

# CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY



Volume 61:Numbers 1-2

January-April 1997

## *Table of Contents*

---

---

### **The Porvoo Common Statement**

Prepared by the Fourth Plenary Meeting  
held at Järvenpää, Finland, 9-13 October 1992 . . . . 3

### **The Porvoo Declaration in Confessional Perspective**

The Departments of Systematic Theology:  
Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne,  
Indiana, and Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis,  
Missouri . . . . . 35

### **The Holy Spirit in the Augsburg Confession: A Reformed Perspective**

Richard A. Muller . . . . . 53

### **A Lutheran Professor Trained at Westminster Looks for Similarities and Dissimilarities**

Richard E. Muller . . . . . 79

### ***Cum Patre et Filio Adoratur*: The Holy Spirit Understood Christologically**

David P. Scaer . . . . . 93

<b>Saint Polycarp of Smyrna: Johannine or Pauline Figure?</b>	
D. Richard Stuckwisch . . . . .	113
<b>Books Received</b> . . . . .	126
<b>Book Reviews</b> . . . . .	127
<i>Emanuel Hirsch und Paul Tillich: Theologie und Politik in einer     Zeit der Krise.</i> By A. James Reimer . . . . .	Lowell C. Green
<i>The Descent of God: Divine Suffering in History and     Theology.</i> By Joseph M. Hallman . . . . .	Jeffery A. Oschwald
<i>Adolf Schlatter: A Biography of Germany's Premier Biblical     Theologian.</i> By Werner Neuer . . . . .	William C. Weinrich
<i>Martin Luther in Two Centuries: The Sixteenth and the     Twentieth.</i> By Helmar Junghans . . . . .	Paul J. Grime
<i>A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada.</i> By Mark A. Noll . . . . .	Robert E. Smith
<i>True Faith in the True God: An Introduction to Luther's     Life and Thought.</i> By Hans Schwarz . . . . .	Martin Noland
<i>Baptized into God's Family: The Doctrine of Infant Baptism     for Today.</i> By A. Andrew Das . . . . .	James W. Kalthoff
<i>Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary.</i> By Peter Stuhlmacher . . . . .	Jonathan F. Grothe
<i>Genesis 1-11: From Eden to Babel.</i> By Donald Gowan . . . . .	Dean O. Wenthe
<i>I Believe but I Have Questions.</i> By Jane L. Fryar . . . . .	James E. Butler
<i>Christian Moral Judgment.</i> By J. Philip Wogaman . . . . .	Terrence Reynolds
<i>Giving Goliath His Due: New Archaeological Light on the     Philistines.</i> By Neal Bierling . . . . .	Thomas H. Trapp
<i>Windows on the World of Jesus: Time Travel to Ancient Judea.</i> By Bruce Malina . . . . .	Charles A. Gieschen
<i>Islam: An Introduction for Christians.</i> Edited by Paul Martinson; Leader's Guide by Irene Getz . . . . .	Henry Rowold
<i>Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology.</i> By Rolf Rendtorff . . . . .	Henry Rowold
<b>Indices to Volume 60 (1996)</b>	
Index of Authors and Editors . . . . .	153
Index of Titles . . . . .	154
Index of Book Reviews . . . . .	156

# The Holy Spirit in the Augsburg Confession: A Reformed Definition

Richard A. Muller

Following an introductory perspective on the relationship between the Augsburg Confession, this study deals first with points of ecumenical agreement on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. A second section considers confessional differences on the Spirit and the means of grace. The final portion is a systematic perspective on divergence and debate over the work of the Spirit.

## Introduction: The Augsburg Confession and the Reformed – A Perspective

Given that a reasonably thoughtful perusal of the Augsburg Confession ought to yield, among other results, the impression that the person and work of the Holy Spirit was a prominent concern of confessional Lutheranism, reflection on “the Holy Spirit in the Augsburg Confession,” is easily justified. The subject is, moreover, highly significant inasmuch as the confessional churches of the present day are sometimes accused by various kinds of American evangelicals of lacking a strong sense of the present work of the Spirit—and inasmuch as those who press this point often seem to be unaware of precisely what the great tradition of the church and, one could add, Scripture itself, has identified as the *primary* work of the Spirit. Lutherans—and Protestants generally—in any era have much to learn on this subject from their foundational confessions.

On initial reflection, however, one might question the significance of a “Reformed” or “Calvinist” perspective on the contents and implications of the Augsburg Confession. Reformed or Calvinist theology has not typically been regarded as instructive in Lutheran circles. The title of one of the essays in *Our Great Heritage*, issued in 1991 by the publishing house of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod, is “Calvinism: its Essence and its Menacing Impact upon American Lutheran Doctrine and

---

*Dr. Richard A. Muller is Professor of Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary, Grand Rapids, Michigan*

Practice."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it is worth noting that the essay immediately following addresses the subject of "Heaven and Hell."

If, however, we are willing to look beyond mutual recriminations and polemical stereotypes that never quite fit the historical data but that nevertheless have plagued four centuries of relationship between the Lutheran and Reformed confessional families, it becomes obvious that there is a substantial common ground upon which we stand. There is no intention at all, in speaking thus, to advocate a naive Calixtine "unionism" that stresses agreement on "constituent articles" and a rather blithe agreement to disagree on "consequent articles." That was a disastrous proposal in the era of orthodoxy and not a particularly useful one for our time. The confessional differences remain; we can be clear about what they are and what they are not—and let us recognize that we are unlikely to settle them before the Second Coming. We can, however, also recognize that the far greater danger to us today comes from a generic American conservative religion that has little respect for and even less interest in the tradition of the Reformation, whether it is found in the liturgy, in the hymnody, or in the confessions of the Reformation.

Rather than advocate a bland ecumenism, we ought to return to our roots and reacquaint ourselves with the confessions and the confessional differences—in the interest not of polemic but of affirming and deepening our own confessionality. Among other things, an examination of the differences and of the reasons for them will serve to reinforce our sense of the importance of the confessional issues and of the integrity of our own faith. There are, moreover, fewer differences between us on the topic of the Holy Spirit than there are in the areas of usual debate, namely, election, christology, and the Lord's Supper.

We ought first to recognize that the sixteenth-century acceptance of the Augsburg Confession by many of the Reformed was quite sincere—as sincere as the heavy reliance on Luther's theology evident in the 1536 edition of Calvin's *Institutes*. And when we recall the disaster of the Marburg Colloquy of 1529,

---

<sup>1</sup>*Our Great Heritage*, ed. Lyle W. Lange, 3 volumes (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1991): 3:604-649.

---

when Luther met face to face with Zwingli, we must also remind ourselves of the very different result achieved by Martin Bucer's visit to Wittenberg in 1536. Bucer had been initially drawn to the cause of the Reformation by Luther's arguments in the Heidelberg Disputation of 1516. Bucer also had stated for the church of Strasburg, in the Tetrapolitan Confession presented to the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, that Christ gives us "His true body and true blood to be truly eaten and drunk for the food and drink of souls."<sup>2</sup> This assertion occurs in a major Reformed confession, issued in the year and at the same place as the Augsburg Confession. Bucer, moreover, accepted the Schwabach Articles virtually without qualification. The two major sixteenth-century confessions of the English church, the Edwardine Articles and the Thirty-Nine Articles, both usually identified as belonging to the Reformed family, were based in large part on the Augsburg Confession and frequently reflect it at a rather precise verbal level. It is also the case that the Augsburg Confession in its unaltered form, albeit often juxtaposed with the Variata, the Saxon Confession of 1551, and the Württemberg Confession of 1552 were included in the Reformed Harmony of Confessions of 1581.<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted also that the Tetrapolitan Confession (1530), the First Confession of Basel (1534), and the First Helvetic Confession (1536) stand outside of the Zwinglian paradigm and have some affinity with the Lutheran perspective on the centrality of justification. Very much like the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (1530) and the Smalcald Articles (1537), but in some distinction from the purely Zwinglian confessions, the First Helvetic Confession announces that justification by grace alone

---

<sup>2</sup>Tetrapolitan Confession, xviii, cited from Arthur C. Cochrane, editor, *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), emphasis added. Citations of the Tetrapolitan Confession, the First Confession of Basel, the First Helvetic Confession, and the Confession of Faith [Geneva, 1536] are from Cochrane; citations of all remaining Reformed confessions are from Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 volumes, sixth edition, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983).

<sup>3</sup>*Harmonia Confessionum Fidei Orthodoxarum et Reformatarum Ecclesiarum . . . Quae Omnia, Ecclesiarum Gallicarum et Belgicarum Nomine, Subjiciuntur Libero et Prudenti Reliquarum Omnium Judicio* (Geneva, 1581).

through faith is “the primary and principal” article of the church’s teaching and adds, in the German text, that this doctrine ought to be announced “in all preaching” and “impressed on the hearts of all people”<sup>4</sup>

We need to keep in mind, therefore, that the churches of the Reformation in the sixteenth century recognized a more variegated spectrum of theological opinion than that represented by the simple opposition of Lutheran and Reformed or of Luther and Zwingli. The Lutheran faith itself cannot be defined simply in terms of the contrast of Luther and Melancthon: to borrow some controverted words from Philip, theologians like Rhegius, Brenz, Amsdorf, Flacius, Major, and the Spangenberg, father and son, were not “stocks and blocks” in the work of shaping later Lutheranism. Even so, on the other side of the question, there are significant differences in formulation and direction between Bucer and Zwingli, Bullinger, Calvin, Musculus, and Vermigli. Then, too, there is Andreas Hyperius of Marburg, still claimed by Lutherans and Reformed alike. We are not dealing here with confessional monoliths, but with the views of many thinkers and, on the Reformed side, with many confessions. We are dealing not with simple oppositions but with a highly complex and varied spectrum of opinion.

Beyond these points, we now move to consider a particular *genre* of theological and churchly document, the confession, which in its fundamental intention, transcends the theology of the individual, no matter how significant that individual may be. Confessions, of their vary nature and in their fundamental intention state both more and less than any individual theologian might wish to state—more, because they speak for the broader community of belief, less because they transcend the individual or idiosyncratic ideas of the theologian. As Robert Kolb has observed, the confessions of the Reformation—and the Augsburg Confession *par excellence*—are not merely documents. They are

---

<sup>4</sup>First Helvetic Confession, xii; one may compare the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, IV; Smalcald Articles, II.i. All citations of the Lutheran Confessions are from the *Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, German-Latin-English* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921).

---

documentations of the heart-felt confession of the corporate faith of the church in times of crisis.<sup>5</sup> They are declarations of the faith of the believing community that transcend the interests of the individual—and in so doing provide a declaration of faith for a sizeable portion of a theological spectrum, not simply for a single individual.

At the same time, as Leif Grane has pointed out, the Augsburg Confession is also a document set into a highly charged political context, with political ramifications.<sup>6</sup> The princes and the cities affixed their signatures together with the names of the theologians and pastors; the confession reaches out beyond the study of the theologian, beyond the immediate hearing range of the pulpit into the society at large. It is not a document in which theologians and pastors impose theology on the laity, but a document confessed by clergy and laity alike as reflecting the faith of the entire community in the context of a specific polemic and a specific churchly apologetic.

In the context of this understanding of confessions, the Reformed acceptance of the Augsburg Confession takes on a somewhat different significance. Three levels, moreover, of historical exchange between Lutheran and Reformed should be distinguished: the level of the ecumenical creeds, the level of the churchly confessions, and the level of theological systems. At the first level, that of the ecumenical creeds, there was a consistently acknowledged consensus between Lutheran and Reformed, even in the context of the most polemical encounters (for example, the Montbéliard Colloquy). There is still considerable agreement, together with various points of difference and divergence, at the second or confessional level, between the Lutheranism of Augsburg and one side of the Reformed tradition, namely, the Bucerian and Calvinian side. And, of course, there is a strong disagreement, softened by far fewer points of contact, between the Lutheranism of Augsburg and the other side of the Reformed confessional tradition, namely, the Zwinglian. The point of

---

<sup>5</sup>Robert Kolb, *Confessing the Faith: Reformers Define the Church, 1530-1580* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1991), 15-29.

<sup>6</sup>Leif Grane, *The Augsburg Confession: A Commentary*, translated by John H. Rasmussen (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), 19.

reference for a third level of discourse between Lutheran and Reformed, the theological system, no matter how "confessional" in spirit, is a genre distinct from the confession. As a perusal of theological systems indicates, the major differences between Reformed and Lutheran on the particular theological issue of the Holy Spirit become clear only when the greater detail and amplification of the systems is examined – and here again, more consistently on the Zwinglian than on the Bucerian and Calvinian side of the Reformed tradition.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: Points of Ecumenical Agreement**

There are, of course, several significant references to the Holy Spirit in the Augsburg Confession before the confession's development of the work of the Spirit in Article V. The first reference belongs to the category of ecumenical or credal consensus and it finds explicit parallel, even in nuance, in the early Reformed confessions. Article I of the Augsburg Confession indicates that the Lutheran churches "with common consent, do teach that the decree of the Council of Nicaea, concerning the unity of the Divine Essence and concerning the Three Persons, is true and to be believed" over against the various ancient trinitarian heresies and Islam. Parallel affirmations are found in the earliest Reformed confessions, notably the Tetrapolitan Confession.

Of more interest still, should be the comment of the Augsburg Confession that "the term 'person'" is to be understood "as the Fathers have used it, to signify, not a part or quality in another, but that which subsists of itself." This statement most probably reflects not only the profound catholicity of the early reformers but also their hesitance to move beyond the language of Scripture and their need to explain their normative use of even the most

---

<sup>7</sup>One may compare Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 3 volumes (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950-1953; plus index volume, 1957), 3:146-153, with Archibald Alexander Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (1879; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 447-451 and Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 volumes (1871-1873; reprinted, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing House, 1975), 3:498-508.

---

standard language of the tradition. Thus, the first edition of Melancthon's *Loci Communes* (1521) polemicized against the introduction of non-biblical categories such as trinitarian vocabulary into the fundamental *loci* of Christian theology. Calvin felt the need in the first edition of the *Institutes* (1536) to defend the use of non-scriptural terms such as *persona* and *essentia* on the ground of their utility in the defense of biblical doctrine against the "barking" of the heretics.<sup>8</sup> Similar reflection on the use of traditional trinitarian language is found in Bucer's generally positive reaction to the Schwabach Articles,<sup>9</sup> and is implied in the comment of the Tetrapolitan Confession that the Reformed "agree . . . [with] what the church of Christ has hitherto believed about the Trinity."<sup>10</sup>

In confessions that opposed the normative status of "human traditions" as strongly as the Augsburg Confession and the Tetrapolitan Confession, some definition of the character of acceptance of traditional dogmatic terms was necessary.<sup>11</sup> This acceptance, however, in both confessions, is far more than a simple attestation of the catholicity of the Reformation; it represents the profound recognition that the doctrine of the Trinity, albeit formulated in the tradition of the church, is a profoundly biblical teaching, a teaching foundational to all further expression of Christian doctrine. Maurer thus recognizes

---

<sup>8</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1536 edition (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), II.8.

<sup>9</sup>Bucer's *Critique of the Schwabach Articles*, in Michael Reu, *The Augsburg Confession: A Collection of Sources with an Historical Introduction* (Chicago: Wartburg Publishing House, 1930), \*49-\*50: "Doctor Luther thinks that the word *trinitas* should not be used; others object to the word *persona* because the ordinary man – to the offense of the Jews and all others who have not yet joined our religion – uses the word 'person' in the ordinary sense and speaks of the three Persons as though they were three separate beings (an error which is also suggested by the word 'trinity'). It is also known how many quarrels have arisen over the *processionibus* and *notionibus* which are not mentioned in the Scriptures at all. Now it would be proper to speak of such a high and incomprehensible mystery in the clearest, that is, most scriptural manner; this would be the best way of preventing godless quarrels."

<sup>10</sup>Tetrapolitan Confession, II.

<sup>11</sup>One may compare Augsburg Confession, II.7 (28), with Tetrapolitan Confession, XIV.

of Luther and of the Augsburg Confession that "the terms used here are not word for word the same as those used in the official confession of the ancient church." There is, Maurer argues, "a shift . . . within the trinitarian statements" resting on the fact that "Luther is a biblical theologian who accepts the dogmatic tradition at those points where he can interpret it biblically."<sup>12</sup>

There is a common thread here that must not be ignored: neither Luther nor Bucer confessed the faith of the church because it was the faith of the church. *Fides implicita* in the Roman Catholic sense is utterly ruled out. In the trinitarian statements of the Augsburg Confession and the Tetrapolitan Confession, the trinitarian faith of the church is confessed because it is the biblical faith—and then, beyond mere statements of the truth, the trinitarian faith pervades and governs all further doctrinal statements in the confessions. And, indeed, the Augsburg Confession and the Tetrapolitan Confession were confessed by the Reformers because and only because they were biblical. In their dogmatic reflection on the doctrine of the person of the Spirit in relation to the traditional language of the Trinity, to the fundamentally biblical character of trinitarian teaching, and to the broad implications of a biblical trinitarianism for Christian teaching as a whole, the Lutheran and the Reformed confessions at Augsburg stand on common ground. A similar point, albeit reflecting a far less subtle relation of exegesis and tradition, can be made even of Zwingli's *Fidei Ratio*, also presented at Augsburg.<sup>13</sup>

The second reference, also reflected in many of the Reformed confessions, is the statement of Article II that original sin would "even now condemn and bring eternal death upon those not born again through Baptism and the Holy Ghost."<sup>14</sup> On this basic

---

<sup>12</sup>Wilhelm Maurer, *Historical Commentary on the Augsburg Confession*, translated by H. George Anderson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 249.

<sup>13</sup>Ulrich Zwingli, *Fidei Ratio* (1530), translated as *An Account of the Faith of Huldreich Zwingli Submitted to the German Emperor Charles V, at the Diet of Augsburg*, in *On Providence and Other Essays*, edited for Samuel Macaulay Jackson by William John Hinke (Philadelphia: Heidelberg Press, 1922; reprinted, Durham, North Carolina: Labyrinth Press, 1983), 33-61.

<sup>14</sup>Augsburg Confession, I.ii (ii).

---

point, we find little disagreement between Reformed and Lutheran: deliverance from original sin through Baptism—and, in intimate relation with the churchly act of Baptism, the work of the Holy Spirit—is taught by the Reformed as well as by the Lutheran confessions. The classic divergence, of course, arises when one asks the question of the precise relationship between the outward act of Baptism and the gracious inward work of the Spirit. But, for the moment, we may look at the substantial agreement on the point of Article II.

The main thrust of the article is to declare the natural and hereditary character of human sin, that “all men begotten in the natural way are born with sin.” Each and every human being, specifically, lacks the fear of God and fails to trust in God; and such is the case because of an inborn distortion or privation in the affections, namely concupiscence, defined by the confession as a “disease” and a “vice of origin.” As we learn from the elaboration of the point in the Apology, this “evil inclination within . . . does not cease as long as we are not born anew through the Spirit and faith.”<sup>15</sup> This teaching the Augsburg Confession poses against the “Pelagians” and any others who “deny that original depravity is sin” or who assume that human beings can justify themselves before God through their “own strength and reason.”<sup>16</sup>

As in the Reformed confessions of the era, the Augsburg Confession takes as the common catholic or ecumenical ground the Augustinian view of original sin as developed in the Pelagian controversy of the early fifth century, and poses this fundamentally catholic teaching against the abuses of the late medieval church. The point of the article, even in this positive section of the confession, is to set aside a false teaching of the time and not merely to separate Lutheran teaching from an ancient heresy. The Tetrapolitan Confession stands on precisely the same ground, with even more explicit reference to the problems of the age: “since for some years,” it declares, “we were taught that man’s own works are necessary for his justification, our preachers have taught that this whole justification is to be ascribed to the

---

<sup>15</sup>Augsburg Confession, I.ii(ii); Apology of the Augsburg Confession, II (I).

<sup>16</sup>Augsburg Confession, I.ii (ii).

good pleasure of God and the merit of Christ, and to be received by faith alone."<sup>17</sup> Citing 1 Corinthians 2:14, the confession insists that "the natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God" and that salvation therefore is available only through the work of the Spirit, simultaneous with the preaching of the Gospel.<sup>18</sup> When other of the major (and minor) Reformed confessions of the era are examined, similar and frequently nearly identical statements are found, some with explicit reference to the "Pelagianism" of the age.

### The Spirit and the Means of Grace: Confessional Differences

The next two references to the Spirit in the Augsburg Confession can be taken together. In Article III we read that Christ, after his ascension, has "sanctified all them that believe in him, by sending the Holy Spirit into their hearts, to rule, comfort, and quicken them, and to defend them against the devil and the power of sin." This assertion is surely to be taken together with the declaration of Article V concerning the means by which salvation is accomplished in the office of ministry: "through Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the gospel." Significantly, this positive statement is paired with a condemnation of "the Anabaptists and others who think that the Holy Ghost comes to men without the external word, through their own preparations and works."<sup>19</sup>

The context of the confessional statement is critical to its right understanding: what is explicitly condemned here is the teaching of various Enthusiasts — *Schwärmer* — who claim spiritual gifts for

---

<sup>17</sup>Tetrapolitan Confession, III.

<sup>18</sup>Tetrapolitan Confession, III; one may compare First Confession of Basel (1534), II: "through [the] fall the whole human race was corrupted and made subject to damnation" and "our nature . . . [is] so inclined to sin that, unless it is restored by the Spirit of God, man neither does nor wants to do anything good of himself"; Confession of Faith [Geneva, 1536], iv, vi, viii: "man is naturally deprived and destitute in himself of all light of God. . . . Jesus Christ has done and suffered for our redemption . . . by His Spirit we are regenerated into a new spiritual nature."

<sup>19</sup>Augsburg Confession, I.iii, v (iii, v).

---

themselves and who claim to be infused with a spiritual form of salvation that is distinct from and perhaps higher than the salvation of the baptized hearer of the Word who participates regularly in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.<sup>20</sup> And, indeed, the confession continues its anti-Pelagian (or semi-Pelagian) polemic by specifically singling out those who emphasize an individualized saving work of the Spirit "through their own preparations and works" rather than through the appointed means of Word and Sacrament. Thus, the Anabaptists, who postpone Baptism and regard it as a response to the work of the Spirit in an adult, are the opponents noted here. The Second Helvetic Confession, likewise, insists that the sacraments are "effectual," and it condemns those who view the sacraments as "superfluous."<sup>21</sup>

The sending of the quickening Spirit of Christ into the hearts of believers for the sake of their comfort and sanctification is central to both of the confessional traditions here in view. The statement, too, that "the Holy Ghost is given, who works faith, where and when it pleases God, in them that hear the gospel" offers no difficulty at all to the Reformed. These words of the Augsburg Confession, certainly, militate against an *ex opere operato* understanding of preaching, much in the way that Roman Catholicism understands the sacraments.<sup>22</sup> In other words, the

---

<sup>20</sup>One may compare Maurer, *Historical Commentary*, 349.

<sup>21</sup>Second Helvetic Confession, XIX.10.

<sup>22</sup>The earliest references in medieval theology to an *opus operatum* belong to controversies over simony in the twelfth century, in which the action (*actio*) of the unworthy agent (*opus operans*) was distinguished from the sacramental act (*actus*) or work performed (*opus operatum*). Peter of Poitiers, a student of Lombard, subsequently used the distinction with reference to the actions of the Jews in crucifying Christ and the objective work or act of Christ on the cross, but it is equally the case that this reference to the merit or work of Christ is not what is implied in the scholastic teaching that *sacramenta operantur ex opere operato*, that is to say, that "sacraments operate (or are effective) by the work performed." One may see A. Michel, "Opus Operatum, Opus Operantis," in *Dictionnaire de Théologie Catholique*, 11:1, 1084-1187. In the sacramental application of the phrase, the work performed or *opus operatum* refers, in the words of Ludwig Ott, to "the completed sacramental rite." He states that any interpretation of the sacramental language *ex opere operato* to equal *ex opere a Christo operato* . . . is historically

Augsburg Confession itself may indicate a point of distinction between the outward work of preaching the Word and the inward work of the Spirit—not a positive distinction, as if the Spirit might work apart from the Word, but a negative one, so as to say that our hearing of the Word or our celebration of the sacrament, insofar as it is something that we do, carries no benefit. The Spirit works according to the divine good pleasure—as truly promised in Word and Sacrament—which alone offers comfort and assurance.

This reflection, of course, raises a more systematic problem: *cur alii, alii non?* (“Why some and not others?”) This question the Lutheran dogmaticians, from the era of orthodoxy down to the present, as witnessed by Francis Pieper, have seen to be the source of a distortion of the Gospel or of a rationalization of the problem that leads either to Calvinism on the one side or to Semi-Pelagianism on the other.<sup>23</sup> Granting, of course, that the Reformed dogmaticians are frequently more willing to answer the question on the ground of divine election, they are also consistently wary of using the doctrine as an answer to pastoral questions of assurance.<sup>24</sup>

---

false; for the scholastic term does not purport to indicate the source (*causa meritoria*) of the sacramental grace, but the nature and manner of the sacramental operation of grace.” This specific reference of the language to the efficacy of the performance of the rite is, moreover, the dogma of the Council of Trent, against which the Reformers, both Lutheran and Reformed objected. One may see for instance, Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, translated by Patrick Lynch (Cork: Mercier Press, 1962), 329-330; and again, Michel, “Opus Operatum,” 1086, who also singles out the claim that the term *ex opere operato* refers to the source of “the power and grace of the sacraments” in Christ’s merit. This claim, Michel notes, is an error; the intention of the church is to indicate the sacramental rite itself in its objective accomplishment.

<sup>23</sup>Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 1:94-95.

<sup>24</sup>Some Lutheran theologians have noted a similar pastoral motive, grounded in the problem of the assurance of salvation, in the Formula of Concord, where election is defined without any movement toward the potential synergism of the later *intuitu fidei*. We could, moreover, draw out a spectrum of Reformed teaching on election spanning views from the supralapsarian tendencies of a Theodore Beza to the cautious infralapsarianism of a Heinrich Bullinger and find there some point of contact with confessional Lutheranism.

Because of this pastoral question—and, certainly, because of a recognition that the dogmatic *loci* do not stand in a neatly deductive series—the Reformed confessions, and the Reformed orthodox dogmaticians as well, only infrequently press the doctrine of election at this point in their discussion of Word and Sacrament. When the confessions and catechisms of the Reformed churches do include a doctrine of predestination, they do not at all argue it through the various doctrinal *loci* with any precision.<sup>25</sup> Rather, they tend to indicate that the Word is the primary and necessary means of grace, while the sacraments are subordinate to the Word and are to be understood as means, certainly, but as means that “confirm” or “seal” the grace given in and through the Word.<sup>26</sup>

By way of contrast, we learn from Article IX of the Augsburg Confession that Baptism is “necessary to salvation” inasmuch as “through baptism is offered the grace of God.”<sup>27</sup> On the first of these points, the necessity of Baptism, we encounter some difference between the Lutherans and the Reformed. On the latter point, the assumption that Baptism is a means of grace, we encounter full divergence—not, however, between Lutheran and Reformed, but between Lutherans and some Reformed, on the one hand, and portions of the spectrum of Reformed theology, notably the Zwinglians, on the other hand.

Some elaboration of the point is appropriate, and it is, perhaps, useful to begin at the widest point of divergence, that between the Augsburg Confession and Zwingli’s *Fidei Ratio*. The *Fidei Ratio*, one should recall in the first place, was a personal, not a corporate confession and never had a normative confessional status among the Reformed. Zwingli writes:

I believe, indeed, I know, that all the sacraments are so far from conferring grace that they do not even convey or dispense it. In this matter, most powerful Emperor, I may

---

<sup>25</sup>The catechisms frequently include no discussion of the doctrine of predestination; the Geneva Catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism are cases in point.

<sup>26</sup>Heidelberg Catechism, question 65; Belgic Confession, XXXIII.

<sup>27</sup>Augsburg Confession, I.ix (ix).

seem to you perhaps too bold. But my opinion is firm. For grace comes or is given by the Divine Spirit . . . so this gift pertains to the Spirit alone. Moreover, a channel or vehicle is not necessary to the Spirit, for He Himself is the virtue or energy whereby all things are sustained, and has no need of being sustained; neither do we read in the Holy Scriptures that visible things, as are the sacraments, carry certainly with them the Spirit, but if visible things have been borne with the Spirit, it has been the Spirit, not the visible things that has done the bearing.<sup>28</sup>

The immediate response to such teaching would most certainly be that, if it were true, then sacraments would be quite purposeless and, therefore, unnecessary and dispensable. This is an objection that Zwingli had heard from both sides, the Roman Catholic and the Anabaptist, the former to deny the point and the latter to drive it to its most radical conclusion. He offers a partial answer:

The sacraments are given as a public testimony of that grace which is previously present to every individual. . . . Baptism does not convey grace but the church certifies that grace has been given to him to whom it is administered. I believe, therefore, O Emperor, that a sacrament is a sign of a sacred thing, i.e., of grace that has been given. I believe that it is a visible figure or form of the invisible grace, provided and bestowed by God's bounty, i.e., a visible example which presents an analogy to something done by the Spirit.<sup>29</sup>

Nor was Zwingli one to draw the conclusion that all those who receive the sacrament and are thus certified by the church will be saved. Sacrament and Spirit are, thus, effectively separated. The reason for Zwingli's definition, quite clear in the text and context of his confession, is the problem of the medieval doctrine of the *ex opere operato* character of the sacrament—that the sacrament, in its churchly exercise, conveys grace if there is no impediment. For the sake of pointedly denying medieval Roman Catholic doctrine, Zwingli argues virtually the opposite position.

---

<sup>28</sup>Zwingli, *Fidei Ratio*, 46.

<sup>29</sup>Zwingli, *Fidei Ratio*, 47-8.

---

Here, of course, is ground for disagreement and, indeed, polemic, between Lutherans and Reformed. The claim has consistently been that the Reformed deny that the sacraments are means of grace and sever the bond between the sacraments and the work of the Spirit; and in the case of Zwingli, this judgment is certainly quite correct. Something which we also see here is the basis for the complaint, found in much later debate, that the Reformed emphasis on the traditional definition of a sacrament as a visible sign of an invisible grace was insufficient to the attainment of a right definition of the sacraments.<sup>30</sup> The problem, of course, was not in the definition itself—it can be traced back at least as far as Augustine and had, during the Middle Ages, been associated with the strongest language of sacraments as means, even with definitions of sacramental efficacy as functioning *ex opere operato*. The problem, and the root of the debate, lies in Zwingli's reinterpretation of the definition.

We find, however, a notably different accent in many, if not most, of the other Reformed confessions. Bucer's Tetrapolitan Confession affirms the Augustinian definition without elaboration and then declares of Baptism "that by it we are buried into Christ's death, are united into one body and put on Christ; that it is the washing of regeneration, that it washes away sins and saves us." The Tetrapolitan Confession, thus, approaches far closer to the Augsburg Confession than it does to Zwingli's *Fidei Ratio*. The First Helvetic Confession, drawn up in 1536 by Bullinger, Grynaeus, and Myconius, similarly declines to take Zwingli's radical view of the separation of the sign and the thing signified and, in fact, takes up a more traditional Augustinian understanding of the language. Sacraments, the confession declares, "are not mere, empty signs, but consist of the sign and the substance." Thus, "in baptism, water is the sign, but the substance and spiritual thing is rebirth and admission into the people of God."<sup>31</sup> Even Bullinger, Zwingli's successor, whose

---

<sup>30</sup>One may see John Calvin, "Final Admonition to Westphal," in *Tracts and Treatises*, three volumes, translated by Henry Beveridge, historical notes and introduction by Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1958), 2:491.

<sup>31</sup>First Helvetic Confession, XX.

sacramental theology stands somewhere between Zwingli and Calvin (or if a Lutheran signpost be desired, between Zwingli and Melancthon), insists that the sacramental signs are not "bare signs" but rather signs "which take upon themselves the names of things signified, and are not still called bare water, bread, or wine; but that the water is called 'regeneration' and 'washing of the new birth.'"<sup>32</sup> In the Heidelberg Catechism we read that "the Holy Spirit works in" us "by the Gospel," that "the Holy Spirit teaches us in the Gospel, and by the sacraments assures us, that our whole salvation stands in the one sacrifice of Christ," and, with specific reference to Baptism, "Christ has appointed this outward washing with water, and has joined therewith this promise, that I am washed with His blood and Spirit . . . as certainly as I am washed outwardly with water."<sup>33</sup> What Zwingli put asunder the later Reformed confessions appear to have joined together.

Although none of the major Reformed confessions argues the necessity of Baptism in the manner of the Augsburg Confession, many of the major confessions contain the teaching that Baptism belongs so intimately to the divinely ordained order or means of salvation that it dare not be set aside. "Therefore," the Belgic Confession concludes its argument on the definition and efficacy of Baptism, God "has commanded all those who are His to be baptized with pure water . . . thereby signifying to us, that as water washes away the filth of the body . . . so the blood of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, internally does the same to the

---

<sup>32</sup>Bullinger, Second Helvetic Confession, XIX.10; one may compare Belgic Confession, XXXIII: God "hath joined [the sacraments] to the Word of the Gospel, the better to present to our senses, both that which He signifies to us by His Word, and that which He works inwardly in our hearts. . . . For they are visible signs and seals of an inward and invisible thing, by means of which God works in us by the power of the Holy Spirit (*moyennant lesquels Dieu opère en nous par la vertu du Saint-Esprit*"); Thirty-Nine Articles, XXV: "the sacraments ordained by Christ are not only signs of Christian profession, but are rather certain testimonies, and effectual signs of grace (*efficacia signa gratiae*) of God's good will toward us, by which He works invisibly in us, and does not only enliven but also confirms our faith"; Gallican Confession, XXXIV: they are "outward signs through which God operates by His Spirit, so that He may not signify anything to us in vain."

<sup>33</sup>Heidelberg Catechism, questions 21, 65; 70; 69.

---

soul, sprinkling it and cleansing it from its sins. . . ." So too, the confession declares "everyone who is earnest to obtain eternal life ought to be but once baptized" and "this baptism does not only avail us at the time when the water is poured upon us and received by us, but also through the whole course of our life."<sup>34</sup> The Heidelberg Catechism, similarly, argues that infants, no less than their parents, are to be baptized in as much as thereby they are "ingrafted into the Christian church."<sup>35</sup>

Despite all the common ground, to be sure, one point of difference still remains between all of the Reformed confessions and the Lutheran confessional tradition. It is, however, certainly not as vast a divergence as our polemics have sometimes indicated. The Reformed (with the exception of Zwingli), affirm either that sacraments are means of grace or that grace is certainly made available through the work of the Spirit as signified by the sacramental elements. The former view, associated with Calvin, argues a clear sacramental instrumentality; the latter, associated with Bullinger, argues a covenantal parallelism between the outward administration of the signs and the inward work of the Spirit.<sup>36</sup> Again, with the exception of Zwingli, the Reformed confessions and theologians never claim that the Spirit is so free of Word and Sacrament that seemingly "extraordinary" paths to salvation become ordinary.<sup>37</sup> Between Calvin and Bullinger there remained a difference over the language of sacramental instrumentality, given that Bullinger tended to argue a parallel work of the Spirit with the administration of the sign, while Calvin held for the operation of the Spirit in and through the administration of the signs. Certainly, in Bullinger's case, the

---

<sup>34</sup>Belgic Confession, XXXIV.

<sup>35</sup>Heidelberg Catechism, question 74.

<sup>36</sup>One may see Paul Rorem, "Calvin and Bullinger on the Lord's Supper," *Lutheran Quarterly* 2 (1988): 155-184, 357-389.

<sup>37</sup>Zwingli did, in one of his oddest statements, claim that the patriarchs, apostles, and saints would be accompanied in heaven by Hercules, Theseus, Socrates, the Catos, and the Scipios, together with all good men "from the beginning of the world to the end." One may see *A Short and Clear Exposition of the Christian Faith*, X, in *On Providence and Other Essays*, edited for Samuel Macaulay Jackson by William John Hinke (Philadelphia: Heidelberg Press, 1922; reprinted, Durham, North Carolina: Labyrinth Press, 1983), 271-272.

basis for his argument was the lingering fear of an *ex opere operato* view of sacramental efficacy. Bullinger continued to insist that grace necessarily preceded faithful participation in the sacraments.<sup>38</sup> The major Reformed theologians and the Reformed confessional tradition nonetheless insisted that there could be no salvation apart from the Word; and, certainly, salvation apart from Baptism would be viewed by the Reformed confessions and any theological elaboration upon them as extraordinary in the very strict sense of being outside of what has been ordained by God as the norm.<sup>39</sup>

Even, indeed, with regard to the necessity of Baptism, the Reformed confessions, without elaborating the issue, only deny that the beginnings of regeneration may be mechanically attached to outward human acts. The pressure here, in accord with the insistence of the Augsburg Confession on that God giving his spirit "where and when he pleases," against any notion of human control of the divine, not to the extreme of Zwingli's teaching, but more pointed than that of the Augsburg Confession. The absence of the word "necessary" in the Reformed confessions stands as an implied critique of just this one aspect of the Lutheran teaching — not to allow any sacraments to be omitted, but only to find the Lutheran statement less than quite clear enough in its rejection of the *ex opere operato*.

It is worth remembering, moreover, that the Augsburg Confession asserts the necessity of Baptism in opposition, specifically, to the teaching of the Anabaptists, "who reject the Baptism of children and say that children are saved without Baptism."<sup>40</sup> The confession does not, in other words, single out for debate a view of Baptism that identifies the sacrament as suitable for children as well as for adults but falls just short of defining it as necessary. The polemic against the Anabaptist view is,

---

<sup>38</sup>One may see Rorem, "Calvin and Bullinger," 174-176.

<sup>39</sup>Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, revised edition, foreword by Karl Barth (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950), 623-24.

<sup>40</sup>Augsburg Confession, l.ix (ix).

---

moreover, echoed quite strongly in the Reformed confessions.<sup>41</sup> Nor, indeed, do the Reformed confessions explicitly oppose any Lutheran statements on this issue.

By way of summarizing the difference here, we may observe the way in which Ursinus explains the answer to question sixty-five of the Heidelberg Catechism, recognizing, however, that the explanation rises to a level of detail not found in the Reformed confessions or catechisms themselves. The catechetical question asks from whence faith proceeds, and the answer is, "From the Holy Ghost, who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel and confirms it by the use of the sacraments." Ursinus explains the question and answer thus:

This question points out the connection which holds between the doctrine of faith and the sacraments. The Holy Ghost ordinarily produces faith . . . in us by the ecclesiastical ministry, which consists of two parts, *the word and the sacraments*. The Holy Ghost works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel and cherishes, confirms, and seals it by the use of the sacraments. The Word is a charter to which the sacraments are affixed as the seals of the divine will. Whatever the Word promises concerning our salvation through Christ, that the sacraments, as signs, and seals annexed thereto, confirm unto us more and more for the purpose of helping our infirmity. It is proper, therefore, that we should now speak of the sacraments, the seals of faith, appended to the gospel.<sup>42</sup>

Ursinus' central point is that Sacrament cannot be separated from Word, a teaching shared by Reformed and Lutherans. The reading of Scripture and preaching may occur legitimately

---

<sup>41</sup>One may compare Second Helvetic Confession, XX.6: "we condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that young infants, born to faithful parents, are to be baptized"; Belgic Confession, XXXIV: "we detest the error of the Anabaptists, who . . . condemn the baptism of the infants of believers, who, we believe, ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant."

<sup>42</sup>Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, translated G. W. Williard, introduction by John W. Nevin (Columbus, Ohio, 1852; reprinted Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1985), 340.

without the administration of the sacraments, but there may be no administration of the sacraments without the reading and exposition of Scripture, specifically for the sake of identifying the visible elements as signs and means of grace.<sup>43</sup>

Ursinus then comes, in a somewhat scholastic form of exposition, to an "objection" to one aspect of his definition: "But it is said that the Holy Ghost and the Word produce faith in us, and that the sacraments strengthen it. In what, therefore, do these three differ from each other?" The "three" are, of course, the Spirit, the Word, and the Sacraments. Ursinus responds as follows:

Answer. They differ very much. (1.) The Holy Ghost works and confirms faith in us as the efficient cause, whilst the word and sacraments do this as instrumental causes. (2.) The Holy Ghost can also work faith in us independent of the word and the sacraments, whilst these, on the other hand, can effect nothing independent of the Holy Ghost. (3.) The Holy Ghost works effectually in whomsoever He dwells, which cannot be said of the word and sacraments.<sup>44</sup>

Ursinus further articulates the difference between Word and Sacrament in his explanation of the answer to a subsequent question sixty-seven of the catechism:

The word is sufficient and necessary for the salvation of adults; for "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). The sacraments, however, are not positively or absolutely necessary for all, neither are they in themselves sufficient for salvation independent of the word.<sup>45</sup>

The Word is necessary, moreover, because it is the means by which the Spirit "commences and confirms" faith in believers.

These remarks, taken in isolation, do not fully explain why Ursinus indicated so pointedly that "the Holy Ghost can also work faith in us independent of the word and the sacraments."

---

<sup>43</sup>Ursinus, *Commentary*, 353.

<sup>44</sup>Ursinus, *Commentary*, 340.

<sup>45</sup>Ursinus, *Commentary*, 352.

The independence of the Spirit from the sacraments is clear enough; the sacraments themselves depend on the Word, and the Word is the prior and absolutely necessary means of grace for adults. There is no attempt here, such as is adumbrated by Zwingli, to separate the work of the Spirit from means. Nor does Ursinus look to the eternal decree of election as an explanation. There is, on the other hand, the problem of infant Baptism, which Ursinus juxtaposes with his definition of faith. Faith consists both in knowledge and assurance that the knowledge is true, together with "an assured confidence by which we apply to ourselves the merit of Christ" – *notitia*, *assensus*, and *fiducia* (knowledge, assent, and trust).<sup>46</sup> The definition, particularly the Protestant assumption that faith *must* include *notitia* and *assensus* over against the Roman Catholic notion of an implicit faith understood simply as the absence of an impediment to grace, appears to militate against the doctrine of infant Baptism.

Infants do not hear and understand the Word and, therefore, they cannot grasp the prerequisite to the administration of the sacrament—the read or preached Word that must precede and identify the sacramental signs. Here is the only place that the Reformed argue a departure from the "ordinary" or ordained pattern of the production of faith through the means offered by the office of ministry: "the case is different," Ursinus writes, "in regard to infants in the church: for in them the Holy Spirit neither begins, nor confirms faith by means of the word; but by an inward working; and that because they are also included in the covenant and promise of God, being born in the church."<sup>47</sup> And even this operation of the Spirit is grounded in the Word understood as promise: the promise is to believers and their children (Acts 2:39); the water of Baptism ought not to be refused to any who have received the grace of the Spirit (Acts 10:47), and it is not ours to say which, if any, of the children eligible for Baptism, are or are not recipients of the grace of God.<sup>48</sup> Here again there is the promise that the effective grace of the Spirit

---

<sup>46</sup>Ursinus, *Commentary*, 110.

<sup>47</sup>Ursinus, *Commentary*, 352.

<sup>48</sup>Ursinus, *Commentary*, 366-368.

accompanies the outward signs or means, but there is no allowance for an *ex opere operato* understanding of the sacrament.

### **The Systematic Perspective: Divergence and Debate over the Work of the Spirit**

In looking to the *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* by Ursinus for a clear statement of the Reformed position and, therefore, of the divergence between Reformed and Lutherans, we have already stepped past the pale of the confessions into the realm of dogmatics. That step, in itself, conveys a lesson: the underlying problem of the traditional debate between Lutherans and Reformed over the work of the Holy Spirit, at least from the perspective of a historian, lies in the systematizing and harmonizing character of dogmatic dispute, in which the variety of formulations and the spectrum of opinion found in history tend, especially in polemics, to be collapsed into two opposing systems, a monolithic Reformed and a monolithic Lutheran system. By examining a series of Reformed confessions we have seen that the divergence between the two confessional families is less than has sometimes been supposed, and we have also defined the divergence somewhat more precisely.

What remains, now, is to offer a few points of what was initially called "a Reformed definition." Here, to be sure, no more can be offered than a set of queries. First, and with due respect to the systematic theologians and dogmaticians of our respective confessional communities, there may well be wisdom in not attempting to press for normative definition beyond the ground offered by the confessions. Despite their differences over the use of the language of "necessity" relative to Baptism and over the issue of the precise relationship of the work of the Spirit to the outward celebration of the rite, both confessional families seek primarily to distance themselves from the Roman Catholic concept of *ex opere operato*, and both reserve their explicit condemnations for the theology and practice of the Anabaptists. This is a salutary point to remember in these days of confessional and liturgical erosion. Both Lutherans and Reformed have a strong doctrine of the work of the Spirit, a doctrine that is well defined both in a positive and in a negative sense. Old unsettled battles notwithstanding, the greater danger today is from the

---

proponents of vague spirituality, of excessively affective piety, and of a Holy Spirit who “comes to men without the external word” and with undue emphasis on gifts not so great as faith, hope, and love.

Next in order is necessity of Baptism. Given what has been said concerning the work of the Spirit, the divine ordination of the sacraments as means, and the dependence of the efficacy of the sacrament not on the celebrant or the recipient but on God, who works when and where he wills, we must ask the level of necessity implied. Does the confession refer to what, from our perspective, is an absolute necessity on, to use the scholastic term, a consequent necessity? What of the child of believers who dies prior to Baptism? Or what of the adult believer who has grown to maturity on the assumption that he has been baptized, but who in fact has not? Or, again, what of the adult believer – and this would be a case unlikely in either a Lutheran or a Reformed context – who, because of the political circumstances of his life, has not been baptized and who recognizes the fact? Or does the word “necessary” indicate the divinely given order of things and the command that we observe the order – without constraining the operation of grace: this latter view, of an “ordinate” rather than an “absolute” necessity was the view of Gerhard and Hollazius.<sup>49</sup>

The Reformed answer is that Baptism is the ordained or ordinary means of incorporation into the community, but that there are also extraordinary circumstances under which the Spirit works “the circumcision made without hands” apart from the usual means.<sup>50</sup> Even the Westminster Confession, written a century after the era of the Reformation and more detailed in its exposition of doctrine than virtually any other Reformed confession, does not press the issue to utter closure. It states that infants also “are to be baptized” and then notes that, “although it is a great sin to condemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace

---

<sup>49</sup>Gerhard and Hollazius are cited in Heinrich Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Philadelphia: Lutheran Bookstore, 1876), 554; one may compare the corresponding statements of the Reformed in Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 624.

<sup>50</sup>Second Helvetic Confession, XIX.4, citing Colosians 2:11-12.

and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated or saved without it, or that all who are baptized are undoubtedly saved."<sup>51</sup> What remains necessary, in the absolute sense, is the faith of the Christian who has heard the Word of God. That faith is itself the work of the Spirit, the fruit of God's promise. In the case of the infant, the Reformed insist (as also some Lutheran dogmaticians argue) that infants, who cannot be influenced directly by the Word, are regenerated by grace in their Baptism and given, thereby, the foundation of their faith.<sup>52</sup>

The issue of infant Baptism, given the absence of prior response to the Word, leads to a third issue or query, related to doctrine of the covenant of grace. Here, the Reformed confessions are explicit about the parallel between circumcision and Baptism and the identification of Baptism as the sign and seal that we are "enrolled, entered, and received into the covenant and family, and so into the inheritance, of the sons of God."<sup>53</sup> Baptism, writes Bucer, "is the sacrament of the covenant that God makes with those who are His."<sup>54</sup> Some Lutheran dogmaticians do note the covenantal character of Baptism.<sup>55</sup> However, from a Reformed perspective, the absence of a strong covenantal declaration at the confessional level weakens the doctrine of infant Baptism by pressing the issue of efficacy back upon the external act rather than directing it toward the work of God in his establishment of the church throughout all ages and toward the way in which the grace of God, given through the appointed means of Word and Sacrament, continues to operate in the life of the believer when and where those means are not immediately offered. Here the Reformed do argue the operation of the Spirit in distinction from the presentation of means.

The fourth observation or point of definition, therefore, must press the more systematic question: in the context of the ministry

---

<sup>51</sup>Westminster Confession, XXVIII.5.

<sup>52</sup>One may compare Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 620-622, with Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*, 546-549.

<sup>53</sup>Second Helvetic Confession, XX.2; one may compare XIX.4, 7.

<sup>54</sup>Tetrapolitan Confession, XVII; one may compare *Westminster Confession*, XXVIII.1.

<sup>55</sup>Gerhard and Brochmand, as cited in Schmid, *Doctrinal Theology*, 538, 548.

---

of the church, of the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments, why some and not others — *cur alii, non alii*? This is not a question that can be taken lightly because it presses us beyond our grasp toward the ultimate mystery of God's promise and its extent. Baptism holds forth the promise of God's covenant and, within the covenant, of God's grace; but Baptism does not confer grace on all who receive it, any more than the preaching of the Word is effective in all who hear it. Inasmuch as all have sinned and none can grasp for themselves the grace of God, the doctrine of divine election stands as the final explanation of the limitation of salvation to some and not others, while at the same time the cause of damnation remains the sin of the individual. The gracious gift of regeneration — indeed, of faith — to infants is among the surest signs that our sin belongs entirely to us, while grace is of God alone.

From a Reformed perspective, moreover, we cannot, even when the doctrine of election is invoked, identify which individuals are elect any more than we can identify precisely where and when God works his proper will. For this reason, the doctrine of election is not invoked at this point in the confessions and catechisms. Yet, of course, from the perspective of the larger body of doctrine, it does hover behind the question even as, the Reformed dogmatists would add, election hovers behind the message of salvation throughout Scripture, as also it hovers behind the doctrine of Word and Sacrament in many of the Reformed confessions. Some people, in this fallen mass of humanity, are indeed chosen by God to be the vessels of his mercy and others, because of their sin, both original and actual, are justly passed over and set aside as vessels of wrath. And we must believe that the God, who gives His Spirit "where and when [he] pleases," knows those who are his and ordains the means of his grace for them.

In the mystery of the divine working, we are to believe that the provision of Word and Sacrament, in and through the ministry of the church, is the way in which God ordinarily works his will. This, finally, is the fundamental confession that, despite differences, Reformed and Lutherans share and in which both oppose the Anabaptists, the *Schwärmer*, who existed at the time of

the great confessions, but not nearly in the numbers and variety in which they exist today. These pose, surely, a far greater threat to Lutherans and Reformed alike than such pose to each. Because, beyond the undermining of the confessions, liturgy, and hymnody of both Lutherans and Reformed, the *Schwärmer* thereby also undermine the form of the proclamation of the Gospel as the promise of justification by grace, through faith alone, in Christ alone, apart from the works of the law.