Johann Gerhard's Doctrine of the Sacraments

David P. Scaer

WORD AND SACRAMENTS

Sacraments in Johann Gerhard's theology are external confirmations of the word, that is the gospel, to create and confirm faith. The word was both divine command and promise. As the word is directed to man's soul,

1 Johann Gerhard (1582–1637) was, after Martin Luther and Martin Chemnitz, the most significant Lutheran theologian in classical Lutheranism and known as the 'archtheologian' of the seventeenth century. From 1616 he was professor at the University of Jena and his dogmatics, Loci Communes, was the standard dogmatics in post-Reformation Lutheranism. The writer expresses his gratitude to the Reverend James D. Heiser, Director of the Johann Gerhard Institute of Decatur, Illinois for reading through the manuscript and for his many helpful suggestions.

2 Citations are taken from the fourth volume of John Gerhard, Loci Theologici, ed. Preuss (Berlin: Gustaf Schlawitz, 1866). This first appeared in 1657, twenty years after Gerhard had died in 1637, and was edited by his son. Editions continued during the period of Lutheran orthodoxy until 1767 when rationalism was becoming firmly entrenched. The Preuss edition appeared in 1866. An English translation was made by Richard J. Dinda with the title The Theological Commonplaces of John Gerhard and is available only in typescript and microfiche (St Louis, Miss.: Concordia, 1981). The Dinda translation provides a basis for most quotations from Gerhard in this essay. The Latin word loci, which appears in the title of Gerhard's work and is translated as 'commonplaces', refers to the separate categories or topic headings in which the various doctrines are presented. Gerhard's discussion on baptism was assigned to locus 18; circumcision and passover to 19; and the sacrament of baptism to 20. References to the fourth volume of Gerhard's Loci will be taken from the Preuss edition with numbers of locus and paragraphs following, for example '191 (18:2)'. References taken from other volumes will be preceded by the volume number, e.g., '1.5:32'.
the sacraments are intended for both soul and body, a view Gerhard credits to Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianzenus. For example in the Lord’s Supper there is a spiritual eating for the soul and a sacramental eating for the body. What is proclaimed to the ears in preaching is held before the eyes in the sacraments, a principle characterizing God’s revelation. The correlation between God’s revelation as audible word and external sign and man’s nature as body and soul supports Gerhard’s contention that the sacraments belong to God’s original creative purposes. Through sacraments spiritual mysteries deeper than those given in the divine image are revealed to man. While word and sacraments are two different operations of God, everything which belongs to the word is attributed to the sacraments, which on that account are called visible words. The word provides the sacraments with their authority, power and dignity. Sacraments have particular workings which cannot be attributed to the word in general. Roman Catholics had distinguished the word consecrating the sacraments from the proclaimed word. Gerhard does not dispute the distinction but holds that the word consecrating the external elements as sacraments is also the word proclaiming salvation. Such elements, not through a change of substance, but through a union of earthly and heavenly things, no longer serve a secular but a sacred purpose.

Both before and after the Fall sacraments bring man into a closer and permanent relation with God, but in the state of sin they confer forgiveness, their final cause. Man was created holy with a flawless knowledge of God, but certain divine mysteries were to be known to him only by his eating of the fruit of the tree of life. The tree was Christ and the fruit was the sacrament, an argument borrowed from Augustine:

3 137 (18:2).
4 Following the lead of the Reformer, Lutherans have hesitated to use John 6 in their discussion of the eucharist, a point to which Bellarmine took exception. Gerhard’s distinction between a sacramental eating and a spiritual one permitted him to deny that the former is discussed here, but he paradoxically held that John 6 ‘sets forth the spiritual eating and fruit of the Lord’s Supper’ (144 [18:17]). Perhaps the best explanation is that he was convinced exegetically of Bellarmine’s argument, but Lutheran tradition did not allow him to accept it. Gerhard ate his cake and still had it.
5 169 (18:55).
6 163 (18:51).
7 Luther understands the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as a sacrament but I have not found where he says this of the tree of life. Luther’s Works, American Edition, eds. J. Pelikan and H.T. Lehmann (St Louis: Concordia/Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955–), 1:95. Calvin sees the tree of life as a guarantee of immortality Institutes 4.14.18.
Therefore, in a certain way the tree of life was also Christ the Rock. God wanted man to live in paradise but without physically revealing the mysteries of spiritual things. Man therefore had food on the rest of the trees but a sacrament in that tree.

The trees of the garden provided for man's physical needs, but in the tree of life, which was set aside by a promise, God intended to lead Adam into mysteries higher and deeper than those which were innately his by his special creation. Man's creation in God's image was the prelude to an even better life. The pattern for Gerhard's sacramental understanding is derived from Genesis 2, developed through the Old Testament and culminates in baptism and the Lord's Supper in the New Testament. This pattern becomes important in his debate with the Roman Catholic theologian Robert Bellarmine who denied that Old Testament rites were sacraments of grace. By contrast, Gerhard argued that sacraments in both testaments are not isolated rites but extensions of the presence of Christ from whom they receive their essence and efficacy. By eating the fruit of the tree of life, Adam would have shared in Christ himself. Hence sacraments are more than empty rituals or mechanistic magical forms. In the sacraments of both Old and New Testament, one deals directly with Christ but more intensely so in baptism and the Lord's Supper. 'So also the sacraments are not significative of the absence of Christ but exhibitive of His presence'.

Deprived of the tree of life, man was provided with other sacramental avenues through which he and God could approach each other. Wherever God gave the Word, he provided signs as sacraments. Just as circumcision and the passover held the place of honour among the Old Testament sacraments, so baptism and the Lord's Supper hold this position now. Each sacrament within a designated period of time has its particular signification, purpose and function, a view Gerhard took from Luther's Lectures on Genesis. The sacraments of one era cannot be equated or interchanged with those of another time, though they share certain similarities. Baptism and circumcision are sacraments of initiation, the one a prerequisite for the passover and the other for the eucharist, but baptism does not make a distinction between male and female or Jews and Gentiles as circumcision did. Circumcision signifies an internal circumcision of

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8 137 (18:2).
9 141 (18:10).
10 176 (18:64), 'Ergo etiam sacramenta verbo promissionis addita tam in V. quam N.T. pertinent.'
11 177 (18:64); 164 (18:46).
12 160-1 (18:44)
the heart in infants and baptism an internal washing of sins. As necessary as the sacraments are for forgiveness, the sacramental principle is set in place as part of the original creation and is not a divine afterthought or response to a fallen humanity. Sacraments are neither an exception to God’s creative design nor originally intended as a divine condescension to sinners, but are the ordinary ways in which God approaches man. Gerhard can speak of God addressing himself to human weakness in the sacraments.

Where Genesis chapter two provides the basis for living sacramentally with God, chapter three adds sacrifice to the definition of a sacrament. By providing skins as clothing for Adam and Eve, God showed that sacrifice of life, in this case the lives of animals, was necessary and so established sacrifice as a required ritual. Before and after the institution of circumcision and passover as the authentic sacraments of the Old Testament, sacrifices served as sacraments. The rite was as much a sacrifice in which man gave himself to God as it was a sacrament revealing mysteries to believers. God accepted Abel’s sacrifices and showed his approval of other sacrifices, including those mandated in Leviticus, by sending fire from heaven to consume them. Gerhard also understood the rainbow as sacramental, an external sign for the covenant God made with Noah, although it did not offer what baptism did. Both Old and New Testament sacraments conferred grace, but these rites were not of equal value or interchangeable and did not have the same internal content or external signification. Old Testament sacraments were temporary and New Testament ones permanent. The debate over whether Old Testament sacraments conferred grace did not come up with the Reformed theologians who consistently denied this benefit to any rite, but with the Roman Catholics. Bellarmine defended a view, put forward by the Council of Florence in 1439 and taken up by the Council of Trent (1545–60), that grace was given only in the New Testament rites. Following Luther, Gerhard holds that ‘these sacraments of the ancients … have the same use and purpose which the sacraments of the New
Testament have'. Considering that Gerhard devoted one *locus* each to circumcision and passover, this was no small matter for him. Lutherans, rather than Catholics, took a consistent sacramental approach to the Bible.

**THE DEFINITION OF SACRAMENT**

Gerhard notes that 'sacrament' is derived from the Latin *sacramentum* and acknowledges that its use for baptism, the Lord’s Supper and other church rites goes beyond the biblical usage. Andreas Carlstadt and Ulrich Zwingli suggested its removal from theological vocabulary, but Gerhard, like Luther, keeps the term. He then incorporates its original meaning into his definition of the New Testament rites which the church is bound to practise as Sacraments. Originally a sacrament was a legal term for a bond posted with a holy man by two opposing litigants before their civil case came to trial. The loser forfeited his deposit, the *sacramentum*, to the temple treasury and the victor had his bond returned. The prospect of losing a sizeable amount of money discouraged frivolous lawsuits and encouraged settlement before trial. Later the term meant only the promise without a bond. Litigants made a pledge, *sacramentum*, that they would supply the required cash if they lost. Later *sacramentum* was used for an oath soldiers swore to serve their full terms. In the Latin translation of the Bible *sacramentum* is the translation of *musterion* (Eph. 1:9; 5:32; 1 Tim. 3:16; Rev. 17:7), a mystery, that is, something which is beyond ordinary human experience, for example, God’s plan of salvation, Christ’s relationship to the church or the rule of evil in the world. Great mysteries are hidden within ordinary things and events. In church parlance *sacramentum* was applied to external signs pointing to sacred things or hidden mysteries concealed within them. Jerome said ‘the sacraments of God were preaching, blessing and confirming [confirmation], distributing communion, visiting the sick [and] praying’. Even the cross could be thought of as a sacrament pointing to the atonement. Gerhard grants this wider meaning with the provision that other rites not be placed on the same level as baptism and the Lord’s Supper. Although Melanchthon and Luther accepted a wider definition of a sacrament, Gerhard’s definition fitted only baptism and the Lord’s Supper. A sacrament was ‘a solemn sacred action instituted by God in which the special promise of the gospel

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21 176 (18:63).
22 187–95 (18:73–8).
23 138–9 (18:3–6).
24 138 (18:6).
25 139–49 (18:7). Luther speaks of three sacraments in the *Babylonian Captivity* (Luther Works 36:18).
is applied and sealed through an external, visible sign'. Correspondingly, 'the only two properly called and specifically so-called and permanent Sacraments of the Old Testament are circumcision, Gen. 17, and the passover lamb, Ex. 12'.

Old Testament sacraments were part of the discussion on the seven rites claimed as sacraments by the Council of Trent. Martin Chemnitz, Trent's most significant Lutheran critic, was answered by Bellarmine. Both agreed that the word plus the element constituted a sacrament, but in Gerhard's opinion, Bellarmine manipulated this definition to accommodate penance. At issue was not whether penance, confirmation, marriage, ordination, and extreme unction satisfied one or two of the three sacramental requirements of being God's command, giving grace and the Holy Spirit, and having an external sign, but whether any of the five fitted all three. Only baptism and the Lord's Supper were divinely commanded rites with external elements offering the forgiveness of sins. Even Bellarmine recognized the validity of the Lutheran argument.

For Gerhard sacraments were not the only signs in which God worked. Creation provided the external substance for the sacraments, but only those parts chosen by God to reveal himself are signs. From these signs he elevates only certain ones to sacraments. Gerhard offers three classes of signs. (1) Some, such as the rainbow, the burning bush, and the opening of the Red Sea, confirm a truth of the divine word and guarantee its certainty. Jesus confirms his claim to divinity through miracles. (2) Other signs such as eclipses and comets confirm warnings about impending judgment. (3) Still other signs, to which the sacraments belong, are rituals which confirm previously made promises. A proclaimed word is corroborated by signs within rituals.

26 138 (18:6).
27 183 (18:70).
28 139 (18:6).
29 147–8 (18:24), 'Chemnitz does not do a bad job of investigating in general the nature and character of the sacraments on the basis of baptism and eucharist which by common consent are the true sacraments.' So Bellarmine.
30 In Paul Tillich's sacramentology, all of creation is revelatory or sacramental, with some parts intrinsically possessing higher and lower levels of this potential. This was really only a form of pantheism or panentheism. For Gerhard, God made the choice of the elements through which he would reveal himself.
31 143 (18:16), Gerhard claims support here from Luther who saw sacraments in the ordinary signs of priestly rituals, vestments, vessels, and food, and in the extraordinary signs of the dew on Gideon's fleece and the backward motion of the shadow on Ahaz's sundial. See Luther's Lectures on Genesis, Luther's Works 1:309. 'Thus in the Old Testament faces of the Lord were the pillar of fire, the cloud, and the mercy seat; in the New Testament, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the ministry of the Word, and the like. Be means of these God shows us by a visible sign, that He is with us, takes care of us, and is favorably inclined towards us.'
Sacraments are the external signs confirming an invisible grace preached to believers. They follow rather than precede the preached Word. The invisibility of grace does not mean that the heavenly reality is absent. Rather the sacraments contain within themselves the grace which they symbolize. The sign contains and shares in the reality which it signifies, a definition distinguishing the Lutheran position from the Reformed. Signs resembling the sacraments in containing heavenly realities within themselves include the swaddling clothes in which the Christ Child was wrapped, the ark of the covenant, the burning bush and the pillar of fire. In these God was present. So also the Holy Spirit was in the dove. Outward signs point to the greater realities contained in them. Sacraments exceed human expectations, but are typical of God’s approaches to man.

Gerhard’s attention to the Roman Catholic position did not distract him from refuting the Reformed position that the sacraments were signs pointing to absent realities. Article Thirteen of the Augsburg Confession (1530) defined sacraments as signs distinguishing the Christian community. They have value as rituals instilling moral virtues among believers and as allegories symbolizing the Christian experience of repentance and regeneration. In his conflict with Reformed theologians in general, Gerhard showed that such descriptions were inadequate. Such symbolic interpretations were as far as Carlstadt, the Anabaptists and Zwingli were prepared to go, and remained characteristic of Reformed theologians who denied any real efficacy to the sacraments. Calvin and Beza held that God had instituted the sacraments only as signs, but without heavenly realities within themselves. Gerhard argues that a sign has no meaning without a reality which it signifies. ‘No sign is its own signified thing’. Since in the Reformed definition of signs such realities are absent, their sacraments are not signs. For Gerhard, signs point to the heavenly things which the signs contain but the heavenly things are greater than the signs.

32 140 (18:9).
33 Luther in the Small Catechism taught that baptism signifies the daily drowning of the sinful self and its rising to a new life.
34 141-2 (18:12); 170-1 (18:56). These allegorical or symbolic interpretations of the sacraments characterized the rationalist theologians of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, including Lutherans, and then Schleiermacher, all of whom doubted the divine institution of the sacraments. They were kept as traditional rites to instil moral values and give adhesion to the community. See Julius August Wegscheider, Institutiones Theologiae Christianae Dogmaticae 3 vols. (Halle: Gebauer, 1817), 364-7 and Frederick Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, Der Christliche Glaube, 3 vols. (Berlin: Reimer, 1836), 2:280-4.
35 146 (18:22-3).
36 146 (18:23). Scholars recognize that just as Luther and Melanchthon did not have identical positions, neither did Reformed theologians. Gerhard provides citations from the Reformed fathers to show that they were agreed that sacraments
The necessary relationship between the sign and the thing signified is analogous to the relationship between father and son. A father is not the son, but he could not be a father without a son. Gerhard notes an inconsistency in Beza who admits that in some cases 'the signification of which they [signs] are used is truly being given to us, just as in the blowing of the wind Christ was giving His disciples His Holy Spirit'. The importance of the relationship between the sign and the reality is clear in what Gerhard says about circumcision. 'Thus, sacramental circumcision not only signifies but also effects, applies and seals spiritual circumcision by faith to those who use the sacrament'. This was also true of infants. The same principle applies to baptism where the external washing corresponds to an internal one. Gerhard notes that Zwingli condemned Luther and Melanchthon's definition of the sacraments as signs strengthening faith because they 'wander very far from the truth'. The Reformed doctrine of election cast doubt on whether they even understood sacraments as signs. Children were destined to heaven or perdition apart from the sign of baptism. So in Beza's theology the sign had no ultimate significance.

The external signs of the sacraments correspond to the particular efficacy of each. Physical circumcision effected the spiritual circumcision it symbolized. Baptism as an outward washing with water effects an internal, spiritual washing. It is proper to claim it saves us. The bread of the Lord's Supper is the actual communion of Christ's body. Signs contain the reality within themselves. 'Surely then the sacramental signs consist not only of signifying but also of conferring and applying'. Essential to Gerhard's definition of sacraments was the inclusion of the external as signs did not confer grace: Zwingli held, 'I believe — in fact, I know for certain — that all the Sacraments are so far removed from conferring grace that they not even offer or dispense it'; for Calvin 'A sacrament is nothing else but an external testimony of divine kindness towards us, a testimony which represents spiritual graces with a visible sign'; Beza answers his own question, 'From where does that efficacy of the Sacraments come? In sum, from the operation of the Holy Spirit, not from signs except insofar as our inner senses are moved by those external objects.'
element within a rite. The external thing by itself was not a sacrament. In circumcision the cutting of the foreskin is required, in the passover the slaying and eating of the lamb; in baptism the washing with water and in the Lord’s Supper the eating of bread and drinking of wine. Elements by themselves do not constitute sacraments.\textsuperscript{44} This argument was directed against the Roman Catholic position which saw saving significance in the elements apart from the rite. Reservation of the host was dependent on a transubstantiation of the elements. Gerhard maintained that ‘nothing has the rationale of a sacrament outside of its divinely-instituted use’.\textsuperscript{45} Apart from the rite or act there was no sacrament.

Seventeenth-century Lutheran, Roman Catholic and Reformed theologians agreed with Augustine’s definition of sacraments from his Homily 80 on John: ‘The word comes to an element and a sacrament is created’. If one or the other is absent, there is no sacrament.\textsuperscript{46} Interpreting the commonly held definition was another matter. Martin Chemnitz, the moving force behind the Formula of Concord and the publication of the Lutheran Confessions in the Book of Concord, was the link between Luther and Melanchthon’s Reformation and seventeenth-century Lutheran scholasticism. He set the tone for Gerhard’s and most Lutheran interpretations of Augustine’s ‘word and element’ definition by further delineating eight requirements for a specific rite to be considered a sacrament.\textsuperscript{47} Chemnitz took baptism and the eucharist as the true sacraments and from them he deduced his principles by which others were judged. (1) The element must be part of a liturgical act. (2) The act had to be instituted by divine command. (3) It must be a New Testament rite. (4) It cannot be limited in regard to time. (5) A specific benefit has to be attached to the act. (6) This benefit must belong to the act by divine ordinance. (7) Specific benefits besides justification or forgiveness must be offered in the act itself. (8) Such benefits are not merely announced but actually given to believers. This delineation excluded Old Testament rituals and the five additional rites Rome claimed as sacraments. However, this did not restrict Gerhard’s use of the term for Old Testament rituals and other church rites.\textsuperscript{48} Bellarmine’s

\textsuperscript{44} 147–8 (18:24).
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} 141 (18:11).
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} 160 (18:44), Circumcision and passover play a fundamental part in Gerhard’s argument that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the only authentic sacraments. It is not obvious why his definition for sacraments should be so formulated as to exclude rites which he consistently calls ‘Old Testament Sacraments’ (173 [18:60]). He also recognizes with Bellarmine that ordination (holy orders) and marriage are necessary, not in the sense they benefit the individuals who receive them but as they benefit the church. Gerhard denies that these rites are \textit{vere et proprie dicta sacramenta} but implies that they could be called sacraments in another sense (157 [18:63]).
response to Chemnitz provided an outline for Gerhard’s exposition on the sacraments, as in the case of penance.

At issue was not whether penance (confession and absolution) was divinely instituted, but Bellarmine’s distinction between proclamation and consecration, and his interpretation of the consecratory word as the element in Augustine’s definition. Gerhard recognized the distinction between proclamation and consecration, but maintained that the consecration was also proclamation. More important, he insisted that an element by definition was visible and tangible: the audible word of consecration was for the ears while the elements of baptism and eucharist had to be visible to the eyes.  

Differences over the baptism of John brought the parties into dispute over the Lutheran principle that only New Testament rites qualified as sacraments. Bellarmine held that John was an Old Testament prophet whose baptism was nevertheless on a par with that of Jesus. So Gerhard’s New Testament requirement was refuted. Gerhard devoted a separate locus to circumcision and passover as sacraments, but held they were not on a par with baptism and the eucharist. He understood John’s baptism as a full New Testament sacrament. Gerhard argued that what applied to the baptism of Jesus applied to that of John. In this case Bellarmine’s arguments that John was an Old Testament figure and hence his baptism belonged to that era are the more convincing. Gerhard might have gone another route and conceded that John’s baptism, like other Old Testament sacraments, offered forgiveness, a point he had already established against Bellarmine. Gerhard was right in equating John’s baptism with the one offered by Jesus before his death. Both were superior to circumcision, but only anticipatory and limited in regard to time and hence inferior to the baptism Jesus established after his resurrection. Several jumps in logic cannot go unnoticed. Gerhard assumed that Jesus offered the same baptism before and after his resurrection. Since John’s baptism was identical to that of Jesus before his death, all are of equal value. Then Gerhard takes an excruciating route to show that John was both prophet and apostle and argues that his inclusion in the New Testament canon makes him a figure of the new era. His view that John was an apostle hardly fits the evidence. John was ‘that great Elijah’ standing on the edge of the older age peering into the new era, but not participating in it.

49 142 (18:13).
51 This method also leads to the assumption that all the writers of the New Testament, including Mark and Luke, were apostles. The term ‘Apostolic Scriptures’ required that the apostles themselves were the authors.
52 143 (18:15).
SACRAMENTS AS MIRACLES AND ANTITYPES

Baptism and the Lord’s Supper may also be called miracles, antitypes, mysteries, ceremonies and rites. As miracles they exceed human comprehension in giving grace, but unlike Christ’s miracles the sacraments experience no change of substance. Water remains ordinary water and bread does not lose its substance in becoming Christ’s body. New Testament sacraments may also be called antitypes corresponding to Old Testament rituals and historical events which were types. Christ, whom the prophets knew through the Old Testament rituals, is actually made present for the church in the sacraments.

SACRAMENTS AS DIVINE AND HUMAN RECIPROCITY

Tertullian was the first to refer to the sacramentum of baptism and the Lord’s Supper as promises or oaths made by believers. Gerhard took this original meaning into his own definition so that sacraments are believers’ promises to God to carry out faith’s obligations and satisfy the sacraments’ requirements. Thus Gerhard saw the sacraments as mutual obligations between God and man. Both of these aspects are found in Reformed theology, especially with Calvin. Zwingli saw sacraments as predominantly man’s obligation to God. For Gerhard, sacraments were not legally required pledges but faith’s response.

For just as that money was, as it were, pledged by which they were obliged to each other as if by some definite agreement, so those signs of the covenant added to the promise of grace not only make us certain about the will of God but also bind our faith to Him.

The idea of reciprocity reappears in Gerhard’s discussion of Old Testament sacrifices as sacraments. Before Abraham, sacrifices were the means through which God gave grace to his people. What the people sacrificed to God became the sacraments through which he gave good gifts to them. So ‘in a certain way sacraments and sacrifices fit...”

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53 147 (18:24).
54 141 (18:10).
55 Gerhard does speak of a change taking place in the Lord’s Supper. Between the ‘symbolic shadow’ of the Reformed and the ‘essential mutation’ of the Roman Catholics, he speaks of ‘a sacramental mutation’, Loci 5:153 (21:153). This was in response to Bellarmine’s assertion that since the Lutherans did not believe in an essential mutation (transubstantiation), they did not attribute to the consecratory words the power for bread to become Christ’s body.
56 139 (18:7).
57 149 (18:7).
58 177 (18:64).
Man’s sacrifices to God became God’s sacraments to man. In one sacramental/sacrificial act God and man approach one another.

ARISTOTLE’S CAUSES

Gerhard followed the Thomistic method in using Aristotle’s causes. This was useful in his response to the Reformed accusation that the Lutherans attributed to the sacraments what rightfully belonged only to God and in refuting the Roman Catholic position that the sacraments’ power was found in their substance. Sacraments were not the formal cause of salvation but instrumental causes. They were not autonomous rites with intrinsic power, but instruments of the benefits of Christ’s death, which was the meritorious cause. Material causes of the sacraments were the heavenly elements — regeneration in baptism and Christ’s body in the Eucharist. Sacraments are instrumental causes in effecting believers’ salvation. Justification or forgiveness is their final cause. Baptism as the instrumental cause was ‘the medium of regeneration and thus also the medium for stirring and strengthening faith’. The internal washing of regeneration, the heavenly thing, is baptism’s material cause. The principal cause can be either God, Christ’s death or the Holy Spirit, but not the sacraments themselves, as the Reformed charged that Lutherans believed. Gerhard’s method is evident in his explanation of Titus 3:5: ‘God (the principal cause) saved us (final cause or effect) through the washing of regeneration (through baptism which is the instrumental cause)’. God is ‘the efficient principal cause and author of the sacraments’. Faith is also identified as an instrumental cause. ‘God is the principal cause of justification, the suffering of Christ is the meritorious cause; the word and sacraments are the instrumental causes on the part of God, faith is the instrumental cause on our part’. Understanding faith as a cause in any sense may suggest synergism to some, though Gerhard hardly intends this.

In Gerhard’s sacramental theology, material can be used in two senses. Without a physical substance or material, a sacrament is not a sacrament. To the external element or material comes the Word. Confusing as it may

59 184 (18:71).
60 171 (18:58).
61 195 (18:80).
62 147–8 (18:24).
63 144 (18:17).
64 169 (18:55).
65 148 (18:26).
66 197–8 (18:84).
67 147–8 (18:24).
sound, the *material or the material cause* of the sacrament is not the earthly or external thing like water or bread but the heavenly thing, regeneration or Christ's body. Causes belonged to Gerhard's method of refutation, but are not basic to presenting his own position. He is more the biblical than scholastic theologian as is evident in his 1610 publication, *Ausfuhrliche schriftmaszige Erklarung der beiden Artikel von der heiligen Taufe und dem heiligen Abendmahl*.

Ultimate proof comes from the apostolic words which are not mere opinion but infallible truth.

**SACRAMENTS AS DIVINELY COMMANDED**

Gerhard's identification of God as 'the efficient principal cause of the Sacraments' is directed against the Council of Trent's assertion that the church in Christ's stead can institute sacraments. Gerhard distinguishes between the institution of the sacraments and what he calls 'publication of their institution'. Baptism originates in Christ's death and is published in Matthew 28:16–20. He approvingly quotes Thomas Aquinas that 'the church of Christ is said to have been made through the sacraments which flowed from the side of Christ as he was hanging on the cross', but 'the publication of this event can be made by somebody else'. Related to the origin of the sacraments in the death of Christ is the church's origin within these sacraments. The church is not constituted by believers coming together to form an assembly but by the sacraments.

**AN OCCASION FOR CHISTOLOGICAL CLARIFICATION**

Where Lutherans gave the prominent place in the sacraments to Christ, the Reformed gave a larger role to the Holy Spirit. Specific christological differences surfaced over the relationship of Christ's divine and human natures in his institution of the sacraments. Reformed Christology, with its Nestorian-like separation of the two natures, would be consistent in assigning their institution only to Christ's divine nature and not the human. With their doctrine of the *genus maiestaticum*, Lutherans held that all Christ's divine attributes were given to the human nature and that one nature worked within the other, the *genus apotelesmaticum*. Participation of the human nature in the institution of the Sacrament was no problem for Lutherans, but it was an issue for the Reformed in the 1584 debate at

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68 The original 1610 edition was republished (Berlin: Gustav Schlawitz, 1868).
69 173 (18:59).
70 148 (18:26).
71 Ibid.
Heidelberg. There Grynaeus conceded that both natures participated. This allowed Gerhard to show the inconsistency in Reformed Christology which otherwise did not assign divine attributes to the human nature. For the Reformed the Holy Spirit, rather than the sacraments, bestows God's good things. The Lutherans did not deny a role to the Holy Spirit in the sacraments, even though their strong christological emphasis may have suggested such a denial. In his discussion of the minister's intention in celebrating the sacraments, Gerhard cites Cyprian that the word's power in making the sacrament is that of the Holy Spirit. 'The solemnity of the words, the invocation of the holy name and the signs assigned to the ministry of the priests by the institutions of the apostles celebrate the visible sacrament, but the Holy Spirit fashions and effects the thing itself'.

MINISTERS OF THE SACRAMENTS

Bellarmine accused Luther of holding that lay persons could administer the Sacraments. In response Gerhard held that the institution of the sacraments required that their administrators be ministers as successors to the apostles. By addressing the words of sacramental consecration to the apostles, Christ recognized ministers as the legitimate administrators. 'In regard to baptism and the Lord's Supper, it is clear from the sedes of their institution that Christ committed the administration of these sacraments to the apostles and their successors'. Establishing ministers as administrators of the sacraments was part of the institutions of baptism and the Lord's Supper. In the case of impending death a lay person can baptize, but under no circumstances can he administer the Lord's Supper. 'As far as Luther is concerned, he does not simply and absolutely grant to all baptized people the power to administer the Sacraments'. Baptism had a necessity which the eucharist did not.

72 148–9 (18:27).
73 159 (18:40). The Lutheran fear of acceding to the Reformed role of the Spirit in the sacraments may account for the absence of an epiclesis, a prayer to the Spirit in baptism and particularly in the eucharist, which was a general custom in the east. 74 149 (18:28).
75 148 (18:29). Whether only a clergymen can administer Holy Communion has continued to be debated by Lutherans since the Reformation. Carl Ferdinand Wilhelm Walther (1811–87), the first president of the Missouri Synod of The Lutheran Church — and its most influential theologian, admittedly went against the majority opinion of Lutheran theologians and allowed for lay administration of Holy Communion in cases of emergency. To support his position, Walther cited Johann Gerhard among other theologians. See his Pastoral Theology, trans. John M. Drickamer (New Haven, Miss.: Lutheran News, 1995), 134–9. The citation used
As part of the same discussion, Gerhard disavows the Roman position that ordination gives to priests an indelible character which contributes to the validity or efficacy of the sacraments. Bellarmine went so far as to say that some perish everlastingly because they died before receiving priestly absolution.\textsuperscript{76} Since the minister is only Christ's instrument, his faith, moral character, understanding and intent about the sacraments do not improve or diminish their efficacy.\textsuperscript{77} Gerhard takes over Chrysostom's argument that what God does cannot be perfected by man. This is especially true of the words of Jesus, 'This is my body'.\textsuperscript{78} Gerhard approvingly cites Augustine who recognized a baptism administered by Marcion or one secretly harbouring the Arian heresy.\textsuperscript{79} Doubt about a minister's intent or faith would leave recipients in uncertainty. 'Christ did not institute a joking baptism nor a baptism of a parrot but a sacred and solemn act of the church. Therefore, because of the institution of Christ a baptism is true and complete if a minister establish this act to the use of the church although he provide not the true intent'.\textsuperscript{80} What is determinative of sacramental validity is the church's intent and not that of those who administer or receive the rite.\textsuperscript{81} A baptism performed jokingly was never intended as sacrament by those administering or receiving it.

**RECIPIENTS OF THE SACRAMENTS**

In reaction to placing the eucharist in the mouths of the dead, Gerhard sees only living people as the sacraments' recipients. More importantly he denied the eucharist to baptized children, a custom in place in the Eastern Church but not among Roman Catholics and Protestants. He notes that infant communion was practised by the ancient church, but cites Dionysius, Cyprian, Augustine and Innocent in support of his position in refusing them communion.\textsuperscript{82} Gerhard is persuaded the New Testament requires recipients to examine themselves and so concludes children are excluded. Gerhard recognized a certain logic in the

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\textsuperscript{76} 148 (18:29).
\textsuperscript{77} 150–1 (18:30–1).
\textsuperscript{78} 158–9 (18:40).
\textsuperscript{79} 151 (18:31).
\textsuperscript{80} 157–8 (18:38).
\textsuperscript{81} 155–6 (18:36).
\textsuperscript{82} 160–161 (18:44).
argument for infant communion based on the correlation between baptism and the eucharist and circumcision and the passover: if circumcision made children participants in the passover, they could presumably be given the Holy Communion. But in response he notes that girls were not circumcised, but participated in the passover. Old and New Testament sacraments do not necessarily correspond at each point. Only boys received the sacrament of initiation (circumcision), but both boys and girls received the sacrament of confirmation (passover). So in the New Testament both receive the sacrament of initiation (baptism), but neither the sacrament of confirmation (Lord’s Supper). His argument is clear, even if it is not convincing.

**FAITH AND THE ESSENCE OF THE SACRAMENTS**

As already noted, Gerhard denied that the minister’s or the recipient’s faith or lack of it adds to or detracts from the sacraments’ essence or efficacy. In contrast the Reformed fathers Calvin and Beza incorporated the recipients’ faith into their definition of the sacraments. Without faith the outward shells or the external forms of the sacraments remain, but they are no sacraments. Faith becomes a formal cause of the sacraments. For Gerhard faith receives what the sacrament offers, but does not belong to its essence. ‘The sacraments do not benefit for righteousness and salvation without faith’, but faith does not constitute the sacraments. He argues that if faith belonged to the definition of the sacraments, they could not create and confirm faith.  

**NECESSITY OF THE SACRAMENTS**

The question of the necessity of the sacraments came up in the Council of Trent’s condemning what was alleged to be the Lutheran position that salvation was possible by faith alone without the sacraments. Gerhard denies this caricature fits the Lutheran position. Faith was necessary to receive the sacraments’ benefits, but it did not belong to their definition and could not be substituted for them. Faith and the sacraments saved but in different ways. Their essences and functions were not interchangeable.

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83 By sacramentum confirmationis Gerhard means the Lord’s Supper and not the rite of confirmation which is administered after baptism in the Eastern Orthodox churches and at puberty in Western churches.
84 162 (18:49). To demonstrate the Reformed inclusion of faith in the sacramental definition, he lists several of their theologians: Grynaeus, Piscator, Keckermann, Calvin and Beza.
Sacraments offered salvation, and faith received the salvation they offer. What the sacraments offered, faith received. In his reply to Chemnitz's critique of Trent, Bellarmine mitigated the council's position by asserting that 'no sacraments have an absolute necessity but every necessity for them depends on God's command and institution with a natural congruence connected therewith'. Gerhard finds this acceptable with the understanding that God can work in people through the word. Even Catholic theologians allowed for salvation apart from the sacraments in the case of catechumens martyred before baptism. Gerhard adopts Jerome's position that the despising of baptism and not its lack condemns: 'When one despises the sacraments, he despises God Himself, who is their Creator'. Bernard is also cited. 'It is not the lack but the contempt of the sacraments which condemns'. Gerhard distinguishes between grace and faith, which is absolutely necessary, and the sacraments, which are ordinarily necessary. Unborn and unbaptized infants are among those whom God approaches with salvation apart from baptism. Such children can be sanctified by the name of the Trinity before birth. He also allows for God to work grace in those children who do not hear the gospel because they are savagely killed before birth or as infants. Gerhard moved the discussion from the general necessity of the sacraments to the necessity of each rite. The Lord's Supper is necessary for adults but not for children, an argument not without flaws, as shown above. Baptism is necessary for children, but not in the sense that God is prevented from working salvation by the word in the unborn and those who die before baptism. He also allows this for children of non-practising Christians. Gerhard can speak of a necessity for other rites. He can agree with Bellarmine that ordination is necessary in providing the means of salvation through the ministry and benefits the entire church. A similar necessity can be argued for marriage, but not in the sense that all single persons must be married. Marriage and ordination are neither necessary nor sacraments in the sense that baptism and the Lord's Supper are.

CONCLUSION

The point-counterpoint theological method of the age of Protestant scholasticism clarified differences and produced minimal ambiguity.

85 164 (18:53).
86 164–7 (18:53). Here Gerhard opens the way for a Lutheran response to the fate of aborted children which is an issue in our time.
87 167 (18:53). Luther could speak of marriage as a sacrament and put ministry on the same level of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Luther Works 1:309 and 53:115. Thus Gerhard is developing ideas intrinsic in Lutheran theology.
Gerhard painstakingly analyzed and answered his opponents' arguments. With Rome his major concern was whether all the rites claimed as sacraments were necessary. Bellarmine conceded that baptism and the Lord's Supper were sacraments in a sense the other rites were not. Gerhard challenged the Reformed view that sacraments were only signs. Paradoxically those who stood in Gerhard's tradition of a high sacramental theology developed a practice in which the sacraments played a minor role.

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88 146 (18:21).
89 147 (18:24).