

**ON THE EFFICACY AND UTILITY OF BAPTISM  
IN THE CASE OF ELECT INFANTS WHOSE PARENTS  
ARE UNDER THE COVENANT**

*by Herman Witsius*

Translated from Latin by William Marshall  
(Edited and revised translation by J. Mark Beach)

Introduction by *J. Mark Beach*

HERMAN WITSIUS (1636-1708) was a Dutch Reformed theologian of considerable talent and represented a conciliatory spirit amid the rancor of theological disputation in the seventeenth century. He is perhaps best characterized as an adherent of Voetian orthodoxy and the Nadere Reformatie, while opposing the worst features of Cocceianism. He also opposed Cartesianism and the separatism of Labadism, and waged polemics against both neonomianism and antinomianism, always aiming at concord within Christ's church.<sup>1</sup>

Witsius's treatise *De Efficacia et Utilitate Baptismi in Electis Foederatorum Parentum Infantibus* was published in 1693 at Utrecht, and was later republished as part of a collection of miscellaneous works by

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<sup>1</sup> See J. Van Genderen, *Herman Witsius: Bijdrage tot de Kennis Der Gereformeerde Theologie* ('s-Gravenhage: Guido de Bres, 1953); *Realencyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, 24 vols., ed. Albert Hauck, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1896-1913), XXI, 380-83; and also the sources cited in each of these works.

the author in 1700, this later work being reprinted in several editions.<sup>2</sup> While Witsius is perhaps best known for his *De Œconomia Foederum Dei cum Hominibus, Libri Quatuor* [The Economy of the Covenants, four books] (1677), he was not an author defined by a single book. The treatise produced below testifies to his breadth of theological knowledge and the irenic spirit with which he pursued the theological enterprise.

In this work on the efficacy of baptism, Witsius takes up a topic that has great practical import for believers, especially believing parents who face the task of nurturing covenant children in the Lord or who have faced the sorrowful episode of burying a small child. How should covenant children be regarded—as saved prior to baptism, at the moment of baptism, or sometime subsequent to their baptism? Moreover, are baptized children certainly to be saved? Should it be expected? Or is their salvation a matter of doubt, or perhaps no more than a hopeful wish beyond what might be expected of persons who cannot lay claim to the covenant promises of God? To state the question differently, are baptized children more fit or likely candidates of salvation than unbaptized children?

Distinct from these queries are another set of questions relative to baptism's function, such as, what does baptism do relative to the salvific standing of covenant children? Does it impart salvation itself? Is it an instrument effecting or bringing about salvation? Is salvation tied to the rite or the very act of baptism?

In Witsius's treatise, presented in English translation below, the author treats these sorts of questions and demonstrates how Reformed authors have understood Scripture to address them. He is careful to set forth the Reformed consensus regarding the efficacy of baptism and the status of covenant children before God. It is worthy of note that Witsius, in analyzing the efficacy and utility of baptism as the sign and seal of the covenant of grace, does not disconnect or set aside the doctrine of divine election from that covenant. In fact, he joins God's electing purpose in Jesus Christ with the evangelical covenant in Christ's

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<sup>2</sup> Herman Witsius, *Disquisitio Modesta et Placida de Efficacia et Utilitate Baptismi in Electis foederatorum parentum infantibus* (Utrecht, 1694); idem, *Miscellaneorum Sacrorum Tomus alter, continens XXIII. Exercitationes, maxima ex parte historico-et critico-theologicas . . . Quibus accesserunt Animadversiones Irenicae ad controversias quasdam Anglicanas; ut & Orationes Quinque* (Amst. et Ultraj, 1700); editio secunda (Herbornae Nassaviroum: Iohannis Nicholai Andreae, 1712); editio tertia (Lugd. Bat, 1736).

blood. Moreover, Witsius demonstrates that the issue of baptism's efficacy cannot be divorced from election; and he addresses this question with an understanding, implicit in his discussion, of the Reformed understanding of the sacraments, particularly regarding the relationship between the sign and the thing signified. Witsius's essay, then, in defining the efficacy of baptism, defends the confessional theology explicated in the Canons of Dordrecht. In so doing, he presents the diversity of opinion that can be discerned among sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theologians surrounding these issues, while showing where intramural debate was allowed and also where the line was crossed into heterodoxy.

Witsius's argument in this treatise unfolds under three main headings (which, for clarity, I have added to Witsius's text): first, the benefits signified and sealed in baptism; second, the relation of these benefits to the rite of baptism; and, third, wherein consists the efficacy of baptism?

After briefly laying out the blessing of being a recipient of God's covenant promises, Witsius addresses the benefits of baptism and faces head-on the reality of covenant apostasy and the sorrowful circumstance that not all the covenanted, or those who have received the sign of the covenant, come to salvation. But, asserts Witsius, this reality ought not to cast covenant parents into despair or doubt regarding their children, for such parents are to cling to the revealed promises of God depicted in baptism, which means they may and ought to regard their children as belonging to God. This "belonging" is not to be viewed as a mere corporate sanctity, however, nor as a mere objective right that depends upon the human party to bear fruit. Rather, to belong to Christ constitutes the sanctity that testifies to one's only comfort in life and in death. Given the nature of the divine promise in the covenant of grace, which is according to Christ's blood, and which is signified and sealed in baptism, this sacrament in the strictest sense is suited for God's elect alone, for God makes his promises reach fulfillment in them alone. However, it is improper for us to speculate about God's secret election at this place, for the church does not baptize persons based upon a knowledge of God's eternal election; rather, the church baptizes according to the revealed Word of God, so that while the elect and non-elect alike receive the outward sign of this promise, the elect alone are granted baptism's efficacy and receive from God, according to his irresistible grace, the salvation promised and portrayed in baptism. In other words, the saving efficacy of baptism will be accomplished in the

elect alone, not in the non-elect; or to say this following biblical language, baptism's spiritual and salvific efficacy is exerted in those who "are children of promise" (Rom. 9:8)—something not true of all who are baptized children.

Witsius acknowledges that other Reformed authors, particularly Anglican writers, hold to a twofold salvation or a doctrine of salvation consisting of two types: one for infants; and another for adults—the first being insufficient for the salvation of adults. Thus, according to these authors, all baptized infants are saved, whereas in becoming adults and losing their infantile status, they can fail to come to a state of regeneration or this second sort of salvation, and so be lost. Witsius demonstrates that this view is plagued with greater problems than it solves, cannot track with Scripture, and undermines the efficacy of Christ's atonement and irresistible grace, for it posits a temporary regeneration of the Spirit that is subsequently conquered by adult sins.

Witsius thus returns to his argument that the thing signified in the sacrament of baptism is applied efficaciously to the elect alone—otherwise the covenant of grace would not be *of grace*. What is more, the promises of the covenant do not hinge on fallen humans in their depraved capacity, but they hinge or depend on God who bestows what is needed for us to fulfill our side of the covenant—and these blessings are founded on the merits of Christ. In other words, the benefits of faith and rebirth, of repentance and clinging to Christ, without which a person cannot be saved, are bestowed as gifts, and only the elect receive them. Baptism signifies nothing less than communion with Christ, the forgiveness of sins, regeneration or rebirth, and eternal life.

Next Witsius turns to how these benefits or blessings relate to the rite of baptism. He examines this matter at great length. Here we simply observe that Witsius shows how Reformed theologians have offered different answers to this question: some arguing that these blessings precede the rite of baptism; others arguing that the blessings issue forth after baptism; still others maintaining that these blessings are not tied to the act of baptism and so may come before, after, or at baptism; and finally those who aver that the blessings of baptism are tied to the moment of baptism itself—that is, the view that is now called baptismal regeneration. Witsius regards this last position as aberrant and heterodox, and he carefully rebuts it. For his part, Witsius defends the position that God typically bestows the blessings signified in baptism to elect infants prior to the rite of baptism—a perspective that has longstanding Reformed pedigree.

Lastly, Witsius considers the question of the nature of baptism's efficacy. Specifically, he asks wherein consists the efficacy of baptism? Witsius's answer to that query is that it consists in the confirming and certifying of promised grace. Baptism, we must not forget, is a sacrament; and as a sacrament it is a seal; and seals function to confirm and certify something. Thus the efficacy of baptism, given that it is a sacrament (and of course Witsius is assuming the validity of the Reformed conception of sacraments), is altogether moral in nature rather than physical or substantive. In other words, baptism is not a physical agent that bestows grace. The sign (the washing of the water) is not to be confused with the thing signified (the blood of Christ that washes away all our sins), though they are closely related to one another. Witsius ably depicts the Reformed rejection of Roman Catholic and Lutheran positions on this question, even as he carefully refutes the few writers, falling under the wide Reformed umbrella, who advocate something akin to Romish or Lutheran views.

Inasmuch as the controversy that Witsius addresses abides with Reformed and Presbyterian churches to this day, his treatise proves quite up-to-date, exposes modern readers to a host of erudite and gifted Reformed theologians of an earlier era (though no longer well-known today), and demonstrates that, amidst a diversity of expression, a basic consensus can be found among the Reformed writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries regarding the efficacy of baptism.

In conclusion, a few words are needed concerning the translation and editing of this treatise. This work was first translated into English by William Marshall and offered as an appendix to his book entitled *Popery in the Full Corn, the Ear, and the Blade; or, The Doctrine of Baptism in the Popish, Episcopalian, and Congregational Churches; with a Defence of the Calvinistic or Presbyterian View* (Edinburgh: Paton and Ritchie, 1852)—a valuable volume in its own right. I have worked through Marshall's translation and revised (and hopefully improved) it in numerous places. For Witsius's Latin text, I worked from the second edition of his *Miscellaneorum Sacrorum tomus alter*. As already mentioned, I have inserted three major headings in order to aid the reader in following Witsius's presentation; all the Latin subheadings, however, belong to Witsius. In editing this work I have occasionally inserted some Scripture references, which have been placed in square brackets. Throughout Witsius's essay, I have sought to discover and expand on, or cite in full, his rather cryptic or abbreviated references to sources; I have not been able, however, to find all the works Witsius cites and these are marked with

an asterisk (\*). The citations from Calvin are not taken from any published English translation of his works, but are translated by Marshall with my revisions.

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On the Efficacy and Utility of Baptism  
in the Case of Elect Infants Whose Parents  
Are Under the Covenant

I. The question respecting the efficacy and utility of Christian baptism in the case of the elect infants of covenanted parents is particularly difficult and abstruse, and as in former so also in later times has been much obscured by the subtleties of elaborate discussion. The experienced and impartial reader must be allowed to determine whether this little work of mine is calculated to serve the purpose of clearing up this question so that the truth may be better understood and the peace of the church more firmly cemented. Certainly no one shall here find cause of offense, either in undue zeal to serve the interests of a party, or in unbecoming censure directed against opinions or against individuals, or in violence of temper, or acrimony of language, or in anything approaching to respect of persons (προσωποληψία)—all tendency to such things I am anxious to keep at a distance. I hold it unworthy of men professing the study of wisdom, and most of all unworthy of theologians, if, in controversial discussions, they cannot make known their disagreement unless their language have a sting in it, or their ink is largely mingled with gall. To me nothing seems more in accordance with sacred truth and solid erudition than a mild and courteous spirit. And if at any time I must enter on a debate, whether in writing or otherwise, that divine admonition

*Quaestio de Baptismi  
efficacia modeste  
tractanda est*

of the Apostle Paul remains and ever shall remain deeply fixed in my mind, “To speak the truth in love” (ΑΛΗΘΕΥΕΙΝ ΕΝ ΑΓΑΠΗ).

### The Benefits Signified and Sealed in Baptism

II. My purpose is to arrange the following remarks such that the discussion shall begin with those things that are simple and easily understood and end with the elucidation, and to the best of my ability, the solution of those that are more abstruse and intricate. And, in the first place, I assume as admitted by all orthodox writers upon the subject, although it is not safe to pry too curiously into the secrets of the divine counsels or to draw too confident conclusions concerning the lot of those dying in infancy, that a distinguished privilege belongs to those infants whose benefit it is in divine providence to be born of parents whom the grace of the Most High has honored with the saving fellowship of his covenant. For it would be altogether wrong to suppose that the promise made to Abraham (“I will be thy God, and the God of thy seed after thee”) has been either revoked or brought within narrower limits by the introduction of the better dispensation, especially seeing that Peter, on the glorious day of Pentecost, impressed upon his hearers that the promise of the Spirit of grace was given not to themselves only but also to their children; and that the Lord Jesus took up in his arms the children of covenanted parents, blessed them, and, in a word, declared that of such is the kingdom of heaven (which Scripture testimonies I do not feel myself called to dwell upon at present, as I have expounded them at length in another place).<sup>3</sup>

III. This however by no means implies that all the children of pious parents should be regarded as ordained to salvation by the divine appointment. For it is manifest, both from the indubitable

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<sup>3</sup> Editor’s note: Witsius does not indicate where he exposits this, but it can be found, for example, in his *De Œconomia Foederum Dei cum Hominibus, Libri Quatuor*, editio quarta (Herborna, 1712), IV.xvi.1-50.

records of the sacred volume and the examples there placed beyond controversy, and from the experience of everyday life, that not infrequently the offspring of the best of men grow up with the worst dispositions, wickedly bent upon their own destruction. Still God has given that pledge to pious parents that they may regard their little ones as the children of God by gracious adoption, until, when further advanced, they betray themselves by indications to the contrary, and that they may feel not less secure regarding their children dying in infancy than did Abraham and Isaac of old.

*Omnisque ut electos intueri licet, donec contrariis se indiciiis prodant.*

IV. And this, I think, Paul intended when he wrote, “The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband, else were your children unclean; but now are they holy” (1 Cor. 7:14). The apostle seems to allude to the fact that among the Jews, children who were of Gentile extraction on the side of either parent were reckoned unclean—whence we read that in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah that the people were commanded to put away from themselves those children, along with their mothers, who were begotten as Gentiles from their mothers [Ezra 10:3; Neh. 13:23ff.]. Paul forbids Christian spouses to entertain any scruple on that matter, giving them to understand that the party who has not yet embraced the Christian faith is so far sanctified, in a certain way, by the believing party that his or her unbelief cannot render the children of such a marriage unfit to enjoy the benefits of the federal promise. And with that view he calls them “holy,” not so much by an absolute and inherent holiness, which consists in moral perfection, as by a relative and federal holiness, of which we so often find mention made in the books of the Old Testament:

*Quod Apostolus docuit  
1 Cor. VII. 14*

That is to say, that among the people of Israel there was, as it were, a twofold holiness of persons: the one common, according to which that whole nation was separated from all other nations so that they might be covenanted and consecrated to God—and

for that reason they were called “a holy nation,” while the rest of the nations were “profane”; the other more special, and proper to those who, for the service of God in the tabernacle, were exempted from other employments—on which account they were with peculiar propriety called “holy,” as also, in the same manner, were all vessels made use of in the sacred service. In fact, then, the apostle refers to the one or the other of these two kinds of holiness, with a view to show either that the children of believers are set apart by God, to the end that they may resemble certain vessels that under the old economy were specially dedicated to his own service, or that they are separated from the common condition of other infants so that they may participate in the covenanted people of God.<sup>4</sup>

However, in addition to this, there seems to be something further, which Cocceius has briefly and perspicuously expressed in his commentary on the seventy-fourth question of the *Heidelberg Catechism*. He says,

It signifies not merely that there is an external sanctity arising from their not being conceived and born like heathen children (regarding whom there is a strong presumption that they will drink in impiety with their mother’s milk) but also that there is good reason to hope that they may really be sanctified from their tender years so that when they reach the years of understanding, they will through God’s blessing upon the instructions of their parents discern and love the truth, and that, on the other hand, if they should die in infancy, then, as holy persons and members of Christ, they shall be saved. All this we believe on the ground of the promise given to Abraham, and through him to all believers, that Jehovah would be the God—that is, the sanctifier and the justifier—not of him only but also of his seed.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> \*Moïse Amyraut, *Disputatio de Paedobaptismi*, §XIV. Editor’s note: Witsius is likely citing from *Syntagma thesium theologiarum in Academia Salmuriensi variis temporibus disputatarum* (Saumur, 1665), a work co-authored by Amyraut, Cappel, and La Place.

<sup>5</sup> Johannes Cocceius, *Explicatio catecheseos Heidelbergensis*, in *Opera*, vol. 7; also *De Heydelbergse Catechismus der Chr. Religie*, trans. Abraham van Poot

V. Moreover, this federal sanctity suffices as a warrant for *Sanctitas foederalis infantium, sufficiens* parents to bring their infants to the sacred bath of baptism. It is *fundamentum paedobaptismi est* also a sufficient warrant for the office-bearers of the church to wash the children so brought in the waters of the mystical font. For charity requires that children so distinguished be regarded as children beloved of God and reckoned of the family of God until they manifest the reverse by an evil disposition and a wicked course of life. Indeed, the height and depth of eternal predestination forbids us to pry into its hidden things with more than a lawful curiosity. Yet, judging soberly, there can be nothing to prevent us from conferring the sign and seal of the covenant upon those whom it is proper to acknowledge as the covenanted people of God; meanwhile the secret things of predestination have been left to God according to his freedom. A most excellent man and solid theologian, Robert Boyd of Trochrig, after illustrating this saying of Paul by an accurate commentary, thus proceeds:

Meanwhile, we in no wise so connect the grace and mercy of God towards infants with the faith of believing parents as to infer any prejudice to the free and secret election of him who, both among infants and adult professors of the faith, knows who are his own and has sealed them with a seal known only to himself. We merely assert that it appears to us from the good pleasure of the grace of God toward infants, as disclosed in his covenant, that so far as concerns their being admitted to baptism and reckoned members of Christ's church till they shall have arrived at riper years, their being the children of pious parents has precisely the same value as a profession of faith on the part of those who have grown up and become capable of belief.<sup>6</sup>

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(Amsterdam, 1679), comment on Q/A 74. Cf. idem, *Summa doctrinae de foedere et testamento Dei* (Amsterdam, 1648), cap. XIII. §454.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Boyd, *Roberti Bidii A trochoregia Scoti SS. theologiae in academiis salmuriiana, glascuana, & Edinburgena professoris eximii, in epistolam Pauli Apostoli ad ephesios praelectiones supra CC. lectione varia, multifaria eruditione, & pietate singulari refertae* (London, 1652), p. 762.

But respecting infant baptism itself, and the grounds of it, I have already discoursed largely in another place.<sup>7</sup>

VI. In the meantime, let it be observed that if we take the strictest view of baptism, it is in its true nature and in the

*Qui tamen nullam obsequat  
gratiam, nisi electis.*

judgment of God suited only to the elect, because it is always agreeable to truth.

For since baptism is a sign and seal of that covenant in which God has made over to his covenanted people the benefits of saving grace and whatever has a sure connection with eternal life, it follows that those who neither have nor ever will have any right to the benefits of the covenant, in like manner have no right before God's tribunal to the seal of the covenant. The ministers of religion, indeed, who, in regard to individuals, must be guided by the judgment of charity, cannot distinguish elect from non-elect, and thus they do not sin although they should occasionally sprinkle with the baptismal water those whom in strictness they ought not. To such persons, however, baptism conveys nothing that is truly good—no grace, no salvation does it signify and seal any more than a piece of wax impressed, perhaps, with beautiful characters and appended to fair paper on which nothing is written or to be written, or, if you please, appended to paper all over stained with foul blots so that nothing good can be written on it. The whole efficacy of baptism therefore—the whole of its saving use—is to be sought for in elect infants. Robert Abbot, Bishop of Salisbury, writing against Richard Thomson, chap. 7, finely remarks: “Even as the sacraments are the seals of grace, so do they exert their spiritual efficacy in those only who are the children of the promise and the heirs of grace.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Editor's note: See Witsius' *De Œconomia*, IV.xvi.40-50.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Abbot, *De gratia, et perseverantia sanctorum exercitationes aliquot habitae in Academiae Oxoniensi, authore Roberto Sarisburiensi iam episcopo, ... Quibus accessit eiusdem in Richardi Thomsoni Anglo-Belgici diatribam de amissione & intercisione iustificationis, & gratiae, animaduersio brevis* (London, 1618), p. 118.

VII. There are not wanting, I admit, theologians even of the highest name who give a somewhat different account of these

*Quam vis contrarium sentientibus, & omnibus rite baptizatis gratiam quandam Baptismalem attribuentibus, Pareo, Roberto Baronio, Augustino & Prospero.*

matters, maintaining that a certain kind of regeneration and

justification is not only signified but bestowed upon all the infants of covenanted persons without exception, although it may not be infallibly connected with salvation inasmuch as they may fall from it by their own sin after they have grown up. Pareus, writing in *Against Bellarmine*, teaches that “all the children of the church are justified in baptism and regenerated by the Holy Spirit according to their age and capacity, reserving, however, the divine counsel respecting them which is wont to disclose itself in afterlife.”<sup>9</sup> He is followed by Robertus Baronius, a most acute philosopher and theologian, in his *Discourse on Original Sin*.<sup>10</sup> Nor does Forbes differ very far from him in his *Instructiones historico-theologicae*, where he quotes the opinion of Augustine, and likewise that of Prosper, both of whom maintain that all baptized infants are justified, and therefore that original sin is remitted to them in baptism—with this difference, however, that Augustine conceded to reprobate infants no more than a forgiveness that is revocable and certain to be revoked. Prosper assuredly said that it is irrevocable: “If, indeed, a baptized person should withdraw from Christ, and finish this life all alien from grace, he must fall into perdition, not however that he is condemned for original sin, but that he perishes in consequence of his subsequent transgressions, suffering even what was due to him on account of those which were

<sup>9</sup> \*Pareus, *Contra Bellarminum*, Bk. III, *de Justif.*, chap. XIV, at the second paragraph. Editor’s note: Witsius’ cryptic citation here seems to refer to David Pareus’ *Quaestiones controversae theologicae, de jure regum et principum* (Ambergae, 1612), but I was unable to confirm this.

<sup>10</sup> Robertus Baronius, “Disputatio de Origin. Peccat.,” sect. XIV. Editor’s note: Witsius appears to be referring to Baronius’ *Disputatio theologica, de vero discrimine peccati mortalis et venialis, deque impossibilitate implendi legem Dei ob quotidianam peccatorum venialium incursionem* (Amsterdam, 1649).

remitted.”<sup>11</sup>

VIII. Forbes himself sets forth his own view with sufficient clearness and subtlety in his 102nd section, *Nec abludente Forbesio*, answering the question respecting the efficacy of baptism to children in the following terms:

Calling and justifying are regarded in a twofold light: either as respects the purpose and foreknowledge of God, or as respects the tenor of the divine covenant. These two things are not at variance with each other but are variously distinguished. For the purpose of God is secret, the covenant is disclosed in the preaching of the gospel; the purpose is absolute, the covenant is conditional; the purpose is infallibly efficacious and accomplishes whatever it has designed, but the covenant is often violated by the ingratitude of men who reject it and consequently the thing promised does not come to pass. The sacraments are instituted not as seals of the purpose or foreknowledge of God, but that through the medium of the covenant they may lead us to the purpose. Nor do the sacraments seal anything beyond what is promised in the letter of the covenant.<sup>12</sup>

Thus far Forbes.

IX. But of all expositors of these opinions, the most acute is John Davenant, at one time a deputy of the English Church to the Synod of Dort, afterwards Bishop of Salisbury, *Et valde urgentibus Davenantio & Wardo*, a theologian of solid judgment and great erudition. In a letter to Samuel Ward (his former colleague in that embassy and subsequently a very celebrated professor at the University of Cambridge), he contends that the blood of Christ is so far applied to every infant duly baptized that original sin is remitted—whence he teaches that all such infants are in a certain sense not only adopted and justified but also regenerated and sanctified. But the justification, regeneration, adoption that he grants as suited to

<sup>11</sup> John Forbes, *Instructiones historico-theologicae: de doctrina christiana & variorum rerum statu, ortisque erroribus & controversiis, jam inde à temporibus Apostolicis, ad tempora usque seculi decimi-septimi priora* (Amsterdam, 1702), Bk X, chap. 16.

<sup>12</sup> See Forbes, *Instructiones historico-theologicae*, sect. 102

baptized infants is not altogether the same with that justification, regeneration, adoption, which, in the question of the perseverance of the saints, we maintain to be at no time lost. It only avails so far as to place them in a state of salvation conformably with their infantile condition, so that little ones dying before they attain to the use of reason may actually be saved through that peculiar justification, regeneration, and sanctification. But although it suffices for the salvation of children, he does not regard it as sufficient for adults. And thus those who perish in more advanced life, in consequence of coming short of their baptismal engagements, have lost not the state of salvation that belonged to them as infants but the infant state itself, which being superseded, what was by the divine decree sufficient for their salvation while children ceases to be sufficient for their salvation as adults.<sup>13</sup>

X. Who can deny that these are the acute and learned discussions of very erudite men? To me, however, if I may be allowed to give an opinion, they seem not altogether sound; and indeed, the whole of these excellent men come to this: that while they get rid of certain difficulties, they involve themselves in others not less serious. For, in the first place, by what word of Scripture can they prove that an application of the

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<sup>13</sup> John Davenant, *Epistola ad Samuelem Wardum*. Editor's note: It is likely that Witsius is citing the following work: *Reverendi viri Dom. Joannis Davenantii, Sarisburiensis Episcopi, ad virum clarissimum Dominum Samuelem Wardum, collegii in Academiâ Cantabrigiensi sidneiensis prafectum, epistola in qâ de infantium qorumvis rite baptizatorum statu disseritur, nec ad controversiam de sanctorum perseverantiâ atque apostasiâ pertinere desinitur: unâ cum stricturis in eandem nonnullis*, by Thomas Gataker (London, 1654). Witsius also refers the reader to Ludovicus Le Blanc, "De Usu & Efficacia Sacramentorum Novi Testamenti," in *Theses Theologicae, variis temporibus in Academia Sedanensi editae et ad Disputandum propositae* (London, 1675), sect. 37, and then compare Voetius' *Selectae disputationes theologicae*, 5 vols. (Utrecht, 1648-69), part 2, p. 409. Witsius writes, "To nearly the same purport is the opinion of D. Du Brais, professor at Saumur, which, as attacked by Du Bosc and vindicated by himself, may be seen in the two last of Du Bosc's Epistles."

blood of Christ is made to any man to the remission of original sin, even to the effecting of a certain justification, regeneration, and adoption—such an application as may suffice for his salvation in a certain condition of life—while that man has not been given to Christ by the eternal destination of the Father, so that Christ in the discharge of the mediatorial office might sustain his person, make satisfaction, and merit salvation for him? The application of the blood of Christ, like the shedding of it and all the benefits thence accruing, is regulated solely according to the divine good pleasure. But this is the will of the Father: that Christ should sustain the persons of those who are given to him and of none besides, for them, not for others, should shed his blood, to them, not to others, should apply his blood; in short, should not only place them in a state in which they may be saved but should actually save them and “give unto them eternal life” (John 6:38, 40); and, by this good pleasure of God, as many as are sanctified in Christ are sanctified unto salvation (Heb. 10:9, 10).

XI. Further, I should wish to have explained to me what kind of remission of original sin it is that may be separated from the remission of actual sins. Every true remission of sin is founded on the satisfaction of Christ made for that sin. Christ made satisfaction for no sin that he did not take upon himself. He did not take upon himself any sins save those of the elect. Their persons only did he bear. And in every case in which he made a single debt of a sinner his own by taking it upon himself, in that case he took upon himself the burden of all that sinner’s debts together. For he did not partly bear and partly not bear the person of any, nor become sponsor or surety for some single debt and not for the rest. Whence follow these two things: first, that the remission of original sin has been obtained by the blood of Christ for none save the elect; and second, that for whomsoever the remission of original sin has been obtained, for them also has been obtained the remission of all other sins. But either of these conclusions is diametrically opposed to the hypothesis of these learned men. And, finally, what is the nature of this remission of original sin in baptism? Is it conditional, as Augustine, or absolute,

*Nec remissio peccati  
originalis, a qua  
sejuncta sit aliorum  
peccatorum remissio.*

as Prosper, would have it? If the former, how is it that the satisfaction of Christ for that sin, which is undoubtedly absolute and perfect in all its parts, has merited no more than a conditional—that is, a very imperfect—remission? If the latter, does Christ so divide the debts of some men as to expunge one of them himself by his blood and leave the rest to be expiated by themselves? Such doctrine is not taught in the Bible.

XII. But it is also especially worthy of notice that all regeneration entitled to the name consists in the infusion of spiritual life—at least insofar as respects its commencement or first movement, so to speak. Spiritual life is infused into no one dead in sin except on the ground of the merit of Christ's death. The life that Christ has merited by his death is everlasting, for it corresponds to that life that Adam should have obtained had he continued in his integrity. And it flows from the Spirit of life in Christ risen from the dead, for as Christ himself having once died, dies no more, so neither shall the second death reign over anyone who, by the Spirit of life in Christ, is raised from the first. For these reasons, we admit no regeneration through the blood of Christ that, although sufficient for everlasting life, may possibly end in eternal death. Whoever is born of the Spirit immediately enters into the kingdom of heaven—first, as a state of grace; afterwards, as a state of glory. The Holy Spirit knows nothing of any other regeneration.

XIII. It must indeed be confessed, as Forbes remarks, that baptism, like the other sacrament, is a seal not so much of the secret purpose of God as of the revealed covenant of grace. But at the same time we must observe that the covenant of grace is nothing more than the accomplishment of the eternal counsel of God. The righteousness of faith, of which the sacraments are the seals, and which is promised in the covenant, belongs exclusively to the elect. Nor must we omit to observe what is here of no small consequence, that the promises of the covenant, including everything it embraces, are not conditional but absolute. For in

*Neque veri nominis regeneratio,  
quae terminari queat morte aeterna.*

*Promissiones foederis gratiae  
proprie ad electos pertinent, neque  
omnes conditionatae sunt.*

the covenant God promises to bestow even those qualifications that are to be regarded as the prerequisites of its ultimate and complete fruition (Jer. 31:32, 33; 32:39, 40). The reason is that the promises of this covenant are founded in the satisfaction and merits of Christ, who has merited for his people not only eternal life but likewise all those benefits without which that life could not be obtained.

XIV. From all this we infer that there is no such thing signified and sealed, much less conferred, upon all covenanted infants in

*Id circo de Baptismi efficacia  
in infantibus electis praecipue  
quaestio est.*

baptism as a kind of common justification, regeneration, and sanctification, which shall place them in a state of

salvation prior to the use of reason and become insufficient for their salvation after they have grown up, nor any remission of original sin, whether revocable or irrevocable; but that the whole efficacy of baptism, insofar as it implies a state of salvation even conformably with that period of life, belongs exclusively to infants who are elected. Hence, among orthodox theologians disputing about the efficacy of baptism, the question is chiefly, if not solely: What benefits does it confer upon elect infants, who alone in the estimation of God have, strictly speaking, a right to it?

XV. In what, then, does that efficacy really consist? Let us

*Quae indubie significatione & oblatione bonorum foederis  
consistit.*

begin with what is simplest. Since baptism, as all

orthodox theologians agree, is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, and since the use of a sign and seal is to signify and make sure, it follows that by baptism the benefits of the covenant of grace are signified and made sure to elect infants as belonging to them. And this somewhat general statement is in itself so perspicuous that it may seem to stand in need of no further exposition or proof.

XVI. Yet in this statement there are three things that require

*Circa quam rem tria enucleanda restant.*

particular examination: (1) the benefits of the covenant

of grace that baptism serves peculiarly to make sure; (2) the relation that these benefits bear to baptism; and (3) the design of

the sealing, and the extent of its efficacy.

XVII. The blessings sealed by baptism are chiefly these: In the first place, general communion with Christ and with his mystical body, and consequently a right to participate in all its benefits.

*Bona Foederis Baptismo  
obsignata, sunt 1.  
Communio cum Christo.*

With this view we are said to be “baptized into Christ” (Rom. 6:3, Gal. 3:17) and “by one Spirit baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13) and “saved by baptism” (Tit. 3:5).

This communion with Christ without doubt implies that the baptized infant may be regarded as given by the Father, as redeemed by Christ, as at least so far reconciled to God through Christ that its sin can never be imputed to it for punishment. For, although by nature it is a child of wrath, by destination it is doubtless a child of grace. But in my opinion still more is implied. All those things just mentioned belong to the whole of the elect, even to those who are born beyond the fellowship of the covenant. We must therefore take into consideration the actual union of infants with Christ through the Spirit of grace, operating indeed in a way that is unseen and inexplicable by us, yet making them truly members of his mystical body and giving them a right to all the benefits of the Head—to be bestowed on them in due order at the appointed season.

XVIII. A second blessing is the washing away of sin (Acts 22:16). The filth of sin may be viewed either in respect of the

guilt that attaches to the stain—and thus  
*2. Peccati ablutio.* considered, it is taken away by remission, which

is called justification—or in respect of the stain itself, or spiritual deformity and defacing of the image of God—and in this view it is removed by the grace of the sanctifying Spirit. Both the one and the other are sealed by baptism. Of the first, Peter discourses in Acts 2:38. Of the last, Paul writes in Eph. 5:26, 27. Both are propounded jointly in 1 Cor. 6:11, “But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.”

XIX. The washing away of sin therefore includes also the mortification of sin, so that it shall no longer live and reign (Rom. 6:6). The mortification of sin is the quickening and regeneration

of the sinful soul, which, if distinguished from the mortification of sin, is so only in the conception or view we have of it. And that it also is sealed by baptism appears from this circumstance: that baptism is called “the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5). By what is here called regeneration, we understand the infusion of spiritual life that springs from the above mentioned communion with Christ in his death and resurrection. But that life may be considered either as to its first beginning while as yet it is no more than a mere faculty or intrinsic constitution of the soul whereby it is adapted in certain given circumstances to put forth operations agreeable to God by Christ, or in respect of its progress when by vital activity it approves itself to God and man. Of this subject I have treated at length in another place.<sup>14</sup>

XX. Further, there is signified and sealed by baptism a happy deliverance from all the miseries of this life and a blessed victory over the hardships of the world; and, moreover, the glorious resurrection itself to life eternal after the pattern of Christ our Lord (cf. 1 Pet. 3:20-21 with Rom. 6:3-9). All these blessings, and whatever else is connected with these, are signified and sealed to baptized infants, and that with all the superiority of possession and dignity that is peculiar to the new covenant. And thus far all the orthodox are of the same mind.

### The Relation of These Benefits to the Rite of Baptism

XXI. But in what relation do all these blessings stand to baptism? It is obvious that those things that have been mentioned respecting victory over the miseries of this life, and a blessed resurrection, are signified and sealed as yet future. Fellowship with Christ and his mystical body seems in the case of elect infants to go before baptism, at least in the judgment of charity, for it is made the

*Horum ad Baptismum hic videtur esse ordo, ut communicatio cum Christo Baptismum antecedit.*

<sup>14</sup> Editor’s note: See Witsius’ *De Œconomia*, III.vi.1-28.

foundation of infant baptism. In fact, the argument on which the orthodox continually insist is that those must be baptized to whom belong the covenant of grace and the fellowship of Christ and the church, and of whom is the kingdom of heaven. But all these privileges belong to elect infants, born under the covenant. It may be of advantage once more to listen to Boyd discussing this subject in his own weighty style, in his *Commentary on Ephesians*. His opinion is that the doctors of the Romish church are chargeable with most grievous error in maintaining, as they do, that persons to be baptized are not members of Christ nor belong to his body and fellowship prior to their being marked with this seal, but at that time only are set free from the power of Satan and pass into the family of Christ. That these doctors hold such an opinion is demonstrated by their exorcism, for at baptism they exorcise the infants of believers as if they had been seized, entered, and possessed by the wicked one. "That opinion," says he,

if it were true, would prove that the children of Christians must no less than those of Turks, Jews, and heathens be debarred from baptism until they are of years to profess their own faith, for there is no reason why the seal of the covenant should be put upon those who have no interest in the covenant itself; and then the language of the covenant itself, in which God promises to be not only our God but the God of our seed, would be vain and meaningless. These persons therefore actually exclude the seed of believers from the covenant of God while at the very instant they admit them to the seal of the covenant. And thus they most perversely contradict themselves.<sup>15</sup>

So far Boyd. Certainly, if the children of believers, prior to their baptism, are not to be regarded as having communion with Christ and the church, we must of necessity consider them as persons meanwhile subject to the wrath of God, under the power of the devil, and lying in a state of condemnation; assuredly, insofar as concerns their present condition, they differ in no respect from the children of other persons, even the furthest

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<sup>15</sup> Boyd, *Ad Ephes.*, pp. 756, 757.

removed from the pale of God's covenant—for as there is no middle condition, he who is not yet in Christ must belong to Satan. Nor thus far does even the election of infants make any distinction. So long as their election is known only in the secret purpose of God, it introduces no real difference of state. The Ephesians, whom Paul describes in his divine epistle, had indeed been elect in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world, but prior to their being effectually called through the preaching of the gospel, they differed in no respect from the rest of their fellow citizens whose names were never inscribed in the book of life. They were at that time aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world [Eph. 2:12]. This is a condition in which I can never suppose the elect infants of believers to be placed prior to their baptism.

XXII. But if, prior to their baptism, they have communion with Christ, as has just been shown, it would appear that the same thing must be maintained respecting the remission of original sin, which is the first thing that flows from participation in the covenant of grace and fellowship with Christ. This has been brought out very well by Moses Amyraut in his discourse *On Infant Baptism*. "Seeing," says he,

we have demonstrated that the covenant of God belongs to the infants of believers, of what benefit flowing from it shall they partake, if they cannot even have their original sin forgiven? Again, no one is deprived of the offered gift except he who rejects it. But an infant cannot be said to reject the gift of remission, for rejection implies a mental act, to which infants are incompetent. And the very same thing takes place here as in other kinds of action, for if any agent operate upon a thing that is by nature adapted to its action, and if there is nothing in the thing acted on which, by its resistance, may counteract the force of the agent, it follows of course that the action is allowed.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> \*Moïse Amyraut, *Disputatio de Paedobaptis*, §XVIII.

But further, it appears to me to follow likewise, that if an infant, according to the gracious manifestation of the divine good pleasure, is covenanted and united to Christ in virtue of its being born of covenanted parents, even before it is washed with the water of baptism, and if there is no reason why God should not bestow the remission of original sin as flowing directly from that covenant, then the true state of the matter is that God does not delay the bestowal of the gift till after the ceremony of baptism, especially since the rite of baptism itself is peculiarly adapted to the sealing of a gift already bestowed. "Baptism, then, is not necessary to an infant in order to reconciliation and reception into a state of grace, *since reconciliation has gone before baptism.*"<sup>17</sup>

XXIII. But with regard to the place of regeneration there is greater difficulty. On this part of the subject, I find four distinct opinions among theologians. Some think that regeneration takes place at different periods of time—it may be before, it may be at, or it may be after baptism. Others place it uniformly before baptism. Others teach that infants are baptized unto future regeneration, being incapable of it at the time. Indeed, many contend that God usually confers regeneration upon infants in the very act and moment of baptism. Let us look at the arguments of each class, and subject them to an impartial examination.

XXIV. That in the dispensation of his saving grace God is restricted to no particular period of time will be admitted by every person who entertains a becoming reverence for his supreme and almighty dominion. The sole question is: What he may have prescribed to himself in the exercise of his unlimited freedom, or may have revealed in his Word, or made manifest by experience? Jerome Zanchi is of the opinion that neither in the case of infants nor of adults does God proceed always in one way. In his *Commentary on Ephesians 5*, in an

*De ordine regenerationis,  
quadruplex est  
Theologorum sententia.*

*Modestiae litare videntur, qui nullum certum  
ei determinant temporis articulum.*

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<sup>17</sup> \*Pierre Du Moulin, *Disputatio de Nec. Baptis.*, Part I, §XXXIV.

excursus on the subject of baptism, he says, “Both among infants and adults, some prior to baptism are blessed with the spirit of faith and are therefore engrafted into Christ, enjoy forgiveness of sins, and are regenerated. Others are not dealt with in that way but are blessed with these benefits at the time of baptism itself.”<sup>18</sup> With this agrees the opinion of Ames, who in his *Refutation of Bellarmine* observes, “That God indeed infuses a gracious disposition or principle into some in the very act of baptism, we by no means deny. But God is able to communicate the same grace either before or after baptism.”<sup>19</sup> And in nearly the same terms writes Friedrich Spanheim the elder in his *Dubia evangelica*, “Baptism serves for regeneration, either antecedent in adults, or subsequent in infants, and puts forth its virtue, in some cases, at the time, and in others, afterwards, according to the varying dispensations of God.”<sup>20</sup> Certainly those writers are the most modest who restrict the freedom of God’s actions within no limits that he has not clearly prescribed for himself.

XXV. Those who think that an infant’s regeneration precedes baptism reason nearly in the following manner: They understand by regeneration that divine grace by which the initiatory principle of spiritual life is first infused into a human being otherwise spiritually dead. That principle of life they conceive of as a kind of faculty that need not be regarded as always active, unless the subject is defined in such terms as to make this necessary. Just as in a newborn there is the principle of rational life without which it would not be a human being, and just as since the fall of our protoplasts (first parents) there is in the child born of corrupt parents the principle of moral corruption and of vicious life, although neither faculty puts or can put itself forth in its appropriate actions till the child has attained to years capable of

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<sup>18</sup> Hieronymus Zanchius, *In D. Pauli Epistolam ad Ephesios, commentarius*, Digress. de Baptismo (Neostadi, 1594), comm. on chap. V, 3, § XXXI.

<sup>19</sup> William Ames, *Bellarmino enervato*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Oxford, 1629), Bk. III, Disput. XIV., quaest. III.

<sup>20</sup> Friedrich Spanheim, *Dubia evangelica in tres partes distributa* (Geneva, 1655-58), XXVII, § VI.

reason, so, in nearly the same way, they conceive of the principle of spiritual life in an infant, by which it is brought into such a state, that, as soon as it can use its reason, it shall be found through the superadded quickening and influence of the divine Spirit capable of putting forth such actions as are pleasing to God. But I cannot express this better than in the words of the celebrated Spanheim, whom I have just been quoting. He says:

That infants may possess the root and principle of faith is clear both from the principle of reason (of which they are capable, although not of reasoning) and from the condition in which those infants must have been who should have descended from Adam if he had continued in his primeval integrity, in whom certainly there would have existed from the womb an innate purity—a principle and root of assent to every word of God, which would have put itself forth in due time; and likewise from the opposing root of sin that now lies hid in the infant soul.<sup>21</sup>

Again, having stated the objection that it is incomprehensible (ἄκαταληπτov) how sanctifying grace should be found in an infant, he replies:

This is no more incomprehensible (ἄκαταληπτov) than how either innate purity should have existed in children descended from Adam in a state of innocence if he had continued in his integrity, or how sin, not only in respect of guilt but also in respect of inherent corruption, should exist in children descended from Adam in his fallen state, or how the principle of reason or laughter should now lie hid in an infant, &c.<sup>22</sup>

But especially may this matter be illustrated by the example of Christ, who (seeing that in all things with the exception of sin he was made like unto his brothers) was not during his infancy more capable of reasoning than any other child. For the obstruction of the ratiocinative faculty, by which it is prevented from putting forth its appropriate actions, is not owing to any moral defect in

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<sup>21</sup> Spanheim, *Dubia evangelica*, § XII.

<sup>22</sup> Spanheim, *Dubia evangelica*, § XIII.

the child but arises from the natural constitution of its corporeal organs and the law according to which its soul and body are united, which is wholly of God. To this law of nature, as well as to all others of the same kind, it became Christ in his humanity to be subject. Yet the soul of Christ, and even the very constitution and conformation of his body insofar as these are auxiliary to the soul, were sanctified from his birth so that whatever rational faculties he possessed as a human being he possessed as a spotless human being in a state of holiness.

XXVI. And this remark not merely throws light on the *Et habet revera.* doctrine we are propounding but also furnishes an argument of its truth, as Calvin has nobly urged in his *Institutes*:

And truly for this cause Christ was sanctified from his earliest infancy, that he might sanctify in himself his own elect without exception and of every age. For as he, in order to put away the offense of disobedience that had been perpetrated in our nature, took that very nature upon himself, that in it he might supply a perfect obedience as our Surety and substitute, so he was conceived of the Holy Spirit, that being wholly filled with his holiness in the assumed nature, he might infuse it into us. If in Christ we have the most perfect pattern of all the graces with which God adorns his children, in this circumstance also we have doubtless a proof that the age of infancy is not so very incompatible with sanctification. However, we hold this at least to be beyond controversy, that none of the elect are removed from the present state without being first regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit of God.<sup>23</sup>

So writes Calvin.

*Imo absolute iis ad salutem necessaria est.* XXVII. Whence that to infants also regeneration is absolutely necessary, the same Calvin argues in the following way:

Moreover, that infants who are to be saved (as certainly some of

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<sup>23</sup> Calvin, *Institutes* (1559), IV.vi.18.

such years are saved) are in the first instance regenerated by the Lord is in no degree doubtful. For if from the womb they are partakers of an inborn corruption, they must needs be purged from it before they can enter into the kingdom of God, into which nothing enters that is polluted or unclean. If they are born sinners, as both David and Paul affirm, they must either remain offensive and hateful to God or they must be justified. And why should we inquire further when the Judge himself plainly declares that the way to celestial life is open only to such as are born again?<sup>24</sup>

These three things, then, have been established: that infants are capable of early regeneration; that God actually bestows it on elect infants; and that indeed to infants, if they are to be saved, it is altogether indispensable. And all these parts of the truth are so clear I judge that they are not called into question by any of the orthodox. It remains only to be considered whether or not the regeneration of elect infants may take place prior to their baptism.

XXVIII. I have not yet seen it proved by any testimony of Scripture that God (who in regulating the plan of our salvation *Liberum Deo manet regenerationis gratia donare non baptizatos.* acts with all the sovereign freedom that belongs to him as the Supreme ruler) has prescribed for himself the law that regeneration shall be conferred on no one till after the administration of baptism. Says André Rivet in his *Le catholique orthodoxe*, “If anyone shall assert that with persons in covenant God’s grace never precedes the sign nor bestows inwardly what is simply essential to salvation, he puts forth a heresy utterly unsupported by Scripture.”<sup>25</sup> Although we have a controversy with the Papists as to whether or not infants are holy before baptism, that circumstance has not prevented *Bishop Bitontinus* from openly preaching at Rome, “That by a special privilege of divine grace infants may enjoy sanctification through

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<sup>24</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.vi.17.

<sup>25</sup> André Rivet, *Le catholique orthodoxe opposé au catholique papiste, en IV traitez ...* (Saumur, 1616), Tract 3rd, quest. 3, sect. 2. Witsius appears to quote from a Latin edition of this work.

Christ, even in the womb, as in the case of Jeremiah, John Baptist, and the Virgin.” And after throwing in a few other things, he concludes, “It is clear that the divine grace of Christ is not inseparably connected with the sacraments.”<sup>26</sup> The same sentiment is more fully vindicated by Jean le Charlier de Gerson, in a speech on the nativity of the virgin, delivered at the Council of Constance. He says:

It is evident that God has not so connected his grace with the common ordinances of Christian doctrine, he has not so connected it with the sacraments, but that, without prejudice to the ordinance, he may sanctify by the baptism of his grace or by the power of the Holy Spirit even infants not yet born. Wherefore pregnant women, and likewise their husbands, ought diligently to offer up prayers to God and [in accordance with the superstition of the age, he adds] to the holy angels, the guardians of men, inasmuch as their infant is not yet born, that if it should die before it can enjoy the grace of baptism by water, the Lord Jesus Christ, the great high priest, may deign graciously to consecrate it by the preventing baptism of the Holy Spirit.<sup>27</sup>

XXIX. I proceed: Not only is it in the freedom of God to bestow the grace of regeneration upon elect infants prior to the rite of baptism, but it is to be believed that this is the course he usually pursues. This I deduce in the following manner from what has already been said: Since God may from their very birth receive elect infants into the fellowship of his covenant, unite them to Christ, reconcile them to himself, remitting to them the guilt of original sin, there seems no reason why he should not regenerate them at the same time, unless they are incapable of regeneration, which, as we have just proved, is not the case. Besides, I cannot suppose it possible to prove by any example or testimony that the guilt of any sin may be taken away through forgiveness unless at

*Nec improbabile est, quod ordinarie eam gratiam faciat foederatis qui in infantia moriuntur.*

<sup>26</sup> \*Bishop Bitotine; see Cornelius Mussus' *Commentario ad Rom*, chap. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Editor's note: Gerson (1363-1429) attended the Council of Constance in 1415.

the same time the dominion of that sin is broken, so that while it loses the power to condemn, it loses also the power to reign. So far as the power of sin is weakened, sin is mortified. So far as sin is mortified, the soul is quickened—this very quickening of the soul’s regeneration. In addition, the soul cannot be united to Christ except through the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit of Christ is the Spirit of life (Rom. 8:2). Christ himself is our life (Col. 3:4). How then can it be that a soul chosen of God, beloved of Christ, absolved from the guilt of original sin, and united to the source of life by the Spirit of life should not be immediately quickened into spiritual life by Christ and his Spirit in virtue of that union? From all these things it undeniably follows that those infants who, before receiving baptism, are regarded as partakers of the benefits of the covenant of grace, united to Christ, reconciled to God, absolved from the guilt of original sin, ought also to be regarded as born again and quickened by Christ’s Spirit. Nor does any argument occur to me to the contrary—so far, at least, as concerns those who depart from this life before attaining to the use of reason.

XXX. Slightly different, indeed, seems to be the case of those children who live till they are able to exercise their reason. For when they grow up, facts demonstrate how much grace has been bestowed upon them in infancy. It is natural for young people in the transition stage of life to reject the lessons of piety, whether they are or are not baptized. Nor can we at this time discern the difference between elect and non-elect except through the special operation of divine grace. More correctly, as there are different dispositions and varying temperaments, it sometimes happens that young persons, born within the pale of the covenant, reckoned among the elect and baptized as such, turn out for a time specially intractable and wicked, who yet, afterwards, on arriving at greater maturity, make their calling and election sure. What are we to think of such persons? One of two things must be supposed. Either that they had been born again in infancy, but that the seed of the new birth had laid hid in the soil for many years, all but choked by the thorns and thistles of

*Nam eorum qui  
adolescent diversa  
videtur esse ratio.*

youthful lusts, till at length, through the communication of more grace, the opposing influences were vanquished and it broke forth and germinated with greater strength and beauty; or that God, who is tied down to no particular season, communicates the grace of the new birth to the elect whenever he will, and that they, although in the judgment of charity duly baptized, are often left for a considerable number of years in a state of dominant unsubdued corruption before they are renewed by the grace of his Spirit. And, indeed, to this latter opinion Pierre Du Moulin leans in his *Discourse on Baptism*, where, after noticing the differing dispositions and manners of young people, he thus concludes, “On which account we leave this hidden efficacy to God, the sovereign dispenser, whose grace is not confined to the element of water.”<sup>28</sup> The same thing has been wisely observed by the venerable Beza in his *Acts of Montpellier collated*:

With regard indeed to infants born within the pale of the church and divinely elected (of which character I have said, we must not rashly conclude everyone to be) and dying before they attain to the use of reason, I have little difficulty in concluding on the basis of the divine promise that they are engrafted into Christ from their birth. With regard to others, what else can we conclude, without manifest presumption, but that they are then at length regenerated when we perceive them to be endowed with genuine faith. Who indeed among men shall define this time except in these few cases in which the Most High may have very strikingly put forth the influences of his Spirit?<sup>29</sup>

*Gisbertus Voetius omnes infans foederatorum electos in infantia regenerari putat, sive adolescent, sive non, idque ante ipsorum Baptismum.*

XXXI. The second opinion is held by Gisbertus Voetius, a theologian of un-

dying reputation and the venerable father of our college, who

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<sup>28</sup> \*Du Moulin, *Disputatio de Baptis.*, part 3, sect. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Beza, *Acts of Montpellier Collated*, p. 106. Editor’s note: that is, Beza’s *Response de M. Th. de Bèze aux Actes de la conférence de Montbéliard imprimées a Tubingue* (Geneva, 1587).

in his *Select Discussions* has the following very remarkable words on this subject:

There is a seventh opinion prevalent among the Reformed doctors, which attributes regeneration to all and sundry of infants within the pale of the covenant, provided they are elect—whether they are baptized in infancy or otherwise, whether they die in infancy, whether they are educated in the faith from their birth and always lead a godly life, or whether before their death they are brought to faith and repentance by actual conversion. And I acquiesce in this opinion to a great extent.<sup>30</sup>

Further, after having quoted from an English treatise of Cornelius Burges *On the Baptismal Regeneration of Elect Infants*—a passage distinguishing regeneration into initial and actual—he thus proceeds:

The opinion of this author pleases me insofar as he thinks that an initial regeneration of the Holy Spirit takes place in elect infants, by which is implanted the root and seed of actual conversion or renewal, to follow in its own season. But insofar as he makes this regeneration posterior to baptism, and connects it with that ordinance as a *sine qua non*, or a kind of moral charter to which it is attached, his opinion is not admitted by the Reformed theologians whom he himself quotes. *The well-known opinion of these theologians is that the efficacy of baptism consists not in producing regeneration but in sealing a regeneration already produced.*<sup>31</sup>

XXXII. There can be little doubt that this doctrine of the regeneration of infants, at least according to the judgment of charity concerning individuals, is the received view of the Belgic church, in whose baptismal liturgy the following question is put to parents when they present their

*Liturgia Belgica regenerationem  
Baptismum praestruit.*

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<sup>30</sup> Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, vol. 2, p. 410.

<sup>31</sup> Voetius, *Selectae disputationes*, vol. 2, p. 412. See Cornelius Burges, *Baptismal regeneration of elect infants professed by the Church of England, according to the Scriptures, the primitive Church, the present reformed churches, and many particular divines apart* (Oxford, 1629).

children for baptism: “Do you acknowledge that our children, though conceived and born in sin and therefore subject to all manner of misery, even to condemnation itself, *are sanctified in Christ, and therefore as members of his church ought to be baptized?*” To this question an affirmative answer is required; and this they set forth as the opinion of those who hold that the initial regeneration of elect infants under the covenant precedes their baptism. I acknowledge that with those who maintain this opinion I am so far at one.

XXXIII. Very different indeed is the doctrine of some other theologians of great name, who contend that infants are baptized with a view to future sanctification, which whether or in what way they distinguish it from regeneration I confess myself unable clearly to understand. From among many, we may as well hear Moses Amyraut who pleads for this opinion in his usual eloquent and copious style. In his *Discourse on Infant Baptism*, he says:

*Amyraldus infantes, ut regenerationis incapaces, in futuram sanctificationem baptizari contendit.*

In the case of infants after justification is conceded, there is neither the same necessity nor even possibility of immediately bestowing the sanctifying Spirit, for in the first place no one can hesitate to admit that their powers are in such a state that the Spirit cannot operate upon them in the same manner as on adults.

Having shown this, he thus proceeds:

In fact, they are adopted into the hope both of a future sanctification and of an eternal inheritance. And just as a wise man, were he adopting a little child still crying in its cradle, would defer the attempt to fashion its character in morals and in virtue till it should become capable of learning, so the most wise God, when he adopts infants, delays for a time to put forth upon them the influence of the sanctifying Spirit until the state of their faculties is such as to admit of that operation. As then, in order to their being justified, it was no way necessary that they should possess faith either habitual or actual—it being enough that they were the offspring of those to whom God’s covenant belongs—

so in like manner, after they are justified it is not absolutely necessary that they should immediately obtain sanctification, either habitual or actual, it being enough that what God has guaranteed he should faithfully bestow in his own time.<sup>32</sup>

XXXIV. Of this let me only make one brief observation. If by “habitual sanctification” this very learned man means that divine grace by which the mental states of spiritual understanding, faith, hope, charity are produced, then neither do we consider infants capable of them. But if “habitual sanctification” is the same with him as regeneration is with us, or that divine grace by which the faculty of new spiritual life is conferred, then it is clear, I think, from the discussions with which we have just been occupied that such a faculty of new life cannot be denied to infants, for there is nothing in it at all unsuited to persons in that stage of existence.

XXXV. But we shall have more light from what follows. He says:

*Proaemia futurae sanctificationis,  
quae in quibusdam infantibus sunt,  
ad Spiritum sanctificantem  
referenda esse, negat Amyraldus.*

We do not deny, however, that it is possible, and in fact sometimes does occur, that God may put forth some efficacy in infants, which is, as it

were, a kind of introduction, foretold (προόμιον) and preparatory exercise (μελετή) of coming sanctification. For he implants in their minds a certain adaptation to good (ἔνφυα) and kindles in their breasts the sparks of virtue, which are by and by to be matured and come forth as shining graces.<sup>33</sup>

Right so far. This is what we also mean. But immediately the learned author adds what we certainly do not hold, for thus he proceeds:

But neither is this done in all cases, nor, even if it were so, ought it to be ascribed to the operation of the sanctifying Spirit as such.

Why not? I ask. He continues,

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<sup>32</sup> \*Amyraut, *Disputatio de Baptis.*, §§ 21, 22.

<sup>33</sup> \*Amyraut, *Disputatio de Baptis.*, §§ 21, 22.

Because the Spirit has no way of sanctifying except by taking those objects that in the cross and resurrection of Christ, and in the other parts of the Christian religion, are intended to incite to the exercise of the Christian graces and that are set before us in the preaching of the gospel—impressing them on our minds, recalling them to our fading remembrance, and indeed so illuminating them by his own light that from the understanding they may penetrate into the affections, and in them keep up a constant warfare against our natural depravity. The operation I speak of has to do rather with *the improvement of our corporeal temperament*, which is surely to be ascribed to an influence partaking more of the nature of physical causes than of such as are calculated to produce a moral impression or representation of objects.<sup>34</sup>

XXXVI. In this statement I find some things not very agreeable to my mind. (1) It appears to me that the writer does not sufficiently distinguish the procedure of God as the author of human nature, ruling in the exercise of his ordinary providence, from his conduct as the dispenser of saving grace. For what he styles the *proem* (foretoken) of future sanctification—those sparks of virtue that break forth afterwards into brilliant graces—do not belong to that *ἔσφυσια* which proceeds from God as Creator, but to the new and nobler creature whose author is God in Christ, according to the purpose and covenant of grace. For whatever prepares the mind for more perfect sanctification proceeds from the same Spirit, who performs *unto* the day of Christ the good work that he has begun. Not only the progress and continuance of sanctification but also its first beginning—its earliest *μελετή*—must be ascribed to the same sanctifying Spirit. These natural operations are not grace producing arrangements. (2) Nor does that part please me that seems to place what he calls *ἔσφυσια* almost exclusively in an improvement of the corporeal constitution, since that divine efficacy has a reference principally to the state of the soul. For as natural depravity has its seat chiefly in the soul, so in the soul

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<sup>34</sup> \*Amyraut, *Disputatio de Baptis.*, § 22.

ought that which is intended for its destruction chiefly to put forth its power. What is there, I ask, to hinder grace from operating effectually to spiritual life in the same infant soul in which sin operates to spiritual death? Is it not absurd to suppose that the same subject that is capable of death is not capable of life, considering that death is nothing more than the privation of life in a subject capable of possessing it? (3) It appears to me that the groundwork of this foolish reasoning is the learned man's supposition that the sanctification of a human being cannot be effected except by a moral impression and representation of objects, and that the operation of God as the sanctifier does not correspond well with the nature of physical causes. I readily admit indeed that this moral representation of objects has its own place, and, so far as is proper to that kind of causes, its own influence in the sanctification of adults; yet, I contend that it will avail to the sanctification of none unless there is added to it a more effectual operation of the Spirit that, by a power that must be called *supernatural*, shall change the very faculties of the human being and render them fit for the apprehension and reception of these objects. Why, indeed, may not the sanctifying Spirit put forth in infants, without the representation of the objects, that very supernatural (ὑπερφυσικῆν) influence that, in and along with that representation, he exerts in adults—so disposing the mind at the time, that afterwards, when in further advanced life the objects are introduced to its notice, it may prove to have been furnished with faculties fit for their apprehension? Just as through a natural εὐφυΐα in some men there is from the first a genius remarkably adapted to a variety of arts, so the εὐφυΐα that proceeds from the sanctifying Spirit produces in elect infants that excellent disposition of soul by which they are inclined towards divine and heavenly things.

XXXVII. This very acute writer perceived that the case of John the Baptist might be objected against him, concerning whom

*Observationes Amyraldi ad  
Johannis Baptistae exemplum.*

the angel said, “And he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15). And

certainly this argument possesses great force, for it shows that

infancy is capable of sanctity, and also that its sanctity proceeds from the Holy Spirit *as the sanctifier*—both of which facts this most judicious theologian has deemed himself at liberty to deny. But let us hear his reply to the objection. He goes on:

What the angel said indeed respecting John the Baptist being *filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb*, the most celebrated interpreters have understood as, to a certain extent, spoken hyperbolically because otherwise it would have been necessary that in his earliest childhood, when others are as yet scarce able to cry, he should display some striking and obviously extraordinary marks of the grace of God towards him, which should afterwards grow brighter and brighter. But although there were no hyperbole in the words, they might yet be referred to that incomparable and altogether noble εὐφροια of which we have spoken above, which, while it could not but proceed from some influence of the Holy Spirit, yet differed mightily from that operation of the same Spirit that, after John was grown up, both furnished him with all sorts of excellence and stirred him up to the performance of all sorts of noble deeds. But whatever it might be, it was a rare thing; and it has in few besides John ever been discovered.

XXXVIII. It is astonishing how directly Calvin has replied to these special pleadings. It would almost seem as if they had been brought against himself—only in the inverse order. In his *Institutes*, we read:

*Calvini argumenta in contrarium.*

And that [the Holy Spirit] might silence gainsayers of this description, he has given us in the case of John the Baptist, whom he sanctified even in his mother's womb, a proof of what he may do in other cases. Nor do they gain much by the shift to which they have recourse when they say that this is a solitary instance from which we are not at liberty to conclude that the Lord deals so with infants indiscriminately, for in no such way do we argue. Our argument only goes to show that they erroneously and wickedly prescribe limits to the power of God, within which it refuses to be confined. Of equal value is the other subterfuge that, according to Scriptural usage, the expression *from the womb* has the same force as if it had been said

from his childhood. It is clear, that when the angel uttered the words to Zacharias, he meant something else than this. His meaning was that he should be filled with the Holy Spirit even before his birth; wherefore let us not seek to fetter the Most High, as if he might not sanctify whomsoever he will in the same way as he sanctified this individual, seeing there has been no diminution of his power.<sup>35</sup>

XXXIX. I must not however conceal (for in my opinion we ought always to act honestly, nor is our cause to be maintained by the authority of men but by solid argument) that the same Calvin in his *Commentary on Luke* puts another interpretation upon the words of the angel. It is often of importance to observe whether a writer is contending with an opponent or commenting with an unbiased mind. This I consider a matter to be very carefully attended to. Thus, then, writes Calvin in the place mentioned:

*Qui tamen sibi non  
ubique constat.*

In these words nothing more is signified than that John would manifest a disposition that should afford a hope of future greatness. *From the womb* has the same force as *from the earliest infancy*. We admit indeed that the power of the Spirit did operate in John while he was yet shut up in his mother's womb; but here the angel had another meaning—viz., that John, while yet an infant, should appear before the public singularly favored with the grace of God.<sup>36</sup>

XL. I see no reason, however, why Calvin should have regretted his earlier interpretation, for to it the force of the Greek expression brings *ἔτι ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς αὐτοῦ*.<sup>37</sup> The meaning is, *even from the womb of his mother*. But

<sup>35</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xvi.17.

<sup>36</sup> John Calvin, *Comm. on Luke 1:15*.

<sup>37</sup> Editor's note: Inasmuch as Calvin's commentary on the Synoptic Gospels appeared in 1555, while the final editions of his *Institutes* appeared later than that date, it is not strictly accurate to characterize Calvin's interpretation of this passage in the *Institutes* as either "prior" or "regretted" in relation to the one set forth in his commentary.

according to the remark of the celebrated Grotius, ἐκ κοιλίας is put for ἀπο κοιλίας—that is, *from the time when he shall be in the womb*, in which form the expression stands in the Syriac and Arabic versions. Thus Paul says in Galatians 1:15—ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου, alluding to what had been said by God to Jeremiah—1:5: πρὸ τοῦ σε ἐξελεθεῖν ἐκ μήτρας ἡγίακά σε. In the same sense, Acts 3:2, χωλὸς ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς—that is, lame born and conceived. Nor is the particle ἔτι, *even*, without a special emphasis. It signifies, *even then* from the womb, which exactly hits the meaning. In this way Luke uses the word, 14:26—ἔτι δὲ καὶ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ψυχὴν. And Paul, in Hebrews 11:36—ἔτι δὲ δεσμῶν καὶ φυλακῆς. Since, therefore, the angel meant to announce something peculiarly remarkable concerning John, since the words given us by Luke are more than ordinarily emphatic; and, besides, since John was greater than all who are born of women, our piety is not called upon to suffer any mere ingenuity of interpretation to weaken the force of the inspired language.

XLI. Only one thing do I add: that the learned Amyraut has done well in confessing that the noble and unparalleled disposition

*Heroica Johannis indoles, non ab aliqua virtute Spiritus Sancti, sed ab illius plenitudine erat.*

of John is to be ascribed “only to some grace of the Holy Spirit.” But I do not see why he should have allowed himself to speak so grudgingly on the subject. For Luke mentions not any particular grace of the Holy Spirit but *his fullness*. Nor is he here thinking of the Holy Spirit under the general idea of Godhead, as the author of all sorts of good qualities discovered by men, but according to that economy which he pursues in distributing the gifts of his grace. For that such is everywhere his meaning when he uses the expression is clear from what is stated in verse 41, “And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit”; and again, in v. 67, “And Zachariah his father was filled with the Holy Spirit”; yet, again, in 5:1, “And Jesus, being full of the Holy Spirit, returned from Jordan”; and then, Acts 2:4, “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” Can anyone doubt that in all these places and in many others of the same description the (gifts of the) Holy Spirit spoken of pertain to the economy of grace? “But,” says our author,

“this gift of the Spirit differed vastly from that spiritual operation which, after John was grown up, stimulated him to all kinds of noble virtues.” It did indeed differ, but not to such an extent without, in both cases, it was the sanctifying Spirit who, having implanted in the infant the seeds of a holy disposition, led forward the adult to the exercise of the most distinguished graces. These arguments then being set aside, I see no reason for thinking that the infants of believers are baptized only in order to future sanctification, as if they were incapable of present sanctification.

XLII. There remains now the discussion of the fourth opinion, which is strenuously defended by many theologians of well-known erudition and of very high authority: that regeneration, according to the plan of the divine goodness, is usually bestowed upon elect infants in the administration of baptism itself. To make good this assertion, they bring forward those

*Argumenta eorum qui regenerationem,  
ipso Baptismi momento, ordinarie  
infantibus conferri pugnans.*

passages of Scripture in which it is said that by baptism we “are saved” [1 Pet. 3:21], “are washed” [1 Cor. 6:11], “are cleansed from our sins” [Acts 22:16], and in which baptism itself is called “the laver of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit” [Titus 3:5]. They add that this has been the prevailing faith among the Fathers and throughout the whole Christian church in all ages—that even now it is the faith professed by the Protestant churches, both those who hold to the Augsburg Confession and those usually styled Reformed. This, they say, the public and authorized liturgies of these churches distinctly testify. Thus, in the formula for the administration of baptism used by the Reformers in France, the minister, before baptizing the infant, prays to God: “That he would grant to the infant the remission of original sin, which is laid to the charge of every descendant of Adam, and that he would sanctify it by his Holy Spirit; and in order that it may obtain these blessings from God, that God would be pleased to engraft it into the body of Christ, that so being made a member of his body, it may be a partaker of his various benefits”—which prayer obviously supposes that the infant about to be baptized is still under the guilt of original sin, that it is

not yet engrafted into Christ, nor a partaker of Christ's grace. Similar passages are to be found in the liturgy of the Anglican church—from all which the conclusion is confidently drawn that

It is a rash and unfounded assertion that infants born within the pale of the church are ordinarily favored with the saving grace of God prior to baptism. Without doubt, such an opinion is at variance with the common consent of Christians, not only of both the Greek and Latin churches but also of all those Protestants who adhere to the Augsburg Confession, and, moreover, the great majority of the Reformed. And certainly to oppose oneself to a sentiment so harmonious, so ancient, and so universal among Christians without some very convincing argument seems to me entirely reckless.

These are the words of that very learned theologian, Louis Le Blanc.<sup>38</sup>

XLIII. Doubtless this statement displays abundant confidence in his cause. But let us calmly examine the whole subject. If I'm not mistaken, we have demonstrated above that those who take a different view have no lack of a good foundation for their opinion, nor of argument as convincing as the nature of this controversy admits of—at least, that they are not to be branded, even among very cautious men, as guilty of temerity. Yet the arguments just advanced are not exactly such as to need no reply. As for the passages of Scripture, we shall sift them a little more carefully by and by when we come to discuss the question as to how baptism operates. In the meantime, let this general observation suffice: that Paul and Peter wrote in those times when baptism was chiefly administered to adults, when the church was first being gathered from among Jews and Gentiles by the preaching of the gospel—whence it follows that the descriptions given of baptism in their epistles are so introduced that we must necessarily understand them as referring, at least in

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<sup>38</sup> Editor's note: Witsius does not here cite the source from which he quotes Le Blanc, but it is from Le Blanc's *Theses Theologicae*, sect. 50.

the first instance, to the baptism of adults. In the case of adults, however, it is manifest that regeneration, repentance, faith, from which remission of sins cannot be separated even for a moment, are prerequisites—which if it is true, as it certainly is, renders unnecessary all further argument to prove that neither Paul nor Peter intended to teach in the passages quoted that the washing away of sin, and regeneration and the renewing of the Spirit, are ordinarily conferred only in the act of baptism itself, since indeed these were uniformly regarded as prerequisites to the very baptism about which they were principally treating.

XLIV. What, then, do the apostles of Christ really mean when they speak of baptism in such exalted terms?  
*Eorum vera mens.* Let Cocceius answer for me in his *Commentary on the 71st Question of the Heidelberg Catechism*:

When baptism is styled ‘the laver of regeneration,’ the meaning is that to believers *is given a testimony of their being regenerated* since they are in Christ and are children and heirs of God. Also, when one is said to have his sins washed away by receiving baptism, the meaning is that *he receives a testimony that his sins are washed away*; and thus that by receiving the seal, he lays aside the consciousness of guilt and publicly professes to give thanks that his sins are forgiven.<sup>39</sup>

XLV. Thus, then, the propounders of this opinion, driven from the citadel of Scripture, will not find very secure protection anywhere else. The consent of the whole church, about which they boast, is not so very complete as they allege. I acknowledge that most of the Fathers speak as if regeneration and justification were bestowed only in the administration of baptism. But I doubt if the learned men sufficiently consider that these same Fathers, for the most part, speak so of the baptism of adults, whose regeneration and justification not even they themselves would tie down to the moment of baptism; no indeed, nor the Fathers either, if they

*Patrum dicta adulatorum  
Baptismum praecipue  
respiciunt; ad quem  
regeneratio praerequiritur.*

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<sup>39</sup> Cocceius, *Explicatio catecheseos Heidelbergensis*.

judge rightly. Ancient history is rich with examples of catechumens who possessed sterling virtue and piety, which surely cannot exist apart from the forgiveness of sin and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Ambrose, while yet only a catechumen, was elevated to the episcopate—the fame of his sanctity and of the strictness of his life, having already spread far and wide. And the same father relates many things of the virtues of his own brother Satyr prior to his baptism. The virtues of Constantine and his benefactions to the church are proclaimed by the ancients with one mouth; yet he was not baptized till afterwards, when on the confines of life and death.<sup>40</sup> Already, then, these persons had received the Holy Spirit before baptism, already their sins had been forgiven, and already therefore they had enjoyed the renovation of the second birth.

XLVI. That the Fathers therefore may be brought into harmony with Scripture, with experience, and even with

*Regeneratio quae Baptismo  
acquiritur, Sacramentalis est,  
distincta a Reali, quae  
praesupponitur.*

themselves, we must distinguish between two kinds of regeneration and justification—the first real (*realis*), the second sacramental (*sacramentalis*). I call the real that which takes place in

the souls of the elect and by which they are renewed to spiritual life and the enjoyment of the favor of God. I call the sacramental that which consists in the solemn exhibition, the sealing and profession of the seal, in the use of the sacraments. (See, if you please, Forbes, Bk 10, chapt. 8, § 8.) Without this distinction the Fathers cannot be understood nor reconciled with themselves. We may learn the praxis and the faith of the primitive church from Justin Martyr, a writer so ancient that he might have seen the Evangelist John—at least he flourished in the fortieth year after his decease. In his Apology, addressed to Antoninus Pius, he states in the following terms the praxis of the church to which I have referred: “Ὅσοι ἂν πεισθῶσι, καὶ πιστεύωσιν ἀληθῆ ταῦτα τὰ ὑφ’ ἡμῶν διδασκομένα, καὶ λεγόμενα, ἕναι, καὶ βιοῦν ὅτως δύνασθαι ὑπισχνῶνται, εὐχεσθαι τε καὶ ἄιτειν

<sup>40</sup> See \*Du Moulin, *De Necess. Bapt.*, part 1, sect. 38.

νηστευοντες, παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, τῶν προήμαρτων ἄφεσιν διδασκονται, ἡμῶν συνευχομένων, καὶ συννηστευόντων αὐτοῖς. Ἐπειτα ἄγονται ὑφ' ἡμῶν ἕνθα ὕδωρ ἔστι, καὶ τρόπον ἀναγεννήσεως, ὃν καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀναγεννήθημεν, ἀναγεννῶνται.” (*“As many as shall have been persuaded, and shall have believed that the things taught and spoken by us are true, and shall have undertaken to live in accordance with them, are ordered to pray with fasting and to ask from God the pardon of their former sins—we also praying and fasting along with them. After this they are conducted by us to some place where there is water, and according to the figure of regeneration with which we ourselves have been regenerated, they are regenerated.”*) I entreat the learned reader to mark what goes before baptism, namely a faith springing from a genuine persuasion of the soul, the consciousness of and engagement to a life worthy of Christ and the gospel; indeed, prayer joined with religious fasting. Are not these the very surest marks and operations of the sanctifying Spirit? Yet Justin tells us that those who are thus regenerated are brought to baptism so that they may be regenerated. Clearly, those who are really (*realiter*) regenerated before baptism are regenerated sacramentally (*sacramentaliter*) in baptism itself. Can anyone doubt that many of the catechumens were possessed of a true and lively faith in Christ, seeing that some of them for Christ’s sake eagerly underwent the most grievous sufferings, and coveted the most horrible deaths? These very persons, however, were not written among the ranks of the faithful unless they were baptized. Therefore they were truly justified and saved by a faith prior to baptism, but they obtained a name and a place among the faithful by a faith acquired at baptism. And what could this be but the sacramental profession of faith? If, therefore, we are to suppose that the Fathers speak consistently with themselves, we must understand sacramentally those things that they teach respecting regeneration and sanctification through baptism. If they are otherwise understood, they contradict both themselves and the truth.

XLVII. Take, for example, Ambrose, who in a certain place thus writes in his book, *Concerning Those Who Are to Be Initiated*, chap. 4, “The catechumen is a believer; but unless he shall have

been baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, he cannot receive the forgiveness of sins, nor partake of the gift of spiritual grace.” Yet in his funeral oration on the death of Valentinian, the younger Augustus, who had died before receiving baptism, he thus declaims, “I have lost him whom I was about to beget by the gospel; but he hath not lost the grace that he was seeking, he now enjoys eternal life. Holy Father! he who had thy Spirit, how shall he not also enjoy thy grace?” Unless these things are reconciled by the distinction we have just drawn, it seems probable that they are not to be reconciled at all. I am much pleased with that part of the doctrine of the Fathers in which they teach that it is possible for a person to enjoy grace, the Spirit of God, and eternal life—consequently to be truly regenerated—who may not have been washed in the waters of baptism. All the rest I willingly leave to themselves.

XLVIII. But there are not wanting even among the Fathers

*Nam & Patrum nonnulli*

*Baptismem regenerationis*

*typum ac symbolum dixerunt.*

some who have styled baptism a symbol and type of regeneration. Says

Chrysostom, *In. Caten.*, John chapt. 3,

“Ἐπεὶ καὶ θανάτου καὶ ἀναστάσεως

σύμζολον λεγεται εἶναι τὸ βάπτισμα, διὸ καὶ ἀναγέννησις καλεῖται.” (“*Since baptism is said to be a symbol of death and of the resurrection, it is therefore also called regeneration.*”) Basil the Great,

*On the Holy Spirit*, chap. 15, “Ὁ τὴν ζωὴν ἡμῶν ὀικονομῶν κύριος, τὴν του βαπτίσματος ἡμῖν ἔθετο διαθήκην, θανάτου τύπον καὶ ζωῆς περιέχουσαν: τὴν μὲν του θανάτου εἰκόνα του ὕδατος ἀναπληροῦντος, τον δε τῆς ζωῆς ἄρραζωνα πληρουντος του πνευματος.” (“*The Lord who dispenses life to us has appointed us the covenant of baptism, exhibiting a figure of death and of life—the similitude of death in the covering us over with water, the pledge of life in the full communication of the Spirit.*”) Right, without doubt.

Therefore there is in baptism a sacramental representation of regeneration, as it were, by type and symbol.

XLIX. Nor do the Liturgies of the Reformed churches speak exactly as these learned men maintain. Unquestionably the most accomplished Gallican theologians have not understood them in that sense. Take as an example of the whole, Pierre Du Moulin,

who has a thousand times over repeated the formula of baptism in the churches; yet so far is he from regarding *Liturgiae Gallicae mens* it as denying that infants born within the pale *ex sententia Molinaei.* of the church are usually favored with the grace of God prior to baptism, that he has elaborately demonstrated the opposite. Let anyone consult the fortieth thesis of his oft quoted treatise *On the Necessity of Baptism*, of which the conclusion is as follows: "The infants, therefore, had been received into the covenant and favor of God before they were ever visibly initiated into any sacrament, or sealed with the seal of the covenant."

L. In my opinion, however, we shall nowhere find a more competent interpreter of the Liturgy than Calvin, *Et Calvini.* whose views of the efficacy of baptism will appear from a few sentences that may here be transcribed without much trouble. And, in the first place, he teaches that

Baptism is set forth by God to us as the symbol and seal of our purification or like some sealed charter in which he *guarantees* to us that all our sins are so blotted out, covered, cancelled, as never more to come into his sight.<sup>41</sup>

In like manner,

That baptism *bears witness* that we are not only engrafted into the life and death of Christ, but are so united to Christ himself as to be partakers of all his benefits.<sup>42</sup>

Again,

It remains, now, that from the promises given in baptism we should ascertain its nature and efficacy. Scripture proves *that here is shown forth in the first place* the remission of sins, which we obtain by the blood of Christ; next, the mortification of the flesh, which consists in the participation of his death, through which believers are regenerated into newness of life, and even unto the fellowship of Christ. This is the sum of all that is

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<sup>41</sup> *Institutes*, IV.xv.1.

<sup>42</sup> *Institutes*, IV.xv.6.

delivered in the Scriptures regarding baptism.<sup>43</sup>

More particularly regarding infant baptism, he says,

The seal of God communicated to the child does, as by the impression of a signet, *confirm* and *declare to be certain* the promise given to the pious parent: that the Lord will be a God not to him only but also to his seed.

And again,

For this reason no further efficacy can be looked for in the baptism of infants than that it should ratify and make sure the covenant that God has established with them.<sup>44</sup>

But why should I multiply quotations? Nothing can be clearer than what occurs in his *Letter to John Clauburg*:

And that all uncertainty may be the better removed, let us ever hold fast the principle that baptism *is not conferred on infants in order to their becoming children and heirs of God but because God regards them as already enjoying that rank and standing*. Therefore the grace of adoption is sealed upon their flesh; otherwise the Anabaptists would act properly in refusing them baptism. For unless their case admitted of the reality of the thing signified, it would be a gross profanation to admit them to the participation of the sign itself.<sup>45</sup>

And now I implore these learned men to judge impartially for themselves, whether a person who teaches respecting baptism as we have just found Calvin teaching, would expound the liturgy in the way in which they are accustomed to do—concluding from it that remission of original sin, regeneration, and fellowship with Christ are ordinarily conferred on infants only in and through the administration of baptism?

LI. Next, let us inquire into the true meaning  
*Ipsaque illius contextu.* of the liturgy. When the church prays for the

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<sup>43</sup> *Institutes*, IV.vi.11.

<sup>44</sup> *Institutes*, IV.vi.21.

<sup>45</sup> Witsius refers to p. 244 of his copy, \**Letter to Clauburgum*.

infant about to be baptized that God would remit its original sin, sanctify it by his Spirit, and engraft it into Christ, the sense may most readily be supposed to be that God would hold as ratified all that is now sacramentally signified and sealed regarding remission of original sin, sanctification, and engrafting into Christ; and that, moreover, he would graciously deliver the infant from the evil consequences of original sin, follow up the begun work of regeneration by subsequent ulterior sanctification, and enrich the baptized with all saving blessings in the fellowship of Christ. In short, in this prayer is sought the confirmation and establishment of present grace, with its continuance and increase for the future, for it is taken for granted in the liturgy that infants, “In consequence of their being sprung from believing parents, are acknowledged by God as among the number of his people, heirs of the promised life, and so distinguished from the children of heathens and infidels; indeed, that to them belongs the kingdom of heaven.” From all such it is concluded that they are not to be shut out from fellowship with the church in the sacraments. After the passages just quoted, God is entreated,

That he would be pleased to *confirm* that grace to the infant, and to receive it under his protection, declaring that he will be its God and Savior in the remission of original sin, in process of time sanctifying it by his Spirit, so that on attaining to years of discretion it may acknowledge and adore God alone as its God, glorifying him throughout its whole life, to the everlasting enjoyment of the forgiveness of sin.

Taking all these things together, it is tolerably clear that what I have stated is the true sense of the Gallican Liturgy.

LII. Precisely identical with this is the meaning of the Belgian Liturgy. Since, as we have above remarked, parents are required

*Denique & collatione  
cum Liturgiae Belgica.*

to profess prior to baptism that their infants are already sanctified in Christ, and on that account are to be baptized as members of his church, while, notwithstanding, the church prays that “God would engraft this child into Jesus Christ by his Spirit” (unless the language is understood of a sacramental engrafting and a

confirmation of the real engrafting by increase and fruit the liturgy will labor under a manifest contradiction). But this, of course, is not to be supposed of a formula so carefully weighed, so generally received, and in constant use during so long a series of years.

LIII. Moreover, when this learned man [Le Blanc] boasts that *De Theologorum consentientium numero.* the great majority of theologians are of his mind, he is, to say nothing more severe, considerably overweening. I shall not stop to make a calculation, although I rather think, seeing that the arguments are pretty well refuted, that probably a greater number of theologians—and these not of the least consideration—will be found ranked on my side. But this is not one of those matters that are to be decided by a plurality of votes.

LIV. With regard to the theologians of the Augsburg Confession, I acknowledge that their opinion is repudiated by *Cum Augustanae confessionis Theologis controversia super hac re Reformatis est.* those of our persuasion, as I learned while yet only a youth from the *Synopsis purioris* of the Leyden Professors, in the discussion respecting baptism, of which Walaeus is the author. “We reject,” he says,

the opinion of certain Ubiquitarians, who connect the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit in such a way with the external water in baptism that either it must exist in the water itself or at least can inchoate regeneration only in the very act of baptism, for this opinion is at variance with all those passages of Scripture in which faith and repentance, and therefore both the root and seed of regeneration, are demanded as a prerequisite in those who are to be baptized.<sup>46</sup>

A little further on it is said,

We therefore do not tie down the efficacy of baptism to the instant at which the body is washed with the external water, but in accordance with Scripture we require beforehand that persons

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<sup>46</sup> Antonius Walaeus, *Synopsis purioris theologiae, disputationibus quinquaginta duabus comprehensa ac conscripta per Johannem Polyandrum, Andream Rivetum, Antonium Walaeum, Antonium Thysium* (Leiden, 1625), XLIV, § 27.

to be baptized shall, in the judgment of charity at least, possess faith and repentance, and that no less in the case of covenant infants—in whom we contend the seed and spirit of faith and repentance must, through the influence of the divine blessing and the gospel covenant, be presumed to exist (*statuendum esse*)—than in the case of grown-up persons, &c.<sup>47</sup>

LV. The conclusion is that the opinion of those who contend that the saving grace of God, remission of original sin, and regeneration are ordinarily bestowed in the act of baptism, and not sooner, is destitute of the required proof, and that those who hold a different opinion are by no means convicted of foolhardiness.

### Wherein Consists the Efficacy of Baptism?

LVI. Thus far we have seen what those benefits are which are signified and sealed to elect infants in baptism. We have seen also in what relation these benefits stand to the rite of baptism. It now remains to be ascertained wherein consists the nature and efficacy of the sealing. On this head we maintain generally that as baptism is a sacrament, and a sacrament is a seal, and the use of a seal is to confirm and certify something, the efficacy of baptism consists in the *confirming* and *certifying* of promised grace. In truth, its whole efficacy is moral (*moralis*), to speak scholastically, and is altogether distinct from an efficacy real (*reali*) and physical (*physica*). It is well observed by Francis Burman in his *Synopsis theologiæ*, “Nor do we acknowledge in the sacraments any other than a *moral* virtue, such as resides in signs and words—not such as can effect or produce anything, but only such as signifies and seals.”<sup>48</sup> That signifying and sealing is indeed altogether valid, and when legitimately used contains in itself a certain *exhibition* of the thing signified, but such an exhibition as is

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<sup>47</sup> *Synopsis purioris theologiæ*, XLIV, § 29.

<sup>48</sup> Franciscus Burmannus, *Synopsis theologiæ, & speciatim oeconomiae foederum Dei* (Amsterdam, 1699), Bk VII., chapt. 4, § 27.

agreeable to the nature of sacraments. The opinion of the Remonstrants respecting the efficacy of the sacraments has been set forth in scientific language by their Apologists. As Burman says, pages 243-44:

There are various ways of exhibiting and of sealing. There is a certain *physical* exhibition, in which something is exhibited either as by an impression from a seal upon wax, or as by a mark on a vase, or as by a seal affixed to a deed, or as a barely affiliated sign, or a lying concealed under the forms of the sign—that is, to make the matter somewhat clearer, in which something is physically, so to speak, brought near, extended, distributed, either at the same time as, or in company with, or in connection with or through or under or in or near or round about the signs. There is also a certain *hyperphysical* or *miraculous* exhibition, in which something unknown or doubtful is confirmed, established, and made sure, and so is exhibited to the mind as it were in a visible and tangible form. Of this nature are miraculous signs, prodigies, virtues transcending all natural strength. In fact, there is a certain *sacramental evangelical* exhibition, in which, by means of certain signs, divine grace is represented not in a distant or far-fetched manner, nor is it dimly shown as yet far distant under types or shadows or particular figures, but by which that grace, as if actually present, is set before the eyes so very clearly as to be almost palpable to sight and touch—so efficaciously that the mind cannot be more truly impressed by such signs, allowing the nature and inherent properties of signs and their significations to be preserved whole and entire. Now this third method of exhibition is unquestionably the method intended by the Remonstrants.

He afterwards adds in illustration of this method, page 245:

Perhaps it will be said that such an exhibition may be imagined, if the solemn and lawful use of the sacraments are regarded as a condition of God's bestowing and exhibiting in a sensible manner, as it were, some peculiar grace—viz., of God's honoring with a sense of his special favor the person who uses these signs, according to Christ's appointment, in the exercise of true faith, and uses them so dutifully that the very use and

practice of them becomes, so to speak, the means of inducing greater alacrity and forwardness in obedience to God, and a more diligent prosecution of all the other parts of his service. Now this is what every Remonstrant will cordially admit.

Very just! Nor do I see what more an orthodox man could ask from them on this part of the subject. But as this kind of signifying and sealing, and sacramental exhibition, seems to require a certain knowledge of which infants are not capable, the question comes to be, of what use and efficacy is infant baptism?

LVII. Certainly, then, its advantage is not small. And first, as respects pious parents, to whom it cannot but be most agreeable that their dear children enjoying the blessing of newness of life and consecrated by the washing of the mysterious font, should be established in God and his Christ, and that as persons united to the fellowship of the church they should be solemnly admitted to the participation of all saving benefits and publicly sealed as belonging to God in Christ. Thus, through the manifestation of the great mercy of God, they will be furnished in the first place with the amplest ground for exalting his glory, and led to take no mean delight in piety, while at the same time they will be powerfully excited to return the affection of a pious parent, whom they find making his children, for their own sake, the objects of so much solicitude. And certainly were there no other advantage arising from infant baptism, all prudent persons will acknowledge this to be exceedingly important: that it imposes upon parents the most sacred obligations to take heed that their children, whom they have so deliberately devoted to God, shall by instruction, correction, and example be carefully educated in the mysteries of the Christian religion and in true holiness of life.

LVIII. In the next place, great advantage redounds to the infants themselves, especially when they shall have grown up and come to understand what a pious intention did for them while they were yet children. How dear to pious hearts must be the remembrance of that love divine, which, as it were, solemnly took them into its

own arms from the bosom of their mother when they had but just entered upon life and were still rosy from the birth that put this song into their mouths, “Thou hast made me to hope from my mother’s breasts; I was cast upon thee from the womb; thou hast been my God from my mother’s belly” (Ps. 22:10, 11), which, in short, from early childhood, as we say, united them to itself by the holiest bond and mercifully initiated them into the enjoyment of all good. The same remembrance, as it is full of consolation, is also calculated to strengthen the Christian virtues and the power of genuine holiness. For nothing ought to be more dear to us than that we may keep sacred and inviolable that covenant of our youth—the first and holiest pledge that has been given to God in our name.

LIX. Finally, baptism is not without its value and efficacy to infants even during their childhood. Surely they derive some advantage from their baptism, in being received into the body of the church, and therefore, in some degree, entrusted to the keeping of the other members, and carefully commended to God in the ordinary prayers of the whole assembly. But let it be chiefly observed that baptism belongs to that class of signs which is called exhibitivè—which so represent the thing signified as, at the same time, to set forth the right to its enjoyment. Just as if to a royal infant, still crying in his cradle, the crown and scepter were brought by the chiefs of the realm; or as if to some other noble child were brought the symbols of high degree and honorable office—such as a purple collar, or a golden chain with the fleece, or a blue cross-cut ribbon with a suspended crucifix or dove, or any of the many other ornaments of a similar description. These things, indeed, are not understood by that little infant; but they are not, on that account, mere empty signs. On the contrary, they are the real badges of distinguished rank. In like manner, an infant, when it is washed in the sacred font, knows not what is done to it, and so far the washing is to it no sign. It understands neither the external rite, nor the thing signified, nor the relation that the one bears to the other; and hence it is conscious of no joy on account of it—none of the happiness of a mind exulting in the possession of such

an honor. Yet it meanwhile obtains what, according to the divine institution, most assuredly symbolizes the highest blessings, what is in no way affected by its ignorance, and what it shall have the felicity to realize either in time or in eternity.

LX. Thus far the orthodox are of one mind—none of them, so far as I am aware, attributing less efficacy to baptism. But many *Lutheranorum de Baptismi efficacia opinio.* think they ought to go farther. I say nothing of the doctors of the Romish church ignorantly throwing out their coarse errors in the most barbarous language, and babbling, I know not what, about all *opus operatum*. The theologians of the Augsburg Confession contend that the sacraments are

organs, mediums, or vehicles (ὄργανα), by which God brings near, exhibits, and applies to believers the gospel promise that belongs to them, regarding remission of sins, righteousness, and eternal life. Hence it resembles the divine hand with which God the Father chooses to exhibit, to bestow, and to apply his grace; while Jesus Christ the Son applies his merits to his people; and the Holy Spirit puts forth his efficacy in every believer.<sup>49</sup>

On this subject, of course, they are at variance, not only with Zwingli, but also with Calvin, Beza, Grynæus, Tossanus, Piscator, and the Reformed doctors in general, who deny that the sacraments are the true repositories of the riches of heaven's grace, as if *through them* the promises were bestowed upon us.<sup>50</sup>

LXI. True, indeed, Reformed theologians make no complaint of being attacked, but are themselves the aggressors in this *Reformatis passim improbata.* controversy with the Lutherans. Beza, after elegantly stating, "That the church is cleansed figuratively (*significative*) by the baptism of water and really (*realiter*) by the baptism of the Spirit," thus proceeds: "Has not the opposite opinion been drawn from the stagnant marshes of the schoolmen, who, in order to introduce their own Satanic

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<sup>49</sup> Editor's note: Witsius offers no citation. See *The Augsburg Confession*.

<sup>50</sup> See Johann Gerhard, *Loci Theologici*, 9 vols. (Jena, 1610-25), locus *On the Sacraments*, chap. 9, sect. 1, §§ 55-56.

distinction, have ascribed a causative (*caussativam*) influence to the sacraments, making them the instrumental (*instrumentalem*), while God is, in their language, the principal cause in conferring grace?”<sup>51</sup> Nearly in accordance with these words of Beza, Andreas Rivetus, a name revered not only in the Gallic but also in the Belgic churches, after having quoted the opinion of Bonaventure, Scotus, Durand, Occam, Gabriel, Richard, and others (who teach that “The sacraments confer grace *not because they produce it but because God produces it, and brings it near according to his covenant in the use of the sacraments*”), thus goes on:

But although these writers are to be blamed, inasmuch as forsaking the form of sound words (ὑποτυπῶσει) they introduce vain janglings (κενοφῶνιαις), yet, in reality, they seem to be sounder than those who, taking their name from Luther rather than from Christ, speak of the Word and sacraments in such a way as to make them essential to the bestowal of grace and justification, rejecting, indeed, nominally, the *opus operatum*, yet attributing no less efficacy to the external ceremony than those who regard the sacraments as the true causes of grace.<sup>52</sup>

In this, indeed, he complains that we [the Reformed] are misrepresented both by the Papists and the Lutherans, as if we deemed the sacraments mere naked and empty and therefore useless signs; and he thus sets forth the opinion of the Reformers: “Since, in addition to their signification according to the appointment of God, we ascribe to them *also their own exhibition (only in a way suited to sacraments)* and confirmation of the divine promises.”

LXII. It is not to be denied, however, that some of our writers, even theologians of the highest standing, do not differ very widely from the Lutherans, whose agreement with them they even acknowledge. That very judicious and learned man, Louis Le Blanc, protests that he

*A qua tamen non abhorret  
Ludovicus Le Blanc.*

<sup>51</sup> Beza, *Acts of the Conference at Montpelier*, dogm. 1 and 2.

<sup>52</sup> Andreas Rivetus, *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, § XLIII.28.

cannot agree with those who admit indeed that the sacraments are practical and exhibitiv signs, and, when duly administered, are not without their efficacy, even in the case of persons ignorant of their meaning or not enjoying the use of reason, but who hold, at the same time, that the sacraments are active and practical only in the way of sealing grace already received, and that, therefore, whether in adults or in infants, the sacraments presuppose justifying grace (which is the opinion of Henry Alting).

In direct opposition to this, he thinks it must be maintained,

That the sacraments not only seal grace received, but are also the mediums through which it is received, and the signs of some particular present grace, which, in connection with them, is communicated and bestowed.

He also supposes that

In the sacramental signs, legitimately used, there exists a certain divine influence, which, according to the sure covenant and promise of God, confers saving grace upon the recipient, and operates upon his soul.<sup>53</sup>

LXIII. But, so far as I am aware, no writer on our side has magnified the efficacy of baptism more freely or carried it to a greater length than that illustrious man, Pierre *Juriei elogium.* Jurieu—a name celebrated at this day, particularly in the Gallican church, for a great number of very learned writings and for many personal excellencies; and destined to be revered not only by the present generation but also by a grateful posterity. The opinion of this great man and honored friend I will here, by his good leave, set down as I have gathered it from various parts of his writings and condensed into the form of aphorisms. The following, then, may be regarded as the sum of what he has put forth in an extended form on diverse occasions:

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<sup>53</sup> See Le Blanc, *Theses Theologicae*, sect. 45, 46.

LXIV. (1) That, besides the objective efficacy of the sacraments, there must also be recognized an efficacy of another kind, similar to that of the signs with which God in ancient times accompanied the performance of miracles. The laying on of hands was of this nature by which the Holy Spirit was wont to be conferred, and the touch of the apostles by which they raised the dead and healed the sick. (2) That God ordinarily bestows his grace along with the representation of it, unless there is some special obstacle. Not but that God may sometimes bestow his grace prior to baptism, but that this is done with reference to the baptism about to follow inasmuch as the cause is a moral one, and acts before it becomes manifest. (3) That the elect infants of persons within the pale of the covenant are, prior to their baptism, the children of wrath, seeing that up to their baptism they are still liable to death, and their full reconciliation is not accomplished till this first seal of the covenant has been received; nor are they loved of God with the love of complacency, till they have been baptized and washed from that filthiness in which we all are born. (4) That by baptism the whole guilt of original sin is removed, so that no baptized person can be condemned on account of original sin. (5) That infants duly baptized, and dying in infancy, are certainly saved; and that, in such cases, baptism is an indubitable proof of election. But regarding the salvation of those who die unbaptized, we can only indulge a charitable hope, since, as they are still under the bondage of the guilt of original sin, that may prove a sufficient cause of their reprobation. (6) That baptism is therefore necessary to salvation—as necessary as food is to life or medicine to health. (7) That God may and in some cases certainly does save infants without baptism, but that this is done in an extraordinary and all but miraculous way, which involves a very wide departure from the ordinary course of his providence and grace, just as he has sustained many during a long period without food, or as he kept alive the companions of Daniel in the midst of the fire. (8) That, in infants, death makes up for the want of baptism, as, according to the doctrine of the Romanists, martyrdom does in adults.

LXV. In defense of these views are brought forward: First, *Cum suis firmamentis.* some passages of Scripture; secondly, the concurrence of the Fathers, who with one voice, it is said, assert these very things; and; lastly, the authority of the most accomplished modern theologians. Whoever will not yield to the combined force of all these arguments is accused of *sacramentarian* heresy. Yet I do not suppose it to be beyond the province of a professed theologian to examine these arguments somewhat minutely in their order.

LXVI. Let us begin with Scripture. It teaches “that Christ gave himself for his church, that he might sanctify it to himself by the washing with water through the Word” (Eph. 5:25); it teaches that “God hath of his mercy saved us by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:5); it teaches that “baptism, which as a figure answers to the deluge, doth also now save us” (1 Pet. 3:21); it teaches that Ananias said to Paul, “Arise and be baptized, and be washed from thy sins” (Acts 22:16). But the question is whether Scripture, in so teaching, affirms that some exhibitiv and effective influence belongs to the sacrament distinct from efficacious sealing, and whether it affirms that the grace of regeneration is so ordinarily conferred through baptism that without baptism it would like a miracle for a person to be regenerated and saved. I confess, this is what I do not see taught in Scripture.

LXVII. In the passages quoted, Paul particularly explains the causes of our salvation, which, as a matter of course, will operate *Non Paulus.* diversely according to the nature of each separately considered. In what way each by itself may operate, he does not indeed explain, but leaves to be otherwise ascertained. In the first place, he mentions God, from whose counsel and decree our salvation has its origin; next, the mercy of God, which is the chief prompting cause; then Jesus Christ, who, as Mediator and Surety, has given himself for his church; next, the nature of salvation, which is purification, sanctification, renewal by the Holy Spirit; lastly, the instruments that God and Christ

employ for the promotion of these objects—these are the Word and baptism. The influence and efficacy of the Word consist in this: that it clearly teaches the truths to be believed, together with the duties of religion, and authoritatively exhorts to faith and holiness. But wherein consists the special efficacy of baptism? From these detached passages one can only learn that baptism is of some use towards our purification, renovation, and salvation—and what that something is we must gather from the nature and character of baptism itself. And since, like circumcision, this is a seal of the righteousness of faith, its virtue must consist in its being a seal of the most authoritative and efficacious kind. Nor do learned men require to be told that this is the explanation most generally admitted among Reformed interpreters.

LXVIII. In the speech of Ananias to Paul, baptism and the washing away of sin are joined together by a certain sacramental connection; but it by no means teaches that Paul *Nec Ananias.* enjoyed no gift of grace nor had any of his sins remitted before receiving baptism. Can anyone doubt that he felt the efficacious influence of divine grace when addressed by the celestial voice on the way to Damascus? or that he was illumined by the internal light of that Spirit when the scales fell from his fleshly eyes? or that he began to admire, to adore, to love the Lord as soon as he had beheld his glory, and had experienced his kindness in connection with the vision of his transcendent majesty? The evidences of a soul savingly affected, convinced of its sins, panting after a richer measure of grace and extorting it from heaven by a kind of friendly violence, were those warm sighs and floods of tears and fervent supplications, and the three days fasting, which were so pleasing to God that, when Ananias sending to him, he inserted these words in his hallowed mandate, “Behold he prayeth!” But there was also a proof of his reception into the divine favor and friendship in that prophetic vision in which Ananias was shown to him coming in and putting his hands upon him so that he might receive his sight—with which imposition of hands were connected the recovery of his sight and the amplest communication of the Holy Spirit. For thus runs the sacred narrative: “And Ananias went his way and entered into the

house, and putting his hands on him, said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.’ And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales; and he received sight forthwith” (Acts 9:17, 18). All these events seem to have preceded his baptism. What, then, did baptism contribute towards the washing away of his sins? Baptism confirmed the grace already obtained, and was an earnest not only of its continuance but of its increase, and so filled his soul with holy consolation as to animate him to undertake, with the utmost intrepidity, whatever might be required of him in the discharge of the office with which he was entrusted.

LXIX. But least of all do these learned men find anything like a defense in the words of Peter. True, indeed, Peter declares that baptism saves us, but he also explains in what way it *Nec Petrus.* saves. It does not save us, he says, insofar as it is “the putting away of the filth of the flesh,” but insofar as it is “the answer of a good conscience towards God.” He separates from baptism all causative influence in the way of promoting salvation. Baptism, viewed as a cause, may effect the putting away of the filth of the flesh. In that way, indeed, it has the force of signifying and representing the putting away of the filth of the soul. But it does not have power to effect our salvation. If water was not a cleansing thing, having the power of purifying the flesh from its filthiness, baptism would not be what it is—the seal of the righteousness of faith and of the sprinkling of the heart from an evil conscience. The washings of the Old Testament, while they externally cleansed the body, symbolically denoted a ceremonial cleansing, which Paul denominates (τῆς σαρκὸς καθαρότης) “the purifying of the flesh” (Heb. 9:13)—that is, such a cleansing as fitted them for standing in places that were called holy, and entitled them to partake of the consecrated flesh of the sacrifices. The washing of the body, which takes place in our baptism, is the symbol of a better purification, namely of that which cleanses the soul, granting us access to heaven and the enjoyment of spiritual blessings. But it is a symbol, and no more. For that figure does not save us, but that which is compared with water, and is called pure

water, in a metaphorical sense (μεταφορικῶς). Let anyone consult Cocceius on this topic. How, then, does baptism save us? Insofar as it is the answer of a good conscience, for baptism is a certain solemn agreement, confederation, and mutual obligation, in which on the one hand God puts the question to the person about to be baptized, whether he will do his endeavor to maintain a good conscience towards him. On the other hand, the person to be baptized inquiring of God, in the confidence of a good conscience, whether he will be pleased to continue to be his God forever. In the ancient church the bishop, or someone for him, interrogated the catechumen to be baptized, or, which is the same thing, covenanted with him: “Do you utterly renounce Satan?” He replied, “I do utterly renounce him.” Again, being asked, “Do you believe in Christ?” he replied, “I believe.” This is what Tertullian calls “the saving engagement,” and Cyprian, “the baptismal interrogation.” The words of Peter plainly refer to the same thing. For it is certainly to be believed that a formula of question and answer similar and of the same import, if not the same, was used at baptism in the time of the Apostles. And even granting that there may have been no express formula of this kind, there is yet in baptism itself, as the initiation into the covenant, a stipulation of that nature. Moreover, there is no difficulty in understanding how the answer of a good conscience saves us. I conclude in the words of Beza, than which there can be nothing clearer on this subject. “We may say,” he remarks, “that the Apostle alluded to the questions of the catechists when the catechumens testified *that the inward baptism was to be ratified by the outward*—whence that expression of Tertullian, which may be regarded as a comment on this passage in his book on the resurrection of the body, ‘*the soul is consecrated not by the washing but by the vow.*’”

LXX. As for the Fathers, I confess that their language, for the most part, sounds as if they connected grace and salvation with the sacrament. I have no wish to handle these errors severely, as seems to be the fashion at present among certain writers, who are affected with such an itch of finding fault with and railing at the Fathers that with or without occasion they will

*Patres in re sacramentaria  
hyperbolicis locutionibus luxuriant.*

defile their pages with their blunders. In my opinion we owe so much reverence to men who, by their diligence, their zeal, and their example, have deserved well of the church of Christ, that, in consideration of their excellencies, we may overlook their blemishes. Yet it must not be concealed that they are sometimes exceedingly infelicitous in their mode of discussing even the most important subjects, and frequently use expressions of such a kind as to suggest a shockingly harsh meaning unless they are softened by a favorable interpretation. Take, for instance, those passages that the celebrated Jurieu has laboriously collected out of the Fathers on the subject of worshipping the Trinity. But the Fathers have chiefly run wild about the sacraments; and as they have loaded the external use of the signs with the proud pomp of ceremony, so they have ascribed to them greater influence than the simplicity of Scripture warrants.<sup>54</sup> It is safer to adhere to this than to be carried away, as with a torrent, by the rhetorical amplifications of the Fathers. Nor do I think that there are now any theologians among us who would choose to adopt in full their doctrine on the subject of baptism, for certainly they have magnified its influence beyond due bounds. And if it is impossible to help their words by a liberal construction, they must just be abandoned to their exaggerations.

LXXI. I perceive, however, that some of the most impartial among our writers have been at great pains to find excuses for them—as if, by an unfortunate way of speaking, they were ascribing to the signs what belongs only to the thing signified.

*Neque juvari possunt, nisi benigna interpretatine.*

Thus Beza, *On the Acts of the Conference at Montpelier*, in the place formerly cited:

I do not deny that some have been led into this very gross error through a misunderstanding of the language of the Fathers,

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<sup>54</sup> Witsius's text continues, "Nazianzenus, in carmine de vita sua, narrans quanto in periculo navigans fuerit, id sibi praecipue doluisse testatur, quod nondum esset baptizatus: Καθαρσίωv γὰρ, ΟΙΣ ΘΕΟΥΜΕΘ' ὑδάτων / Ηλλοτριόμην ὑδάσι ξεοκτόνοις. *Lustralibus etenim ab aquis illis quibus / Nos deificamus, me arcebant undae maris.*"

who—not certainly with a view to attribute in any way to signs what is the work of the Holy Spirit alone, but that they might commend the use and efficacy of the sacraments—have frequently spoken in such a way as apparently to ascribe to them (as in their opinion subordinate instruments) what belongs exclusively to divine grace.

I observe, in addition, that these highly wrought statements of the Fathers respecting the efficacy and necessity of baptism are, for the most part, at variance with the ordinary praxis of the church, as I shall presently make clear.

LXXII. In my opinion, we need not contend about the number of theologians who may concur with us in sentiment  
*Theologorum numero infeliciter pugnatur.* (ὁμοψήφων). Religious opinions are to be upheld not by human but by divine authority. Yet if this controversy were to be determined by that sort of argument, I might promise myself much from the suffrages of the great majority, even of those who are most learned. Whoever is not a stranger to the writings of the Reformed doctors will easily call to mind whole legions who stand shield-to-shield in well ordered array in defense of the doctrine I am now maintaining. But I do not fight with such arguments, nor can I allow them to have any great force when they are brought against me.

LXXIII. Let the illustrious Jurieu permit me to say this only to him: that I know no theologian, of any country within the whole  
*Jurieu opponitur Burmannus.* compass of the Reformed church, who has treated successively all the points relating to baptism as he has done; and I shall be deceived if he himself is able to point out any. Yet there is no reason why he should complain of being matched with an unworthy antagonist if I bring Burman against him, who, with a boldness equal to his own, powerfully and eloquently defends the opposite opinion:

Nor do they speak in a satisfactory manner who annul by the sacraments the operation of the internal influence in the soul, and yet suppose that these same sacraments, whatever are the causes, do infallibly produce grace—God uniformly operating in

virtue of a certain law or covenant, whereon the sacraments are observed. For although these persons ascribe the whole influence to God, and not to the sacraments, yet they do not avoid the other mischiefs of the opinion formerly mentioned (that which ascribes to the sacraments an influence of a physical kind). For they connect the divine influence with these signs, as if it could operate only when they are present, which is altogether false, *since even before the sacraments are partaken of, God is accustomed to bestow his grace, of the acceptance of which these are but the signs and tokens.* And, indeed, their opinion differs but little from the superstitious notion of magical incantations by signs and words—just as Scripture frequently gives the name of sorcerers to those corrupters of religion who attach importance in sacred matters only to external words and signs. And besides, they fix the minds of believers far too strongly upon these mere external symbols, so that they are apt to imagine that, apart from them, the grace of God and eternal life can scarcely be bestowed.<sup>55</sup>

I do not deny that the sentiments impugned by Burman go somewhat farther perhaps than the illustrious Jurieu would choose. Let this, however, suffice for the present: that Burman's opinion is diametrically opposed to Jurieu's hypotheses.

LXXIV. To reconcile these hypotheses with the praxis of the church, either ancient or modern, is certainly a difficult matter, if

*Illiusque sententiam  
priscae & recentioris  
Ecclesiae praxis refellit.*

it is not altogether impossible (ἐκ τῶν ἄπλῶς ἄδυνάτων). In the ancient church there were stated places and, for the most part, also stated times for baptism.

Tertullian says of baptism, "Every day belongs to the Lord, every hour, every season is suitable for baptism. There may be a question about law and custom; there is none respecting grace." Afterwards the two annual festivals, Easter and Pentecost, were, for the sake of greater solemnity, made the chief seasons of this sacramental work, about which indeed the ancients were more than becomingly solicitous. This was the case even in the times of Tertullian, who assigns reasons for the thing, although they are

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<sup>55</sup> Burman, *Synopsis*, Bk VII, chap. iv, sect. 28.

colder than the snow. By and by it was provided by law that baptism should be administered at no other season. Leo I, Bishop of Rome, wrote to the Bishops of Sicily, who were wont to baptize even on the day of Epiphany. "There are two lawful seasons in the church for baptizing the elect; and therefore," says he, "we admonish you, beloved, that you confound no other days with those appropriated to this observance." At length the penalty of excommunication was decreed against any person who should baptize at any other season, unless it were in the crisis of death. In the Atisidorian Council, which was held in the year 590, in canon 18, "It is decreed that he who shall do this shall be separated from the fellowship of the church for three months." I am aware, indeed, that decrees of this nature were not of universal and perpetual obligation, and that, before long, they were deservedly abrogated. Yet, even the Reformed church is not accustomed to administer baptism except at the ordinary places and seasons of the public assemblies; and regarding this matter there are ecclesiastical constitutions almost everywhere extant. But if it were true, or if it were generally held to be true, that infants up to the period of baptism continue to be children of wrath, are not loved of God with a love of complacency, but remain in the guilt of original sin; and if in baptism they are certainly regenerated, while without baptism they cannot be saved except by a miracle, it would not only be very hard and unjust, but even tyrannical, impious, sacrilegious, and worse than parricidal to restrict baptism to a stated season. No, not even a moment should be lost that our dear children, the instant they are born, may be delivered from the guilt of original sin, transferred from a state of wrath to a state of grace, and established in the sure hope of eternal felicity. Oh! ungodly parents, who delay even for a single moment! Oh! ungodly church, which, by its ill-timed constitutions, keeps back those who are approaching, denies to those who are asking! And, oh! ungodly ministers of the sanctuary, who are not ready in every place and at all seasons for the discharge of an office of piety so absolutely essential!

LXXV. But there are also other difficulties by which the opinion of this learned man is encumbered. (1) If the sacraments

are to be compared with those signs or instruments, in connection with which God of old time performed miracles, such as the touch of the Apostles, the shadow of Peter, the handkerchiefs of Paul, not only does the ordinary course of divine providence in the communication of grace seem to be reckoned among miracles, but, in truth, the whole efficacy of the sacraments is destroyed. For those things, in connection with which God operated, contributed nothing whatever to the miraculous effect—the causes of which cannot even with propriety be called moral. In the sacraments the case is altogether different, inasmuch as they are appointed of God as means, in their very nature, peculiarly efficacious, which God may employ in order that something may be wrought in us. For the resemblance constituted between the sign and the thing signified, together with the divine appointment through which they acquire the power of signifying and sealing, attaches to them a very special influence in increasing grace, strengthening faith, confirming hope, and kindling the flame of charity. As God acts on the hearts of the elect not merely in connection with the preaching of the Word, but through the Word, so he acts through the sacraments according to that order and mode of action which is agreeable to their nature. Thus far, then, I attribute more efficacy to the sacraments than that learned man—although this is perhaps a matter of very little consequence.

LXXVI. (2) If God usually bestows his grace at the same time as it is exhibited in the sacrament, and in the very administration of baptism both regenerates infants and delivers them from the guilt of original sin, the forwardness of parents in speedily presenting their children for baptism will accelerate their regeneration, with all its consequences, while their negligence will retard it; and thus the influences of divine grace upon the souls of some persons will be usually determined by the activity or the slothfulness of others. As to what is added about God sometimes bestowing grace with reference to the baptism about to be performed, I ask: By what word of Scripture, by what other argument of any weight is it proved? Is it enough in religious discussions to write down as authoritative whatever enters the mind or in any way serves the purpose of a hypothesis?

LXXVII. (3) If infants, up to the period of baptism, are the children of wrath, and by receiving baptism pass immediately into a state of grace; and if the salvation of baptized persons dying in infancy is certain, while we have only the judgment of charity regarding the salvation of those not baptized, I repeat, there must be a most inexcusable want of Christian parental love (στοργή) and of paternal piety, when parents do not, at the very instant of birth, procure that baptism on which so much depends. Nor can those ecclesiastical constitutions be defended with the slightest show of reason, which impose the smallest delay upon the administration of the rite.

LXXVIII. (4) If the guilt of original sin is so removed by baptism that no baptized person shall be condemned on account of it, while yet they may not escape damnation on account of other sins, one of two things necessary follows: either that the remission of original sin does not take place on the ground of the satisfaction of Christ, or that in the case of some persons Christ has so divided the satisfaction as to have taken part of it upon himself and left the remainder of it to them—both of which suppositions we have already shown to be utterly inconsistent with the truth (see sect. XI). There is also this additional difficulty: Whoever in infancy receives the pardon of original sin—the only sin with which an infant is chargeable—is immediately free from all sin; that person is in a state of grace. He no longer belongs to Satan. If that same person, in subsequent life, should yield himself up to actual sins, on the ground of which he is condemned, then he relapses from a state of grace into a state of wrath; and after having belonged to Christ, he once more begins to belong to the devil and continues to be his forever. How such things as these are to be reconciled with the doctrines of the Reformed church, I certainly do not see.

LXXIX. In like manner, I profess myself unable to reconcile with these doctrines such things as the following: that baptism is as necessary to salvation as food to the sustenance of life, or medicine to the restoration of health; that it is something approaching to a miracle if anyone is saved without baptism; that since we are not to presume too rashly upon the performance of

*Sicut & multis premitur  
incommodis.*

miracles, the judgment of charity respecting the salvation of those dying without baptism rests upon a very doubtful foundation; and that, in the meanwhile, death supplies the want of baptism in infants, as, according to the Papists, martyrdom does in adults. These things seem to me mutually to refute each other, for if death procures for infants what, according to the Papists, martyrdom procures for adults, the salvation of infants dying without baptism will be as certain as that of those who are baptized. For who in the Romish church has any doubt of the salvation of the martyrs? But where did this great man [Jurieu] learn that death supplies the want of baptism? Has he been taught it by any testimony of Scripture? Is there otherwise any argument in mere assertion, however emphatic?

LXXX. But let there be an end of this discussion, which, as I stated at the outset, has been entered on with the view of elucidating the truth, and, at the same time, of establishing peace between brothers. I therefore implore all devout Christians, who have anything to do with this controversy, should they alight upon these pages of mine, that they will examine what is stated without passion, without prejudice, as it has been written by me. To sum up this matter, all we who are called orthodox are by the grace of God agreed upon the following points: (1) That the sacraments, so far as respects the bestowal of divine grace, are destitute of all physical efficacy, properly so called, and only contribute to this bestowal in a moral way; and when we speak of adults and persons enjoying the use of reason, that no grace whatever is conferred by the sacraments except upon those who come to them under the due influence of faith and repentance; and more, that, even in the legitimate use of the sacraments, there is nothing to merit grace. (2) That notwithstanding all this, the sacraments are not naked and empty signs but the seals of the covenant, possessing, according to the divine appointment, the greatest efficacy in the way of signifying and sealing divine blessings; indeed, so much efficacy that more cannot be desired in causes of this kind. (3) That the grace of God is not so connected with any sacrament such that, without the use

*Orthodoxi omnes in re ipsa  
consentiunt; dissensus de  
modo & tempore est.*

of a sacrament, God may not confer grace whenever and upon whomever he will, although by his divine freedom he has decreed the use of the sacraments unto the possession and increase of his grace. (4) That the baptism of infants is founded on the Word of God, and expressly on that gracious covenant that, by the appointment of God, embraces not believers only but also their seed. (5) That the benefit of infant baptism is great not only as respects those who grow up to maturity but also in the case of such as die in infancy, to whom, though they are ignorant of the fact, it is the surest pledge of present grace and future glory. (6) That parents ought to exert themselves to procure baptism for their children as early as it can be conveniently done. On these points all [the orthodox] are agreed. The difference relates only to the manner and the time of its operation.

LXXXI. That difference, I will venture to say, is not so important that either of the differing parties should accuse the other of sacramentarian or of Popish heresy. Let all endeavor to adapt both their meaning and their language to the straight edge of Scripture. In respect to each point, there is only one true opinion, and it is the duty of every theologian, indeed, of every Christian, to give anxious heed to its discovery. It is not meet, in such a case, to regard anything as unworthy of our diligence. But, in the present clouded state of our understanding, let us not be angry with anyone who does not, in all things, see exactly as we think we see or as, by the grace of God, we really do see. The love of truth and the spirit of charity, cultivated with equal care, constitute the most shining ornaments of a Christian—that is, of a truly noble mind.

LXXXII. One thing, I think, must yet be added before I bring this dissertation to a close. There is no reason why the doctors of the Romish church should cast up this difference of opinion as a reproach against Protestant theologians, seeing that they themselves, in this very controversy regarding the efficacy of the sacraments, are split into as many distinct parties (I speak very mildly; I might have said many

*Qui tanti momenti non est, ut  
haeresin introducat, vel  
Ecclesiae pacem turbare debeat.*

*Male nobis hanc discrepantiam objicerent  
Ponticii plus ipsi discrepantes.*

more). In this, indeed, they all agree: that the sacraments of the New Testament produce their effect in consequence of an *opus operatum*. This barbarism is the very shibboleth of the Papists. But when we come to seek an explanation of such a portentous form of speech, we find nearly as many opinions as persons; and these opinions are so inconsistent with each other as to furnish, by so many contradictions, a clear proof that they have no fixed doctrine upon the subject. Besides, they debate among themselves with such monstrous enigmas as none but Oedipuses and Sphinxes could solve. Says William Estius:

All these different opinions may be reduced to two general modes of stating the subject. For some will have it, that the sacraments are properly called the instruments of God, who is, as it were, the chief cause in producing grace; and therefore they ascribe to them that kind of influence that belongs to the instrumental cause, insofar as it is put in action by the principal agent. Others, again, neither acknowledge in the sacraments a properly so-called—that is, a physical—instrumental cause, nor do they think that there is in them any created influence by which they may operate a gracious effect. But they say that the sacraments are only thus far efficacious signs of grace: that a divine influence accompanies the sacraments to the certain and infallible production of a gracious effect, according to the promise of Christ, so that they certainly have the force of an instrumental cause generally so called. They style them a moral instrument.<sup>56</sup>

But these two general divisions are separated again into various companies, to enumerate all of which would be exceedingly tedious. Gabriel Vasquez,<sup>57</sup> in volume three of his commentary on

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<sup>56</sup> \*Guilielmus Estius, *Book iv.*, Sent. Dist. 1, Num. 5. Editor's note: Witsius is likely citing Estius' work, *In quatuor libros Sententiarum commentaria quibus pariter S. Thomæ Summæ theologicæ partes omnes mirifice illustrantur, cum triplici* (Paris, 1680).

<sup>57</sup> Gabrielis Vasquez, *Commentarii ac disputationes in tertium partem Symmæ theologiae sancti Thomæ Aquinatis: quibus non solvm vervm, et Germanvm intellectvm sententiæ S. Thomæ accuratissimè explanat . . .*, 3 vols. (Venice, 1610), III, Q. 52, disp. 132.

Thomas, mentions, in the first place “five” opinions of those who deny that the sacraments are physical causes of grace. Of these opinions “four do not please him, the fifth partly pleases and partly displeases” (chapter 1). Then in chapter 2 he mentions “four more” opinions of those who say that they are divine instruments for physically producing grace—all of which he refutes (chapters 3 and 4). At length (chapter 5), after confuting the opinions of others with their weak and tottering arguments, he concludes, “that the *more probable* opinion bears, that the sacraments of the new law are only moral instruments for the production of grace.” Let anyone consult Rivet’s *Le catholique orthodoxe*, Tract 3, quest. 2. Since therefore there is such a diversity of sentiment on this subject in the Romish church, it would be unfair in them to drag forth into an occasion of scandal the comparatively trifling discrepancies of our writers. If they have all respect for their own opinion, it ought to be an agreeable thing to them to find that some of our theologians approach somewhat near to them, as we from the heart congratulate those of their number who, standing at a shorter distance from the truth than others, are found approaching to our views.

### *Epilogue*

The foregoing observations, the result of my honest convictions, I had written and committed to the press, when a friend of mine put into my hands the letters of the celebrated Jean Claude,<sup>58</sup> giving me to understand that in the seventeenth letter the whole controversy respecting the efficacy of infant baptism was fully and clearly discussed. Rejoicing at this information, as soon as leisure permitted I eagerly turned up the book, sought out the letter, and began to read, not ceasing till I had read it through.

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<sup>58</sup> Editor’s note: I have not been able to ascertain what source Witsius is citing; however, after Witsius’ death, a work was published that contained the letters of Jean Claude pertaining to the question of the efficacy of baptism, as well as Witsius’ material on this question. See *Recueil de lettres et de divers traités de Jean Claude et Herm. Witsius, et autres savans hommes du siècle [sur l’efficace du baptême]* (Amsterdam, 1715).

I can scarcely express the delight I experienced on discovering to what an extent there is an exact agreement between my views and those of that celebrated theologian—so much so, indeed, that many of my thoughts may almost look as if they had been borrowed from him. By which circumstance I was at once greatly confirmed in my opinion, and strongly impelled to give thanks to God, for I knew how great and memorable was the name of Claude, especially among the remnants of the Gallican church now dispersed over the world—which had so often seen and admired him, so boldly, so skillfully, so successfully pleading the cause of truth. And hence I was the more easily led to hope that the brothers, to whom the memory of so great a man is dear, would be of the same mind. Not that I would wish to argue, from human authority, a proceeding against which I have frequently protested, but because I feel confident that through the influence of a name so venerable the minds of many will be stirred up to consider with greater care the importance of the question, and the reasons that make it of such consequence. For that reason I should hope that the brothers just mentioned will deign to compare my thoughts with those of Claude—thrown together, as they are, from the same motive, for the same purpose, and, I may add, throughout, nearly in the same frame of mind. Let me finish with the divine admonition and prayer of Paul, *“whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, and let us mind the same thing, but if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God will reveal even this unto you.”*