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Hermeneutics, the Analogy of Faith and New Testament Sacramental Realism

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INTRODUCTION

ALL types of sacramental theology represented in the historical spectrum of Christian understanding lay claim to the biblical text as a basis. In the modern situation this appeal is especially prominent in view of the new exegetical possibilities which exist. Advances in knowledge on all fronts, coupled with the rise of a more aware and scientific method in biblical theology, have produced a remarkable ferment in the reconsideration of the biblical doctrine of the sacraments. More and more the results of biblical theology are coming under the control of precise presuppositions of a historical rather than a theological type. Those who labour in this field are now specialists who at the same time are generally not systematic theologians. This is true both of Roman Catholic and Protestant scholars. The classical theological formulations control the results of biblical theology to a significantly smaller degree than ever before, although fundamental differences are still discernible.

All of this should be hailed as a signal advance toward a more genuine understanding of the actual contents of the biblical text. Anything which allows the text to speak for itself, anything which frees it from tradition, whether exegetical or theological, ought to be welcomed. A remarkable thing has occurred in this process of re-evaluation of the New Testament doctrine of the sacraments, especially among Protestant scholars. There is a strong trend toward the acceptance of the idea that the New Testament writers do actually

teach genuine sacramentalism. This development, which reflects the influence of the history of religions approach on scientific biblical theology, has brought to a head the old theological divergences which have existed from Reformation times between Roman Catholics and Protestants, and among Protestants themselves. The ecumenical ferment has added force and interest to this issue.

Our basic conviction concerning the way in which this issue is to be treated from a biblical point of view has been nicely stated by Donald Baillie in these words:

The amount of direct teaching in the New Testament about the sacraments is small, and there is lively controversy in our time as to its real meaning. There are many questions of exegesis that we cannot answer with certainty. Our reconstruction of sacramental theology must rather be based on a deeper understanding of the whole Christian message in the New Testament.¹

In short, the issue of sacramental theology in general and of sacramentalism in particular cannot be resolved simply in terms of the exegesis of the passages of the New Testament which deal with the sacraments. It is not a matter of exegesis simply, but of hermeneutics.

I. THE HERMENEUTICAL METHOD

Hermeneutics, as we are using the term here, involves both an historical and a theological aspect. The historical aspect of the hermeneutical effort is bound up in what may be called the "exegetical spiral," and can be broken down into a contextual component and a component of content. We begin with the contextual component. Every document springs from a particular context of history and thought. Every writer is in relation to some context. Positively a writer relates to some tradition of perspective. It may not be his own time or his own culture. But there is always some positive relation. Negatively a writer may oppose that which differs from his own perspective or, more constructively, he may attempt a synthesis or an assimilation. In either case he is influenced by that which he opposes. In the case of the New Testament writers, especially Paul and John, we must recognize initially that they stem both from the context of Palestinian Judaism, already influenced by Greek cultural patterns, and also from that of the early community of Palestinian Christianity. We begin with a general knowledge of the place and time in world history which belongs to them.

We then pick up the New Testament writings and begin to read. The reading is directed to the task of comprehending the structure and content of their thought-forms in their own context, both historical and intellectual. In this reading a large number of variables

¹ Donald M. Baillie, *The Theology of the Sacraments* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), p. 41.

are treated, from introductory issues of time, place and order of writing, through translation and understanding of critical concepts, to a clear perception of the whole structure of New Testament thought. In all of this there is a dynamic interaction between the grammatical and internal logical structure of the text and a general conception of the nature of the writer's context on the one side and the writer's relation to that context, both positive and negative, on the other. The analysis of the text, which depends upon some notion of context, in turn throws light on the context and the relation the writer bears to it. A key example of this interaction can be seen in the procedure by which a concept found in the text is gained. Involved are etymological, grammatical, literary and historical matters. But these are then put in relation to the actual use given to the particular concept by the writer; to the way in which the concept relates to the whole structure of the writer's thought. What we have here is not the "hermeneutical circle" but the "hermeneutical spiral." There is an essential circularity in the very methods of scientific hermeneutics. There must be presuppositions about text and writer prior to interpretation. Presuppositionless hermeneutics is an illusion.

This does not mean that all our knowledge of the writer's thought is necessarily relative in terms of our own thought forms. This is the meaning of the word "spiral." We say "spiral" because the strict application of the literary-historical method involves in itself a corrective to the need for presuppositions. Any hypothesis about the context can be tested by the text's actual structure and use of concepts. In this way hypotheses can be rejected or purified and strengthened. Similarly, any view of the structure of conceptual framework of the text can be tested against both the total structure of the writer's thought and also against the context of his thought. Through this process we are able to ascend to a more and more accurate perception of the thought of the writer as expressed in the text from his pen. In short, though it is admittedly complex and probabilistic, it is possible to gain an understanding of another man writing in another time and in another context.

II. THE ANALOGY OF FAITH

The theological component of the hermeneutical effort comes under the general concept of the analogy of faith. Here we rise above the level of the historical component which we have just described as the "hermeneutical spiral" into the spheres of systematic theological effort and of the history of theological ideas. The analogy of faith begins at the point where the "hermeneutical spiral" leaves off. The analogy of faith is a construct which emerges from the application of

systematic methods within a theological tradition to the data generated from the purely historical and exegetical efforts of the "spiral." On the first level this produces a biblical theology of a particular writer or class of writings in Scripture. What is involved is an effort to discern the meaning of leading concepts and the over-all structure of the thought expressed in the writings. This leads to the next step, the construction of a generalized view of the structure of New Testament thought (in its inner relatedness and in its contrasts). The same applies of course to the Old Testament. The final step, on a level which is purely that of biblical theology, involves an understanding of the relationship of the Old Testament and the New Testament within the total sweep of salvation history.

At this point the method of systematic theology takes over in order to put the result of biblical theology into relation to the whole of man's intellectual awareness, particularly in relation to general issues of logic and philosophy. Here an attempt is made to find the controlling principle in the totality of the biblical revelation. When such a principle is discerned and stated, it is used for a systematic delineation of the biblical record in order to organize and explicate the logical structure and movement of thought contained in the revelation. It is in this systematic effort that the greatest danger exists for the importation and imposition of alien presuppositions. In this, however, it shares a danger similar to that which exists for the historical component of the hermeneutical effort. In either case a necessity exists logically for the establishment of general assumptions which must be brought to the text. Ideally these assumptions should be of such a nature that they do not automatically preclude the possibility either of understanding the text or of altering the presuppositions in the light of the text.

It should not be supposed that the historical and systematic components of the hermeneutical process are related in a simple dependence. There is also an influence of the systematic upon the historical. At this point Baillie's comment becomes significant. What he says specifically of the sacramental teaching of the New Testament applies in many other instances. The inner coherence of thought (such as it is) can and must be used in the proper interpretation of the thought of the New Testament. This is especially so in the issue of New Testament sacramental doctrine. There is a great amount of obscurity involved in interpreting the fragmentary sacramental doctrine of the New Testament. The obscurity is etymological and historical. Here it is proper and scientific to apply the results of systematic thought (the fundamental assumptions of which are derived, it is hoped, from the text) to the doubtful points. The over-all structure of New Testament thought in general and of

individual writers in particular helps to define the possibilities of meaning for ambiguous expressions in the text. It can also suggest the probable role which should be played by such expressions in the general scheme of thought. Such a procedure is not merely the arbitrary application of *a priori* historical, theological, or philosophical traditions (although it can be). Rather, it is the very reasonable and necessary application both of a general assumption of coherence in human thought and also of a structure of thought itself derived from scientific observation. Of course not all writers are completely consistent. An attitude of openness should be maintained toward the possibility that various unconscious or unresolved tensions might exist within the thought structure of a particular writer or tradition.

Before we proceed with our examination of the relation of the analogy of faith to the New Testament text a few more limiting observations about the nature and application of the analogy of faith are required. First, since the analogy of faith is founded upon the historical-exegetical aspect of the hermeneutical task, it can in no wise be a substitute for it. Its application can only be on doubtful points (though doubtful points are not necessarily insignificant points). The analogy of faith is simply an awareness, founded upon observation, of the fundamental unity of the biblical record and the harmony of its parts. In this way one of the key principles of interpretation is allowed its due influence. This principle is that the clear, direct and didactic passages are to be used to interpret the obscure, incidental and figurative passages. The principle must not be used to rule out a sense of progress in the text. Unity and harmony do not rule out the possibility of progression in revelation, neither do they impose a specious uniformity on the whole. In other words, a balanced and sensitive application of the analogy of faith is required if its use is to be valid and not *a priori* in nature. So long as these limitations are recognized and given due weight the analogy of faith is an excellent and necessary tool in understanding the biblical message as a whole and in resolving questions which remain doubtful or obscure on a particular level.

III. REALISTIC SACRAMENTAL LANGUAGE

What are the actual phenomena in the New Testament in relation to the sacraments, especially as they reflect on the issue of sacramentalism or sacramental realism? First of all it is quite conspicuous that the New Testament has very little to say concerning the sacraments. The word "sacrament" in a technical sense does not even appear in the New Testament.² And there is nothing at all

² It appears in a non-technical sense in the Vulgate as a translation of the Greek μυστήριον. See, for example, Eph. 5: 32.

concerning sacramental efficacy as such. This lack of specific material is not surprising in view of the nature and purpose of the New Testament writers.

In the Synoptic Gospels we find three accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper in a Passover setting. Only Luke gives the command of repetition. All three, however, do use the significant words of Jesus "This is my body" and "This is my blood of the covenant," although Luke gives a modified form of the latter phrase. The "realism" here is the word "is." "This is my body" is a phrase which calls for some interpretation. With regard to baptism only Matthew records the dominical institution of it (Mark 16: 16 is certainly not original). The more significant texts are in relation to John's baptism. John's own statement concerning the contrast between his form of baptism in water and that of the One who was coming, who would baptize with the Holy Spirit, is the most significant (Mark 1: 8; Matt. 3: 11; Luke 3: 16; Acts 1: 5).

The Fourth Gospel is rather different from the Synoptics as regards the sacraments. There is no direct mention of the sacraments in the Gospel (except for the rather confused reference to Jesus' baptizing in John 4: 1, 2). As we have already seen, however, the Fourth Gospel has a considerable sacramental interest. In fact when the texts in John 3: 5 and 6: 52-58 are taken as directly related to baptism and the Eucharist, they serve as examples of the highest degree of sacramental "realism" in the New Testament.

The book of Acts has a number of references to the sacraments, especially to baptism. There is nothing of a didactic nature in the references; rather there is an interesting diversity exhibited in the mentions of baptism, especially in connection with the reception of the Holy Spirit and the laying on of apostolic hands. The general teaching of the book of Acts, however, is fairly consistent. Baptism is viewed as a concrete expression of the Gospel itself and of the entrance of the individual into the Christian community of the redeemed. Forgiveness of sins and the reception of the Holy Spirit were particularly associated with baptism. The order of events in baptism was that typified by Acts 18: 8, "many . . . hearing . . . believed and were baptized." There are a couple of references to baptism which might be termed "realistic." Acts 2: 38 and 22: 16 both speak of baptism for the remission or washing away of sins. These call for some analysis in connection with the issue of sacramental efficacy.

In the Pauline corpus we find the only discussion on a didactic level to be discovered anywhere in the New Testament. Romans 6: 1-11 includes a reference, incidental to be sure, to baptism in a

didactic setting. Certainly verse 4, "we were buried with him by baptism into death," has a very "realistic" ring to it. (Col. 2: 12 is very much along the lines of Rom. 6: 4.) There are a number of other "realistic" usages of the term "baptism" in the Pauline corpus. Titus 3: 5 is perhaps the most significant: "He [God] saved us . . . by washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit. . . ." Gal. 3: 27; Eph. 5: 26; 1 Cor. 6: 11; 12: 13; 1: 13 are other texts which deserve consideration in this regard. The "realistic" element in the Pauline discussion of the Lord's Supper centres on the precise background and significance of the use of *κοινωνία*. Both 1 Cor. 10: 1-22 and 11: 17-32 contain many phrases which can be construed in a "realistic" manner, particularly 11: 27, 29, 30.

In the Petrine epistles, 1 Peter 3: 21, which stands in a notoriously obscure context exegetically, is one of the strongest expressions regarding baptism as a salvation-event in the New Testament. The sacramental realism, which it is possible to see here, must be recognized in some way on the level of the theological aspect of the hermeneutical task. We cannot, of course, deal with the sacramental language of the New Testament either exegetically or in terms of a constructive biblical theology in this context. But we must ask what are the implications of this "realistic" sacramental language in the New Testament, particularly in relation to the analogy of faith. What is the significance of this phenomenon? What are the limits within which such language must be understood? Where does the analogy of faith enter in treating the "realistic" texts of the New Testament?

For sacramentalists and those influenced by the notion that Paul and John are strongly dependent upon either the Greek Mysteries or incipient gnosticism as their sacramental milieu, there is little need to do more than accept and explicate the texts as they stand as realistically as possible. For them the analogy of faith is already explicitly founded on the sacramental principle and nothing remains to be said.³ It should be noted that the analogy of faith in this instance is both the sacramentalist tradition and the "realistic" language of the New Testament. Tradition stands in the place of the historical aspect of the hermeneutical task.

³ Cf. R. Schnackenburg, the very fine Roman Catholic New Testament scholar, in his book *Baptism in the Thought of St. Paul*, translated by G. R. Beasley-Murray (New York, Herder and Herder, 1964), p. 134: "In fact, the Pauline baptismal texts only allow of being interpreted in a realistic sense. Since scholarship, including the Protestant camp, widely admits this fact, we may spare ourselves a detailed proof of it." The problem is not "realism" but the significance and limits of it.

For those in the evangelical tradition the matter is not so passive. The analogy of faith is actively applied to the text in order to avoid confusion and contradictions within the text as a whole. It will be instructive to observe how this actually operates. John Calvin, the "Prince of Exegetes," will serve very well as an example at this point.⁴ We need not take every text to illustrate the application; a few will suffice. In Acts 2: 38 Peter makes the following statement regarding baptism: "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Calvin comments thus on this text:

That needeth no long exposition where he commandeth them to be baptized for the remission of sins; for although God hath reconciled men unto himself in Christ . . . and doth now imprint in our hearts the faith thereof by his Spirit; yet, notwithstanding, because baptism is the seal whereby he doth confirm unto us this benefit, and so, consequently, the earnest and pledge of our adoption, it is worthily said to be given us for the remission of sins. For because we receive Christ's gifts by faith, and baptism is a help to confirm and increase our faith, remission of sins, which is an effect of faith, is annexed unto it as an inferior mean [*sic*].⁵

Calvin is aware of the use made of this text in Roman Catholic theology but he immediately avoids a sacramentalist understanding by adducing that which is clearest in the analogy of faith, that all God's gifts are found in Christ Himself and are received fully and exclusively by means of faith given by the Holy Spirit. When this is kept in view Peter's language must be understood in an attenuated sense which rules out causality and stresses the sign and seal aspect of baptism. In commenting on Ananias' statement to Paul, "Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22: 16), Calvin is even more precise and theological:⁶ "But because it may seem that by this means more is attributed to the outward and corruptible element than is meet, the question is, whether baptism be the cause of our purging." Again the questioning and hesitating in the face of "realistic" sacramental language is evident. This is so because to take it without consideration would involve a contradiction of the analogy of faith as Calvin understood

⁴ The specific theological basis of what Calvin does with the sacramental texts could be treated under the concept of *phraseologia sacramentalis* which is itself based upon the theological notion of *unio sacramentalis*. But this actually falls under the hermeneutical rule of the analogy of faith, since it is but a formalization of the analogy of faith in connection with a specific issue—sacramentalism.

⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary Upon the Acts of the Apostles*, translated by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), Vol. 1, p. 119.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 302.

it. He replies to his own question with the following careful statements which embody the substance of the analogy of faith for the evangelical tradition:

Wherefore, we must hold this, first, that it is God alone who washeth us from our sins by the blood of his Son; and to the end this washing may be effectual in us, he worketh by the hidden power of his Spirit. Therefore, when the question is concerning remission of sins, we must seek no other author thereof but the heavenly Father, we must imagine no other material cause but the blood of Christ; and when we come to the formal cause, the Holy Ghost is chief. But there is an inferior instrument and that is the preaching of the word and baptism itself.⁷

A whole structure of causality is brought to bear on this particular text to avoid the sacramentalist understanding and to provide a view which accords with the broader base of the biblical witness. Calvin concludes that

Therefore, forasmuch as baptism doth help our faith, that it may reap forgiveness of sins by the blood of Christ alone, it is called the washing of the soul. So that the washing . . . doth not note out the cause; but is referred unto the understanding of Paul, who having received the sign, knew better that his sins were done away.⁸

We bring forward one more instance of Calvin's method of applying the analogy of faith to sacramental texts.⁹ In Galatians 3: 27 Paul, in developing his argument concerning the relation of the Law and Christ, makes the following statement: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Calvin brings out further principles of interpretation in dealing with this statement. He says:

But the argument, that, because they have been baptized they have put on Christ, appears weak; for how far is baptism from being efficacious in all? Is it reasonable that the grace of the Holy Spirit should be so closely linked to an external symbol? Does not the uniform doctrine of Scripture, as well as experience, appear to confute this statement?¹⁰

Here he again raises the question of the propriety of realistic sacramental statements. This time he explicitly points to the analogy of faith as being contrary to such a mode of understanding (not of speech). He continues after these questions thus:

I answer, it is customary with Paul to treat of the sacraments in two points of view. When he is dealing with hypocrites, in whom the mere symbol awakens pride, he then proclaims loudly the emptiness and worthlessness of the outward symbol, and denounces, in strong terms, their foolish confidence. In such cases he contemplates not the ordinance of God, but the corruption

⁷ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

⁹ All the rest of his comments on texts relating to the sacraments are uniformly consistent with what we have seen here.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, translated by William Pringle (Grand Rapids, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1949), p. 111.

of wicked men. When, on the other hand, he addresses believers, who make proper use of the symbols he then views them in connexion with the truth—which they represent. In this case, he makes no boast of any false splendour as belonging to the sacraments, but calls our attention to the actual fact represented by the outward ceremony. Thus, agreeably to the Divine appointment, the truth comes to be associated with the symbols.¹¹

Here we find an awareness of the various modes in which Scripture speaks of the sacraments as well as a full recognition of the union of sign and reality in the believer by the Spirit's operation. In this way realistic language is accepted in its seriousness and value, while yet being preserved from views that are contrary to the analogy of faith which puts all in Christ and is received by faith alone.

For the sake of comparison and contrast we adduce here just two brief comments by Roman Catholic interpreters on Titus 3: 5. The first comment is by Rudolf Schnackenburg, the justly renowned New Testament scholar, whose works are modern and scientific in spirit and generally unfettered by theological orthodoxy (we do not mean he is un-orthodox!). This is his comment:

Is this intended to supply a closer definition, 'bath of regeneration,' or does it denote a second means of consecration alongside baptism? Without doubt it serves solely to characterize the saving event that takes place at 'regeneration,' for the primitive Church knew only baptism as a decisive means of deliverance, cf. Acts 2: 38; 16: 31; John 3: 3-5; 1 Pet. 3: 20 f.; Mark 16: 16.¹²

There is here a different understanding of the analogy of faith at work, one founded upon the acceptance of the Sacramental Principle. Schnackenburg raises no questions at all concerning the sacramentalist interpretation of baptism. He seems only concerned to prevent a false view that renewal by the Spirit could be separated from baptism.

The second example of Roman Catholic treatment is found in *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, edited by Bernard Orchard and others (New York, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1953), on p. 925. The commentator (R. J. Foster) writes:

This laver or bath of regeneration is Baptism, by which we are delivered from that slavery of sin into which we were born (our first birth) and become sons of God (our regeneration or second birth) cf. Jn. 3: 3 ff. "Renovation of the Holy Ghost"—expresses another aspect of our regeneration; it is a renewal effected by the Holy Spirit, the production of a new "being"—sin, actual and original, is remitted by the infusion of a new life which takes the place of spiritual death.

Again there is no questioning. Baptism is understood here without qualifications. The statement stands as it is in accord with the analogy of faith understood from a sacramentalist viewpoint.

What are we to say, then, concerning the sacramental realism in the New Testament? It is obvious that this question cannot be

¹¹ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

answered in any simple or decisive way which will compel assent. We can only make a few observations which will indicate especially the limits which must be placed upon the understanding of New Testament usage. First of all, though the New Testament certainly uses language which can be regarded as realistic, that is, language which indicates an actual ontological efficacy in the sacraments, yet this can be viewed simply as an example of spiritual metonymy resulting primarily from the actual historical situation. In baptism, for instance, this is especially clear. The basic New Testament emphasis on faith as a response to the gospel and on faith as the fundamental instrument in justification precludes the need for careful, logical distinctions in regard to baptism. Baptism was not a subject of controversy in the early Church. Therefore baptism and the Lord's Supper, rich in the basic content of the Gospel message, served as a basis for parenetic expression which would be common to all in the Christian community. The incidental nature of all the references to the sacraments not only accounts in part for their obscurity, but also accounts for the lack of precision in speaking of them. The fact that they occur as often as they do indicates the strong place they held in the common life of the early Church. In contrast, when Paul was faced with the vital controversy concerning the Judaizing error, he multiplied distinctions and gave forth carefully reasoned arguments for the gospel and against the error.

Further, the practice of baptism was such that the dramatic change wrought by the Holy Spirit in hearing and believing the Gospel tended to be focused on the immediate event of baptism as a concretization of the convert's response of faith and of the application of the Gospel promises to him individually. To the new believer baptism marked a drastic break with a sinful past, official entrance into the Christian Church, an official acceptance of the yoke of Christ and a placing of the believing individual under the Triune Name, an act which proclaimed that the gospel was for that particular person. Because all of this was compressed in a short span (cf. the Ethiopian eunuch or the Philippian jailor) and was inevitably attended with profound subjective spiritual experiences (cf. the typical appearance of charismata in Acts in association with baptism), it was natural to speak realistically.

Secondly, we must take note that, without any doubt, the complex of Word and Faith dominated the apostolic activity of proclaiming the gospel of Christ and His saving work, with a corresponding demand for a response of repentance and faith. Paul's argument in Romans 10: 9-17 is a paradigm for this emphasis. Paul's own comment about his apostolic task in 1 Cor. 1: 17 (not meant as a deprecation of baptism by any means) justifies the evaluation that baptism, at least, is an "appendix" to the word of the gospel preached

in demonstration of the Spirit and of power and received in lively faith. Even in the realistic texts there is always an explicit and strong emphasis on the presence of an active faith on the part of the recipients of baptism and the participants in the Supper. Certainly the most realistic language of the New Testament falls far short of any magical, mechanical or moralistic view of the sacraments. The New Testament always contains a genuine recognition of the evangelical realities of faith and the operation of the Holy Spirit.

Even more, speaking from the perspective of detailed hermeneutics, we must face the question of which text interprets which. Here we see the issue of internal consistency as of central importance. The most didactic exposition of soteriological doctrine in the New Testament is Paul's letter to the Romans, which touches all the fundamentals of the gospel of God—justification by faith, sanctification by the Spirit, election of grace. Yet this completely passes by the sacraments except in an incidental, parenetic way in the reference to baptism in Rom. 6: 1-4. Certainly the "Golden Chain" of Romans 8: 29, 30 leaves no place for sacraments (unless it be interpolated). The Lord's Supper is completely absent in Paul's most systematic theological effort. Too many of the didactic texts bypass the sacraments in favour of faith (cf. Acts 16: 31; Rom. 10: 9; Eph. 2: 8, 9). The situation here is not unlike that involved in the agelong controversy involved in harmonizing the strong texts on election and predestination on the one side and those implying man's responsibility and the danger of apostasy. In the harmonization, which group of texts is to be taken as primary and which as secondary? The whole sense of Scripture, the analogy of faith in its totality, is involved in the decision. A sensitivity to the basic tenor of Scripture is needed to render a serviceable judgment. We only note here that the historical background does not require a sacramentalist view and that the theological fact of the dominance of the word-faith complex does not point in that direction either.

One final point should be made concerning the sacramental issue. It may seem obvious, but it is not unimportant, that there is absolutely nothing in the New Testament like a theory of the operation or efficacy of the sacraments. There is really no didactic teaching at all on the sacraments, much less any contemplation of causality. There is no speculation in the New Testament. The whole is oriented toward the objectivity of salvation in the person and work of Jesus Christ and toward the role of the Holy Spirit and faith in relating the individual to that objective reality. Because no theory, or hint at one, is to be found in the New Testament—a sacramentalist would not usually expect one of course—there are definite limits to what the sacramentalist may say concerning sacramental efficacy and still remain on biblical ground. The most that can be done is to point to

the realistic language of the New Testament and to demand that it be taken seriously. It is possible, however, to take such language seriously and yet also, in a fine balance with the analogy of faith, to deny any sacramentalist implications to the texts. This, for example, has been accomplished very nicely in Reformed sacramental teaching. It makes the necessary logical distinctions to avoid confusion and yet, through the dynamic concept of *unio sacramentalis*, it is able to speak fully and strongly on the ontological realities involved in the sacraments.

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