

I

The Sacrament

(1) General Concept

The Reformers inherited the sacrament of baptism from the medieval church, but in this as in other matters they were anxious to test the accepted usage by the supreme rule of Holy Scripture. For that reason they were led to some extent to consider the foundations of the rite even from the linguistic stand-point. Of course, too much must not be expected of them in this direction. The Reformers had learned the need for a great carefulness in exegesis, but they had no gratuitous linguistic or historical interest. They were not scholars even in the sense that Erasmus was a scholar. Certainly they did not share the enthusiasm for the historical method, or the faith in it, which have characterized the more modern period. Their interest was for the most part engaged only where grammatical inquiry might determine a disputed doctrinal point.

In these circumstances the paucity of purely linguistic discussion can hardly surprise even if it may disappoint us. There had been definitions even in the older theology. Thomas, for instance, had granted that the word baptism could be used for any kind of washing, but he had alleged three reasons for giving to the general term a specific Christian connotation: first, because baptism as it is practised in the church is more than a washing; second, because the sacrament of baptism is a particular use of water; and third, because the baptismal “word” is added to the element.¹ The Tridentines were merely following Thomas when they explained that the Greek word may be used for any kind of ablution, but “that with the ecclesiastical writers it denotes that ecclesiastical use which belongs to the sacraments”.²

Of the Reformers abroad it was Luther who was primarily interested in the linguistic aspect. In an early sketch he contrasted Christian baptism with the ceremonial washings of the Jews and the Johannine rite, linking the three in a quasi-evolutionary theological scheme.³ Again, in his *Sermon on Baptism* he discussed the derivation of the two terms *mersio*

1. S., III, qu. 66.

2. C.T., II, 2, qu. 3.

3. W.A., VI, p. 472.

and *touff*, connecting the latter with *tief* and pointing out that in both cases the root-idea is submersion under the water.⁴ Once again, the linguistic study was occasioned by more strictly dogmatic considerations, and subordinated to them.

It was the same dogmatic concern which prompted the parallel inquiry of Zwingli into the use of the term “baptism” in the New Testament. Not very convincingly, he attempted to distinguish four different senses: the baptism of water, the baptism of the Spirit, the baptism of teaching, and the baptism of faith and profession.⁵ With a different intention, some of the Anabaptists tried to press the fact that the term “baptism” has a wider and more general connotation: their deduction being that Christian baptism does not differ in kind or efficacy from similar washings amongst the Jews and Turks. Rogers noted that the Bannisterians held a view of this type.⁶ But this early if tendentious effort at a comparative study was decisively rejected by the Reformers.

The Anglicans had singularly little interest in the question of origin or derivation. The matter was not discussed at all until the publication of the Rhemish New Testament. Even then it arose only in a wider context, for Fulke used the example of baptism to show that the originals often justify the non-ecclesiastical rendering of ecclesiastical terms: “This word *baptisma* signifies by ecclesiastical use the sacrament of holy baptism, yet you are enforced Mark 7 to translate *baptismata* ‘washings’.”⁷ The reference was purely polemical in purpose. By and large we may say that the Reformers were satisfied with the traditional interpretation. The word “baptism” signified “washing”, but in the Christian church it was applied specifically to the sacramental washing, holy baptism. No very significant doctrinal point appeared to be at issue in this connection, and having no historical interest except in the service of doctrine, they did not see any great necessity to press the matter more closely.

In the form in which it interested the theologian, baptism was the rite which has been handed down from the earliest days of Christianity as the first and initiatory sacrament. But the ranking of baptism as a sacrament raised a preliminary question in which the Anglican teaching especially still demands clarification. In the Middle Ages the number of acknowledged sacraments had been fixed as seven. Of course, it had always been seen that in the early church the term “sacrament” was used

4. W.A., VI, p. 727.

5. C.R., IV, p. 219.

6. Rogers, P.S., p. 278.

7. Fulke, P.S., I, p. 110.

in an extended sense,⁸ but after some disputing the Schoolmen had laid it down that there are seven particular signs appointed by God as special means of grace. For all seven the divine institution was expressly claimed⁹ and the authority of Scripture and the Councils as well as tradition was alleged in favour of this particular number.¹⁰ It was not pretended, of course, that all seven were of equal rank. Baptism, communion and penance were singled out as “generally necessary to salvation”, and even of these communion was exalted as the most excellent¹¹ to all the seven the term sacrament was applied even in its more rigorous sense.

Earlier critics of the medieval system do not seem to have taken up this point, for Wycliffe could still refer to seven sacraments in his *Trialogus*.¹² But in the first days of the Reformation Luther boldly singled out the three pre-eminent sacraments and contended that they alone were sacraments of the Gospel instituted by the Lord Himself. The others could be termed sacraments in a loose sense, but not strictly or properly. Even of the three, baptism and communion were of higher dignity than penance.¹³ The Reformed school took up the same point, but more radically still, for Zwingli would admit only two evangelical or dominical sacraments¹⁴ and the Anabaptists were of the same mind, except for those like Franck who rejected all sacraments as mummerly and childish play.¹⁵ Calvin made a clear distinction between sacraments in general and those sacraments which are the divinely appointed means of grace.¹⁶ Of the latter there are only the two, although as it was practised by the apostles confirmation might also be regarded as a temporary sacrament.¹⁷ The various Reformed confessions all made it clear that in the stricter sense there are “twa chiefe sacramentis onelie instituted by the Lord Jesus”, as the Scotch confession puts it.

In England Henry VIII had of course defended the seven sacraments in his rash assault upon Luther, who as he saw it had destroyed all the sacraments except baptism.¹⁸ The question did not arise seriously until

8. Cf. Calvin, *Instit.*, IV, 14, 18.

9. C.D., VII, Bapt. Can. 1.

10. C.T., II, 2, qu. 14.

11. C.D., VII, Sac. Can. 2-3.

12. *Trialogus*, p. 156.

13. R. Seeberg, *Die Lehre Luthers*, p. 315.

14. C.R., III, p. 761.

15. D.A., p. 188.

16. *Instit.*, IV, 14, 19-21.

17. *Comm. Acts*, II, p. 209.

18. *Assertio*, pp. 46, 183.

1536, when a great debate was held upon the subject in Convocation.¹⁹ Stokesley headed a considerable traditionalist party in support of the view that “the rites of confirmation, and of orders, and of annealing, and such other, ought to be called sacraments, and to be compared with baptism and the supper of the Lord”, but Cranmer himself favoured only the two sacraments, and he introduced the Scot Alesius as a chief speaker in the discussion. According to Alesius, a true sacrament must be of divine institution, and must have both a visible form and an invisible grace, which the Master of Sentences had equated with the remission of sins. Only the two main sacraments answered to these tests. Cranmer followed up the debate with a questionnaire on the Scriptural evidence, and in his own reply he stated: “I find not in the Scripture, the matter, nature and effect of all those which we call the seven sacraments, but only of certain of them, as baptism.”²⁰

In the reign of Edward VI the Reformed view quickly established itself. Three sacraments could still be asserted in the Lutheran *Catechism*,²¹ but Hooper saw only two sacraments “with their proper promises, and proper commandments”,²² and Nowell claimed that “Christ instituted only two sacraments in his church”.²³ This teaching evidently filtered down to the rank and file, for under Mary the “error” was sufficiently important to be noticed in the official interrogatory, and although there were a few like Elizabeth Thackvel and Kathleen Hut who “could not tell what a sacrament is”,²⁴ Iveson and many others answered that “there be in the catholic church of Christ two sacraments only”.²⁵

The Elizabethans adopted the same position, as we may see from Jewel’s statement in the *Apology*: “We acknowledge that there are two sacraments properly so called: for so many we see were delivered by Christ, and approved by St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, and the ancient fathers.”²⁶ The two decisive tests of the true sacraments were the element and the institution, as Jewel pointed out in his larger *Treatise of the Sacraments*.²⁷

It is in the light of statements such as these that the Article (25) has to

19. Cf. J., II, pp. 16-17; Foxe, V, p. 381.

20. G. Burnet, *A History of the Reformation in the Church of England*, III, p. 69.

21. *Cranmer’s Catechism*, p. 184.

22. Hooper, B.R., p. 215.

23. Nowell, P.S., p. 85.

24. Foxe, VIII, p. 450.

25. Foxe, VII, p. 307.

26. Jewel, P.S., II, p. 12.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 1103.

be understood, and the statement is clear and definite. There are only two sacraments of the Gospel generally necessary to salvation. The five other rites are perhaps sacramental in a loose sense, but they are not sacraments according to the strict and proper meaning of the term. Some are states of life which have a sacramental aspect. Others are based on apostolic customs which may still be turned to a profitable use, although not in any way obligatory. The words “commonly called sacraments” indicate, perhaps, a willingness to ascribe a wider sacramental significance to these rites or states, but they can hardly be construed to mean that the five are after all true sacraments by popular consent. The point is made much more fully and with complete clarity in the *Homily on Common Prayer and the Sacraments* approved in Article 35.

Baptism, then, was one of the two evangelical sacraments for which element, institution and promise could all be claimed. It was in this theological context that the Reformers sought to understand its real basis and meaning. As they saw it, they were not dealing with a human and historical rite, venerable only by reason of its associations and antiquity, but with a divinely appointed means of grace. Baptism was a visible sign with an invisible signification and grace.

It was by reason of this divine aspect that in common with earlier writers the Reformers emphasized the twofold and even threefold use of the term in apostolic and patristic writings. The distinction had already been clearly made by Thomas, for in spite of the possible objection from Ephesians 4:5 Thomas had contended strongly for a threefold baptism, pointing out that the baptism of blood and the baptism of the Spirit had always been accepted as full equivalents for water-baptism.²⁸ could not be regarded as a fourth equivalent, since the fire of Matthew 3:2 was merely symbolical of the Holy Spirit.²⁹

Wycliffe in the fourteenth century had tried to press the distinction in an evangelical direction, claiming that “ther ben three baptisingis: the firste ... in water, the tother ... with blood, but the thridde baptising, moost needeful and moost worth, is purging of the Hooli Goost”.³⁰ Some of his followers carried the emphasis almost to a denial of the external act. Swinburne argued that the water of John 3:5 does not signify real water any more than does the fire of Matthew 3:2 real fire,³¹ and

28. S., III, qu. 66, 11.

29. C.T., II, 2, qu. 8.

30. Arnold, *Select English Works*, II, p. 4.

31. Foxe, III, p. 168.

John Pyke maintained that there is no baptism but of the Holy Spirit.³² The same view was to appear again amongst the Anabaptists.

The Reformers were not sidetracked into this depreciation of the external washing, but they accepted the general distinction between the baptism of water and the baptism of the Spirit. Zwingli broke new ground when he claimed that there is a baptism of teaching and faith as well as of water and the Spirit. But the other Reformers did not develop this analysis. For the most part they were content to see only the twofold baptism, of water and the Spirit.³³

In England a considerable stress was laid upon the threefoldness of baptism. Tyndale set the fashion by making the Johanne link of water, blood and Spirit.³⁴ He was followed by Becon, who emphasized the fact that without the inward baptism of the Spirit, which is the true baptism, “the outward baptism of the water profiteth nothing”,³⁵ a good Zwinglian assertion. Elsewhere Becon mentioned the three baptisms of the Spirit, blood and water, of which three “the baptism of water is the most inferior”.³⁶ Ultimately, however, the three were only the different moments of the one baptism, “of divers diversely taken”.³⁷ Sandys made a similar distinction between the outward washing and the inward cleansing,³⁸ and Jewel contended for a threefold baptism, the outward water being a witness to the cleansing death and resurrection of Christ and also to the purgation of the life-giving Spirit.³⁹

The Reformers did not attempt to separate between a so-called water-baptism for repentance and a Spirit-baptism for regeneration and inward filling. Certain texts of the New Testament can be and have been read in this way. An almost inevitable result is either to deny water-baptism altogether or to depreciate its importance by linking up the Spirit-baptism with confirmation, of which it becomes the otherwise obscure inward grace. The earlier practice of taking baptism and confirmation together has sometimes been advanced in favour of this view.⁴⁰ But what the Reformers were contending for was not the twofoldness of baptism and confirmation, but the twofoldness of

32. E.M., I, 1, p. 190.

33. Cf. *Instit.*, IV, 15, 8; Bullinger, P.S., IV, p. 251.

34. Tyndale, P.S. II, p. 209.

35. Becon, P.S., II, p. 218.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 225.

37. *Loc. cit.*

38. Sandys, P.S., p. 302.

39. Jewel, P.S., II, p. 1107; III, p. 470.

40. Cf. E.C. Ratcliffe in *Theology*, LIX, No. 315.

baptism itself. Baptism was a human act, a washing in water: but it was also a divine act, the inward washing and regeneration of the Spirit. The two acts might not coincide in time, but both were necessary to constitute baptism in the full sense. It was this conception which underlay the clear-cut division of Tyndale between “those who are baptized in the flesh and those who are baptized in heart”.⁴¹ The same view may be found in such varied writers as Hooper,⁴² Cranmer,⁴³ and the Elizabethan Lake,⁴⁴ all of whom demanded both an internal and external baptism, but insisted upon the primacy of the baptism of the Spirit. If the baptism of blood played only a minor part in these discussions, the reason was that the question usually arose in relation to the alleged necessity of the sacrament. The concern of the Reformers was to show that it is not the external rite which alone or primarily constituted the sacrament.

The fact that baptism was an act of God as well as an act of man implied necessarily its divine origin. Historically, the rite could no doubt be traced back to Jewish and even pagan sources, but the human antecedents were not of great interest to the sixteenth-century theologians. What mattered to them was the divine authorization and authority, from which the sacrament derived its true signification and force.

At this point, as at so many others, the traditionalists and the Protestants were in substantial agreement. The main controversy arose in relation to the time of institution, which had always been a thorny point. Thomas had contributed an early and thorough discussion of the problem. In support of the favourite conception of an institution in Matthew 28 he saw three main arguments: first, that baptism derives its power only from the passion; second, that the mandate of Christ is necessary to its efficacy; and third, that it has been binding only since the passion. But Thomas himself inclined to the view that its institution dates from the baptism of Christ Himself, according to the teaching of Augustine. He conceded that it did not become obligatory until after the passion.⁴⁵

The detailed argumentation of Thomas was not repeated by all theologians, but the traditionalists of the sixteenth century insisted

41. Tyndale, P.S.I., p. 357.

42. Hooper, P.S., I, p. 74.

43. J., IV, p. 29.

44. Sermons, p. 174.

45. S. III, qu. 66, 2.

upon the divine institution, as we may see both from the Canons⁴⁶ and also from the Catechism of Trent.⁴⁷ To the question of origin the answer of Thomas was given: "The sacrament was instituted by the Lord, when he himself, having been baptized of John, gave to the water the virtue of sanctifying. ... After the resurrection of our Lord, he gave to the apostles the command: Go and teach all nations, baptizing them."⁴⁸

The Reformers had no great interest in the time of institution, except in so far as they claimed an identity with the baptism of John, but they all laid emphasis upon the fact of the divine institution. Luther spoke of God or Christ as the true author of baptism.⁴⁹ Zwingli referred to the sacraments as bequeathed to us by Christ.⁵⁰ Calvin inveighed strongly against those who usurped the divine prerogative by adding new sacraments: "Foolish men forge various sacraments at their pleasure, but as the word, which is the soul, is not in them, they are idle and unmeaning shadows."⁵¹ It was largely because Christ alone can institute a sacrament that Calvin claimed Him as the author even of John's baptism. In different ways the confessions all referred to the divine institution. The *Confession of Faith in the name of the Church of France* spoke of baptism as a treasure which God has placed in the church.⁵² Knox made the divine institution the test of a true sacrament, and derived the continued observance of baptism from the divine mandate.⁵³

The English writers did not add anything new, but they made the usual points with impressive unanimity. Wycliffe already had pointed out that "God hath ordeigned, in tyme of his both lawes, how man shuld have sacramentis to make him able for this traveil".⁵⁴ He had found in Matthew 28 the authority for a continued use of baptism.⁵⁵ In the earlier Reformation formularies, the *Ten* and *Thirteen Articles*,⁵⁶ and the *King's Book*,⁵⁷ reference was made to the divine institution, and Cranmer mentioned it again in his *Answer to the Men of Devon*.⁵⁸ Frith, Hooper and Becon all stressed the point, Becon claiming that "God the Father did first institute this holy

46. Schaff, *Creeeds*, p. 207.

47. C.T., II, 2, qu. 20.

48. *Ibid.*, qu. 21.

49. W.A., VI, p. 530.

50. C.R., III, p. 761.

51. *Harm. Evang.*, p. 385.

52. Calvin *Tracis*, II, p. 153.

53. Knox, I, p. 198, Cf. the *Ordouire of Baptisme*.

54. Arnold, II, p. 258.

55. *Trialogus*, p. 156.

56. Cranmer, P.S., II, p. 474.

57. K.B., p. 41.

58. Cranmer, P.S., II, p. 176.

sacrament with John”.⁵⁹ At a later date the Reformed view was propagated in Bullinger’s *Decades*,⁶⁰ and Hooker described baptism as “a sacrament which God hath instituted in His church”.⁶¹

The argument from the divine institution was used by Bonner in Mary’s reign as an argument against certain confessors who refused to accept “Papist” baptism. Thomas Haukes, for example, was told that baptism is commanded by the Word of God. Haukes did not deny this, but with Knox he could not agree that Papist baptism is the “trew baptisme whilke Cryst Jesus did institute”.⁶² The Separatists followed the same line of reasoning when they refused to be baptized in the established church, for it was one of their aims to have the sacrament administered “purely, onely, and all together according to the institution and good words of the Lord Jesus.”⁶³ The one doctrine of the divine institution underlay both the demand for conformity and the refusal to conform.

The various official formularies all found a place for the doctrine. It was mentioned in Article 25, and in the Baptismal Office the words of institution were recited from Matthew 28. It is interesting that in the opening prayer there is perhaps an echo of Augustine’s view in the words: “Who by the baptism of Thy well-beloved Son in the river Jordan didst sanctify water to the mystical washing away of sin”, a phrase which was hotly contested by the Puritans. There was a further reference to the divine institution in the sacramental section later added to the Catechism.

Naturally, in the sixteenth century there was no question of applying historico-critical tests to the evangelical narratives. The verse in Matthew 28 was the main proof of a divine authorization, although it was supported by apostolic practice. Yet it must be remembered that the belief was of a piece with the general theology of the Reformers. According to their view, Christianity is not a human religion, but a divine revelation. It is not the culmination of a spiritual search, but the transcendent gift of God in the unique word and work and person of the divine Son. If this is the case, it is irrelevant to seek to understand the Christian mysteries in terms of their possible natural or historical development. The important thing concerning them is the fact that they have been divinely given.

59. Becon, P.S., II, p. 2C3.

60. Bullinger, P.S., IV, p. 352.

61. L.E.P., V, 60, 3.

62. Knox, I, p. 19.

63. E.E.D., II, p. 13.

It was because baptism was thought of as divinely given that it could be described in terms of what it was believed either to signify or to effect. At a later stage we shall have to study more closely both the signification and the effect, but already we may notice some of the terms by which it was defined and described. The terms do, of course, indicate the various effects or meaning ascribed to it, for, as the Reformers constantly insisted, the early writers commonly called the signs by the names of that which was signified.

On the traditionalist side the *Catechism* of Trent assembled many of the definitions used by earlier writers. It described baptism as the sacrament of faith, an illumination, a purgation, a planting, and a burial.⁶⁴ In the later Greek and Russian symbols it was referred to as a washing, and as the extirpation of original sin.⁶⁵ Elsewhere it had been called our regeneration, and the gateway or door of the Christian life.⁶⁶

As will appear later, the Reformers had a particular interest in the signification of the sacrament, and they summed up the various meanings in the descriptive titles which they applied to it. Luther defined baptism as a conjunction of word and water, the water being the water of life which is rich in grace, the bath of regeneration.⁶⁷ In the *Confession of Seventeen Articles* it was described as a holy and mighty thing, a bath of regeneration and spiritual renewal.⁶⁸ Again, baptism was a divine covenant of grace given under a visible form.⁶⁹ Melancthon had much the same thought in mind when he styled it the sign of a divine promise.

The covenantal aspect was particularly prominent in Zwingli, for whom baptism was essentially a pledge or initiatory sign.⁷⁰ Baptism was the covenant sign of the people of God, and it served as their badge of allegiance.⁷¹ The Anabaptists developed this idea, interpreting the external rite as a public confession and witness.⁷² On this view, the human aspect tended to become much more pronounced, and baptism was no longer defined in terms of its inward grace.

64. C.T., II, 2, qu. 4.

65. Schaff, *Creeds*, pp. 373 f.

66. Cf. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Art. Baptism.

67. W.A., XXXIV, 1, p. 88; Wernle, *Luther*, p. 257.

68. Wernle, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

69. Seeberg, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

70. Wernle, *Zwingli*, p. 202.

71. *Ibid.*, p. 204.

72. C.R., IV, p. 218 (Hübmaier).

With Calvin the emphasis shifted, for while he rejected sacramentalist conceptions he certainly maintained a high doctrine of the sacraments. One of the titles which he frequently applied to both sacraments was that of a “visible word”, a testimony to the grace of God.⁷³ But he could also call the sacrament an instrument by which God Himself acts.⁷⁴ Baptism was still an initiatory sign, but it pointed not merely to our entrance into the church, but to our insertion into Christ.⁷⁵ Like the Lord’s supper, it was a mark or badge of the Christian profession and fraternity,⁷⁶ but it was also a badge and attestation of the divine grace and seal of the divine promise.⁷⁷ Stressing as he did the divine as well as the human aspect, Calvin could easily refer to the sacrament in terms of its signification, as a spiritual washing and sign of regeneration. The Confessions and the later Reformed theologians concentrated upon the two aspects, covenant and regeneration: thus Knox described baptism as “a holie syne and seale of God’s promesses”,⁷⁸ and Heidegger entitled it the sacrament of regeneration.

It would be tedious to list in detail the various Anglican definitions, which for the most part followed the same lines. Tyndale, for example, described baptism as a witness, as the bond and seal of the covenant,⁷⁹ and as “the sign of repentance (or, if they will so have it called, penance), washing and new birth”.⁸⁰ For Frith it was a token of grace and free mercy, the fountain of the new birth.⁸¹ The covenantal aspect found a place even in the *King’s Book*, and for the majority of writers baptism served as “a testimony to God’s promise”, “a certain pledge of his love”, “a seal and covenant”, “a confirmation and heavenly token”, “an evidence and sealed charter”, “a substantial covenant and agreement”. But it could also be described as “a certain entry by which we are received”, “a cleansing away of sin”, “the fount of regeneration”, “life”, “salvation”, “the forgiveness of sins”, “the power of God to resurrection”. Amongst less common definitions we may mention that of the *King’s Book*, which equated baptism and justification,⁸² Cranmer’s reference to baptism as a receiving of the Holy Ghost and putting Christ upon us,⁸³ Becon’s

73. J. Beckmann, *Vom Sakrament bei Calvin*, p. 45.

74. *Tracts*, II, p. 340.

75. *Instit.* IV, 15, 1.

76. *Tracts*, II, p. 214.

77. *Harm. Evang.* p. 384; *Tracts*, II, p. 153.

78. Knox, IV, p. 172.

79. Tyndale, B.R., p. 407.

80. *Ibid.*, P.S., II, p. 161.

81. Frith, B.R., pp. 92-4.

82. Cf. Cranmer, P.S., II, p. 133.

83. *Ibid.*, I, p. 64.

description of it as the seal of righteousness,⁸⁴ and Whitgift's as the seal of faith,⁸⁵ the two latter being combined in Bullinger's "seal of the righteousness of faith".⁸⁶ Jewel quoted Tertullian to the effect that baptism may rightly be regarded as a sacrifice, but his main concern was to refute false ideas of the sacrifice of the mass.⁸⁷

The definition given in the Article is rather disappointing, as such statements usually are. In an attempt to be comprehensive it seems to fail in precision. But a comparison with the individual descriptions will show that it is not quite so vague as sometimes suggested. Baptism is a sign of profession and mark of difference – this includes rather than refutes the Sacramentarian view. It is also a sign of the new birth – the normal Reformed interpretation. It is an instrument to graft into the church – the idea of initiation or entry. And it is the seal of the divine promise of forgiveness and adoption – as in all the Protestant teaching. The term "instrument" has attracted some attention, but it is not without parallel in Reformation writings abroad.

With regard to the definitions as a whole, three points may be made. First, they all remain within the general tradition of the church. More modern definitions like Quick's "sacrament of the divine Fatherhood" would have sounded strangely in the Reformers' ears. The new feature was perhaps the greater insistence upon profession and covenant. Second, the sacrament was interpreted in terms of the word. Just as the word might be described as the word of life, so baptism might be described as the water of regeneration; not as the source or cause, but as the sign and means. Finally, in its full sense the sacrament included the thing signified as well as the sign. That is why the Reformers could give even to the external sign the title of the internal grace, not as itself the reality, but as the sign of the reality. The language of sacramentalism could be used, but in a purified and evangelical sense.

The fact that baptism was classified as the first of the two dominical sacraments inevitably suggested a certain comparison with its sister-sacrament, the Lord's supper.

The point is not quite so academic as it may appear, for in the sixteenth century the "sacrament of the altar" was accorded a position of absolute pre-eminence in the sacramental hierarchy, as containing

84. Becon, P.S., II, p. 217.

85. Whitgift, P.S., III, p. 113.

86. Bullinger, P.S., IV, p. 323.

87. Jewel, P.S., II, p. 893.

not grace only, but the very author of grace.⁸⁸ It was on this ground that Gardiner objected to Cranmer's coupling of baptism and the supper in their eucharistic debate.⁸⁹

But from the very first the Reformers swept away all distinctions of rank between the evangelical sacraments. This was true even of Luther, who in spite of his doctrine of consubstantiation could find in the two sacraments the one grace of incorporation and a common necessity of faith.⁹⁰ On the Reformed side both Bucer and Calvin used the doctrine of baptism as an aid to their eucharistic teaching, Bucer with the aim of conciliation,⁹¹ Calvin with the desire to arrive at a true doctrine of the presence.⁹²

In England the comparison was taken up by not a few writers, as, for example, Nowell,⁹³ but it was Cranmer who made greatest use of it, and here again for the purpose of reaching a true doctrine of the presence. According to Cranmer, no greater reverence ought to be paid to the bread and wine than to the water, for the presence and "shewing" of Christ are the same in both sacraments.⁹⁴ The same comparison was used by Ridley and Glyn,⁹⁵ and in his controversy with Watson, Cheke attempted to prove it from the Fathers.⁹⁶

There were several interesting discussions of the relationship during the Marian period. Bradford was challenged on the matter by two friars, but he silenced them by quoting 1 Corinthians 12.⁹⁷ Philpot pressed the comparison as an argument against private masses: "If a priest say these words over the water, and there be no child to be baptized, those words only pronounced do not make baptism. The pronounciation only is not enough, unless the words be therewithal applied to the use, as Christ spoke them. So is the supper."

Harpsfield: "Nay, that is not like; for '*Hoc est corpus meum*' is an indicative proposition, showing a working of God in the substance of bread and wine."

Philpot: "It is not an indicative proposition, but also imperative or commanding: Take ye, eat ye."

Morrow-Mass Priest: "Many must then be baptized, if the commandment be followed."

88. T.B., p. 353.

89. J., III, p. 242.

90. Hamel, *Der junge Luther*, pp. 57, 151.

91. Hastings, Eells *Martin Bucer*, p. 72.

92. *Tracts*, II, pp. 564-5.

93. Nowell, P.S., I, p. 214.

94. J., III, pp. 10, 61 f., 242.

95. Foxe, VI, pp. 452 f.

96. Strype, *Cheke*, pp. 101 f.

97. Bradford, P.S., I, p. 82. Cf. p. 533.

But Philpot could reply with the scriptural example of the eunuch.⁹⁸ The same comparison was used by less eminent sufferers like Woodman,⁹⁹ and Foxe himself quoted a sermon of Aelric in which the two sacraments were treated as parallel.¹⁰⁰

The Elizabethans followed the same lines, and they arrived at some curious conclusions. Certain Puritans, for example, claimed that no more than the surplice should be worn at communion, since the communion does not give higher or better things.¹⁰¹ Others argued that deacons ought to administer either both sacraments or none and Cartwright detected a false distinction between the sacraments in the disciplinary ruling upon this point.¹⁰² In essentials, however, Anglicans and Puritans were well agreed.

It may be noted that the Reformed use of the comparison was almost exclusively controversial, but behind the polemical application there was a point of real theological importance. The sacraments are different in detail and use, but they are one in essential nature. Both are instituted by Christ to proclaim His redemptive work and to be a means of grace in the church. To create a false distinction between the sacraments is not merely to disturb sacramental theology, but to confuse the whole witness and operation of the Spirit.

Baptism was not in any way subordinate to the Lord's supper, but it was certainly subordinate to the Gospel itself: that is, not to the word of the Gospel, Holy Scripture and scriptural preaching, but to the promises of God as they are given in and with Jesus Christ. This point was made by Calvin when he maintained that the gift of baptism, adoption, is prior to baptism itself.¹⁰³ Another way of putting it was to say, as Frith did, that the election precedes the sacraments.¹⁰⁴ The fulfilment of a sacramental scheme does not evoke but rather attests the election. It was perhaps for this reason that Tyndale saw a need for preaching as well as baptism,¹⁰⁵ for behind both word and sacrament he discerned both the same promise and the same Christ.

Cranmer approached the matter differently, and at a deeper level. For him the Gospel was not merely the covenant or the election, but Jesus Christ Himself. It was the office of both word and sacrament to exhibit

98. Foxe, VII, p. 637.

99. *Ibid.*, VIII, pp. 351 f.

100. *Ibid.*, V, p. 286.

101. P.B.O., p. 39.

102. Whitgift, P.S., III, p. 59. Cf. *A Pleasaunte Dialogue*, p. 28.

103. *Instit.*, IV, 14, 22; *Tracts*, I, p. 73.

104. Frith, B.R., p. 92.

105. Tyndale, P.S., I, p. 253.

Christ, which they did, not by a corporal but by a spiritual presence: “For Christ after one sense is exhibited in all these three, in His word, in baptism, and in the Lord’s supper, that is to say, spiritually”.¹⁰⁶ Other Anglicans laid stress upon the primacy of “the promise of eternal joy”, “the free grace and mere mercy of God”, and the divine covenant,¹⁰⁷ for, as Rogers made clear, the means of grace are subordinate both to the grace itself and to the Lord of grace.¹⁰⁸

A point of no little importance was involved in the discussion, as we may see in the little passage-at-arms between John Smith and Bishop Bonner:

Smith: “I pray you, my lord, show me, are we saved by water or by Christ?”

Bonner: “By both.”

Smith: “Then the water died for our sins. ... The water is unto me a preacher, not a Saviour.”¹⁰⁹

The position of Smith was in effect the same as that of Calvin, who accused his opponents of “passing by Christ, and fixing their confidence of sanctification on the elements”.¹¹⁰ But the doctrine could be used against the Anabaptists too, for if children are heirs of the Gospel promises, as Philpot and Bullinger argued, they ought not to be refused the sign of the promises, for the Gospel is more than baptism.¹¹¹ Calvin used much the same line of reasoning when he pointed out that the gift of adoption is prior to baptism.¹¹²

The point was comparatively trifling in itself, but great issues were involved. The subordination of the sacrament to the Gospel meant at bottom its subordination to Christ Himself. It meant a subordination of the sign to the thing signified. It meant a subordination of the individual decision of faith to the prior election and salvation of God. The sacrament was a means of grace, but it could not supplant the grace. And that grace was Christ.

(2) Signification

For many years prior to the sixteenth century the detailed meaning of the sacrament of baptism had hardly been considered except in relation

106. Cranmer, P.S., I, p. 156.

107. Hooper, P.S., I, pp. 128-30; Becon, P.S., II, p. 216; Jewel, P.S., II, p. 1105.

108. Rogers, P.S., p. 250.

109. Foxe, P.S., p. 352.

110. *Tracts*, II, p. 340.

111. Philpot, P.S., p. 276; Bullinger, P.S., IV, p. 389.

112. *Tracts*, I, p. 99.