

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

ASPECTS OF LUTHER'S DOCTRINE OF BAPTISM

It is most unfortunate that comparatively minor disputes with regard to the proper mode and the proper subjects of baptism have come so often to obscure the great doctrines of the sacrament. This was so even in Reformation times, when the Anabaptists quickly raised their voices against the baptism of infants,¹ and much time and energy which might have been turned to more profitable use in the theological study of baptism, and in the refutation of false Roman teaching, had to be devoted to a defence of the catholic practice. In almost all post-Reformation discussions this problem has occupied a disproportionately preponderant place.

At the same time a great deal of valuable constructive work was done by the Reformers, and some of the earlier works of Luther, especially the *Sermon vom Sacrament der Tauf* of 1519, the *Disputatio de baptisate legis, Johannis et Christi* of 1520, and the *De captivitate Babylonica*, give illuminating insights not only into the views of Luther himself, but into the whole baptismal and sacramental theology of the Reformers. The primary concern of Luther in these works was to combat the false teachings of Scholasticism, and to establish a true doctrine of the sacrament in relation to the justifying work of Christ. A brief consideration of the leading ideas in these works will amply repay all who seek to understand the true significance of baptism in Christian life and teaching.

I. THE THREE TYPES OF BAPTISM

In the *Disputatio*, which takes the form of a series of theses, Luther applies himself first to a discussion of baptism in its threefold form: the washings enjoined by the law, the baptism of John, and the baptism of Christ. At this point, a contrast emerges between Lutheran and the later Reformed teaching,

¹ The Anabaptists do not seem to have stressed particularly the *mode* of baptism. Cf. H. E. Dosker, *The Dutch Anabaptists*, p. 176.

for instead of identifying the two latter baptisms, as Zwingli,¹ and later Calvin² did, Luther finds here three quite different types, the baptism of the flesh, the baptism of repentance and the baptism of grace.³ The washings prescribed by the law were outward, the washing of hands, garments, vessels. In themselves these had no moral significance, except in a purely symbolical way. As ceremonies which could be rigidly kept, if they ministered to righteousness, it was to a dangerous self-righteousness, the righteousness of the fulfilling of outward ritual requirements, not the righteousness of the inward change of heart.⁴

With the baptism of John a new and higher type of baptism was introduced, the baptism which is the outward expression of an inward and moral change. The character of the outward act changed. With John it was no longer a washing, but an immersion,⁵ and this immersion pictures man and the race of men engulfed in sin. As the water covers the body, so sin engulfs the soul. The man who is baptised with John's baptism is baptised to a recognition of sin, to repentance. He does not come to a sense of his own righteousness by the fulfilment of a regulation, but to a sense of his sin and of his abandonment to sin, not to peace, but to despair and to a longing for the grace of God.⁶ This despair, however, is still a human state, the reaction of man to a law which he has consciously broken, just as the self-righteousness of carnal baptism is a human state, the reaction of man to a regulation which he has consciously fulfilled. The great difference is that whereas the one, carnal baptism, is a fulfilment of the law, the other is a revelation of the law in its true power and grandeur.⁷

The baptism of Christ resembles that of John, not only outwardly, as an immersion, but inwardly, in its proclamation of sin. Indeed the baptism of John prepares for that of Christ as the law prepares for the Gospel.⁸ In the Lutheran scheme, the legal washings correspond to a Pharisical fulfilment, the

¹ *Corpus Reformatorum : Zwingli* iv. p. 260 : " Joannes hat nun den touff der leer und des wassers ggeben, den die junger ggeben habend."

² Calvin on Acts xix (Commentary ii. p. 209).

³ Th. 1 : " Lex baptisma carnis, Johannes baptisma poenitentiae, Christus baptisma gratiae habet."

⁴ Th. 6 : " Baptisma legis poenitentiam non praestabat."

⁵ Th. 4 : " Baptisma Johannis . . . immergit."

⁶ Th. 4 : " Baptisma Johannis . . . omnes peccato immergit et gratiae avidos facit."

⁷ Ths. 3 and 4 : " legis velamen ; " revelata facie legis."

⁸ Th. 7 : " donec ad baptisma Christi pertingebat."

baptism of John to the true application of the law which deflates a man, and the baptism of Christ, as the final stage, to the Gospel which raises up the man overwhelmed by the Law to newness of life in Christ. In so far as it too is immersion, the baptism of Christ teaches repentance. But a new thing is added which makes it an act of God rather than a mere human reaction, the giving of the new name, which, as the personal address and promise of God, signifies the adoption to new life as a son.¹ It is this fact, that God is Himself active by word and deed in Christian baptism, which makes of it a true sacrament rather than a mere ritual or symbolical act. In accordance with this line of thought, Luther concludes that those who were baptised of John needed to be rebaptised with the baptism of Christ.²

II. THE GENERAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRISTIAN BAPTISM

In a broad sense the meaning of Christian baptism has already emerged in the discussion of the three types of baptism and of their special characteristics. In all cases, of course, baptism has to do with righteousness, or holiness, with the doing away of that which defiles, whether by an outward and ceremonial washing, or by an inward and moral change, or by the act of God. It is now necessary to see a little more closely how this work of God in the conquest of sin and of its defilement is brought out in the general symbolism of the baptism of Christ.

First, it must be noted, that although Luther is not unaware of the connection between the outward washings of the law and an inward washing of the soul by Christ, he does not develop this thought in his teaching. It is one aspect of baptism—this Luther is willing to concede.³ But it does not lead us to a full and right understanding of the work of God. Christian baptism is not merely washing, it is an immersion,⁴ with all the fullness of meaning which underlies this picture. Baptism, as the conquest of sin, typifies the descent of the soul into sin and death, and the raising up to newness of life in the power and the promise of God.⁵

¹ Th. 11 : "sed addito verbo vitæ seu promissionis perfecisse."

² Th. 12 : "Ob quam causam baptisati a Johanne denuo baptisandi fuerunt baptisate Christi."

³ *De c. Bab.*, Erlangen edit., p. 66 : "Quod ergo baptismo tribuitur ablutio a peccatis, vere quidem tribuitur."

⁴ For this reason Luther stresses the need for a full immersion (*ibid.*).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66 : "Peccator enim non tam ablui, quam mori debet, ut totus renovetur in aliam creaturam."

The general meaning of Christian baptism is then two-fold. It signifies first the destruction of the old life of sin, of the old sinful man who in baptism has come to an awareness of sin. Immersion is the symbol of the overwhelming of man in and by sin. But it is more: it is the symbol of man given over to the suffering and the penalty of sin, which is death. In baptism a man acknowledges himself to be submerged in sin, but sin itself, the old life of sin with all its works, is also submerged.¹ Man sees in baptism what his life henceforth must be, a life in which sin is destroyed, a life of dying to sin, by repentance, by mortification, by self-discipline, by physical affliction.² More even than that, baptism, as will be seen more fully later, is in symbol what the actual physical end of this sinful life must be, even for those who are given new life in God, the dissolution of the outward man in death.

A most important point calls for notice here. If baptism is a picture of the victory over sin by a death to sin rather than by a cleansing from its defilement, then it follows that the post-baptismal life will not be, as some Anabaptists claimed,³ a life of freedom from sin, but a life of mortification. It is, says Luther, a serious error to think that there is no sin after baptism, since complacency is engendered thereby, and the soul becomes slack in doing the work signified in baptism, the killing off of sin.⁴

Baptism does not signify only death and destruction. It carries with it the complementary thought of rising again. Not only does the old man of sin die, spiritually first, and then outwardly, but the new man, created of God, is raised up, first spiritually, but finally, at the last day, in the Resurrection.⁵ Renovation goes hand in hand with mortification. The old man is crucified with his wicked works, in order that the new man may be raised up with works of righteousness. This thought is very clear in Luther's teaching, but Luther was not quite sure how exactly this truth is symbolised in the process of baptism. It has already been seen that in the *Disputatio* he identified the resurrection to life with the giving of the new name, the word and the promise of God.⁶ In the *Sermon*, however,

¹ Erl. edit. 21, 17: "dass der alte Adam soll ersäuft werden."

² Ibid.: "durch tägliche Reue und Busse."

³ L. von Muralt, *Glaube und Lehre der Schweizerischen Wiedertäufer*, p. 36 (quoting Altenbach and Sattler, and Zwingli's judgment).

⁴ Erl. edit. 21, 237: "Darumb ist das ein grosser Irrthumb, die da meinen, sie seien durch die Tauf ganz rein worden."

⁵ Erl. edit. 21, pp. 227 ff.

⁶ Ths. 11 and 12.

Luther relates this raising rather to the action of re-emergence from the water. Immersion signifies sin and the death to sin. Emergence signifies the resurrection to life and righteousness. And the water of baptism itself, which partly typifies sin, partly the power which destroys sin, is seen to be endowed with life-giving power.¹ In his *Greater Catechism* Luther develops this thought, that the water of baptism is no ordinary water, and he finds that the power within it is the power of the promise, or word, which accompanies it, thus returning to his first position.² In the *De captivitate Babylonica* Luther connects the new life directly with faith, which itself is based upon and called forth by the promise of God.³

In a penetrating analysis of Luther's doctrine of baptism in its relation to the thought of death,⁴ Carl Stange has drawn attention to one or two difficulties in this symbolism. He points out, for instance, that immersion is for Luther a picture of the overwhelming of man by sin, but also a picture of the overwhelming of sin itself in the death to sin. The dominion of sin is thus symbolised, but also the liberation from sin. Immersion as a symbol does double service. There are two answers to the apparent discrepancies. First, Luther, as Stange himself shows,⁵ identifies sin with the sinner. When Luther speaks of sin, he does not speak of isolated acts, but of a disposition to evil. Sin and the sinner are the same. Thus, as man is submerged in sin, it is sin, in the person of man, which is done to death. Second, sin is self-destructive. Sin overwhelms man, but sin, as baptism proclaims, means death, destruction. In destroying man, sin destroys itself;⁶ in the case of the unbeliever, in judgment, in the case of the man who by faith identifies himself with Christ and in repentance enters into a death to sin, in salvation. Of course, the symbols cannot be too closely pressed—water does not actually destroy water as sin destroys sin—but a true picture is given of the victory over sin. The dominion of sin is a dominion of death, by which sin itself is overthrown, and the repentant and believing soul liberated.

Stange asks and answers a further question. Is there for

¹ Quoting John iii. 5 (Erl. edit. 21, 230).

² Ibid. 130: "ein göttlich, himmlisch, heilig und selig Wasser . . . alles umb des Worts willen."

³ Erl. edit. pp. 57, 64.

⁴ "Der Todesgedanke in Luthers Tauflehre", *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* iv. (1928), pp. 758 ff.

⁵ Ibid., p. 786.

⁶ Erl. edit. 21, 239.

Luther any real connection between the outward process—baptism—and the inward and spiritual process which it symbolises—the work of renovation? If so, what is the causal connection, apart from any purely symbolical similarity? The answer is that baptism is meaningless except to the soul which has by the Word of Baptism, which is the Gospel, the knowledge of sin and of the promise of God, except to the soul which stands in the position depicted in baptism. Baptism is no mere rite—otherwise it would have been discarded. It is not an act of magic, producing an effect upon the soul *ex opere operato*. It is the outward sign, itself a proclamation of the Word and the promise of God, of a true inward work in those who are by faith receiving the Word, or who will certainly come to do so if their god-parents fulfil the tasks undertaken by them.¹

III. BAPTISM AND CHRIST'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Thus far the general symbolism of Christian baptism has been discussed. It has been seen that baptism depicts a death and resurrection of man by the recognition of sin and by the receiving of the life-giving Word of God. Baptism for Luther stands in a close connection with the Gospel, that is to say, with the saving work accomplished in Jesus Christ. How close this connection is will become apparent when it is remembered that this saving work itself consisted in death and resurrection. The question must now be considered how in Luther's teaching baptism, which is the sacrament of death and resurrection both spiritual and physical, is related to the death and resurrection of Christ.

The evidence is superficially so slight as to be disappointing. In his discussions of baptism Luther speaks seldom of the work of Christ, although it is naturally presumed, and he makes little attempt to draw together baptism and the death and resurrection of Christ. Of course he mentions Romans vi., and speaks of our burial with Christ by baptism into death,² but he does not develop the theme. Stange asks whether Luther after all only looked upon the death and resurrection of Christ as events with which baptism could be compared, as, for instance,

¹ Stange, pp. 771-772. The Anabaptists also stressed moral death and resurrection as the work of baptism (cf. the 1st Article of Schlatten), but they insisted upon an individual confession of faith and denied that infants could have faith (Muralt, pp. 34-35).

² In the *Sermon* (21, 231): "Also sagt S. Paulus Röm. 6, 'Wir seien . . ."

the ark and the flood, the passage of the Red Sea, or, in the general sphere, natural birth.¹ After a careful and thorough investigation Stange concludes that although Luther does not work out the question, the death and resurrection of Christ are for him far more than a mere illustration. They are at once the type, the example and the basis of the death and resurrection, moral and physical, of which baptism is the sacrament.

The reasons advanced in favour of this conclusion are as follows. First, if the death and resurrection of Christ were only an illustration, then they would add nothing new—no more than is suggested by an image drawn from nature, such as autumn and spring, sunrise and sunset. But for Luther they clearly mean far more than that. Second, they would complicate the imagery. Baptism as the picture of moral renovation has already its own imagery of immersion, without introducing a new comparison with the death and resurrection of a man. Third, if the death and resurrection of Christ introduced nothing real, then the baptism of Christ would not differ substantially from that of John, as Luther held it to do. Fourth, the death and resurrection of Christ would not even give a true picture, since they were sudden and physical, whereas the death and resurrection pictured in baptism are lifelong and moral, only finding their consummation in actual physical death and resurrection. But if there is an intimate connection between the work of Christ and baptism, then much that is obscure becomes plain. Faith becomes important because it is identification with Christ. It is because he is thus identified with Christ that man is forgiven and that he can die to sin. It is because he is identified with Christ, who died for sin, but who rose again, that man can be assured of the resurrection to eternal life after physical dissolution. The true meaning of Baptism only emerges when it is considered in the light of the work of Christ, and that is what Luther means when he says that in baptism Christ is given to us.²

The discussions of the *De captivitate* make this abundantly plain. Three main points emerge. First, baptism is thought of as bringing into a relationship with God. Baptism, of course, admits into the fellowship of the Church.³ But this means that it admits into the knowledge of God. In baptism God is revealed, not

¹ Stange, p. 800. These comparisons are used in the *Sermon*.

² Erl. edit. 21, 235. In baptism "wird uns Christus geben".

³ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

the *Deus absconditus* of nature, but the *Deus revelatus* of grace.¹ God is not known, however, except by the Word of God, that is to say, by Jesus Christ and His work. Baptism is testimony to God, because it speaks of the work of Christ, His death and Resurrection, making it real to the soul.

Second, baptism is the act of God. The priest performs the act, outwardly, and in that sense it may be said that he baptises us.² But God Himself does the inward work, and it is God Himself who really does the outward act, through his appointed minister.³ The rite of baptism is not a human work, pointing to something which God does, allegorical only, but it is a work of God, the sign of that which God does in the soul, sacramental. This means that baptism, as the act of God in the individual soul, is brought into the closest possible relationship with the act of God which made this possible, the death and the resurrection of Christ. When we say that God gave Christ to suffer and raised him up the third day, and that God slays us, the old Adam, and raises us up to a new life with him, we do not speak only of acts which are similar. We speak of the same act, here generally set forth as the basis and the prototype, there individually applied to the individual heart and life, sacramentally in baptism, really in the work of baptism.

The means by which the individual enters into the work and makes baptism real is faith. Upon this point Luther is emphatic in all the writings. God promises life, but life is not given mechanically or in virtue of the fulfilment of the rite. Baptism is God's guarantee of death and resurrection, accomplished already in Christ, but to be worked out in the individual both spiritually and physically. To enter into God's work man must believe the promise. In this connection Luther cites Mark xvi. 16.⁴ If a man believes, then already he has.⁵ But if he does not believe, then he makes God a liar and is lost.⁶ Unbelief alone can destroy the work of baptism.⁷ Of course

¹ Cf. Stange, pp. 817 ff. Luther speaks of the act "per quod Dominus in coelo sedens te in aquam suis manibus propriis mergit, et remissionem peccatorum promittit in terris, voce hominis tibi loquens per os ministri sui" (p. 61).

² "Homo enim baptisat et non baptisat. Baptisat, quia perficit opus, dum mergit baptisandum."

³ *Ibid.*, p. 60: "Non baptisat, quia non fungitur in eo opere sua autoritate, sed vice Dei."

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57: "Qui crediderit et baptisatus fuerit, salvus erit."

⁵ 21, 239: "Glaubst du, so hast du; zweifelst du, so bist du verloren."

⁶ *Erl. edit.* p. 57: "Incredulitas enim eiusmodi mendacem arguit promissionem divinam, quod est summum omnium peccatorum."

⁷ 21, 239: "allein durch den Unglauben ihres Werks wird sie zunichte."

baptism itself, the sign of death and resurrection, is an aid to faith. Pointing us to what God has promised, it is a witness in times of doubt and temptation.¹ It looks backward, to what God has already done in Christ. It looks forward, to what God will do in us. Faith is the identification of ourselves with Christ in his work. It is itself for Luther a kind of inward and spiritual baptism.² The man who is baptised and who is a believer enters into the death and resurrection of Christ, by promise immediately, by mortification gradually, by physical dissolution finally and eternally.

In his utterances Luther does not closely relate the sacrament to the death and resurrection of Christ, but it is clear that this thought underlay the whole teaching. Were it not for the basis in that work, our relationship with God could not with any meaning be expressed in the sacrament of baptism, the promise and the act of God would not convey anything to us, and faith in the promise and entering into the work would thus be impossible. The inward work of renovation would carry with it no guarantee of salvation, and would in any case be impossible. If baptism signifies death and resurrection, then the death and the resurrection of Christ are not an illustration, but the very basis. It is by identification with Christ that we partake in the redeeming work of God thus set forth and guaranteed to us.

IV. BAPTISM AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

As the sign of death and resurrection baptism speaks not only of a work of God which by faith is done in a moment, the transition of the soul from death to life, but it also speaks of the Christian life in which that transition is worked out, the experiences of daily life. Everywhere Luther is aware of the twofold nature of baptism. It is the work of a moment. By faith we are already that which God would have us be. It is a process which covers the whole of life from baptism to the grave. In experience we become that which by faith we already are. The rite itself is the work of a moment, and so is that which is promised and

¹ Luther cites the saintly virgin who, in temptation, pointed the devil to her baptism: " ' Christiana sum ' ; intellexit enim hostis statim virtutem baptismi et fidei . . . et fugit ab ea " (pp. 58 f.).

² P. 67: " ita semel es baptisatus sacramentaliter, sed semper baptisandus fide. "

by faith is. But the work of baptism is a work which is only completed in death and at the Last Day.¹

This point emerges clearly in Luther's teaching upon the death to sin, of which baptism is first the symbol. This death is not a sudden but a lingering death. Sin does not fully die as long as there is earthly life.² Luther takes into full account the weakness of mortal nature. Even where there is faith in the divine promise, even where there is the will to have done with sin and to work righteousness, that other law, the law of sin and death, persists in our members, inclining to evil. As long as life upon earth lasts, this corruption of the inward nature remains. The old man is crucified with Christ by faith, but in experience he is only fully crucified with the end of this sinful life.

Full allowance is thus made for post-baptismal sin, as experience demands, and none but those who are blinded by fanaticism can dispute. But Luther brings this sin under the sign and within the scope of baptism. Roman Catholics, who also admitted post-baptismal sin, took rather a different course. Baptism for them covered original sin, and actual sins committed prior to baptism. But when the baptised fell again into actual sin, a second plank was needed to rescue them, the sacrament of penance.³ Luther had a very high regard for penance, and was willing, with Melanchthon, to regard it as a sacrament.⁴ But he subordinated penance to the evangelical sacrament of baptism. The forgiveness signified in baptism was for Luther forgiveness not only of acts of sin, but of the sinful disposition of the heart. Baptism as the sacrament of forgiveness thus covered the whole process of the death to sin and of the resurrection to eternal life, and penance is not something which exists apart from baptism, to which we must trust separately, but something which belongs to baptism.⁵ To relate baptism only to original sin, or to pre-baptismal sins, is, Luther complains, to restrict it wrongly in its operation and to take away from its true power and dignity.⁶ Even although we fall into sin after baptism, it is wrong to ask

¹ Erl. ed. p. 66 : " Hic iterum vides, baptismi sacramentum, etiam quoad signum, non esse momentaneum aliquid negotium, sed perpetuum. . . . Licet enim usus eius subito transeat, tamen res ipsa significata durat usque ad mortem, imo resurrectionem in novissimo die."

² 21, 230 : " die Sünd hört nit auf, dieweil dieser Leib lebt."

³ " Secunda tabula post naufragium " (p. 56) ; Jerome is cited.

⁴ Cf. Melanchthon, *Loc Theologici (Corpus Reform. XXI, pp. 42-43)*.

⁵ 21, 238 : " Denn auch das Sacrament der Buss seinen Grund an diesem Sacrament, dieweil allein denen die Sünd vergeben werden, die getauft sein."

⁶ *Ibid* : " Der Art seind auch die, die da meinen, ihre Sünd mit Genugthuung tilgen und ablegen, kommen auch so ferr, dass sie der Tauf nit mehr achten."

what then is the use of baptism. Baptism is the guarantee of the eternal mercy of God and of a work of God which *will* be completed. Penance is not something in which to trust apart from the baptismal promise. In this sacrament, as Luther conceives it, the promise of baptism is reaffirmed,¹ and penances imposed are, not a means to self-righteousness, but an aid to the destruction of the sinful man within the baptismal sign.²

The driving-out (*Austreiben*) of sin is a long and painful process, but in baptism its final accomplishment and the full forgiveness of God are assured. Two questions need to be asked at this point: What exactly does Luther understand by this spiritual death, that is to say, what is it that is driven out or destroyed? and how is the process of destruction accomplished? The answer to the first question is that it is the sinful will of man, the man of self, the sinful nature, the old Adam,³ which must be done to death. Individual acts of sin are to be set aside, but it is the sinful nature which produces these acts that must be destroyed. In answer to the second question Luther finds the means of destruction, not only in repentance and in penance, as already mentioned, not only in such godly, but voluntary disciplines as fasting,⁴ but also in the sufferings and afflictions of this present world. Baptism explains to us the process of tribulation as a means of mortification.⁵ Suffering takes on so grievous an aspect because sin and the life of sin do not die willingly.⁶ Naturally, suffering and trouble differ with the different walks of life, but in their different spheres all men are taught of God by their different experiences to kill off the sinful nature within,⁷ to see this life as a stage on the road to eternity, and to conceive a horror for the things of this world, and a love for the world to come.⁸ It is only when men set their affections upon this world, and refuse to destroy the old Adam, that they complain bitterly at suffering and find a terror in death.

The death to sin is, of course, only one side of the moral

¹ Ibid. "Also dass der Buss Sacrament erneuert, und wieder anzeigt der Tauf-sacrament."

² Ibid., p. 240.

³ 21, 17: "der alte Adam."

⁴ 21, 240: "Man sollt Fasten und alle Uebung dahin leiten, dass sie den alten Adam, die sündlich Natur drucken."

⁵ 21, 239: "dass die Tauf alle Leiden, und sonderlich den Tod, nützlich und hülflich macht, dass sie nur dienen müssen der Tauf Werk, das ist, die Sünd zu töten."

⁶ Ibid.: "Die Sünd stirbt nit gern; darum macht sie den Tod so bitter und greulich."

⁷ Ibid., p. 240 f.: "mancherlei Ständ, in welchen man sich üben und leiden lehren soll." This is worked out in some detail.

⁸ Ibid.: "Lieb des ewigen Lebens, und Greulichkeit dieses Lebens."

and spiritual process which baptism signifies. The other side is the resurrection to the life of righteousness which is the life of eternity. The process of spiritual death is lifelong, so too is that of spiritual resurrection. In baptism and by faith the work is done in a moment: the old man is dead, the new raised up. But in experience the work of resurrection, like that of mortification, is not accomplished until the Last Day.¹ For the baptised man earthly life is then a life of mortification on the one side, and on the other a life of increase in grace and righteousness, of progress in good works, in the power of the Holy Ghost. Luther sees here a distinction between the sacrament of baptism and the work of the sacrament. Sacramentally, the baptised man is already pure and holy. In actual life, he is becoming pure and holy.² When Luther speaks of this progress in good works, although at times he does use language which suggests the scholastic idea of an infusion of grace filling up the void left by nature,³ he is of course thinking of works which are the operation of the indwelling Spirit of God, not of works which are in any way meritorious or justifying.

The thought of the moral death to sin and resurrection to life brings into baptism the element of personal response to the work and the promise of God. The work and the promise are of God alone, but as man must believe the promise, so he must be willing to let God work. It is thus that baptism becomes a covenant. Man for his part engages to enter into the meaning of baptism, and to use all means to kill the old Adam and to raise up the new.⁴ God promises man the forgiveness of sin and guarantees the accomplishment of the work. A failure on the part of man, except through loss of faith, or lack of it, does not destroy the contract. In the mercy and grace of God the man who falls into sin is received again so long as he has a true desire for restitution and for the accomplishment of the work of God.⁵ Stange raises the question whether this insistence upon the *consensus voluntatis* is not a relic of scholasticism,⁶ but notes that it recurs too frequently to be dismissed in that way. The work of

¹ 21, 231: "aber die Bedeutung, die geistlich Geburt, die Mehrung der Genaden und Gerechtigkeit, hebt wohl an in der Tauf; währet aber auch bis in den Tod, ja bis an jungsten Tag."

² Ibid., p. 234: "ganz rein und unschuldig, sacramentalisch . . . aber. . ."

³ Ibid.: "Gott . . . geusst dir ein sein Gnad und heiligen Geist."

⁴ Ibid., p. 234: "dass du dich ergibst in das Sacrament der Tauf und ihrer Bedeutung."

⁵ Ibid., p. 235: "so du doch wieder aufstehest, und wieder in den Bund trittst."

⁶ Stange, p. 783.

God is not forced upon man. If he is to die and to rise again, he must want to do so, he must also believe that God will do the work. The work is God's, even the desire for it and the faith are of God, but man must have the desire and he must believe. The fact that renovation, like forgiveness, is of God does not clear man of responsibility. If there is no response, then the work and the promise of God turn to destruction and to condemnation instead of to justification and renewal.¹

V. BAPTISM AND THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

One of the outstanding features of Luther's treatment of Baptism is that he does not hesitate to bring it into relationship with the actual physical dissolution of the believer and the resurrection at the Last Day. Baptism is not only the sign of something which takes place in the soul, moral renovation. Luther does not say: As Christ died, so we die spiritually; as He was raised, so we are raised spiritually. He says: As Christ died, so we die, both spiritually and physically; as He was raised, so we shall be raised both in soul and body. Luther thus gives to baptism an eschatological and cosmic as well as a moral and spiritual significance. We literally die with Christ and are raised in and with Him. That is why Luther always insists that the work of baptism cannot be completed until the day of death, indeed the Last Day.² That is why he speaks of baptism as a true sacrament and not merely an allegorical picture.³

This teaching is clear and straightforward enough in itself, but one or two points call for notice. First, it brings baptism into a far closer and a more concrete relationship with the death and resurrection of Christ. This point has been discussed above, but it is plain that if we are to die, as Christ did, and to rise again as He did, and if baptism is the sign of this death and resurrection, then the relationship is more real than if we were only to die and to rise again morally and spiritually. Baptism as the sign and promise of the work of God concerns our whole life, and brings us into relationship with Christ in every aspect

¹ Cf. 21, 238-239.

² *Ibid.*, p. 230: "Die Bedeutung . . . wird allererst im Tod vollbracht."

³ *Erl. ed.*, p. 65: "Quod enim minister puerum immergit in aquam, mortem significat, quod autem rursum educit, vitam significat . . . quam non oportet allegorice tantum intelligi de morte peccati et vita gratiae . . . sed de vera morte et resurrectione."

of it. The work of moral renovation is not thereby excluded. Physical death and resurrection are a consummation. In them the process of death to sin and resurrection to life, already begun in spirit, culminates. Sin is finally destroyed, and the life of righteousness perfected.¹

Second, baptism is the sign of something eternal and not merely transitory. Outwardly, baptism admits into an earthly fellowship,² but inwardly it marks the movement from the world of sin to the world of God. Baptism is an act of God whereby we enter already in faith into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and it is thus a dividing-point between time and eternity. It has reference to a work of salvation, begun indeed in this life, but completed in eternity. Baptism is not just the symbolical representation of the fact of death and of the hope of a life beyond. It is such a symbolical representation within the context of the saving activity and of the promise of God. It is an evangelical sign, proclaiming that death and hell and sin are vanquished in the death and resurrection of Christ, calling to sinners to enter by faith into that death and resurrection, assuring of the final deliverance with the dissolution of the body and resurrection to the life of eternity.

Finally, baptism, as the sign of death and resurrection, gives the clue which enables us to understand suffering and death in this world, that suffering and death which reached a climax in the passion and the cross of Christ. The sufferings of this world, as mentioned above, are means of mortification. Luther can even say that the more hardly we suffer the happier we are, because the more quickly is the meaning of baptism fulfilled and deliverance wrought. Times of persecution are the happiest times in the history of the Church.³ Death itself is the result and the penalty of sin;⁴ but Christ has borne the penalty, and in our baptism, when by faith we are identified with Christ, we are forgiven even as we accept the judgment. But death is also, in the mercy and the providence of God, the means whereby

¹ Erl. ed. p. 66: "Morimur, inquam, non tantum affectu et spiritualiter, quo peccatis et vanitatibus mundi renunciamus, sed revera vitam hanc corporalem incipimus relinquere, et futuram vitam apprehendere, ut baptismus sit realis et corporalis quoque transitus ex hoc mundo ad Patrem."

² 21, 230: "Aufnahme in das 'Volk Christi'."

³ Erl. ed. p. 67: "quo brevius a vita absolvimur, eo citius baptismum nostrum impleamus, et quo atrociora patimur, eo feliciter baptismum respondeamus. Ideoque ecclesiam tunc fuisse felicissimam, quando martyres mortificabantur omni die et aestimabantur sicut oves occisionis."

⁴ 21, 239.

sin is destroyed.¹ The believer, although he will not die eternally, because he is forgiven, must still die in the flesh, in order that sin may finally destroy itself and in order that the work of renovation may be consummated in the resurrection.² But for the believer death has lost its true terror. He does not need to fear death, because he is forgiven. He can welcome death, because it is the climax, a completion of the saving work of God. This does not mean that life upon earth is no longer valued: it means that it is set against the background of eternity and of the redemptive work of God. To the unbeliever, who has hope only in this world, death is an enemy, irrational, causing qualms of conscience, holding the threat of judgment.³ But for the one who looks at Christ there is in death the promise of life. The perfect attitude to death is that of Christ, who went to His early and cruel death without a qualm, composed, serene, obedient, opening up as the forerunner and as the saviour the way to life.⁴

Baptism, the sacrament of regeneration, brings into relationship three essential things: (1) the work of Christ as the means of forgiveness, the guarantee of victory; (2) the inward renewal by faith, repentance, mortification, the apprehension of forgiveness, growth in righteousness; (3) carnal death and resurrection, the entering into the triumph of Christ and the accomplishment of the work of God. Luther rightly stresses all three. Only thus can the fullness of God's work be known. Baptism is the sign of the death and resurrection of Christ, the basis; of the present death and resurrection morally and spiritually, the beginning of the work of God; of the future death and resurrection of the body, the completion. In baptism the whole of God's redemptive work is thus signed and sealed to the believing soul.

G. W. BROMILEY.

*Haile,
Cumberland.*

¹ Erl. ed.: "Also gnädig ist Gott und mächtig, dass die Sünd, die den Tod bracht hat, wird mit ihrem eigen Werk wieder vertrieben."

² 21, 231: "so stosst er uns wieder in die Erden durch den Tod und macht uns wiederumb am jungsten Tag, dass wir dann wohl geratheen und ohn Sünd seien."

³ Cf. *Sermon von Bereitung zum Sterben*, 21, 256 ff.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 263-265: "Am Kreuz . . . hat er uns sich selbst bereit ein dreifältig Bild, unserm Glauben furzuhalten. . . ."