

“On a wide-ranging canvas and with bold strokes, J. V. Fesko gives us a study of baptism which joins a treasury of theological citations with strong theological insights. After a survey of the history of the doctrine, Fesko focuses on the Reformed tradition and its important figures and confessions. He indicates the biblical dimensions of the meanings of baptism and provides a positive and constructive statement of its theological truth. This is a valuable work for its mastery of primary sources as well as its clear articulation of the covenantal dimensions which give a Reformed theology of baptism such power and purpose for Christian believers.”

—DONALD K. MCKIM, Editor, *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*

“This book represents a substantial accomplishment, one that provides a useful resource for those wanting to deepen their understanding of the sacraments, particularly baptism. Reflecting a massive amount of research against the background of an in-depth survey of various views of baptism in church history, Fesko provides an extensive exegetical and biblical-theological study of the covenantal and eschatological significance of baptism followed by systematic theological reflections on key issues like baptism as a means of grace, the efficacy of baptism, the biblical warrant for infant baptism (and against paedocommunion), and the importance of baptism for the church. One need not agree with Dr. Fesko’s reflections at every point to benefit from his considerable labors.”

—RICHARD B. GAFFIN, JR., Emeritus Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Westminster Theological Seminary

“Wonderfully Reformed...John Fesko shows the fruitfulness of reflecting on baptism as a marvelously robust doctrinal statement. He is to be commended for his first rate, deep theological thought on a core sacrament of our faith.”

—WILLIAM H. WILLIMON, Presiding Bishop, The United Methodist Church, Birmingham Area, North Alabama Conference

“J. V. Fesko’s *Word, Water, and Spirit* is a major work that both models how to do theology by moving from historical theology to biblical and systematic theology and, most importantly, presents fresh insights for a Reformed understanding of baptism. Fesko’s fair-minded, page-turning history of the doctrine of baptism is itself worth the price of the book. Most enlightening, however, is his biblical-theological survey of baptism as new creation, covenant judgment, and eschatological judgment. The book’s emphasis on God’s judgment in baptism is particularly innovative and helpful. These insights pave the way for treating baptism systematically as a means of grace and as a sacrament in relation to its recipients and ecclesiology. Highly recommended for all who wish to grapple seriously with the doctrine of baptism and its implications.”

—JOEL R. BEEKE, President and Professor of Systematic
Theology, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

Word, Water, and Spirit

A Reformed Perspective on Baptism

OTHER BOOKS BY THE AUTHOR

Diversity within the Reformed Tradition: Supra- and Infralapsarianism in Calvin, Dort, and Westminster

Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1–3 with the Christ of Eschatology

What Is Justification by Faith Alone?

Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine

The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Grace and Works in the Mosaic Covenant
(co-editor and contributor)

The Rule of Love: Broken, Fulfilled, and Applied

Where Wisdom Is Found: Christ in Ecclesiastes

Word, Water, and Spirit

A Reformed Perspective on Baptism

J. V. Fesko



REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Word, Water, and Spirit: A Reformed Perspective on Baptism

© 2010 by J. V. Fesko

Published by

Reformation Heritage Books

2965 Leonard St., NE,

Grand Rapids, MI 49525

616-977-0889 / Fax 616-285-3246

orders@heritagebooks.org

www.heritagebooks.org

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—except for brief quotations for the purpose of review or comment, without the prior permission of the publisher, Reformation Heritage Books.

Printed in the United States of America

10 11 12 13 14 15/10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fesko, J. V., 1970-

Word, water, and Spirit : a Reformed perspective on baptism / J.V. Fesko.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and indexes.

ISBN 978-1-60178-101-7 (hardback : alk. paper) 1. Baptism—Reformed Church. 2. Reformed Church—Doctrines. I. Title.

BX9427.5.B36F47 2010

234'.161—dc22

2010029699

For additional Reformed literature, both new and used, request a free book list from Reformation Heritage Books at the above address.

For my grandfather
Ismael Alatorre Valero
(June 1, 1923–March 8, 1987)

Me enseñaste a ser un hombre de Dios más de lo que supiste.

You taught me to be a man of God more than you knew.

Table of Contents

Preface	ix
Abbreviations	xiii
Introduction	1

Part I: The History of the Doctrine

1. Baptism in the Patristic Age, Middle Ages, and Counter Reformation	15
2. Baptism in Luther and Lutheranism	41
3. Baptism in Zwingli and the Anabaptists	57
4. Baptism in the Reformed Tradition	79
5. Baptism in Early Orthodox Reformed Theology	104
6. Baptism in High Orthodox Reformed Theology	129
7. Baptism in Modern Theology	156
Summary of Part I	193

Part II: Biblical-Theological Survey of the Doctrine

8. Baptism as New Creation	199
9. Baptism as Covenant Judgment	228
10. Baptism as Eschatological Judgment	249
Summary of Part II	259

Part III: Systematic-Theological Construction of the Doctrine

11. Baptism as a Means of Grace	265
12. Baptism as a Sacrament	290
13. Baptism Proper	308
14. Baptism and Its Recipients	337
15. Baptism and Ecclesiology	368
Summary of Part III	395
Conclusion	399
Bibliography	403
Scripture Index	427
Subject Index	439

Preface

This book represents the conclusion of a long journey. When I went to seminary in the early 1990s, I arrived with my TULIP (the five points of Calvinism¹) in hand. Many of my professors sought to pluck the petals off my TULIP. But the more my professors challenged me, the more I studied and read, the more my TULIP grew into an entire garden. Through the works of John Calvin, Francis Turretin, Jonathan Edwards, Louis Berkhof, and the like, I realized that there were far more than five points of Calvinism in the Reformed faith.

One of the points with which I initially struggled was infant baptism. As I studied the doctrine, it was in reading an anti-paedobaptist work by Baptist theologian Paul Jewett that I became convinced of one of the more crucial points of the Reformed faith: the indispensability of covenant theology. From that point onward, I studied and sought to understand the doctrine of the covenant and especially its signs. Over the years, I have become more and more convinced, steeled, and encouraged by God's covenant dealings with His people and especially the signs of the covenants.

In my decade-plus ministry in the pastorate, however, I found that people often were not as convinced as I was of the doctrine of the covenants and their attending signs. I ministered in the Baptist-dominated South, where visitors and even some church members looked with a high degree of suspicion on the Presbyterian practice of baptism. Why was so little water used? Why were infants baptized? I also encountered those who were in full retreat from the Reformed doctrine of baptism. Even though they had had some of their children baptized as infants, they were stepping back and refraining from having their newborns baptized out of a fear they had committed a grave error. I also found many students who were skeptical

1. The five doctrines that make up the acrostic TULIP are **t**otal depravity, **u**nconditional election, **l**imited atonement, **i**rrresistible grace, and the **p**erseverance of the saints.

of the Reformed doctrine of baptism. Like a guest invited to a meal, they would gladly eat the main portion but politely leave that part untouched.

My hope is that people with all sorts of questions will be able to profit from this book. For those who want to learn about the doctrine of baptism, I hope the book is informative and edifying. For those of a Baptist persuasion, my prayer is that they will see that their Presbyterian brothers and sisters have a biblical understanding of baptism. For those who have retreated from the Reformed doctrine of baptism, my hope is that they will see and understand why baptism is so important and why, as the sign of the covenant, it should be administered to their children. Even if it is only in a small way, I want the church to know that God has spoken and said so much through water and the Word as He applies it by the Spirit.

There are a number of people to whom I owe a great deal of appreciation: Bryan Estelle, John Muether, Darryl Hart, Lane Keister, Mike Horton, and Will Willimon. I am especially thankful to both Dave VanDrunen and Jay Collier. Dave read through an early draft and really helped me clean it up. Jay was especially helpful, not only in his encouragement to pursue the book and have it published with Reformation Heritage Books, but with his editorial comments and key research tips at points. I am also thankful to Joel Beeke for reading the manuscript and his willingness to publish it. Many thanks are also due to the publishing staff at Reformation Heritage, without whom this book would not have seen the light of day.

I owe a great deal of thanks especially to my wife, Anneke. Our Lord has blessed me through you in so many ways. You have shared in my joys, challenges, and times of laughter and sorrow. Most important, especially as it relates to this book, we have both been able to receive a life-enduring blessing through our respective baptisms and have together heard the gospel promises preached audibly and seen them visibly poured out on our son, Val. I look forward to baptizing our second child with the visible Word of God in the sacrament of baptism. My prayer is that both of our children will lay hold of the gospel promises by faith alone in Christ alone by His grace alone.

My grandfather, Ismael Alatorre Valero, was a godly man, one for whom I continue to have a great deal of respect. He was very humble, had a diligent work ethic, loved his family, and was a Baptist deacon. But most of all, he loved Christ. I can remember as a small child listening to his prayers before dinner. He loved to pray. My grandmother would remind him as he started to give thanks, “Solamente por la comida, Ismael!” (Only for the

food, Ismael!) Sadly, my grandfather died when I was seventeen years old. As painful as his death was for my family, our hope lies continually with the grace and mercy of our covenant-keeping Lord. In more ways than you ever knew, Papa, you taught me to be a man of God—a man of my word. It is to your memory that I dedicate this book. I look forward one day to breaking bread with you, the church, and our Lord at the marriage feast of the Lamb on that glorious eternal Sabbath-day rest.

Soli Deo Gloria

Abbreviations

General Abbreviations

ca.	<i>circa</i> , about
cf.	<i>confer</i> , compare
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i> , for example
i.e.	<i>id est</i> , that is
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic text (of the Old Testament)
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
OPC	Orthodox Presbyterian Church
PCA	Presbyterian Church in America
q.v.	<i>quod vide</i> , which see
RCC	Roman Catholic Church
vol.	Volume
v., vv.	verse, verses

Commonly Used Abbreviations

ANE 1 & 2	Pritchard, <i>Ancient Near East</i> , vols. 1 & 2
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
BDAG	Bauer-Danker-Ardnt-Gingrich, <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i> , 3 rd ed.
BDB	Brown-Driver-Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BBR	<i>Bulletin of Biblical Research</i>
BC	<i>Book of Concord</i>
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
CD	Karl Barth, <i>Church Dogmatics</i>
CH	<i>Church History</i>

CNTC	<i>Calvin's New Testament Commentaries</i>
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
CTS	Calvin Translation Society
CTQ	<i>Concordia Theological Quarterly</i>
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
EQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
HALOT	<i>Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IJST	<i>International Journal of Systematic Theology</i>
JETS	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
JPSTC	Jewish Publication Society Torah Commentary
JSNT	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
LC	Larger Catechism
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
LQ	<i>Lutheran Quarterly</i>
LW	Luther's Works
MAJT	<i>Mid-America Journal of Theology</i>
Mid Rabb	<i>Midrash Rabbah</i>
NCB	New Century Bible
NIB	New Interpreter's Bible
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDNTT	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i>
NIDOTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NPNF ^{1 and 2}	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First and Second Series
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NTC	New Testament Commentary
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
PR	<i>Princeton Review</i>
PTR	<i>Princeton Theological Review</i>
SC	Shorter Catechism
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary

TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
TynBul	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Introduction

Most professing Christians have passed through the waters of baptism. Whether one is a Baptist, a Roman Catholic, a Presbyterian, a Methodist, or a member of one of any number of denominations large or small, he likely has been baptized at some point. But this is only the tip of the iceberg. Above the surface of the waters there is apparent harmony, but below lurk jagged and sharp edges of differing opinions regarding what baptism actually means, how it should be defined, and to whom it should be administered.

There are some for whom baptism is a remembrance of the work of Christ. For others, it is a means by which God cleanses a person from sin. Others believe it is a sign of the covenant. For still others, it is a token of the believer's faith and commitment to God. But despite these doctrinal differences, all denominations can be classified into two groups—those who baptize *only adults* who make a profession of faith (the Baptist tradition) and those who practice *both adult and infant* baptism.

When opinions on a doctrine multiply and flood the theological scene, requiring proponents of various views to build little theological boats in which to escape the rising waters, it is necessary to return to first principles and re-examine the doctrine afresh. We find ourselves in such a time of floods and boat-building today; hence, this study.

METHODOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS: COVENANT AND CANON

The goal of this study is to explain what baptism means, define it, and identify to whom it should be administered. The underlying methodological commitment of this study is that God reveals Himself to His people through Christ and covenant. In one sense, this may not seem all that

significant, as all relate baptism to Jesus in some fashion and many make reference to the covenant concept to some degree. Often, though, that reference to the doctrine of the covenant is nominal and does not undergird the explanation of the doctrine of baptism. Such a reference appears in a recent book written by Baptist theologians titled *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*. The term *covenant* appears in the subtitle, but there is little effort to set forth the doctrine of the covenant in the book. The largest interaction with the doctrine is directed more at correcting paedobaptist understandings of covenant rather than setting forth a positive exposition of the doctrine as it relates to baptism. Moreover, the doctrine of covenant does not permeate the various essays in the book.¹

A similar trend appears in Stanley Grenz's (1950–2005) summary statement regarding baptism and the Lord's Supper, which he calls "community acts of commitment":

As symbols of his story which is now our story, baptism and the Lord's Supper form the practice of commitment within the community of faith. Through these two acts we enact our faith as we symbolically reenact the story of redemption. We memorialize the events of Jesus' passion and resurrection, we bear testimony to the experience of union with Christ which we all share in the community, and we lift our sights to the grand future awaiting us as participants in the covenant community of God.²

In one respect, it is commendable that Grenz mentions the covenant. However, all biblical covenants involve two parties. After all, a covenant is an agreement.³ Grenz's statement explains what the community enacts: its faith, its remembrance, its testimony, its experience, and its hope for the future. What, however, is God saying through these "acts of commitment"? God has given His covenant to His people through Christ; man has not

1. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 97–162, 257–84. There are some exceptions to this trend, such as Paul K. Jewett, *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 219–50; also Fred A. Malone, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone: A Covenantal Argument for Credobaptism Versus Paedobaptism* (2003; Cape Coral, Fla.: Founders Press, 2007).

2. Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 677.

3. Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 10, 23–34; Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Overland Park, Kan.: Two Age Press, 2000), 1–8; cf. John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace: A Biblico-Theological Study* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R, 1987).

scaled the heights, knocked on heaven's door, and offered a man-made rite to Him. So many theologians focus on what the covenant servant does, but what about the covenant Lord?

The absence of the doctrine of the covenant is even sharper in the Roman Catholic doctrine of baptism. Roman Catholic theologians historically have conceived of their soteriology largely in terms of ontology rather than covenant. Roman Catholic theologian Edward Schillebeeckx (1914–2009) explains that the “peculiarly Protestant theology of the Covenant” leads to a “spirituality that is entirely different.” He writes that though John Calvin (1509–1564) spoke of the sacraments containing and really giving grace, nevertheless there was a world of difference between the Calvinist and Roman Catholic interpretations of the sacraments.⁴

Michael Horton has adapted Paul Tillich's (1886–1965) typology of the various kinds of philosophy of religion to explain the differences between Roman Catholic and Reformation soteriologies: overcoming estrangement, meeting a stranger, and the stranger never met. The stranger never met is the totally transcendent and therefore unknowable God, such as in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Then there is the idea of overcoming estrangement. According to Roman Catholic doctrine, for example, in baptism man receives the infused righteousness of Christ and the created grace of God, a *habitus* (habit), a disposition or inclination toward spiritual good. Through this infusion of created grace man cooperates with God and overcomes his fallen estate. As it was in the creation before the fall, so it is after the fall in baptism and beyond—grace perfects nature. On the other hand, Reformation theology historically has argued that man's sin is not an ontological but a moral-ethical problem. Man is a covenant breaker. He is redeemed by meeting a stranger—Christ, who redeems him. Grace redeems nature. The difference is not between nature and grace but sin and grace.⁵ Moreover, man encounters this stranger within a context, namely, that of covenant.

The difference between an ontological and a covenantal approach appears in Francis Turretin's (1623–1687) interaction with Thomas Aquin-

4. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 185.

5. Michael Horton, *Lord and Servant: A Covenant Christology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 3–21; also idem, “Meeting a Stranger: A Covenantal Epistemology,” *WTJ* 66.2 (2004): 259–73; cf. Paul Tillich, “The Two Types of Philosophy of Religion,” in *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 10–29.

nas (1225–1274) regarding *prolegomena*. Turretin argues that when God is set forth as the object of theology, He cannot be known as God is in Himself. In such an ontological approach, God is incomprehensible. Instead, God as the object of theology must be approached in terms of how He has revealed Himself in the Word. In the Word, God comes to sinful man as He has covenanted in Christ. All good theology must embrace these two points: Christ and covenant.⁶ Turretin's point is simple. God does not nakedly reveal Himself, but comes clothed in Christ and covenant. This produces two important correlates.

Covenant

First, it means that a believer cannot have a mystical salvation experience based in some sort of unique private event that is divorced from Christ and the Word, such as it is captured in the C. Austin Miles (1868–1946) hymn “In the Garden,” which speaks of an experience that “none other has ever known.” It is not that man overcomes his estrangement as his soul deals directly with God in some sort of mystical experience.⁷ Rather, Jesus the stranger condescends to fallen man. This means that man's redemption is inextricably bound with redemptive history, as God has progressively revealed Himself in covenant to His corporate people, culminating in His revelation in Christ. Knowledge of God is openly revealed in the concrete events of redemptive history in God's condescension to His fallen creatures. Beginning in the Old Testament, God covenanted with historical flesh-and-blood people, and He gave the new covenant through the God-man, Jesus. Theologians, therefore, cannot merely start with the advent of Christ and the individual's profession of faith, but must account for God's covenantal dealings with His people from the very beginning in the garden-temple of Eden.

The fact that God reveals Himself in covenant also means that individuals cannot isolate themselves. All individuals are redeemed as part of the covenant community, the body of Christ, the church. This is not a new observation, as to be a part of the new covenant is to be joined to Christ

6. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R, 1992–97), 1.5.4; cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (Allen, Texas: Christian Classics, 1948), 1a qq. 12–13, 1.58–59.

7. For analysis of these individualistic mystical trends, see Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (1994; New York: Chu Hartley, 2006), 54, 236, 220, 250–58; cf. E. Y. Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*, eds. Timothy and Denise George (1908; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 1–26, 60.

Himself. It is interesting that Justin Martyr (100–165) once wrote that Christ Himself is the new covenant.⁸

Canon

The commitment to the principle that God reveals Himself in Christ and covenant brings a second correlate, namely, that doctrine is canonical; doctrine must be built on the whole of Scripture, not merely the New Testament. This is a point that even those not normally associated with conservative evangelicalism have noted. Walther Eichrodt (1890–1978) explains that the encounter with Christ in the Gospels is inseparably bound up with the Old Testament past, a history that points into the future. That which indivisibly binds the two testaments is the irruption of the kingdom of God into this world. This irruption is the unifying principle because the same God builds His kingdom in both testaments. This is why the central message of the New Testament leads back to the message of God in the Old Testament.⁹ Eichrodt saw the need to look at the whole of Scripture to understand any one part.

Eichrodt's observation echoes in the writings of others, such as Gerhard von Rad (1900–1971): "The student of the New Testament also works with the Old Testament material which has been absorbed into the New by typological means. It is therefore the two Testaments which are our instructors, bidding us give more serious consideration to this element which is obviously typical of the Biblical understanding of history." Von Rad explains that it is only when the student of Scripture is able to make people believe that the two testaments belong together that he has the right to term his pursuit a theological undertaking, and therefore a truly biblical theology.¹⁰

Leonhard Goppelt (1911–1973) has observed this pattern in the hermeneutics of the apostle Paul. Goppelt explains: "So far as we can tell, Paul was the first to use the Greek word *typos* (adj. *typikos*) as a term for the prefiguring of the future in prior history. God dealt in a typical way (*typikos*) with Israel in the wilderness, in a manner that is a pattern for his dealing with the church in the last days. The fortunes of Israel are types (*typoi*) of the experiences of the church (1 Cor. 10:11, 6; cf. Rom. 5:14)."¹¹

8. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chap. 51, in ANF 1.221.

9. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1961), 1.26.

10. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960–65), 2.410–29, esp. 428–29.

11. Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the*

Other theologians have noted the necessary unity of the Scriptures. Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988), in his five-volume presentation of doctrine as theo-drama, begins his study with a survey of the relationship between the theater and Christian theology. In his survey of the history of religious-themed theater, he explains that Easter plays in the Middle Ages naïvely portrayed Christ's descent into the underworld. Von Balthasar then explains the characteristics of the typical Easter play:

Its perspective was centered in the Eucharistic mystery and at the same time in the whole drama of salvation. The consequences for theology of a genuinely dramatic grasp of the *descensus* are immeasurable; we shall continually be coming across them. It is from this center, insofar as they remain in contact with it, that the other episodes of the Old and New Testaments have their dramatic relevance; wherever they become independent units they are in danger of being merely episodic, moralistic or simply entertaining.¹²

Here von Balthasar sees that to isolate any one part of the dramatic narrative neutralizes its meaning, which can be derived only from its connection to Christ. Therefore, it is not merely Reformed theologians who see the need to argue doctrine from the basis of the whole canon; they are joined by a number of voices from different portions of the international theological spectrum, including Brevard Childs (1923–2007), Pope Benedict XVI, and Francis Watson.¹³

To construct theology on the basis of the canon takes into account the whole of God's revelation in Christ, but also adds a fullness and depth of understanding to the church's reading of Scripture. This practice also recognizes the plain and simple fact that for Jesus, Paul, and every other first-century theologian, the Old Testament was the Bible.¹⁴ This means

New (1939; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 4–5; contra Malone, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone*, 138–39.

12. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 1.114.

13. See Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflections on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 70–79; Scott W. Hahn, "The Authority of Mystery: The Biblical Theology of Benedict XVI," *Letter & Spirit* 2 (2006): 97–140; Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 127–78.

14. Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), x–xi, 21–24; see also Watson, *Text and Truth*, 216–19.

that the church must learn to read the Old Testament as Paul read it and not according to created hermeneutical systems, such as the literalism of dispensationalism or any other theological explanation of the Bible that fails to take into account the necessity of explaining any doctrine from both testaments.¹⁵ Nineteenth-century German universities first granted institutional recognition to the idea that the New Testament should be studied separately from the Old Testament and *a fortiori* in isolation from theology and history.¹⁶ To study the isolated New Testament, therefore, and derive doctrinal conclusions from it is a relatively recent and novel development in the context of church history. Readers must understand the grammar and immediate historical context of a passage, but also must relate any New Testament passage under consideration to the rest of the canon, especially if there is an allusion, echo, or quotation of an Old Testament passage.¹⁷

The necessity of a commitment to canonical theology is illustrated briefly in John the Baptist's statement to the crowds gathered at the Jordan River: "I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit'" (John 1:33; cf. Matt. 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luke 3:16). What many do not realize is that English translations of this verse do not translate the word βαπτίζω. Translators merely transliterate the Greek term. Clearly, John's baptism is literal, but Christ's is of a different nature. A normal reading of the verb βαπτίζω means immersion in water, but its metaphorical meaning is that of being overwhelmed by something.¹⁸ If analysis were to stop here, perhaps it would have done

15. See Herbert W. Bateman IV, "Dispensationalism Yesterday and Today," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 31; Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1970), 37, 131; idem, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1986), 525–32; 539–41; cf. Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith* (London: T & T Clark, 1999), 62, 611.

16. Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 38.

17. See G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), xxiii–xxviii. There has been a flowering of literature exploring the interconnected relationship between the Old and New Testaments. See, e.g., Steve Moyise, *The Old Testament in the New* (London: T & T Clark, 2001); Craig A. Evans, ed., *From Prophecy to Testament: The Function of the Old Testament in the New* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004).

18. I. Howard Marshall, "The Meaning of the Verb 'to Baptize,'" *EQ* 45/3 (1973): 131, 137; also idem, "The Meaning of the Verb 'Baptize,'" in *Dimensions of Baptism*, JSNT Sup 234, eds. Stanley Porter and Anthony R. Cross (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003): 8–24.

justice to the grammar and immediate historical context, but what about the greater context of redemptive history? John refers to the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and various Old Testament passages state that the Spirit is “poured out” or “sprinkled” (Isa. 32:15; 44:3–5; Zech. 12:10; Ezek. 36:25–27; 39:39). From this broader redemptive-historical context, it is evident that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the same thing as the baptism of the Spirit.

Based on this type of canonical contextualization, it is evident that John had in mind the descent of the Spirit from above like an outpoured stream of water. This baptism would be one of Spirit and fire in the sense that it would purify and purge the recipient by an agency more powerful than water. But if the verb βαπτίζω is to be coordinated with the Holy Spirit, then what is said of it also must be true of water baptism. For John the Baptist, βαπτίζω cannot have referred only to dipping and plunging in water. Rather, the verb must imply being drenched with water from above as well as from below.¹⁹

Good theology cannot rely merely on lexicons and grammars, but ultimately must grow organically from the canonical context; theologians must define and employ terms in the manner in which the Scriptures define and employ them. This canonical method simply recognizes the tried and true hermeneutical axiom: words mean nothing apart from a context. This aphorism can be modified: biblical words mean nothing apart from their immediate historical and broader redemptive-historical contexts. This redemptive-historical hermeneutical principle will be used in this essay to explain the doctrine of baptism.²⁰

PLAN OF THE PRESENT ESSAY

Given the observations made above, this essay will proceed along the following lines. Part I will survey the history of the doctrine. Ordinarily, a chapter or two on this subject might suffice, but given the scarcity of standard historical works on the doctrine of baptism, a greater amount of space must be employed.²¹ Any serious study of a doctrine must be done with an

19. Marshall, “The Meaning of the Verb ‘To Baptize,’” 139.

20. This is a decidedly different approach than Malone’s commitment to the grammatical-historical hermeneutic, one that eschews connections to the Old Testament (*Baptism of Disciples Only*, 28–29, 138–39, 219).

21. See Bryan Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From the*

awareness of its antecedent history. As J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937) observed, “A man cannot be original in his treatment of a subject unless he knows what the subject is; true originality is preceded by patient attention to the facts which, in application of modern pedagogic theory, is being neglected by the youth of the present day.”²² The historical study of baptism is a sorely missed element in recent treatments of the doctrine—in the hands of some writers, their cup of cappuccino has become all froth and no coffee.²³ Therefore, this part will survey the understanding of baptism from the post-apostolic church and trace it through the Middle Ages, the Counter-Reformation, the Reformation, the post-Reformation, and modern periods, examining key documents and theologians.

Part II will consist of a biblical-theological survey of the doctrine of baptism covering main themes connected with it, namely, baptism as new creation, covenant judgment, and eschatological judgment. This portion of the study will identify key concepts connected with the doctrine of baptism. In other words, it will show how the Bible itself unfolds the doctrine of baptism by exploring the three above-mentioned themes from the canon of Scripture. In terms of Geerhardus Vos’s (1862–1949) explanation of biblical theology, this section will trace these themes through the Scriptures with a line—the progressive unfolding of baptism from Genesis to Revelation.²⁴

Part III will employ the same biblical-theological data gathered in Part II, the straight line, in order to draw a systematic-theological circle.²⁵ In other words, there is the need to systematize the biblical-theological data to show how it all coheres. At the same time, this section will keep an eye to the historical issues and questions that were raised in Part I and provide

New Testament to the Council of Trent (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); and idem, *Reformation and Modern Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From Luther to Contemporary Practices* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

22. J. Gresham Machen, *What is Faith?* (1937; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 19.

23. Bockmuehl notes this trend among New Testament scholars vis-à-vis Martin Luther’s reading of the Pauline corpus (*Seeing the Word*, 37). The ignorance of the history of the doctrine of baptism is especially true of treatments coming from proponents of the so-called Federal Vision. See Douglas Wilson, *“Reformed” Is Not Enough: Recovering the Objectivity of the Covenant* (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2002), 85–108; E. Calvin Beisner, ed., *The Auburn Avenue Theology Pros and Cons: Debating the Federal Vision* (Fort Lauderdale, Fla.: Knox Theological Seminary, 2004), 233–44, 254–269; Steve Wilkins and Duane Garner, eds., *The Federal Vision* (Monroe, La.: Athanasius Press, 2004), 47–126.

24. Geerhardus Vos, “The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R, 1980), 23.

25. Vos, “Biblical Theology,” 23–24.

answers to them. Part III therefore will survey baptism as a means of grace, as a sacrament, and as a formal doctrine, and in terms of the recipients and the relationship of baptism to ecclesiology. Following Part III, the essay will conclude with some observations regarding the importance of the doctrine of baptism for the church.

THE ULTIMATE AIM OF THE STUDY

The overall goal of this book is to validate the exegetical and theological conclusions of the Westminster Confession of Faith on baptism: “Baptism is a sacrament of the new testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible church; but also, to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his engrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life” (WCF 28.1). However, understanding such a statement involves the idea that the sacraments are God’s visible revelation—what the Word is to the ear, the sacraments are to the other senses, but chiefly to the eyes. Recognizing that the sacraments are divine revelation means not only that they are signs of the covenant, but that they can be means either of covenant blessing or sanction.

There are no neutral encounters with God and His revelation, whether in Word or sacrament. Whether man receives Word and sacrament as covenant blessing or sanction depends on the presence or absence in the recipient of faith in the incarnate, crucified, risen, and ascended Messiah. Moreover, despite the insistence of some on one exclusive mode of baptism, all three modes—immersion, sprinkling, and pouring—are biblical, as all are connected in some way with the promised baptism of the Spirit.

Paul Tillich (1888–1965) once wrote of the “death of the sacraments.”²⁶ He believed that a complete disappearance of the sacramental element would lead to the disappearance of the cultus, and eventually to the dissolution of the visible church itself. This stinging observation is true of many churches. In some churches, the sacraments have been relegated to the museum of faith as relics and trappings of a bygone era. One Baptist church, which shall remain nameless, placed the administration of baptism in the “traditional” worship service, which was held in the evening for those who liked “old-time religion.” Baptism, apparently, was not considered

26. Paul Tillich, *The Protestant Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 94.

contemporary enough to be celebrated during the “contemporary” worship service. In other quarters, baptism is treated as a quaint sentimental observance dedicated to what P. T. Forsyth (1848–1921) called the “cult of the child.”²⁷ The cult of the child cuts across denominational lines, whether in the baptism of an infant in a Presbyterian church as congregants fawn over a newborn, or in the efforts of a small child to “swim” out of the baptismal pool in a Baptist church to the sound of muffled laughter. In the Roman Catholic setting, there seems to be no shortage of those who rarely darken the door of the church, but when a child is born they want to have him or her baptized, “just to be safe,” as if baptism were a “fire insurance policy.”

Surprisingly enough, Tillich believed that finding “the solution of the problem of ‘nature and sacrament’ is today a task on which the very destiny of Protestantism depends.”²⁸ In many ways, this is certainly a true statement, as not only are Protestants leaving Geneva for Rome or Constantinople, but an unawareness of exactly what the sacraments are has so relativized them that many Protestants see no difference between their own practice and that of the Roman Catholic Church.²⁹ Yet if the sacraments are objective revelation of God, then the church must recapture an understanding of their significance.

Would sentimentalism and saccharine emotions dominate congregations if they realized that a person is baptized into the death of Christ? Would characterizations of baptism solely as man’s pledge to God dominate if churches realized that baptism is God’s visible covenant promise when accompanied by the Word? Would as many languish in their struggles with a lack of assurance were their baptisms to echo throughout their lives—the echo of the sign and seal of the covenant promises of God in Christ? Would so many flippantly approach baptism or disregard it if they recognized that it is the objective, double-edged, blessing-and-sanction revelation of God? A biblical doctrine of baptism is crucial for the edification of the church and the glory of the triune Lord.

27. P. T. Forsyth, *The Church and Sacraments* (1917; London: Independent Press Ltd., 1955), 172.

28. Tillich, *Protestant Era*, 112.

29. See, e.g., Scott and Kimberly Hahn, *Rome Sweet Home: Our Journey to Catholicism* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993); Roger Beckwith, *Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009).