

Luther and Lutheranism's anti-rebaptistic Anti-Anabaptism -- by Prof. Dr. F.N. Lee

In his own work *Concerning Rebaptism* (1528), Luther thrashes the Anabaptists. They had over-emphasized the subjective and downgraded the objective side of baptism. Yet, Luther retorted, important as faith is -- it is the Word, and not faith, which is the basis of baptism. Any would-be baptizer who regards faith on the part of the baptizee as essential for the validity of the baptism -- can never consistently administer baptism. For he can never be certain that faith in Christ really is present.

It is possible, concedes Luther, that some might conceivably doubt the validity of their own infant baptisms. For they might well have no irrefutable evidence that they even then already truly believed. They might then conceivably wish to request (re-)baptism -- when adults.

That request, however, should not be granted! Instead, insists Luther, the one making this request should be told that even if he were thus to be 'baptized' a second time -- Satan might well soon trouble him again, as to whether he then too really had faith. Then he would have to be 'baptized' yet again -- a third time -- and so on, *ad infinitum*, for just as long as any such doubts kept recurring.

"For it often happens that one who thinks that he has faith," explains Luther, "has none whatever -- and that one who thinks that he has no faith but only doubts, actually believes. We are not told 'he who knows he believes' nor 'he who thinks he is sure he believes' [shall be saved]..., but 'he that believes [and is baptized] shall be saved' [Mark 16:16]....

"The man who bases his baptism on his faith -- is not only uncertain.... He is...godless and hypocritical.... For he puts his trust in what is not his own -- viz., a gift [of faith in Jesus] which God has given him -- and not in the Word of God alone." Consequently, even though at the time of baptism there be no faith -- the baptism, nevertheless, is still valid.⁹⁹

As already noted, Luther died in 1546. His *Collected Works* (or *Gesamtausgabe*) were printed in Jena from 1555 to 1558, in twelve volumes. Also therefrom, in 1570 a *Thesaurus* (or *Treasury*) of Luther's writings was selected from all of his works which had that far been collected. This *Treasury* adds the following about baptism and the Anabaptists:

"We were born from Adam and Eve, unto this life. Thus the same old man would be born in sin and unto death, and need to be born again unto righteousness and everlasting life by the power of the Holy Spirit.... Therefore do not look to the hand and mouth of the minister who only takes water, and speaks a little word [Matthew 28:16-20]! That alone is but a slight action which fills only one's eyes and ears, and indeed does nothing as far as blind reason is concerned -- except that baptism is constituted according to the Word and work of God Who, truly, is the Baptizer! That is why it also has such power, as the Holy Spirit testifies through St. Paul [Romans 4:11 & 6:3-14 and Colossians 2:11-13 *etc.*]....

"I shall and will not risk...depending on who a minister is, or what he believes. But in order that my baptism be certain -- I want to look at its Establisher, and listen to what His Word and command is! The minister must indeed be there, and extend his hand and mouth to

it. But I would not be pointed to the visible [human baptizer], but to the invisible Baptizer Who established and ordained baptism....

"God supplies the minister, be he whatever he may.... He [the minister] does not baptize in my name, nor in that of Peter or Paul [*cf.* First Corinthians 1:13-16]...but in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is Thereinto that I see the baptizee baptized...or sprinkled with water! Thus, I know that such is a correct baptism. For Scripture clearly testifies this.... For here it is God the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost Himself Who baptizes.

"That is why St. John portrays baptism so that we should not regard it only as water. For Christ, he says [First John 5:6], does not come with water alone -- as the Anabaptists [*Wiederteuffer*] allege... Peter [First Epistle 1:2 & 3:20 *cf.* Second Peter 1:16-21 & 3:13-18] says that one is baptized and sprinkled with the blood of the guiltless Christ.... Peter [First Epistle 1:2 & 1:23-25] says that sprinkling means nothing else but preaching.... The water of sprinkling, is Holy Scripture....

"Therefore such preaching and baptizing [Matthew 28:19] is equivalent to being sprinkled with the blood of Christ Himself. Only, here it occurs Spirit-ually -- for corporal sprinkling does nothing.... That is why I must therefore hide and mask it -- lest you should say: 'I don't see anything in baptism but the water with which the baptizer baptizes...and sprinkles the little child; and I hear nothing but the words "I baptize you in the Name [*etc.*]" being spoken!' But the Word and faith tell me that God Himself is there....

"Concerning the fruit resulting from baptism..., we are punishable if we do not augment that doctrine with a life [accordingly]. For wherever the doctrine and faith are right, also the same fruit shall follow -- and we live as a baptizee should.... But whenever the doctrine is false -- there too also the life is no help..., but both get lost and evaporate....

"Papists...and the herd of Anabaptists do this to holy baptism, whenever they merrily struggle against the ordinance of God.... That deserves no sword or temporal punishment! But it does deserve the devil himself, and everlasting hellfire....

"Peter and Paul warn that one is able to detect, from our lives, whenever we have received baptism usefully and blessedly.... For here one must see to it that the devil...not prevent us from treating baptism unrighteously.... May the baptismal font never testify against us!....

"Dear brethren, I have never taught you that baptism should give freedom to sin.... But now, you should love another life -- and relinquish sin! Having been baptized, yet remaining in sin -- are irreconcilable with each other [Romans 6:1-18].... For it [baptism] has been given, so that sin be removed -- and so that one now, henceforth, becomes pious and increases in good works.... Wherever you do not do so -- don't think that things around you are right...and that you can excuse your sins!... For to remain your old self -- and to continue in anger, impatience and envy -- indicates that you have received holy baptism unto great damage [*cf.* Mark 16:16 and Hebrews 6:1-8].

"Thus, if you were an adulterer or a whoremonger or a miser -- baptism teaches you henceforth no longer to be violent or to fornicate or to be miserly or to steal and to rob.... Henceforth -- be a pious and a righteous and a benevolent and a modest person!... But if you remain the same as previously -- nothing can help you. For [then,] you are not honouring nor treating your baptism purely.... You may indeed be called a Christian. But you have certainly let go of Christ, and are sinning against your Lord and serving the devil.... You no longer have the name and appearance of Christianity.... You are deceiving yourself, and doing yourself damage....

"Once again. He who does not live...the way he should, dishonours and defames both his own doctrine and his baptism. He testifies against himself that he is not worthy of grace, and is nothing but a stain and excrement among Christians -- as Peter called such [in his Second Epistle 2:18-22]. Therefore let us too seriously and diligently attempt to be found among those who taste and adorn [baptism as] this high treasure of ours -- also with a life and walk toward God as well as before the world!...

"Concerning infant baptism.... Children are rightly baptized, and they too believe.... Such infant baptism devolves from the Apostles [Acts 2:14-39 & 16:15 & 16:33 & 18:8 and Romans 4:11 & 6:3f and First Corinthians 1:16 & 7:14 & 16:15 and Colossians 2:11-13].... So we cannot reject it, and must let it remain! For nobody has yet been able to prove that children, in baptism, cannot believe -- nor that such baptisms are not right.... For wherever baptism is right and useful, it blesses the children (who believe as we do)....

"If infant baptism were not right -- God would not have allowed it to continue for so long, and so generally, throughout Christendom.... It is precisely the Anabaptists (*Widerteuffer*) who violate it....

"Christians all over the world...regard the children [of believers] as believers. Therefore they have upheld infant baptism, and not allowed it to die out.... In addition, all heretics have died out -- who have been much more recent and newer than infant baptism!...

"God has at all times baptized many children.... He has illuminated and adorned them with the Holy Spirit, and with understanding Scripture [Jeremiah 1:5 and Luke 41-44 *cf.* Acts 2:38f and First Corinthians 7:14 and First Timothy 1:5 and Second Timothy 3:14f]....

"Previously, none have been driven to rebaptism (*Widertaufe*).... The first baptism is correct, and rebaptism is wrong....

"If infant baptism were to be wrong, there would have been no Christendom for more than a thousand years! That is impossible. Then, the article of the [*Apostles*'] *Creed* 'I believe in a holy Christian Church' would be false....

"If infant baptism were to be wrong..., Christendom would have been without baptism for a very long time. If it had been without baptism, it would not have been Christianity. For Christendom is the bride of Christ, subject and obedient to Him. It has His Spirit, His Word, His baptism [Ephesians 4:4-5]....

"If infant baptism had not been general in all the world, but had like the Papacy been received in only some places -- the Anabaptists might have had some credibility.... But in the whole world throughout the entirety of Christendom, infant baptism has kept on -- even until today....

"This agrees with that Scripture where St. Paul says of the Antichrist, Second Thessalonians 2, that he would sit in the temple of God. As it is God's temple [or Church], it is not a den of heretics -- but the right Christendom which must indeed have had the right baptism even under the Pope and the Turk [alias oppressive Islam] and in the whole world.

"Christ called the little children to come and to be brought to Him, Matthew 19, and says: 'Of such is the kingdom of heaven.' The Apostles baptized whole households [Acts 2:38f & 16:15 & 16:30-33 & 18:8 and First Corinthians 1:1-2 & 1:16 & 7:14 & 16:15].... John [the Apostle] wrote to little children [First John 2:12f cf. John 21:15f].... And John [the older half-cousin of Jesus] became a believer in his mother's womb [Luke 1:15 & 1:41-44]....

"These sayings are not enough for the swarms of anabaptistic heretics (*Schwermer*)!... For us, they are enough.... For us, they are certainly enough.... It [infant baptism] is nowhere against Scripture, but in accordance with Scripture [Romans 4:11f and First Corinthians 7:14 and Colossians 2:11-13 cf. Genesis 17:6-14]....

"God has made His covenant with all nations through the Gospel [Matthew 28:19 cf. Revelation 7:2-4 & 14:1 & 15:4 & 21:24-26 & 22:3-4], and has instituted baptism as its sign. Who can exclude the little children therefrom?... The old covenant with its sign of circumcision made Abraham's children [to be marked as] believers.... They were the people of God.... He said: 'I will be the God of your seed!' [Genesis 17:6-14].

"This must be much more so, in the new covenant with its sign [of baptism]!... We baptize all, freely.... Nobody is excluded, save those [like the Judaists and the Muslims] who place themselves outside, and who do not wish to accept such a covenant.

"When we, according to His [*viz.* Christ's] command, baptize all -- we take care that the baptizees believe. That we do, when we preach and baptize [Matthew 28:19 cf. Mark 16:16].... We plant, and water; and we let God give the growth [Isaiah 44:3-5 & 52:15f cf. First Corinthians 3:2-6 & 7:14 & 16:15]!"

The 1530 *Augsburg Confession* (later endorsed also by John Calvin), declares¹⁰⁰ that the Lutheran churches "condemn the Anabaptists...who imagine that the Holy Spirit is given to men -- without the outward Word -- through their own preparation and works.... They condemn the Anabaptists, who allow not the baptism of children....

"They condemn the Anabaptists...who teach that those who have once been holy, cannot fall again.... They condemn the Anabaptists who...contend that some men may attain to such a perfection in this life that they cannot sin.... They condemn the Anabaptists who forbid...civil offices [to Christians].... They condemn the Anabaptists who think that there shall be an end of torments to condemned men and the devils."

Also in the 1577 *Formula of Concord*, three decades after the death of Luther the later Lutherans declared¹⁰¹ that "the Anabaptists are divided into many sects -- of which some maintain more, some fewer, errors. Nevertheless, in a general way -- they all profess such a doctrine as can be tolerated neither in the Church; nor by the police and in the commonwealth; nor in daily [domestic and social] life."

The *Formula* then mentions "'Anabaptist Articles' which cannot be endured in the Church." It claims that "this 'righteousness' of the Anabaptists consists in great part in a certain arbitrary and humanly-devised sanctimony, and in truth is nothing else than some new sort of monkery."

These intolerable 'Anabaptist Articles' include the one "that infants, not baptized, are not sinners before God -- but just and innocent." Concerning "baptism," continues the Lutheran *Formula of Concord*, "in the opinion of the Anabaptists, they [infants] have no need" of baptism or of salvation. "Infants [say the Anabaptists] ought not to be baptized until they attain the use of reason, and are able themselves to profess their faith...."

"They [the Anabaptists] neither make much account of the baptism of children, nor take care to have their children baptized. This conflicts with the express words of the divine promise (Genesis 17:7 *sqq.*). For this only holds good to those who observe the covenant of God, and do not contemn it."