faith that God provides.<sup>37</sup> Because Catholics believed that the sacraments were meritorious, Luther perceived them as trying to earn their salvation. Meanwhile, because Anabaptists overemphasized faith, they turned faith itself into a work. "[They] turned faith into a highly subjective experience, without which there could be no salvation, and certainly no baptismal ceremony."<sup>38</sup> By requiring faith before baptism, Anabaptists were requiring human effort to produce the salvation

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<sup>34</sup> See Darius Jankiewicz and Joel Klimkewicz, "Predestination and Justification by Faith: Was Luther a Calvinist?," in *Here We Stand: Luther, the Reformation, and Seventh-day Adventism*, ed. Michael W. Campbell and Nikolaus Satelmajer (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2017), 42–56; John C. Peckham, "An Investigation of Luther's View of the Bondage of the Will with Implications for Soteriology and Theodicy," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 18.2 (2007): 274–304; Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 382–384. In contrast, Harry J. McSorley argues that although Luther used deterministic language, it was unintentional. Harry J. McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong? An Ecumenical-Theological Study of Luther's Major Work, The Bondage of the Will* (New York: Newman Press, 1969), 256–260. "When Luther speaks of predestination, we must not read back into him a rigidly deterministic understanding with a twofold, symmetrical decree of reprobation and election. Luther does not have nearly so elaborate a scheme." Shepherd, *Interpreting Martin Luther*, 115. Markus Wriedt describes Luther as "almost [falling] prey to determinism, only on the sidelines conceding the freedom of the human's choice with regard to those things which are below him." Markus Wriedt, "Luther's Theology," in McKim, *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther*, 111.

<sup>35</sup> Spinks, *Reformation and Modern Rituals*, 6.

<sup>36</sup> Haitch, *From Exorcism to Ecstasy*, 84.

<sup>37</sup> I find it unclear how Luther was able to conclude that there was an absence of objective faith in Catholic sacramentalism. What he may actually be addressing is a lack of subjective, experiential, and observable faith in those who participated in the sacraments.

<sup>38</sup> Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers against Anabaptists*, 117.



experienced in baptism. In Luther's understanding, faith has everything to do with God, and nothing to do with man. He saw both the Catholic and Anabaptist positions as shifting the focus of faith away from God toward human beings.

#### Faith, Justification, and Baptism

As mentioned above, a major emphasis of Luther's theology of faith is that it is the work of God and not the work of man. This carries over into his theology of baptism and justification. Human beings cannot contribute anything to their salvation. In justification, faith is completely passive.<sup>39</sup> Roger E. Olson dubs free-gift salvation as the "heart and essence of Luther's theological contribution."<sup>40</sup> And because Anabaptists required faith prior to baptism, Luther considered it justification by works.<sup>41</sup>

In Luther's own view, however, the sign itself carries out justification, a reality which he paradoxically did not consider works-oriented. The sign of baptism saves, not in and of itself, but because of the presence and command of God: "Faith clings to the water and believes it to be baptism, in which there is sheer salvation and life; not through the water ... but through its incorporation with God's word and ordinance and the joining of his name to it."<sup>42</sup> Baptism, therefore, is life-giving. One who is baptized experiences forgiveness, which is the removal of "the guilt of original sin but not its substance."<sup>43</sup> This aligns with his belief in *simul justus et peccator*. Baptism removes guilt and the sinner is declared righteous, but the substance of sin remains. Hence Luther's emphasis on continuous conversion through his depiction of the Christian life as "a daily baptism, begun once and continuing ever after."<sup>44</sup>

Luther, to an extent, equated baptism with salvation: "Being in baptism is equivalent to being in Christ."<sup>45</sup> In Scripture, God used signs (e.g., a dove and

<sup>39</sup> Hamm, *The Early Luther*, 242–47; Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 193.

<sup>40</sup> Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 380.

<sup>41</sup> Gonzáles, *A History of Christian Thought*, 3:64–65.

<sup>42</sup> Luther, *Large Catechism*, 460.

<sup>43</sup> Gordon A. Jensen, "The Sacrament of Baptism," *LQ* 29.3 (2015): 267. Luther differed with the Catholic view that baptism merely removed original sin and that the believer needed to produce more works (i.e., participate in sacraments) in order to be more justified. Ramsey, "Sola Fide Compromised?," 181. For Luther, baptism is a one-time act, a death to the old person and a resurrection to the new life. A person who is baptized is already saved; there is no progressive justification. Tranvik, "Luther on Baptism," 79.

<sup>44</sup> Luther, *Large Catechism*, 465.

<sup>45</sup> Scaer, "Luther, Baptism, and the Church Today," 261.



tongues of fire) to bestow his presence, and therefore, "He can certainly come through the use of water when He uses it in connection with His Word."<sup>46</sup> For Luther, "baptism is not a mere sign that points to something else, an allegory, but is the real thing: justification itself."<sup>47</sup> Thus, while Luther places theological distinctions between justification by faith and justification through baptism, practically speaking, there is no distinction. In the reality of human experience, they are one and the same, "so that the person who says 'I am baptized' (*baptizatus sum*) is at the same time saying 'I am righteous' (*iustus sum*)."<sup>48</sup>

Samuel Byung-doo Nam makes the significant observation that there is some tension between Luther's understanding of justification by faith alone, which is an inner experience, and baptism as the locus of justification, where forgiveness and salvation takes place: "Only by faith, not by works or any external form of efforts, does one receive God's justification. Luther's baptismal theology, however, indicates that baptism confines the concept of justification to its external form . . . His emphasis on the locus (external sign) inevitably diminishes the role of faith both in justification and in baptism."<sup>49</sup> Unlike the Anabaptists, who believed that justification by faith was an experience that occurred prior to baptism, Luther believed that it took place during the ceremony itself. Alister E. McGrath, however, points out that "in a paradoxical way, infant baptism is totally consistent with the doctrine of justification by faith [Luther's view], because it emphasizes that faith is not something we can achieve, but something which is given to us graciously."<sup>50</sup>

#### Should Faith Be Required for Baptism?

What relationship does faith have with baptism? Against Catholicism, Luther believed that faith is necessary because the sign without faith is dead. Luther observed that the ritualized ceremonies of Catholicism were dry and empty, making no practical difference in the lives of believers. Faith was required because a baptism that was disconnected from faith had no benefit. "A sacrament can be said to 'depend' on faith only in the sense that a promise has no effect apart from belief."<sup>51</sup> In this sense, faith is required for baptism.

<sup>46</sup> Robert Kolb, "What Benefit Does the Soul Receive from a Handful of Water?: Luther's Preaching on Baptism, 1528-1539," *Concordia Journal* 25.4 (1999): 351.

<sup>47</sup> Timothy J. Wengert, *Martin Luther's Catechisms: Forming the Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 113.

<sup>48</sup> David W. Lotz, "The Sacrament of Salvation: Luther on Baptism and Justification," *Trinity Seminary Review* 6.1 (1984): 8.

<sup>49</sup> Nam, "Baptismal Understanding of Augustine, Luther, Zwingli, and Hubmaier," 93.

<sup>50</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 174.

<sup>51</sup> Tranvik, "Luther on Baptism," 78.

Against the Anabaptists, however, Luther protested the overemphasis on faith, which they required prior to baptism. They even claimed that a person's faith justified them before the water ceremony. Yet, how can you require human beings to produce something before baptism that only God can give as he wills?<sup>52</sup> Subjective human faith is inherently weak and "fickle and transient compared to the Word of God."<sup>53</sup> It is "subject to the vagaries of human moods and emotions."<sup>54</sup> Faith, therefore, could not become the basis for baptism. In contrast, faith "does not make the baptism, but rather receives the baptism, no matter whether the person being baptized believes or not."<sup>55</sup> As mentioned above, Luther believed that we cannot know if a person has faith: "Have they now become gods so that they can discern the hearts of men and know whether or not they believe?"<sup>56</sup> Luther interpreted the "he who believes" of Mark 16:16 as a need for the convert to recognize the necessity of faith in the Christian life, and not as a requirement demanded by the baptizer prior to baptism.<sup>57</sup> Faith is necessary for the individual, but its presence cannot be judged by others, and therefore, it is wrong to make it a prerequisite for baptism. In this sense, faith could not be required for baptism.

Evidently, in Luther's understanding, he was providing a balanced understanding of faith, attempting to avoid overemphasizing or underemphasizing its importance. Jonathan Trigg observes a double principle in Luther's understanding of the relationship between faith and baptism: "While it is abundantly clear that the treasure of baptism has to be received, grasped and held fast in faith, ... the worth of the treasure itself does not depend on faith."<sup>58</sup> Luther was cautious not to place too much importance on faith: "There is quite a difference between having faith, on the one hand, and depending on one's faith and making baptism depend on faith, on the other."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> It is unclear where Luther chronologically placed God's giving of faith. It seems that, according to Luther's logic, faith is given at the moment of baptism, at the same moment when justification occurs.

<sup>53</sup> Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers against Anabaptists*, 117.

<sup>54</sup> Tranvik, "Luther on Baptism," 84.

<sup>55</sup> Martin Luther, Ten Sermons on the Catechism, in John W. Doberstein and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1959), 51:186.

<sup>56</sup> Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, 40:239.

<sup>57</sup> Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther*, 88.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>59</sup> Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, 40:252.

## Validity and Efficacy

One possible way to solve the tension in Luther's understanding of faith is by distinguishing the validity of baptism from its efficacy. Baptism is valid apart from faith—or lack thereof—because God has commanded the practice to be performed: “We do not put the main emphasis on whether the baptized believes or not, for in the latter case baptism does not become invalid. Everything depends upon the Word and commandment of God.... When the Word accompanies the water, baptism is valid, even though faith is lacking.”<sup>60</sup> If a Christian was sincerely baptized but fell away from God, or even if someone was baptized with ill-intent, that baptism would still be valid: “If a thing is in itself correct you do not have to repeat it even though it was not correctly received.”<sup>61</sup> Baptism consequently never loses its validity. In the case of infants, even if they did not have faith, their baptism is still valid. For Luther, the main issue is not whether they have faith. Instead, the main question is, “Did God command it?”<sup>62</sup> Because God commanded baptism, it is valid, even for infants. The ceremony is enough for salvation.

However, without faith, baptism is not efficacious. God's command makes baptism valid, but faith produces the fruits. Baptism without faith “is not of benefit to the baptized.”<sup>63</sup> A baptism partnered with belief is of value, but without belief, the opposite is true.<sup>64</sup> Baptism is valid because it is God's act, but faith is required “for enjoying the benefits of the promise.”<sup>65</sup> Nam comments that, for Luther, although baptism's validity “does not depend on faith, its efficacy does depend on faith. Faith, while not making baptism or guaranteeing its validity, effects baptism. Without faith, one cannot receive

<sup>60</sup> Luther, *Large Catechism*, 463. H. H. Kramm sees Luther's teaching on absolution as a prime example of the validity of sacraments (even though he accepts that absolution is not a sacrament) based on God's command apart from faith. Kramm, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, 57–58.

<sup>61</sup> Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, 40:246.

<sup>62</sup> “I want to be baptized because it is God's command that I should be, and on the strength of this command I dare to be baptized. In time my faith may become what it may.” Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, 40:253. Even if the first baptism is without faith, “the Word of God is greater and more important than faith, since faith builds and is founded on the Word of God rather than God's Word on faith.” For Luther, human faith is changeable and unstable, while God's word is immutable. Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, 40:260.

<sup>63</sup> Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, 40:252.

<sup>64</sup> However, belief does not affect validity, for “baptism in itself is not therefore wrong or uncertain, is not a matter of venture, but is as sure as are the Word and command of God.” Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, 40:253.

<sup>65</sup> Kolb, “The Lutheran Theology of Baptism,” 57.

the benefits of baptism.”<sup>66</sup> The fruits of baptism are seen in the new Christian life: “the longer we live the more gentle, patient, and meek we become, and the more we break away from greed, hatred, envy, and pride.”<sup>67</sup> Thus “where faith is present with its fruits, there baptism is no empty symbol, but the effect accompanies it; but where faith is lacking, it remains a mere unfruitful sign.”<sup>68</sup>

An infant could, therefore, be baptized with or without producing faith (since we cannot be certain), and its effectuality could later follow. They can be baptized with the assumption that their own faith in the future will make baptism efficacious. This baptism is, in a sense, based on potential or future faith.<sup>69</sup> Infant baptism remains valid. But if it can be proven that they do not have faith—and Luther argues that they do—then their baptism is not efficacious. They may be considered saved, but they do not yet produce the fruits of baptism. Moreover, Luther argues that in baptism infants not only receive faith but also “God’s righteousness and holiness.”<sup>70</sup> In baptism, infants are saved and are holy, even without the fruits of salvation.

In the discussion of the role of faith in the validity and efficacy of baptism, it appears that Luther is, in fact, describing two distinguishable aspects of faith. The first is the faith that God creates in those whom He has chosen, which can be given to both adults and infants.<sup>71</sup> It is to this

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<sup>66</sup> He also observes that “Augustine and Luther have basically the same theological understanding of the validity and efficacy of baptism but dealt with different historical contexts.” Nam, “Baptismal Understanding of Augustine, Luther, Zwingli, and Hubmaier,” 88.

<sup>67</sup> Luther, *Large Catechism*, 465.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. Paradoxically, Luther also states that if someone who had not been baptized but “did not know it and firmly believed that he had been rightly baptized,” that person’s faith “would be sufficient for him. For before God he has what he believes.” The believer’s faith would consequently be imperiled by any rebaptism. Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, 40:260. Apparently, Luther is arguing for the validity of a baptism based on the individual’s belief that it rightly occurred, even if it did not. Though he elsewhere argues that the validity of baptism does not depend on faith, in this particular situation it appears that the opposite is true. One should also keep in mind that the end goal of Luther’s statement is to prove that rebaptism is unnecessary. He argues that if God recognizes the validity of one who is uncertain that they were rightly baptized, how much more those who are sure they were properly baptized. Rebaptism, then, is unnecessary.

<sup>69</sup> The younger Luther actually took issue with Calvin’s position of baptizing children on the basis of future faith and claims that “it would be better not to baptize any children anywhere at all than to baptize them without faith.” Luther, *The Adoration of the Sacrament*, 36:300–301. Yet here he takes a similar position.

<sup>70</sup> Martikainen, “Baptism,” 104–5.

<sup>71</sup> This is related to Luther’s breakthrough discovery that *iustitia dei* is not as an attribute belonging to God but is a gift that comes from God. See Alister E.

aspect that Luther appeals for the validity of baptism, regardless of how the believer thinks or feels toward God. The second aspect is the human response of trust, which although still originated from God, also comes from the human heart.<sup>72</sup> This aspect brings about the efficacy of baptism, and it is this aspect of faith Luther observes lacking in Catholicism. It may be that Luther perceived Anabaptists as requiring the second aspect of faith, which could not be the basis (validity) of baptism.<sup>73</sup>

It is also possible that Luther makes a distinction between the faith of adults and infants, providing different requirements for the baptism of each.<sup>74</sup> In the case of infants, because it is unclear whether they have the capacity to believe and receive faith of their own volition, God provides faith for them. Though they may not have their own faith to make their baptism effective, they are still justified by the ceremony itself. In the case of adults, a personal faith response is needed for effective baptism.<sup>75</sup>

#### Infant Faith

Can infants have faith? Luther believed in the possibility of *fides infantium* “infant faith” in relation to *fides aliena* “alien faith” as the basis of infant

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McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross: Martin Luther's Theological Breakthrough*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 153–161; idem, *Iustitia Dei*, 190–97; and idem, *Reformation Thought*, 119–121.

<sup>72</sup> This response, however, is merely “the ‘aha’ moment in which an elected believer *recognized* that which had *already been accomplished* on his or her behalf.” Darius W. Jankiewicz, “Martin Luther and *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus* (‘Outside of the Church There Is No Salvation’): Did Luther Really Abandon Cyprian?,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 28.2 (2017): 93 (emphasis in text). For Luther, “the whole procedure in justification is passive.” Martin Luther, “Commentary on Psalm 51,” in Jaroslav Pelikan, ed., *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955), 12:368.

<sup>73</sup> In studying Luther's concept of faith, one must be careful not to confuse Luther's usage of these two aspects of faith.

<sup>74</sup> Ramsey, “Sola Fide Compromised?,” 191.

<sup>75</sup> The question could be asked: Does the efficacy in the case of adults include justification? In other words, is it possible that they are properly baptized (validity), but because they lack faith they are not justified? David Lotz implies that this is the case. He states that, even without faith, baptism “still *conveys* all that it contains: life and salvation.” Yet, without faith it is not efficacious: “It truly works salvation, but not *my* salvation” (Lotz, “The Sacrament of Salvation”, 9, emphasis supplied). This does not seem possible in Luther's view, due to his emphasis on the validity of the ceremony and his equation of justification with the ceremony itself. If a person is justified by virtue of their being baptized, no personal faith is necessary to affect their justification. Admittedly, Luther's use of validity and efficacy leave room for interpretation. For example, James Good proposes that Luther had an “objective-subjective” view of the efficacy of the sacraments. James I. Good, *The Reformed Reformation* (Philadelphia: Heidelberg Press, 1916), 117.

baptism.<sup>76</sup> At one point (1521), Luther believed that infants could be baptized on the grounds of the faith of other people, such as parents or the church: “Infants are aided by the faith of others, namely, those who bring them for baptism.”<sup>77</sup> But then he also stressed a personal faith necessary for salvation (1522). Thus, “Either infants have faith before baptism, or faith is infused in baptism itself.”<sup>78</sup> Later he gave more emphasis to God’s ability to give faith even to infants (the first aspect of faith).

Luther argued that we cannot understand how God gives faith to infants because this is God’s work and prerogative. Luther placed the burden of proof on Anabaptists, demanding that they prove that infants *cannot* have faith, while citing biblical references indicating that they *might* have faith (e.g., John the Baptist in the womb, Jesus welcoming children).<sup>79</sup>

Luther also appealed to church tradition to defend infant baptism, arguing that it was practiced by the church for centuries, and that “to say that infant baptism is wrong would be to say that there has been no true baptism—thus, no true church—for well over a thousand years.”<sup>80</sup> In the end, Luther admitted that there is no absolute scriptural certainty as to whether infants have faith or not.<sup>81</sup> I believe here he is referring to the second aspect of faith.

Even with the debatable scriptural basis and limited historical evidence for infant baptism, for Luther this is not a problem because baptism is divinely commanded and God provides the faith (the first aspect) necessary to make infant baptism valid: “Whether God imparts faith as a gift to infants or whether faith arises later in life, it is best to obey the clear command to baptize.”<sup>82</sup> Ultimately, the main foundation of Luther’s belief in infant faith and infant baptism is God’s divine command.

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<sup>76</sup> Nam, “Baptismal Understanding of Augustine, Luther, Zwingli, and Hubmaier,” 116.

<sup>77</sup> Luther, *Babylonian Captivity*, 36:73.

<sup>78</sup> Janz, *The Westminster Handbook to Martin Luther*, 11.

<sup>79</sup> Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, 40:242.

<sup>80</sup> Allison, *Historical Theology*, 624. For an examination of all of Luther’s arguments defending infant baptism, which is beyond the scope of this article, see Pelikan, “Luther’s Defense.” To study how predestination is compatible with infant baptism, see Robert R. Booth, *Children of the Promise: The Biblical Case for Infant Baptism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995); and Sinclair B. Ferguson, “Infant Baptism View,” in *Baptism: Three Views*, ed. David F. Wright (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 77–138.

<sup>81</sup> Luther, *Concerning Rebaptism*, 40:254.

<sup>82</sup> Haitch, *From Exorcism to Ecstasy*, 78.

*A Critique of Luther's View*

Thus far, I have attempted to fairly and accurately present Luther's understanding of faith, which, to a degree, is systematic and logically consistent. It can be difficult to understand how Luther combats Anabaptists by downplaying the need for faith prior to baptism, but a deeper examination of Luther's understanding of faith shows some coherence, especially when seen through his theology of God's sovereignty. Such an attempt is born out of a desire to give Luther the benefit of the doubt, and not immediately assume discrepancies in his thinking. However, an attempt to harmonize apparent inconsistencies can only go so far without glossing over actual contradictions. Luther's view is certainly not without its flaws. For example, if faith, which is a trusting relationship, comes from God, what role do humans play? Who is doing the trusting and relating? It seems that this turns human beings into automatons that are incapable of relationships.<sup>83</sup> Three major weaknesses that stand out are discussed below.

## A Defense Based on Philosophical Argumentation

One glaring weakness of Luther's defense is that most of his arguments are not based on scripture. Victor Shepherd surmises that for Luther to give up on infant baptism meant endorsing "everything the radical Reformation endorsed."<sup>84</sup> Thus, Luther's initial reaction was to immediately construct defensive arguments for infant baptism without first thoroughly studying the biblical teaching on the subject. He assumed biblical support for infant baptism and searched for arguments to prove it. His biblical references look more like proof texts than a thorough biblical treatise.<sup>85</sup> This was Menno

<sup>83</sup> Trigg admits that there is a "certain looseness of thought on Luther's part about faith." Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther*, 86–87. In some instances, Luther insists that each individual is responsible for their own faith; in others he appeals to *fides aliena*. Trigg argues that this imprecision is acceptable because faith is not the basis of baptism. Instead, it is based on the surety of God's divine command.

<sup>84</sup> Shepherd, *Interpreting Martin Luther*, 146.

<sup>85</sup> Pelikan's comments on Luther's use of scripture for this defense are enlightening: "This presentation of Biblical evidence is an interesting case study of 'commentary and controversy' in Luther's use of Scripture. It is also a significant index to his affinities with the exegetical, dogmatic, and legal tradition of the Middle Ages. ... Artur Landgraf [*Dogmengeschichte der Frühscholastik*, Part III, *Die lehre von den Sakramenten* (Regensburg: Gregorius Verlag, 1954), I, 296–331] has shown how, on the basis of these arguments, the Biblical evidence had been exploited with increasing care and profundity by early scholasticism and had been carried as far as it could be, until the speculative doctrine of the infusion of faith provided exegetes with a method for gathering additional proof texts. Despite his hostility both to canon law and to speculation, Luther seems in fact to have been drawing on this material in *Von der Widdertauffe* [*Concerning Rebaptism*]." Pelikan, "Luther's Defense," 204.



Simons' problem with Luther's defense of infant baptism.<sup>86</sup> If Luther believed in *Sola Scriptura*, Menno argued, then he should produce better biblical support.<sup>87</sup> Paul H. Zietlow comments that Luther's arguments are "based more on inference than on direct Biblical proof."<sup>88</sup> It appears that Luther's support for infant baptism was largely influenced by tradition and the writings of Augustine, even though he publicly affirmed *sola Scriptura*.<sup>89</sup>

While almost no Scripture can be used to defend infant baptism, there are several that require faith before baptism. The common practice of the apostolic church was to baptize converts *after* they believed (e.g., Acts 8:12, 36–37; 16:30–34; 18:8).<sup>90</sup> Nowhere in these passages is there an indication that faith was given by God during baptism. Moreover, none of the Christian usages of the Greek πιστευω "I believe" indicates that infants can have this kind of faith.<sup>91</sup>

#### Still *Ex Opere Operato*

Another observed weakness is that Luther's theology of infant baptism is still, in a sense, *ex opere operato*. Although he bases the validity of the ceremony on divine command instead of the sign itself, the practical outcomes are still very close to Roman Catholicism's sacramental view. Participation in the sign, apart from the faith of the baptized or baptizer, produces salvation. Baptism

<sup>86</sup> Menno challenged Luther: "If *sola Scriptura* is the way to reform the church and its theology—then quote a text!" Egil Grislis, "Martin Luther and Menno Simons on Infant Baptism," *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 12 (1994): 12.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 12–13.

<sup>88</sup> Paul H. Zietlow, "Martin Luther's Arguments for Infant Baptism," *Concordia Journal* 20.2 (1994): 151.

<sup>89</sup> "No book except the Bible and St. Augustine has come to my attention from which I have learned more about God, Christ, man and all things." Luther, "Preface to the Complete Edition of a German Theology," in Harold J. Grimm and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957), 31:75. See Fernando Canale, "Sola Scriptura and Hermeneutics: Toward a Critical Assessment of the Methodological Ground of the Protestant Reformation," *AUSS* 50.2 (2012): 182–84.

<sup>90</sup> Luther has argued that the baptizing of households in Acts indicates that infants were included. However, this is an argument based on silence, and there is no clear record of infant baptism in Scripture. See "Age of Baptism" in Herbert Kiesler, "The Ordinances: Baptism, Foot Washing, and Lord's Supper," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 587.

<sup>91</sup> *TDNT* 6:208–215. The usages indicate a cognitive acceptance of the gospel message, an acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord, and a personal relationship with Christ, none of which infants are capable of.

still “clearly has an objective reality apart from faith.”<sup>92</sup> Because of the divine command, the act, in and of itself, brings about salvation. This is the very definition of *ex opere operato*, the consequences of which Nam observes:

Faith becomes subordinate to and dependent on *locus corporalis*, where God administers or conveys his grace. The external sign limits the inner meaning of justification. That which the sign signifies becomes subordinate to the sign. Faith is attached to the external means of grace to be activated for salvation, since baptism, the visible means of grace, is the only locus that God chooses and uses for his ministry to humanity. Whenever one overly emphasizes the objective efficacy in a sacrament, a new form of *ex opere operato* inevitably arises.<sup>93</sup>

Arthur Carl Piepkorn identifies two Lutheran sacramental principles that could be problematic “when too literally applied to baptism. The first principle is that the sacraments create faith .... The second ... is the principle that for their fruitful use sacraments require faith.”<sup>94</sup> For the first, he admits that there is no scriptural basis to believe that baptism creates faith, especially in the case of infants. For the second, he acknowledges that Lutherans identify a “saving value” to baptism even if faith is not evident in infants. Piepkorn concludes that “part of the difficulty arises from a too rigid synonymy of conversion, rebirth, creation of faith, and incorporation into the church in the conventional Lutheran theological vocabulary.”<sup>95</sup> Yet, this is exactly the problem with Luther’s theology. I do not see any other way to interpret Luther’s view of baptism in contrast to both Catholicism and Anabaptism than to understand it literally. I acknowledge the possibility that there is more nuance to Luther’s understanding, but from his own writings, I see exactly the weaknesses Piepkorn outlines. Luther does argue that God creates faith in baptism (the basis of validity), and that faith is only later required for “fruitful use” (efficacy).<sup>96</sup> Because salvation is so tightly wound with baptism, the elements of an *ex opere operato* understanding of baptism are present.

<sup>92</sup> Scaer, “Luther, Baptism, and the Church Today,” 254.

<sup>93</sup> Nam, “Baptismal Understanding of Augustine, Luther, Zwingli, and Hubmaier,” 93–94.

<sup>94</sup> Arthur Carl Piepkorn, “The Lutheran Understanding of Baptism: A Systematic Summary,” in *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue II*, ed. Paul C. Empie and T. Austin Murphy (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975), 46.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>96</sup> One could aver that, because Luther required faith for the efficacy of baptism, he did not adhere to an *ex opere operato* sacramentalism. However, as I have argued above, Luther seems to make a distinction between adult and infant baptism. Infants are justified in their baptism apart from personal faith, while for adults, faith is required to effect baptism. Yet, this efficacy cannot mean justification, which occurs in the ceremony itself (see footnote 75). In both adults and infants, then, this constitutes an *ex opere operato* sacramentalism.

### Justified by Faith and Baptism

Lastly, and in connection to still being *ex opere operato*, the effect of Luther's theology of baptism is that justification comes through faith *and* baptism. Because the justification occurs *in* the sign, then one could not be saved without it. Therefore, the sign is necessary for salvation. "Luther's qualifications notwithstanding, his view inevitably turns baptism into a work.... Since forgiveness is ordinarily only given in baptism, when an adult hears and believes the gospel he must remain in an unjustified state until he obeys the command to be baptized."<sup>97</sup> If this is true, then without baptism one cannot be saved, and salvation is no longer *sola fide*. Another consequence is that because it is the church that administers the sign, Luther maintains the *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* ("no salvation outside the church") belief of the medieval church.<sup>98</sup>

To be fair to Luther, his understanding of *sola fide* refers to God creating faith in human beings, and not human faith of itself. But even with this concept of faith, baptism is still necessary to unite God and the sinner in salvation. In the case of infants, because it is unclear whether they have a trusting faith of their own, essentially, they are justified by baptism alone.

### Conclusion

This essay has thus far attempted to make sense of how Luther could believe in both *sola fide* and infant baptism, particularly as he related to Catholicism and Anabaptism. The apparent inconsistency in his theology can be

<sup>97</sup> Ramsey, "Sola Fide Compromised?," 190.

<sup>98</sup> See Jankiewicz, "Martin Luther and *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*," 87–91. Luther clearly believed that "outside this Christian Church there is no salvation or forgiveness of sins, but everlasting death and damnation." Martin Luther, *Confession concerning Christ's Supper*, in Robert H. Fischer and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961), 37:368. However, there is a nuance to his definition of "church." Luther believed there were markers of the true visible church (Jankiewicz, "Martin Luther and *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*," 84–87). Yet, he also used "church" to mean universal Christianity: "The church is not wood and stone, but the assembly of people who believe in Christ. ... They certainly have Christ in their midst, for outside the Christian church there is no truth, no Christ, no salvation." Martin Luther, "The Gospel for the Early Christmas Service," in Hans J. Hillerbrand and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 52:39–40; see also Martin Luther, *Confession concerning Christ's Supper*, in Fischer and Lehmann, *Luther's Works*, 37:367; Stephen M. Taylor, "Sharing within the Community of Saints: A Study of Luther's Ecclesiology," *ABQ* 14.3 (1995): 260–269; Bayer, *Luther's Theology*, 278–281. If Luther's understanding of "church" is used in the universal sense (i.e., anyone who believes in Christ), then his view of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* could be biblically supported, for without Christ a person cannot be a member of the universal church, and without Christ there is indeed no salvation. However, if "church" is taken to mean ecclesiastical institutions, the *extra ecclesiam* view becomes problematic.

reconciled in terms of his deterministic understanding of the sovereignty of God. Luther's theology of infant baptism is best understood in relation to his understanding of faith as a gift from God and not as something that human beings can offer.

There are many nuances to Luther's theology. He believed in the validity of infant baptism based on divine initiative and command (divine sovereignty), as well as the necessity of faith for baptism's efficacy. Faith should not be required prior to baptism, but it should be present for continuous growth. Factoring these nuances into the equation reveals a degree of logical internal consistency in Luther's theology of baptism.

As a whole, however, Luther's theology of infant baptism fails to pass the test of Scripture and reason. His assumption that infant baptism is correct leads him to defend it using weak arguments, which naturally lead to *ex opere operato* baptism, thereby making justification itself to be based on divinely imparted faith *and* baptism.

Despite its failings, it is possible to respect how systematic Luther's theology is while disagreeing with its presuppositions and conclusions. Despite its flaws, overall, it is an internally coherent system. However, it does not correspond to what Scripture teaches. Whether one agrees with his views or not, there is much to appreciate in the way Luther attempts to navigate his own position on faith, justification, and baptism.