"Return to Your Baptism Daily": Baptism and Christian Life

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The fundamental principle of receptive ecumenism is that each tradition focuses on the question: "What can we learn, or receive, with integrity from our various others in order to facilitate our own growth together into deepened communion in Christ and the Spirit?" Receptive ecumenism calls dialogue partners to receive gifts from each other. As Paul Murray expresses it, receptive ecumenism is based on the conviction that the life of faith "is always in essence a matter of becoming more fully, more richly, what we already are;"

what we have been called to be and are destined to be and in which we already share, albeit in part." In what seems to be a paradox, this means that Catholics may deepen their Catholic identity, and Lutherans their Lutheran identity, by looking to their dialogue partner for elements preserved in the other tradition that they may also authentically claim as their own. This essay explores how Catholics can be more truly Catholic by appropriating more fully several aspects of Luther's baptismal theology.

Luther had little quarrel with baptism as practiced in the Roman Catholic Church. In The Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1520), he comments,

Blessed be God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to the riches of his mercy [Eph. 1:3, 7] has preserved in his church this sacrament at least, untouched and untainted by the ordinances of men, and has made it free to all nations and classes of mankind, and has not permitted it to be oppressed by the filthy and godless monsters of greed and superstition.³

Catholics, however, were not so sanguine about Luther's theology of baptism. The seventh session of the Council of Trent in its "Decree Concerning the Sacraments" (March 3, 1547) issued fourteen canons on baptism in which it condemned positions attributed to the reformers that it considered to be heretical. Not all of these pertained to Luther's teaching, because both Luther and Trent were concerned to refute Anabaptist teaching, but Canons 6-10 were directed against the Lutheran teaching on baptism as a perpetual sacrament:

Can 6. If anyone says that one who is baptized cannot, even if he wishes, lose grace, however much he sins, unless he refuses to believe: let him be anathema.

Can 7. If anyone says that those baptized are obliged to faith alone, but not to the observance of the whole law of Christ: let him be anathema.

Can 8. If anyone says that those baptized are exempt from all the precepts of holy church, whether they are in writing or handed down, so that they are not bound to observe them, unless of their own free will they wish to submit themselves to them: let him be anathema.

Can. 9. If anyone says that people must be recalled to the memory of the baptism they received, thereby understanding that all vows made after baptism become of no effect by the force of the promise already made in their actual baptism, as if such vows detract from the faith they have professed and from the baptism itself: let him be anathema.

Can. 10. If anyone says that, solely by the remembrance of receiving baptism and of its faith, all sins committed after baptism are forgiven or become venial: let him be anathema. 4

Today the limitations of these canons are recognized insofar as they are responses to texts extracted from primarily early texts of Luther before his later struggle with the Anabaptists and taken out of context. They do not do justice to Luther's sacramental theology when viewed within the totality of his theology, for his teaching on the relationship between faith, sacrament, and word is very nuanced.

One might also argue that Trent's teaching does not present a comprehensive Roman Catholic sacramental theology, but reduces it to a limited number of concerns such as the septenary number of the sacraments, their institution by Christ, and the principle of their causality *ex opere operato* on those who place no obstacle. Missing elements from the teaching include the ecclesial dimension of the sacraments, their fuller context in terms of Christ and his redemptive action, and their nature as a personal encounter in faith with Christ. 5

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5. Godfrey Diekmann, "Some Observations on the Teaching of Trent Concerning Baptism."
Trent also does not do justice to the Roman Catholic teaching on the necessity of faith for efficacious reception of the sacraments, on which the council fathers were agreed. As Godfrey Diekmann explains, "not faith alone" implied "faith plus something else." Finally, Trent’s emphasis on causality overshadowed the teaching on sacraments as signs.

Later study has determined that the Roman Catholic condemnations “underestimate the ecclesial and soteriological importance which the sacraments have in the Protestant churches as means of salvation.” Nor did the reformers “play off justification by faith alone (sole fide) against the celebration of the sacraments, as they were accused of doing,” and which seems to be reflected in canon 7. Canon 6 does not accurately represent the Lutheran viewpoint, although it may apply to the Zwinglian position. It must also be noted that the phrase “contain grace” (continere gratiam), used in canon 6 of the canons on the sacraments in general, does not reflect the Protestant understanding of the relationship between a sacrament and the promise of grace. Arguably, it also is not the best expression of a contemporary Catholic understanding of grace. Perhaps Lutherans and Catholics could agree that sacraments communicate the grace that they signify if it is clear that the primary actor in the sacraments is Christ, something which both affirm. Finally, Lutherans do not find themselves targeted by canon 10 since ‘they do not hold that persons who fall into grave sins after baptism and persevere in them without true and earnest repentance receive forgiveness of sins merely be recalling in a perfunctory and purely historical way that they were...


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once baptized, so that they have no need of genuine repentance and the ministry of the keys."

Sacraments for Luther were not mere signs pointing to grace, but the necessary efficacious instruments of God who is present in them. Luther’s Large Catechism (1529) states:

Our know-it-alls, the new spirits, claim that faith alone saves and that works and external things add nothing to it. We answer: It is true, nothing that is in us does it but faith, as we shall hear later on. But these leaders of the blind are unwilling to see that faith must have something to believe—something to which it may cling and upon which it may stand. Thus faith clings to the water and believes it to be baptism, in which there is sheer salvation and life, not through the water, as we have sufficiently stated, but through its incorporation with God’s Word and ordinance and the joining of his name to it. When I believe this, what else is it but believing in God as the one who has bestowed and implanted his Word in baptism and has offered us this external thing within which we can grasp this treasure?

Now, these people are so foolish as to separate faith from the object to which faith is attached and secured, all on the grounds that the object is something external. Yes, it must be external so that it can be perceived and grasped by the senses and thus brought into the heart, just as the entire gospel is an external, oral proclamation. In short, whatever God does and effects in us he desires to accomplish through such an external ordinance. No matter where he speaks—indeed, no matter for what purpose or through what means he speaks—there faith must look and to it faith must hold on. We have here the words, “The one who believes and is baptized will be saved.” To what do they refer if not to baptism, that is, the water placed in the setting of God’s ordinance? Hence it follows that whoever rejects baptism rejects God’s Word, faith, and Christ, who directs and binds us to baptism.9

Thus, for Luther, God’s word is joined to the sign of baptism, the water, through which God enacts God’s promise. Catholics, using the


language of metaphysics, would call baptism an instrumental cause of God’s grace. The explanation may differ, but the reality is the same.

In 1966, the second U.S. bi-lateral official ecumenical conversation of the Lutheran–Catholic dialogue sponsored by the U.S.A. National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation and the bishops: Commission for Ecumenical Affairs issued a joint statement written by Bishop T. Austin Murphy and Paul Empie saying, “We were reasonably certain that the teachings of our respective traditions regarding baptism are in substantial agreement, and this opinion has been confirmed at this meeting.”

What Catholics Can Receive from the Lutheran Doctrine of Baptism

In the spirit of receptive ecumenism, Catholics can profit from several themes in Luther’s theology of baptism. This essay develops these three themes:

1. Catholics can better emphasize the role of baptism in governing and directing the whole of Christian life. Although received in its entirety with the invocation of Father, Son, and Spirit with immersion or effusion, all of Christian life is properly baptismal. Luther’s injunction to put on baptism daily aptly applies to all of the baptized.

2. Catholics can bring out more strongly the promissory character of the sacraments and the need to appropriate them through faith.\textsuperscript{11}


\textsuperscript{11} This is a recommendation of the study group which produced The Condemnations of the Reformation Era: Do They Still Divide?, ed. Lehmann and Pannenberg; see p. 76.
3. Catholics can better recognize the eschatological orientation of baptism.

1. Return to Your Baptism Daily

In his *Large Catechism*, Luther emphasized the importance of baptism for daily life:

> Therefore let all Christians regard their Baptism as the daily garment that they are to wear all the time. Every day they should be found in faith and with its fruits, suppressing the old creature and growing up in the new. If we want to be Christians, we must practice the work that makes us Christians, and let those who fall away return to it. As Christ, the mercy seat, does not withdraw from us or forbid us to return to him even though we sin, so all his treasures and gifts remain. As we have once obtained forgiveness of sins in baptism, so forgiveness remains day by day as long as we live, that is, as long as we carry the old creature about our necks.¹²

Through baptism, the Christian is accepted into a relationship with Father, Son, and Spirit in a unique and fundamental way. A person assumes the name Christian, indicating that he or she has put on Christ when plunged into his death and resurrection and has assumed an identity that reorients the whole of life. It is irrevocable and unrepeatable regardless whether or not a person later renounces this allegiance. Baptism is a reality that cannot be destroyed once received even though the benefit of baptism, reception of God’s grace, cannot be fully realized without a response in faith.

Even though baptism truly creates intimacy with God in a graced relationship, this relationship is capable of growth into likeness to God and deepening, what we call growth in sanctification.¹³ In this


sense baptism is an inauguration of a Christian life that is open-ended even though the sacrament is itself complete. In baptism we are made holy and yet can grow in holiness. Baptism, which incorporates us into the once-for-all death of Christ, calls us to a daily dying to sin and rising to new life. Thus it is a continuing call to repentance, faith, and obedience to Christ. As Luther's Large Catechism puts it, living in repentance is a walking in baptism. 14

Catholics would agree with this insofar as the sacrament of penance returns a person to the state of grace initially effected by baptism. Even though Trent in Canon 10 condemned the position "that by the sole remembrance and the faith of the baptism received, all sins committed after baptism are either remitted or made venial," this canon does not take into account the role of repentance in the return to baptismal justification. The Catholic and Lutheran positions are similar in the effect produced even though differences remain in how that effect is produced, Lutherans emphasizing the role of faith in the process of repentance and Catholics the objective role of the sacrament of penance within repentance, which of course also requires faith for fruitful reception. Where Lutherans would say that we always have access to baptism, 15 Catholics would say that we always have the possibility of returning to the condition initially established by baptism.

Luther opposed setting up penance as a replacement for baptism and in effect making penance into a kind of second baptism. For example, he thought that Jerome's allusion to penance as "the second plank on which we must swim ashore after the ship flounders" takes away the value of baptism by making it of no further use to us. He acknowledged that we slip and fall out of the ship, but said that those

14. Large Catechism, IV:75; BC 466.
15. Large Catechism, IV:77; BC 466.
who do fall out should immediately swim to the ship, that is, baptism, and hold fast to it. 16

Using another conceptual system, the Catholic teaching on the sacramental character imparted by baptism certainly affirms the enduring permanence of baptism. The sacramental character means more than simply that baptism cannot be repeated. It confers a competence, a commission within the visibility of the church. 17 This is an authorization to participate in in the public worship of the church. A sacramental character is therefore a type of “ordination” which makes it possible for the worship acts of the baptized to be acts of the risen Christ since the baptized is incorporated into the body of the risen Christ in baptism. St. Thomas identified the sacramental character or competence a participation in the high priesthood of Christ, which varied depending on whether the character was conferred by baptism, confirmation, or the ordained priesthood.

Thomas’s theology of sacramental character remains a theological view and is not official doctrine of the church. The dogmatic definitions of the Council of Florence and of Trent simply stated that the character is indelible such that the sacraments conferring a character can be received only once, but did not specify what a character actually is. 18 Catholic theological consensus, however, is that “a person who bears a character or mark bears a certain relation to the visible ecclesial community.” 19 The Lutheran Confessions nowhere reject a character in baptism, but do not operate with this construct due to its late appearance in western theology, the lack

16. Large Catechism IV:81–81; BC 466.
18. Council of Florence, “Bull of Union with the Armenians” (1439); in Denzinger’s Enchiridion Symbololorum, §1313; Council of Trent, “Decree on the Sacraments” (1547); Denzinger §1609.
19. Schillebeeckx, Christ, the Sacrament of the Encounter with God, 156.
of a biblical basis for it, the metaphorical nature of the term, and uneasiness about the Hellenistic doctrine of the soul inherent in it.  

For our purposes here, it is significant that this relationship to the church is not lost through sin. Thus even though baptismal grace can be lost through serious sin, baptism is not left behind, but endures. Since Lutherans would also say that loss of salvation remains a possibility for a Christian and that baptism is never left behind, for both communions there is something permanent in baptism and something that can be lost. Both communions would affirm that that which is permanent is on the side of God's activity in the sacrament, Lutherans describing this as promise and Catholics speaking of a definitive character of the sacrament. Both communions speak of the possibility of a subjective turning from baptism by the baptized. Finally, both speak of a return to baptismal grace, while Lutherans speak of this as a clinging to baptism through faith in God's promise and Catholics hold that this occurs not through faith in baptism, but through recourse to the sacrament of penance and contrition. Perhaps this account shows unity as well as difference in Lutheran and Catholic accounts of the permanence of baptism and the return to baptismal grace.

The task of remembering our baptism is a recollection of who we are in Christ and bringing to mind that our Christian life is a journey in union with Christ back to the Father within the process of a reconciliation of all in Christ. Baptism calls us to walk daily in the newness of Christian life in which we undertake a Christian ethic. Christian ethics connect the new creature we have become in Christ with the goal of humanity as revealed in Christ. Living out our baptismal identity leads us to sacrificial service. Thus the faith with which we receive baptism finds expression in love, which in turn impels us to mission. As Christ was sent on mission, so we are sent.

to build up the city of God on earth. As he returns to his Father after completing his task, so too do we look forward to a union with the Father when we will see him face-to-face.

Luther’s belief in the sufficiency of baptism received in faith is one reason why he rejected religious vows. He thought that all vows should be abolished and that everyone should be recalled to the vows of baptism: “For we have vowed enough in baptism, more than we can ever fulfill; if we give ourselves to the keeping of this one vow, we shall have all we can do.” Furthermore, he saw vows as multiplying laws and works and as extinguishing the liberty of baptism. In his view, in many ways religious life, interpreted as a new baptism, abrogated to itself the meaning and honor due to baptism.

An alternative view of this regards religious life as being based on baptism and a specific form of living out baptismal identity. For instance, the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Kansas, state in their Constitution, “As Christians united personally by Baptism to Jesus Christ and to his body, the Church, the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth . . . are women who view Baptism as the most significant event in our lives. . . .” Similarly, recent work on lay and ordained ministry roots all ministries in baptism. In part, this is the result of situating all ministry within the context of an ecclesial community. Baptism establishes a person as a member of the community and ministry, lay and ordained, proceeds from baptism as does all discipleship. Sacramental ordination is a further specification of a person’s relationship within the community, out of which relationship derives the power to act in the name of the community.

21. LW 36:75-76; WA 6:539.
and in the name of Christ. Baptism is a prerequisite for ordination as it is for marriage and membership in a religious community recognized by the church. Within this view, lay and ordained ministry and consecrated life are a “re-positioning” of a baptized member within the baptismal community according to the specific character of each.

Despite the relationship between ordained ministry and baptism, neither Lutherans nor Catholics entrust the public proclamation of the gospel and presiding over the Eucharist to anyone who is baptized apart from that person also being ordained. For Lutherans “a regular call” and ordination are normally required, although the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America permits lay presidency in cases of need. Nevertheless, this practice is not without controversy among Lutherans.

The imperative to live out baptism daily means that the whole of Christian life is paschal both in its structure and in its spirituality. Baptism is truly foundational in that baptism is the once-for-all opening insofar as it contains all of Christian life in a nutshell. It elicits a life-long response in faith and discipleship. It represents a journey of ever-deepening communion with God and fellowship with other Christians.

2. Appropriating the promissory character of baptism through faith

Luther said, “the first thing to be considered about baptism is the divine promise, which says, ‘He who believes and is baptized will be saved’ [Mark 16:16].” The sacrament of baptism is an enacted form of word. This theology, of course, comes from Augustine, who called a sacrament “a visible word.” The connection between

24. *LW* 36:58; *WA* 6:527. Note that Luther accepts as canonical the longer ending of Mark’s Gospel.
“word” and “sacrament” so clearly emphasized by Augustine had, during the Middle Ages, passed out of view. In the words of Harnack, “the _verbum_ disappeared entirely behind the sacrament’s sign” with the result that the conception had become “still more magical, and consequently more objectionable.” For Luther, this loss seemed to undervalue the recipient’s role in the sacramental encounter.

Luther’s concept of a sacrament involved three elements: 1) A sacrament is a sign instituted by God and connected with a promise of grace; 2) The sacrament only becomes efficacious through the individuals faith in the promise; and 3) The effect of the sacrament is forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. The recipient’s role in the sacramental encounter, then, is to receive the word of promise embodied in the sacramental sign with the response of faith. Faith does not make the sacrament valid, but it does make it efficacious.

Catholics historically have had an under-developed theology of the Word. Even now after efforts to address this after the Second Vatican Council and the requirement to have scripture texts included in the revision of each of the sacramental rites, the notion of a sacrament as a visible word received in faith is not in the consciousness of most Catholics, even though sacramental theologians are attempting to remedy this. The danger remains of regarding word and sacrament as two separate entities rather than as an interrelated whole.


26. Luther’s conviction of the need for a personal response of faith was problematic with respect to infant baptism. His answer to the problem varied. At times he viewed baptism as the prime example of the absolute gratuity of salvation. At another time he believed that the community of believers that needed to be present, allowing faith to be vicariously present. On yet other occasions, he suggested that infants were capable of faith. He vigorously defended infant baptism against the Anabaptists. This essay does not engage this aspect of Luther’s thought.

Karl Rahner is the theologian after Vatican II who incorporates a robust theology of the word in his account of sacramentality and comes closest to Luther's concept of sacrament. He identifies a sacrament as a "quite specific word-event within a theology of the word. Rahner even says, "the word constitutes the basic essence of the sacrament and that by comparison with the word the 'matter', the elementum has at basis the merely secondary function of providing an illustration of the significance of the word." This word is an event of grace, a saving event made effective by the power of God.

Louis-Marie Chauvet, a Catholic liturgical theologian, in addressing what he calls the "false dichotomy between Word and Sacrament," speaks of the "word that deposits itself in the sacramental ritual as well as in the Bible" such that it is better to speak of "a liturgy of the Word under the mode of Scripture and of a liturgy of the Word under the mode of bread and wine." One avoids a magical or automatic effect of the sacrament by remembering that the communication of God in the sacraments is always "under the mode of communication by word." For Chauvet, the baptismal formula is "the precipitate of the Christians Scriptures" since the baptismal formula, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" is like a "concentrate of all the Scriptures." The baptismal formula functions as the symbol par excellence of Christian identity, is inscribed in the body, which is to say, in the fabric of life. Thus word is understood on three levels: the Christ-Word, the Scriptures, and the sacramental formula itself pronounced "in the person of Christ."

Chauvet's theology of the connection between word and sacrament extends beyond Luther's theology of the word as promise

29. Chauvet, Symbol and Sacrament, 221.
30. Ibid., 222.
and its reception in faith, but it bridges what is too often a dichotomy between word and sacrament and thus retrieves in a contemporary key Augustine's notion of a sacrament as a "visible word." Chauvet makes the connection with faith by recalling that contemporary exegesis of John 6 does not consider it to be a discourse about the Eucharist as such, but "a catechesis on faith in Jesus as the Word of God who has undergone death for the life of the world." Faith is a chewing on the mystery of this scandal. Chauvet comments, "The thoughtful chewing of the Eucharist is precisely the central symbolic experience where we encounter the bitter scandal of the faith until it passes through our bodies and becomes assimilated into our everyday actions." Where the predominant scholastic notion of faith tended to be intellectual assent to truths, and Luther's notion of faith was mainly fiduciary trust, Chauvet takes us to an embodied, enacted faith through participation in sacramental action. We literally enact that which we believe. This is made possible through sacramental sign and the identification between Christ's word and sacrament. Where Luther emphasized sacrament as enacted word, Chauvet emphasizes sacramental action as embodied faith. For both Chauvet and Luther, faith and sacrament, word and sacrament—perhaps better expressed as sacramental word received in faith through embodied sacramental participation—are entwined in sacramental action.

3. Recognizing the eschatological orientation of baptism

For Luther, the fulfillment of the death and resurrection experienced in baptism lies ahead of us. The task of conforming to the death and resurrection of Christ is a lifelong process that will only reach completion on the last day. He describes the eschatological orientation of baptism in his *Commentary on Romans* (1515-16):

31. Ibid., 225.
32. Ibid.
It is not necessary for all men to be found immediately in this state of perfection, as soon as they have been baptized into a death of this kind. For they are baptized “into death,” that is, toward death, which is to say, they have begun to live in such a way that they are pursuing this kind of death and reach out toward this their goal. For although they are baptized unto eternal life and the kingdom of heaven, yet they do not all at once possess this goal fully, but they have begun to act in such a way that they may attain to it—for Baptism was established to direct us toward death and through this death to life. . . .

Luther has described the “already” and “not yet” of baptism in a 1519 sermon:

Therefore, so far as the sign of the sacrament and its significance are concerned, sin and the man are both already dead—he has risen again, and so the sacrament has taken place. But the work of the sacrament has not yet been fully done, which is to say that the death and resurrection at the last day are still before us.

Baptism is essentially eschatologically oriented because the newness effected in baptism, although complete insofar as we are justified in baptism, remains incomplete or at risk insofar as the new creation is not fully realized in historical time. Thus aspects of the “already” and the “not yet” are intrinsic to baptism as they are to all sacraments, although Lutherans and Catholics express this through different conceptual systems. Lutherans express this through their affirmation of a person being simultaneously justified and a sinner, 

\[\textit{simul iustus et peccator}.\]

Catholics, while affirming that the forgiveness of sin received in baptism effects a state of grace, consider that due to human free will, victory over sin is never definitive until death.


34. \textit{The Holy and Blessed Sacrament of Baptism} (1519); \textit{LW} 35:32; \textit{WA} 2:729-30.

35. The purpose of the present essay does not permit a discussion of a possible resolution of these two anthropologies here. See Pieter de Witte, \textit{Doctrine, Dynamic and Difference: To the Heart of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Differentiated Consensus on Justification} (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), and a forthcoming dissertation by Jakob Karl Rinderknecht, \textit{Seeing Two Worlds: the
This is to say that the new creation effected in the modality of sacramental sign, although real and efficacious in terms of grace, is lived out and comes to full embodiment in the everydayness of human interactions and in social realization only in a process involving duration and development within historical time. We die to sin and rise in the grace of God over a lifetime.

Baptism, as the sacramental realization of the end time prophetically breaking into the life of the baptized individual and the church, is inaugurated eschatology.36 The connection between baptism and eschatology lies in the incarnation of Jesus Christ who brought eternity into historical time when he became human and thereby united divinity with humanity. In that moment eternity became enfleshed in history. Jesus Christ, the one who has come and entered our history, who comes in the present through word and sacrament, will come again. Incarnation and redemption rather than being the bookends of Jesus' life, represent an unbroken continuum through which creation becomes the new creation. Just as Jesus did not bypass the materiality of creation, so do Christians use the water and words of baptism to unite themselves to divinity and begin to live an eschatologically transformed life through sacramental mediation.

Through our participation in the death and resurrection of Christ in baptism, these past events are brought into the present historical moment. That sacramental event anticipates the final trans-historical event of our bodily resurrection in the fullness of the new creation. This sacramental view is consistent with the Pauline eschatological view of baptism in Romans 6, 2 Corinthians 5:1, and Galatians 6:15, which consider the present experience of Christians to be a

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participation in eschatological reality. Pauline eschatology, while emphasizing what God has done in the death and resurrection of Jesus, develops the meaning of baptism in the daily life of the Christian, but then acknowledges that the full working out of the power of the resurrection remains to be fully accomplished. The dynamism of dying and rising with Christ sacramentally in baptism and in the daily choice to live that out in a life lived for others and for God identifies the hope of Christians and becomes the grammar of how they structure their lives.

Clearing Up Mutual Misunderstandings

In addition to naming gifts we receive from our ecumenical partners, receptive ecumenism requires that we clear up mutual misunderstandings of one another’s theology of baptism. The first of these is whether a spiritual power resides in the baptismal water. The Smalcald Articles (1537) incorporates Augustine’s definition of a sacrament as the Word added to the element. However, on the basis of this Luther says: “Therefore we do not agree with Thomas and the Dominicans who forget the Word (God’s institution) and say that God has placed a spiritual power in the water which through the water, washes away sin.”37 He has made a similar point in The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, where he comments: “A great majority have supposed that there is some hidden spiritual power in the word and water, which works the grace of God in the soul of the recipient.”38 Here he is referring to a medieval dispute regarding how sacraments cause grace. Hugh of St. Victor held that the grace of the sacrament was contained in the sacramental sign and directly imparted through it. Others, such as Bonaventure and Duns Scotus,

37. Smalcald Articles III.5; BC 320.
38. LW 36:64; WA 6:531.
contended that the sign was merely a symbol, but that God imparted the grace of the sacrament when the sign was used. Luther appears to misunderstand Thomas, who specifically says that “grace is not in the sacrament as in a subject, nor yet as in a vessel inasmuch as a vessel is a certain kind of place, but rather inasmuch as a vessel or instrument is said to be the tool by means of which some work is performed.” 39

A related misunderstanding is whether Catholics consider grace to be a substance. For instance, John Tonkin, in an otherwise fine article on Luther’s understanding of baptism, says,

This view of grace is perhaps the most basic difference between Luther’s theology and the theology of the Church of Rome. In the Roman view, grace is, in effect, an impersonal substance which can be manipulated and brought into the present through the sacramental actions of the priesthood. For Luther, grace was no substance, but the personal presence of Christ and therefore Baptism was not the communication of a divine substance, but the creation of a personal relationship. 40

Certainly, Luther had a lively appreciation for the interpersonal character of grace. Piet Fransen has suggested this may be due to his familiarity with the personalist language of the German mystical tradition. 41 Despite some popular misconceptions, for Catholics grace is also a personal category, referring to God’s gracious commitment to human beings. 42 However, Catholics have distinguished between uncreated grace, which is the very presence of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the justified, and uncreated grace, itself not a substance, but an accidental modification of the soul empowering it to exceed the proportions of any created nature or disposing the soul for uncreated grace. Rahner has insisted that even “created grace” is an essentially

42. Pannenberg and Lehmann, eds., The Confessions of the Reformation Era, 76.
relational reality, having no absolute existence of its own and argues that even in Scholastic terms created grace must be seen as a secondary element in justification. He further asserts that it is not sanctifying grace, a created entity, which effectively relates us to God in justification or sanctification, but uncreated grace. His work as well as more recent theology has retrieved a greater emphasis on uncreated grace borrowed from the insights of the Greek patristic tradition. Grace is always inherently relational and interpersonal, even though the Aristotelian categories of substance, nature, virtue, habitus, etc., have not always communicated this as clearly as one might wish. Finally, in the spirit of receptive ecumenism, since our righteousness is always the imprint upon us of divine righteousness, Avery Dulles has written, "the Reformation categories of justitia aliena and "imputed righteousness" convey an important truth that Catholics do not wish to ignore."

A second misunderstanding of Catholic theology was the reformers' interpretation of sacramental efficacy ex opere operato. Studies have shown that one source of the misunderstanding may be because the Protestant side looks at the reception of the sacrament, while Catholics interpret the terms from the point of view of the dispensation of the sacrament. Accordingly, Protestants viewed the teaching of ex opere operato as affirming an automatic salvific sacramental efficacy when the ritual was rightly performed. The teaching on ex opere operato was intended to stress that the divine offer of grace is independent of the worthiness of the one administering the sacrament and the one receiving it. Lutherans

ations of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace," *Theological:
in Contemporary Catholic Theology," in *Lutherans and Catholics by Faith*, ed. H. George Anderson et al. (Minneapolis: Augsburg.

would agree that sacraments are independent of the worthiness of the one administering them, but would say that sacraments effect salvation only through faith. Nevertheless, they would also affirm the objective validity of baptism apart from faith. For example in a sermon on the Catechism, Luther states, "My faith does not make the baptism, but rather receives the baptism, no matter whether the person being baptized believes or not; for baptism is not dependent on my faith but upon God's Word."

Catholics interpreted the Protestant denial of the teaching on *ex opere operato* as a denial of sacramental efficacy in general, particularly when combined with a teaching of efficacy through faith. Both sides, however, taught that Christ is the primary actor in the sacraments. Catholic doctrine requires believing reception in order for the sacrament is to be "for salvation."

Undoubtedly, Catholics have also misunderstood Lutheran theology. Too often fiduciary faith has appeared to Catholics to be a form of "believe and do what you will" or a dispensation from the precepts of the law. This attitude is reflected in Trent's canon 7, which condemned the position that the baptized are obliged to faith alone, but not to the observance of the whole law of Christ, and in canon 8, which condemned the position that "those baptized are exempt from the precepts of holy church." The emphasis on the commandments in both Luther's *Small Catechism* and *Large Catechism* is evidence of the importance and obligation of Godly behavior for Lutherans.

In recent times Catholics have themselves appropriated a more personalist notion of faith, as for example, in the Catechism's reference to Abraham and Mary as models of faith. This also

46. *Ten Sermons on the Catechism* (1528); LW 51:186; WA 301:114; cited by Tonkin, "Luther's Understanding of Baptism," 100. See also *Large Catechism* IV:28-31; BC 460.
corresponds to an understanding of Christ as the fullness of revelation.\textsuperscript{48} Within this understanding of revelation, faith is adherence to a person. This balances the notion of faith as an act of intellect and will assenting to propositions expressing the “eternal decrees” of God’s will.\textsuperscript{49}

Thanks to developments in both our traditions, good historical studies that elucidate and put into perspective past differences, and the mutual recognition we affirm of each other’s baptism and the communion we share based on that, as imperfect as it might be, Lutherans and Catholics are more open today to learning from each other. Catholics can be enriched by a retrieval of many of Luther’s insights regarding baptism.

\textsuperscript{48}The First Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church ("Dei Filius"") speaks of old to our fathers by the prophets: but in him (Heb. 1:1-2). Vatican II can be read as picking up and thus as being in continuity with Vatican I even though it was arguably the prior to Vatican II, an astute reader of "Dei Filius" will not only the eternal laws of is will to the human race, the text cites the author of the letter to the Hebrews