



# Graspable God

STEVEN PAULSON

**W**ater is vital for baptism because water is a thing, not a metaphor. Metaphors mean something other—perhaps something “more”—than what a thing is, and so they end up pointing away from the thing itself to an object that is seen to reside elsewhere. In baptism, for example, water might refer to its origin in God’s creation, or perhaps to the great events of biblical history when God intervened for his people, like Moses leading his people through the parted Red Sea, or perhaps to abstract ideas of birth and new beginning. Instead of these metaphorical uses, in baptism water is water—and “is” means is. In this thing of water, by a divine promise, God has determined to hide so as to be found by sinners who need an object to grasp.

It is true that God hides elsewhere than water and is in fact present everywhere if you care to find him. Indeed, God hides in the whole of creation in “masks” or *larvae dei*—cocoons holding God inside. But in these other things God hides so as *not* to be found, since to find God in the mountain, in the wind, or in fish is to find God without any accompanying promise. To find God without a promise is to find death, wrath, sin, and the devil, all wrapped up in a single package. So for sinners who are in flight from God, these things of creation appear as threats: “I will send faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; the sound of a driven leaf shall put them to flight” (Lev 26:36). God is not healthy for a sinner, unless God comes to give himself wholly and completely in his Son—the

*Baptism is God graspable. It is the same thing for us that wrapping Jesus in swaddling clothes was for Mary. It is God hiding in a place where he can be pure promise, leading us through death right into the arms of the resurrected Lord.*

Christ—and in the Holy Spirit, in whose baptism a promise is made for the forgiveness of sin.

Even though God hides in order that we will not find him in the things of creation, this is far from withdrawal. God comes nearer to us than we would ever wish, precisely because sinners always want God at a proper distance. Distance between us and deity falsely assures us that God grants mercy for the time being by staying away, withholding judgment, and providing time for the amendment of life. We can comfort ourselves for a little while with the dream that we have time before God arrives for the final judgment. We reason that within ourselves we have the wherewithal to change God's disposition toward us by using the God-given gift of the free will. But the charade of the free will withers when that very divine will is found to desire the death of me, the sinner. The nearness of God is then a problem because it brings death. It is not time's fulfillment, but life's end for me. Adam and Eve knew the fear of death when God came near in the garden, forcing them to hide their nakedness, and launching the life that fears every rustling leaf as the portent of God's arrival. Who wants to have God arrive only to be left behind in such a state?

#### A NEW THING

But then God does a new thing. He appoints specific things in which he wants to be found—not as judgment and death—but as a promise to sinners of the forgiveness of sin on account of Christ's once-and-for-all death on the cross. Once Christ came incarnate, suffered, died, and rose to sit at the right hand of the Father, judging the living and dead, the Father appointed baptism's water as the place—or *larva dei*—in which God *wants* to be found. There, God does a double work, first by putting to death the old sinner, and then by raising up a new creature without sin. God chooses the water of baptism as the place where he executes the old Adam or Eve so that he can finally be found on your side—not as a judge but as the creator of a new you.

---

*once Christ came incarnate, suffered, died, and rose to sit  
at the right hand of the Father, judging the living and  
dead, the Father appointed baptism's water as the place in  
which God wants to be found*

---

This makes water the vital thing of new life, but therein lies a very old problem. It is not just any water that does this, and especially not water *in general*. Abstract water, or the form and idea of water, does nothing. "Creational theology" waxes eloquent about water: water is found most everywhere, even in the driest desert; without water we cannot survive, but with it vegetation flourishes; water is simple H<sub>2</sub>O, but without it we cannot conceive of life anywhere in the universe, so we go about searching for it even on Mars as a sign of life. Water releases the great

memories of God's deeds in history, and Luther succumbed to this temptation in his "Flood Prayer," which becomes merely a paean to water unless the prayer is used carefully. But when Luther came into direct contact with Protestant enthusiasts and saw what he found to be the devastation they wrought in the churches, he made clear in the *Small Catechism* that baptism is not water only but water used together with God's word and by God's command.<sup>1</sup>

#### ON SPECULATION AND KNOWING

There is an irresistible quality of water that tempts us to speculate endlessly about it, trying to peek into the hidden God's choice of water as the thing of salvation; so, let me, too, speculate for a moment before returning to solid theological ground. It is not water's life-giving quality or its imminent threat of death by drowning that is most important, but the passive quality of water that must make it appealing to God for the salvation of humans who would be gnostics. While humans want to prove their subjectivity and the power of their free wills to align with God's, water cannot change itself—but water can be changed. Notably, water can be changed into ice, water, or steam—that is, its form can be changed significantly, but it cannot bring this change from within itself. An outside force or condition must effect the change. For this reason, evangelical Christians occasionally used this quality of water to serve as a metaphor for the radical change that must take place in salvation. That change from sinner to saint is not effected by an action of our own, from within ourselves, but is a perfectly passive justification due to a power from outside ourselves. The argument about that quality of water you may take or leave as you like, since it is only an illustration and all such illustrations fail in the end. So, we must take leave of foolish speculation and return to what we actually know.

For whatever reason, God chose water as the inescapable place of God's hiding without which there is no salvation. Yet, water is the thing in which God hides—it is not God himself. That distinction marks the difference between pagan or Spinozian pantheism, in which God is everything and everything is God, and our theology, in which God hides in everything. Further yet, it is *baptism's* water—not water in general or even the water of a shower or of a fountain in the park—that does the divine work of salvation. In the earliest known orders of Christian worship, questions arose as to what kind of water should be used for a baptism. Should it be "living" water that actually moves, as in a natural river, or can it be dead-still water sitting in a pot? The liturgists then determined rightly that it is not the quality of the water that makes it baptismal. God is present everywhere, but in baptism God has put himself in the water in a specific way—so as to be for you and not against you. How God does this is not a mystery. God puts himself there through a preacher who puts a word into the water. Without this preached

<sup>1</sup>Martin Luther, *The Small Catechism*, in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) 359.

word, water is merely water—good for preserving or destroying life in this old world but nothing more. With the word, the water becomes the place where God is graspable for faith unto eternal life. So we arrive at Luther’s pointed definition of baptism: “Baptism is nothing other than God’s Word in the water.”<sup>2</sup> Nothing else! The simplicity is striking. God puts his word in the water, and there becomes graspable God.

### THE GRASPING OF FAITH

The fact that faith is a grasper is worth a word. Faith does not grasp as our hands grasp a tool or cling to the edge of a cliff. Faith grasps, to use Luther’s illustration, like a drop of water grasps the outside of a cool pitcher. A graspable God makes us into graspers and does so at precisely the right place and time, giving us an external object to hold onto. Faith is letting go of ourselves in times of trouble, and holding onto something that we trust will provide a future. By nature we are trusting and we cannot be otherwise, but what we trust makes all the difference. In the water of baptism, God makes himself graspable to faith and gives a new life.

For this reason, baptism saves. It saves by making us righteous not by works of the law, but by faith. Thus, baptism makes faith where there was none. But Christians are “made” in a strange way, as Paul describes: “Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). Baptism is union with Christ but, very oddly, union with him in his death.

The word that is put into the water is not a general word, but a specific one: a promise given to us. That word is by Christ’s command: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). In this word, God bestows his name by proclaiming it out loud (fulfilling the third commandment in which an unholy thing becomes holy) and so fulfilling the second commandment to keep the name holy by grasping it. The name is given so that we may call upon the Lord on the final day, just as Joel promised—a promise that Paul extended even to the Gentiles: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom 10:13; Joel 2:32).

Trust in this promise that God has put into the water is then applied to an individual sinner, with her name spoken aloud. In doing that, the first commandment is finally fulfilled, that we shall have no other god and that we trust the true God only and alone. The promise is always the same: salvation for faith alone, the forgiveness of sin. So the promise of Christ placed in the appendix of Mark’s gospel is a perfectly good abbreviation: “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16 NIV).

<sup>2</sup>Martin Luther, *The Smalcald Articles*, in *BC*, 319 (part III, no. 5, section 1).

## WHAT BAPTISM DOES

A divine promise is something that shall be done, but what it does is not left to the recipient. The promise depends entirely on the giver, not the receiver. Paul's great argument in his letter to the Romans has baptism's promise at the center, and the whole letter answers the question, "Is God faithful to a promise when the sinners to whom he gave it are unfaithful?" The answer is a resounding yes: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38–39). No other *thing* of creation will be able to separate us, including the rustling leaf. So Paul concludes, "Who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?" (Rom 11:35).

---

*Baptism forgives by killing and making alive through the word proclaimed to sinners. It kills not metaphorically but really.*

---

Baptism is not a metaphor or image used by the church for some other purpose than forgiveness of sin. It is an act that gives Christ's promise to a sinner who needs forgiveness. Baptism forgives by killing and making alive through the word proclaimed to sinners. It kills not metaphorically but really. It does not kill only my lower parts, letting me preserve my *imago dei*. It kills all of me, even the highest parts. It gives then the Holy Spirit, who creates us anew, giving new life. That life trusts Christ and his righteousness, not one's own righteousness, and so finds itself pleasing to God on account of Christ. We can conclude, therefore, that baptism equals justification.

Baptism saves. But salvation is more than we ever wanted. Baptism is God's attack on sin, and so on sinners. Its divine purpose or goal is death for those under bondage to Satan, since only death will end the accusation of the law against sinners. Attempts to make baptism less than this have blunted the reality of justification and so made baptism either a mere initiation into the church or a decision of the free will. Kierkegaard warns that when baptism becomes initiation into the church, the church becomes little more than a social, bureaucratic, whitewashed tomb, and baptism becomes vulgar. Then again, when baptism becomes a decision of the free will, we get American frontier religion of the gnostic sort. In either case, ecclesiology wins the day along with the inevitable conclusion that baptism is not enough to grow the church or preserve it, especially when applied to feckless infants. In this way, original sin is scoffed at, the death that unites us with Christ is ignored, and baptism's forgiveness of sins is hemmed in so that it does not disturb what we consider more important about salvation (like improving our loyalty to Christ by dedication to the church or a higher form of morality).

## ON THE WATER AND THE WORD

The church has created for itself two ruts, or mistakes, when it comes to baptism. One is to think too little of the word in baptism. The other thinks too little of the water. Luther noted this in preparing the *Smalcald Articles* for a possible church council on the evangelical preaching in the church:

Therefore we do not agree with Thomas and the Dominicans who forget the Word (God's institution) and say that God has placed a spiritual power in the water which, through the water, washes away sin. We also disagree with Scotus and the Franciscans, who teach that baptism washes away sin through the assistance of the divine will, that is, that this washing takes place only through God's will and not at all through the Word and the water.<sup>3</sup>

Both of these are theologies of glory, seeking power either in the word apart from the water (and so a power of the intellect or will), or a power in the water apart from the word as a supernatural grace. The Dominicans think too little of the word, and so build a theology around the power of water. This is because grace is believed to perfect nature, and nature's created goodness is being enhanced by grace. Whole theologies of creation are then placed over against Christ and the forgiveness of sin. Of course, Thomas himself was not so pedestrian, but even he thought a word could not quite accomplish such great things as justification, salvation, or forgiveness—and certainly not death and new life. There had to be an element, or thing, imbued with supernatural power that lifts the sinner to heaven. But this misunderstands the water in baptism and sacraments altogether. Baptism does not depend on a blessing that is made over the water by a priest. A blessing would make it fruitful and give it supernatural power. Instead, what a preacher gives is a proclaimed word in the form of a promise.

How does the word get into the water? This is crucial, since the Dominican rut is to think it happens by prayer. It does not; it happens not by praying *over* water, but by preaching *into* it. This seems strange to American Evangelicals raised on the principle of preaching as a moment of decision. But preaching is not speaking to free wills in order to motivate them; it is putting a promise into a thing so that the hidden God can be found on the sinner's side. It is God's arrival into the mask of water so that he can be grasped in that place for the sake of our salvation. The water is not the thing of salvation, but is the place of God's hiding in order for us to find him; so in grasping the water, we grasp him.

Now the Franciscans erred on the other side. They thought too little of the water, and wanted to consider that it was only the word that did these great things. But in separating these two, they made the word into a sheer abstraction. Baptism's word became a metaphor or figure of speech—or, at best, a *general* word spoken before or outside of all time. Christ's word—"whoever believes and is baptized"—was then inevitably divided into two separate steps toward salvation. The

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 320 (part III, no. 5, sections 2–3).

first step is the routine baptism (whose water is treated as an irrelevant sign), followed by faith in the form of some work (however tiny).

What is left out of this equation is the actual promise: “shall be saved.” Baptism and faith are not two steps in a salvation process. Faith is made in baptism simply by the giving of the promise that has been put in the water. This is why “whoever believes and is baptized shall be saved” is not the word the preacher proclaims at baptism. Instead, the preacher says, “N, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The name of God is not a metaphor that can have other words substituted for it, in the same way as the name of the person being baptized cannot be substituted with some other word like “sinner” or “human being.”

---

*The church has created for itself two ruts, or mistakes, when it comes to baptism. One is to think too little of the word in baptism. The other thinks too little of the water.*

---

The Scotist problem makes all God’s promises abstract ideas that must be grasped by intellect or will before they go into effect. This is not baptism. The word is specific and individual. In it, God actually arrives to a particular person at a particular place and time—in the water—so as to kill and raise anew.

The apotheosis of the Scotist disregard for the water is now found in those misreadings of the book of Acts that divide “water” baptism from “Spirit” baptism. Along this line lies the spiritualizing of all the sacraments and turning away from the public preaching that puts the word into the water. Baptism is never without the word and never without the water. Parsing too exactly the arrival of the Spirit for Cornelius in the book of Acts (prior to his baptism) forgets that when public preaching precedes baptism, as it does in Acts 10, it always drives toward this giving of the word-in-the-water and not away from it. Once a person is baptized, he never advances beyond baptism but is justified daily through it.

For this reason we call baptism the royal sacrament because it makes us a royal priesthood, of which none is higher. Baptism is not a sign pointing to something else. It is a thing itself; as Luther said in his *Large Catechism*, it is a “work”—but it is not our work, it is God’s:<sup>4</sup>

Our know-it-alls, the new spirits, claim that faith alone saves and that works and external things add nothing to it. We answer: It is true, nothing that is in us does it but faith, as we shall hear later on. But these leaders of the blind are unwilling to see that faith must have something to believe—something to which it may cling and upon which it may stand. Thus faith clings to the water and believes it to be baptism, in which there is sheer salvation and life, not through the

<sup>4</sup>Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, in *BC*, 460–461 (part IV, sections 35–36).

water, as we have sufficiently stated, but through its incorporation with God's Word and ordinance and the joining of his name to it. When I believe this, what else is it but believing in God as the one who has bestowed and implanted his Word in baptism and has offered us this external thing within which we can grasp this treasure?<sup>5</sup>

Nothing in us saves us. So, since faith alone saves, faith is not in us, but it is rather the going out of ourselves into Christ. Faith is not a power, an "internal" spark, or a quality of my character in the form of a possibility waiting to be awakened in me. Faith is clinging for dear life to a thing—the water of baptism—because God wanted it that way and I have no other choice. By clinging to this water, we find ourselves clinging to God at the same time. Baptism is God graspable. It is the same thing for us that wrapping Jesus in swaddling clothes was to Mary. It is God hiding so as to be found in a place where he can be pure promise, cutting out a swath in this hard world for a future that goes right through our greatest fear—death—and right into the arms of the resurrected Lord. God confirmed this by having his Son Jesus Christ actually undergo baptism so that he would be there in the water, and not somewhere else toward which the "sign" of baptism was supposed to point.

#### ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

What is baptism? It is something to believe. It is graspable God, God incarnate *for me*, not just generally or theoretically. Luther suggests teaching baptism by asking a series of rhetorical questions, beginning with the essence—or "is-ness"—of baptism. What is it? It is not "the shell of a nut";<sup>6</sup> it is God found in the water as a promise for you to hold, use, cling to, trust, and live with.

The second question is "why?" The answer: to save; to deliver us from sin, death, and the devil. Baptism is really exorcism: it pulls us out from under the devil and delivers us to a new Lord, Jesus Christ. In baptism, we are moving from death to life, from one Lord to another, from one kingdom to another—not in theory but in reality. The devil also hides so we do not see or feel him. That is why it appears as if we are born into a primitive state of bliss in which there really is no sin (until we are old enough to be responsible for our actions), and there really is no looming death. A real baptism is a real exorcism, which is why Luther put so many dramatic removals of the devil in his baptismal booklet. Herein lies the one real problem with infant baptism: When people assume there is no original sin and no possession by the devil, what else can baptism become than a sociological initiation into the tribe of Christians?

Deliverance from such enemies is only possible if there is a power in the word to create anew. How does a simple word of promise do this? God pleads, "Here, here, take hold of me here"; but in this grasping, we must let go of all other gods. Recall the story of the fox who, though his mouth was already full, desired never-

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 460 (part IV, sections 28–29).

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 459 (part IV, section 19).



theless one more bite. But when he opened his voracious jaws everything was lost. Unlike the fox, the Son did not count equality with the Father a thing to be grasped, but let go (Phil 2:6–8). This grasping by letting go is, of course, not possible for sinful human beings because of our fear of death. Our life as old graspers at straws—or at whatever else we think is “substantial” in this life—must be ended. Baptism ends that life and gives us new life in Christ. Something happens, something real. Yet to call baptism a something—especially when it involves an infant and is seen in its barest, simplest form—is deeply countercultural and even revolting.

Baptism is something, something to grasp and believe in. It is not just the shell of the nut, but the nut itself. It is not just a mask of creation, but the real Jesus Christ in the flesh. To be graspable, God must be willing (and able) to be present in words of promise. These are, in fact, precisely where our gracious God wants to be found, where God can actually be who God really is—the Big Gracious Giver.

---

*Christ is the last grab. Christ is the thing we were looking for, and when he is already in hand, already given as promise, there is nowhere else to go and nothing more to possess. Christ marks the end of spiritual searching.*

---

This is how Christ makes himself available to sinners in baptism, and it leads to the real argument for infant baptism. There is a strange sort of activity in baptism: the old sinner grabs God as the last and final act of a desperate person—a person who wants life, wants it abundantly, and wants it now! Such is the infant, but when this sinner grasps Christ, then the end to sin arrives. Christ is the last grab. Christ is the thing we were looking for, and when he is already in hand, already given as promise, there is nowhere else to go and nothing more to possess. Christ marks the end of spiritual searching. We find in him a new life, real belief, certainty, and forgiveness of the last great sin. Where there is a God who lets himself be grabbed by sinners in such a way that they end up being the receivers, then there is life and salvation. God found a way to turn our last act of grabbing for life into the first moment of receiving life.

Now how does God actually make this promise work? He makes it “usable.” This is the third rhetorical question we ask in order to teach baptism. We have the “is” and the “why,” and now we turn to the “what”—what is this promise used for? A promise is given so that it can be used, and the use of a promise is to trust or depend upon it. Here, there is a kind of twist on Augustine’s famous distinction between *usus* and *frui* (use and enjoyment), in which Luther went beyond the “sign” theory of words that point to a Christ who is somewhere else. Augustine taught that we are to “enjoy” God and “use” created things. Sin is the comingling reversal of these; using God instead of enjoying God is none other than manipulation and

magic. But Luther recognized that in this sacrament God is enjoyed precisely by being used. God wants you to use him by using his promise.

Now how do you use a promise? Our common experience is with a marriage promise, even when a very fallible person is giving it. One uses a marriage promise by demanding fidelity when one is afraid the promise is not being kept: “Now listen here, you no-good, two-bit, lazy husband, get up off that couch and do something.” Christ makes himself available to us so we can talk to him like a spouse. No matter how unequally yoked we are to Jesus Christ, when we have him inside a promise then we use him by leaning on him in every trouble. The promise makes it possible to say, “Jesus, what are you doing to me? You promised all things work for good for those who love the Lord...” To Christ, when everything is looking really bad, you say, “But I’m baptized, so why are you letting me hang here?”

---

*Jesus doesn’t want you to be a wallflower of faith, he wants you to come out moving mountains, and this means he has given you the grounds for having “attitude” with God*

---

Such pugnacious faith seems irreligious, since it fails to treat Jesus in a holy fashion; but this is what Jesus wants from you—to use him until he is used up in the promise. He doesn’t want you to be a wallflower of faith, he wants you to come out moving mountains, and this means he has given you the grounds for having “attitude” with God. More important, it gives you the chutzpah to argue with Satan, who is your true enemy. You can have attitude with God and defy the devil now that Christ has made himself your own personal “nut.” Luther says it this way: “Thus, we must regard baptism and put it to use in such a way that we may draw strength and comfort from it when our sins or conscience oppress us, and say: ‘But I am baptized! And if I have been baptized, I have the promise that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body.’ This is the reason why these...things are done in baptism.”<sup>7</sup>

For this reason, the key to rightly administering baptism is not to pray but to proclaim the word of promise: “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Such proclamation puts the word into the water so that it is then applied as the gift of the Holy Spirit in person. It is not the baptism itself that forgives (*ex opere operato*) but faith in the baptism. But no faith can be given in the baptism without applying the promise that gives you “something to believe in” (nothing less than Christ). Faith and thing go together; they cannot be separated.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 462 (part IV, sections 44–45).

## THE ROYAL SACRAMENT

Baptism is the royal sacrament because of its “firstness,” its originality, and so its drive to infancy. Baptism is also royal because of its “oneness.” It is done once as an external, public, historical, personal gift. Repeating this act destroys trust in the thing (faith) given, so there is no rebaptism. It is unrepeatable, because here the Holy Spirit opposes that deepest opposition to salvation in Christ alone—the displacement of faith by the myth of the free will. Further, it is royal because of baptism’s “aleness” (faith alone). Introducing other rites and signs distracts or chokes off the water and the word as the only *thing* to believe. Royal also means its exclusive “individuality”—your one, specific name is used so you cannot disappear in the group and deny its application. Finally, we note baptism’s “thingness” that especially concerns the water. It is applied physically and directly to you so that you do not make of this an idea or abstraction.

Baptism’s effect is “royal,” because it makes you “a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none”<sup>8</sup> and so authorized to be a royal priest who applies this now to others. Teaching baptism requires proper teaching about the devil—namely, that he is always a liar. The devil will try to undo the baptism by telling you that it is too long ago; that you did not know or understand; that if you have not been faithful to it, it will not be faithful to you; and that it is too small and thus not necessary. The devil will say that the water is not necessary or the word is not enough. But all of that is based simply in hatred of Christ’s lowly estate; it is searching for glory rather than the cross.

Yet, what is to be made of baptism in which sin is forgiven, but sin nevertheless remains in the old person, and the Christian sees it and feels it? In times of trouble, you use the promise in order to defy the devil. There is no better way of doing this than to begin by telling the devil he is right: “Yes, I see sin in myself after my baptism, but that does not destroy the promise. It only makes it more necessary.” Teach the devil that baptism makes two “yous,” so that he has become a bad dialectician who cannot distinguish the old and the new. Finally, when the devil says, “Look, I see a sin on you,” you can reply, “But I *have* been baptized. I have no free will, and you know it; but I have Christ in charge of my will and not you.” At such a use of the name of Christ, the devil always flees. What, then, if the law comes to you and says, “But you are a sinner!” You say, “But, law, you are not interpreting properly. I have died! You have no more authority over me.”

The constant attempt to turn baptism into glory is why Luther warned that it was nothing to fool with. Baptism as glory becomes detrimental to the Christian who thinks of herself as being impregnable and without sin, quite apart from Christ and his word, therefore resting on her own belief. It is not our piety but the word-in-the-water that makes us righteous. We need something to believe. And that something is Christ himself, as the *Large Catechism* says, “No greater jewel,

<sup>8</sup>Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 31, ed. Harold J. Grimm (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1957).

therefore, can adorn our body and soul than baptism, for through it we become *completely holy* and blessed, which no other kind of life and no work on earth can acquire.”<sup>9</sup> There is no further place to go in your holy life than this. It doesn’t get any better than to have “attitude” with God and to defy the devil. Once Christ makes a promise to you, it is always there as a jewel to be used. The promise doesn’t run out or go empty. It is the thing that we cling to, with which we go forward in a wild and woolly world that always ends in death for the old sinner. Of course, one of the real signs of the presence of such faith is that no one who receives it can wait to give this jewel to others. So, we simply repeat Christ’s evangelical exhortation: “Go ahead making disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” ⊕

STEVEN PAULSON is professor of systematic theology at Luther Seminary, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

<sup>9</sup>Luther, *Large Catechism*, in *BC*, 462 (part IV, section 46) (emphasis added).