

Jack Cottrell's Defense of Baptism as the Occasional Condition: Examining an Underlying Defeater of Traditional Objections

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Due to a desire to preserve the doctrines of sole gratia and fide, many credo-baptists have been uncomfortable with the NT teaching on water baptism. This discomfort has produced interpretations of key texts that seem to avoid the plain meaning. Yet, because these irregular readings result from underlying theological and philosophical convictions, their revision requires more than literary illumination. This paper examines one of these provincial presuppositions, a non sequitur uncovered by Stone-Campbell theologian Jack Cottrell.

NOT BY EXEGESIS ALONE: THE NEED TO ADDRESS DEFEATER BELIEFS

Due to their desire to preserve the doctrines of *sola gratia* and *fide*, many American credo-baptists have been uncomfortable with the NT's close association of water baptism with the reception of saving grace. This discomfort has produced interpretations of key soteriological texts that seem to "avoid the obvious sense of the verse."¹

Yet, because these irregular readings result not simply from unsound exegesis, but from underlying historical, theological, and philosophical convictions, their revision requires more than literary illumination. Such provincial presuppositions effect not only the probability of a sacramental interpretation but even its possibility.

¹ A. B. Caneday, "Baptism in the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright; Nashville: B&H, 2006) 310-311. For a similar assessment of credo-baptist, baptismal exegesis, see Jack Cottrell, *Baptism: A Biblical Study* (Joplin: College Press, 2002) 7-9. See also, Jack Cottrell, *Set Free: What the Bible Says about Grace* (Joplin: College Press, 2010) 244-272; Anthony R. Cross, *Recovering the Evangelical Sacrament: Baptisma Semper Reformandum* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013); Stanley K. Fowler, *More Than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of Baptismal Sacramentalism* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 2002); Stephen J. Wellum, "The Means of Grace: Baptism," in *The Compromised Church: The Present Evangelical Crisis* (ed. John H. Armstrong; Wheaton: Crossway, 1998) 149-170.

Therefore, if the efforts of mid-20th century British reformers, such as H. Wheeler Robinson, Neville Clark, R. E. O. White, and Alec Gilmore, are to inform the spread of sacramentalism stateside as some suggest, then their American counterparts should learn from their unfruitfulness when using exegetical arguments isolated from a larger conceptual framework.² If the persuasive plea of George Beasley-Murray's exegesis failed to sway the "grassroots Baptists" of his day, what hope remains for the mere linguistic contentions of his liturgical descendants?³

Part of the problem for first-generation British (re)sacramentalists was that this "new" teaching did not sound sufficiently "Baptist."⁴ In other words, the dogmatic belief that Baptists have always been nonsacramental, though untested and false, functioned as an undercutting defeater for even the most eloquent exposition.⁵

Only a generation later did Stanley K. Fowler's monograph, *More Than a Symbol*, provide an escape by demonstrating that a sacramental conception of baptism, far from being a novelty, was actually a return to the movement's soteriological roots. Thus, by defeating the defeater, Fowler made the option of sacramental readings live again.

Deluding presuppositions are not, of course, limited to lapses in historical consideration. They also emerge in the spheres of theology and philosophy. One intriguing example is proposed by Stone-Campbell theologian Jack Cottrell.

Cottrell argues that an elementary error in reasoning, a non sequitur, has created an interpretive paradigm that prevents credo-baptists from even the possibility

² Brandon C. Jones, "Baptist Sacramental Theology: A Covenantal Framework for Believer's Baptism" (Ph.D. diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2010) 26-51, documents the inadequacy of mere exegetical contention among mid-20th century British sacramentalists.

³ This paper aims to facilitate a baptismal rapprochement (a "*Consensus Americanus*") between Churches of Christ and their credo-baptist kinsmen. Its call for a paradigmatic shift among ordinance-only baptists, however, does not suggest the concessional burden is one-sided. Indeed, both traditions require refinement if sacramental common ground is to be reached. See John Mark Hicks, "*Consensus Tigurinus* and a Baptismal Rapprochement between Baptists and Churches of Christ," *SCJ* 7 (Fall 2014). See also "Seeking Consensus: A 'Kinder, Gentler' Campbellite Baptismal Theology" (paper presented at the Baptist-Churches of Christ Dialogue, Hardin Simmons University and Abilene Christian University, Texas, January 30-31, 2004); Stanley K. Fowler, "Baptists and Churches of Christ in Search of a Common Theology of Baptism," in *Baptist Sacramentalism 2* (ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson; Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007) 254-269.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁵ For the purposes of this article, references to the notion of epistemic defeat (or defeasibility) are general. Michael Sudduth, "Defeaters in Epistemology," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <https://www.iep.utm.edu/ep-defea/>, defines defeasibility as "a kind of epistemic liability or vulnerability, the potential of loss, reduction, or prevention of some positive epistemic status." A defeater belief then is one which, if true, undermines reasons for assent to a second belief. And such defeasibility can relate either to the probability of an interpretation (an undercutting defeater) or its possibility (a rebutting defeater). See also John Pollock, *Contemporary Theories of Knowledge* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1986).

of reading baptismal texts sacramentally.⁶ Given its relative obscurity and the congenial consequences of its truth, at least for a growing number of American sacramentalists,⁷ Cottrell's contention warrants closer consideration.⁸

REBUTTING DEFEATER IDENTIFIED BY COTTRELL

In a recent essay, Baptist scholar A. B. Caneday contends that the contrived baptismal exegesis of his kinsmen is not merely the result of "theological bias," but of conflating "biblically distinct causation." For Caneday, the problem lies in merging "the means of salvation with its ground." This occurs when an intermediary condition, faith or baptism for example, is "exalted" to the status of efficient cause.

The result is either "baptismal regeneration" that "invests" the water ritual with "effectual cleansing power" or a kind of "credal regeneration" that assigns to a "human decision" the saving power God's grace alone possesses.⁹ And while some within the Churches of Christ have chosen the former, which devalues the role of faith in initial salvation, many modern Evangelicals have embraced the latter, which divests baptism of any divine power.¹⁰

The Defeater Defined

Professor Caneday is not the first to suggest as antecedent to this American-Baptist, interpretive deficiency a confusion concerning the causal nexus of conversion.¹¹

⁶ Jack Cottrell, "The Tyranny of the Paradigm. Part 2," <http://jackcottrell.com/notes/the-tyranny-of-the-paradigm-part-2/>. See also, "The Tyranny of the Paradigm. Part 3," <http://jackcottrell.com/notes/the-tyranny-of-the-paradigm-part-3/>.

⁷ For example, A. B. Caneday, "Baptism"; Thomas Schreiner, "Baptism in the Epistles: An Initiation Rite for Believers," in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (ed. by Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright; Nashville: B&H, 2006) 67-96; Robert H. Stein, "Baptism and Becoming a Christian in the New Testament," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 2 (1998) 6-17, and "Baptism in Luke-Acts," in *Believers Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (ed. by Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006) 35-66. For a broader list of scholars who affirm baptism's soteriological function, see Anthony R. Cross, *Recovering*, 46n24.

⁸ While this paper focuses upon baptism's effective function, there is much more to the sacrament's soteriological contribution than its role as concomitant condition. See, for example, Wellum, "The Means of Grace: Baptism," 153-162; David F. Wright, "Recovering Baptism for a New Age of Mission," in *Doing Theology for the People of God: Studies in Honor of J. I. Packer* (ed. Donald Lewis and Alister McGrath; Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1996) 51-66.

⁹ While both causes and conditions influence a thing's existence or work to bring about a result, only the former (for example, regeneration) does so directly. Conditions (for example, faith, confession, and baptism) function as prerequisites removing whatever prohibits a cause from taking effect. According to Caneday, the conflation of this distinction is what produces bad exegetical outcomes among credo-baptists.

¹⁰ Caneday, "Baptism," 311-312; 325.

¹¹ In this paper, shortened soteriological terminology, such as conversion, initiation, and salvation, encompass the entire process of receiving the gift of redemption (equal to Dunn's endocentric lexeme:

Cottrell has contended this for at least three decades. But the issue for him is not the conflation of grounds and means (namely, the unwarranted promotion of a human response to the seat of divine efficacy), but rather a failure to distinguish between two functionally distinct appropriating conditions.¹² He argues:

Most Protestants are guilty of a serious error in . . . assuming that the means by which salvation is received is the same as the occasion during which it is received. They assume that being saved ‘by faith’ means the same thing as being saved ‘as soon as you have faith.’¹³

For Cottrell, the conflation between the *instrumental* and the *occasional* conditions of grace—the means *by which* it is appropriated and the time and place *during which* it is appropriated—disregards simple logic given that “a necessary condition is *not necessarily* a sufficient [one].”¹⁴

The fallacy is evident once the argument is stated syllogistically:

Major premise: The instrumental condition is *how* one receives saving grace.

Minor premise: Faith is the sole instrumental condition.

Conclusion: Therefore, *at the moment* of faith one receives saving grace.

Even if both premises are true, the conclusion does not follow necessarily and thus the argument is invalid. Just because faith is the sole instrument by which people acquire salvation, does not mean they will receive such deliverance the moment they believe. Or, stated more aphoristically: just because faith is the sole means does not make it the sole condition.

Technically this form of non sequitur is known as *quaternio terminorum* (the fallacy of “four terms”), and it occurs when a categorical syllogism has four (or more) concepts rather than the requisite three. The fundamental mistake of such an argument is that it attempts to reach two conclusions with just one syllogism. In this case, the first conclusion deals with the ‘how’ of receiving salvation (the instrumental condition), while the second addresses the ‘when’ (the occasional condition).

The first of these questions can be stated in valid syllogistical form as follows:

Major premise: The instrumental condition is *how* one receives saving grace.

Minor premise: Faith is the sole instrumental condition.

Conclusion: Therefore, faith is *how* one receives saving grace.

Not only is this a valid argument but, for many credo-baptists, both premises are

conversion-initiation). See James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-Examining of the New Testament on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (London: SCM, 1977) 5-7.

¹² Both Caneday and Cottrell advocate a balanced sacramentalism (a *via media* between effectual regeneration and effete symbolism). The former views it as an issue of *sola gratia*, the latter of *sola fide*.

¹³ Cottrell, *Set Free*, 209.

¹⁴ Cottrell, “Tyranny . . . Part 3”. While the term “instrument” can have a broad connotation, encompassing all appropriating conditions, including baptism, here it is used narrowly referring only to the how of grace reception.

true. Therefore, its reasoning is sound. The major premise is true by definition; the minor premise is true not only by the clear testimony of Scripture, but it has been the dominant Evangelical interpretation since the days of Luther. The when question, however, remains unanswered: "When does faith receive salvation?" requires its own syllogism.

This syllogism which could go something like:

Major premise: The occasion is *when* one receives saving grace.

Minor premise: The moment of faith is the occasion.

Conclusion: Therefore, the *moment* of faith is *when* one receives saving grace.

Again, the structure of the argument is valid, but to be compelling, true premises are required. While the major premise is true by definition, the truth of the minor premise can only be determined by Scripture. "Does one receive saving grace at the moment of faith?" is an inquiry that demands a theological response grounded in sound exegesis. But due to the influence of the non sequitur, many credo-baptists have never even considered the question and have just assumed that if faith is the *how* it is also the *when*.¹⁵

Thus, for Cottrell, a simple error in reasoning has led exegetes to quickly dismiss the dozens of texts that describe water baptism as salvation's occasional condition. When viewed through the lens of the non sequitur, such passages cannot mean what they appear to mean unless contradiction is embraced. If logic necessitates that faith is both the *how* and the *when*, then believers-baptism is eliminated as a condition of initial salvation, regardless of how persuasive the biblical data is.¹⁶

Cottrell provides only a single example to support his sweeping thesis.¹⁷ Norman Geisler, in his *Systematic Theology*, critiques Cottrell's occasionist view by rejecting, seemingly on the basis of the non sequitur, the need for any further condition than faith. He argues:

Cottrell accepts the New Testament affirmation of faith as the means of receiving the gift of salvation: 'Faith is still the primary condition because it is the *sole means* by which salvation is received, but this does not rule out the addition of

¹⁵ Cottrell, "Tyranny . . . Part 2."

¹⁶ While, in this scenario, it is still logically possible for baptism to serve as the locational condition (the place *where* initial faith receives grace), the near impossibility of intentionally immersing someone at that precise moment renders it improbable. Therefore, all references to baptism as the occasional condition include both the *where* and *when* of initial salvation. A helpful illustration for distinguishing between the *how* and the *where/when* is to consider the difference between a ticket to a concert (the means for getting in) and the time and place at which the event is scheduled to occur (the occasion). Having the ticket (meeting the instrumental condition—the *how*) guarantees one access to the entertainment, but only if the possessor attends on/at the proper day/time (meeting the occasional condition—the *where/when*).

¹⁷ Cottrell, "Tyranny . . . Part 3." See also, Cottrell, *Set Free*, 231.

other conditions that serve other purposes'. However, he does not appear to see the inconsistency of adding three more conditions for being saved. If faith is the only means of salvation, why is something else necessary?¹⁸

If by “means” Geisler means (as Cottrell does) the instrument by which one receives initial salvation—if he is referring to the how of grace reception—then he appears to have taken a syllogistical misstep.¹⁹ For, as Cottrell has demonstrated, *solus conditione* does not follow necessarily from *sola fide*. And yet for Cottrell’s theory to hold true, such causal clumsiness cannot be limited to a single faux pas but must stumble about on the soteriological stage of Evangelicalism.

The Defeater Defended

Although the amount of research necessary to confirm Cottrell’s ambitious thesis is beyond the scope of this article, several striking instances of the non-sequitur are discussed.²⁰ Determining underlying assumptions from written texts, however, is notoriously difficult and therefore, except for explicit statements, the following occurrences should (at best) be accepted provisionally.

¹⁸ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume 3: Sin, Salvation* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004) 494.

¹⁹ Geisler may be using “means” here as a substitute for the more general concept of “condition,” and if so, he has not violated the norms of informal logic, at least not explicitly. For if faith is the only condition, then all others must be excluded, including baptism. Such an interpretation is unlikely, however, given it would require Cottrell’s error, or at least Geisler’s perception of it, to be the absurd contention that salvation stipulates both a single condition and four conditions simultaneously. That Geisler would believe Cottrell to be so obtuse, or that he himself would erect so obvious a strawman, are both considerably less likely than reading “means” as instrument in this context. In addition, Geisler (490) defines Cottrell’s use of “means” as follows: “Faith [for Cottrell] is unique among the four supposed conditions of salvation, for ‘faith as a condition for salvation is the means by which grace is received.’ Hence, faith is more than a qualification—it is *the medium by which salvation is obtained*.” [emphasis added] As if to remove all doubt, Geisler (495) offers this objection to confession as a condition of salvation: “Cottrell contends that faith is the means of salvation; consequently, a person is already saved by faith before he confesses his faith.” [emphasis added]

²⁰ Data was collected from the sources listed in the annotated bibliography of Wayne Grudem’s *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), Appendix 4; a list which, in Grudem’s estimation, contains “most of the major evangelical systematic theologies available in English.” This bibliography was first narrowed to exclude paedobaptists and then expanded to include more recent publications including: Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013); Robert Duncan Culvar, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical* (Geanies House, Fearn: Mentor, 2005); James Leo Garrett, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical* (2nd ed.; North Richland Hills, TX: Bibal, 2001); Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Volume Three* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004); Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017); Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity Volume 3: The Doctrines of Salvation, the Church, and Last*

EXPLICIT ARTICULATIONS. While the bulk of evidence for Cottrell's defeater is likely circumstantial, explicit articulations do occur. The most conspicuous is found in John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue's work, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth*. They argue:

A sinner will not be declared righteous in God's sight unless he believes, and it is only through the instrumentality of faith that he will lay hold of the righteousness of God in Christ. Thus, it is proper to place faith before justification, and *because faith is itself the instrumental cause of justification, nothing ought to come between them.*²¹ [emphasis added]

For MacArthur and Mayhue, if faith is the *means by which* divine righteousness is received, then it is also the *moment during which* it is received. Therefore, baptism must be "excluded . . . as a necessary prerequisite" for such would be "contrary to . . . Scripture" which clearly decrees "salvation is solely by faith."²² [emphasis added] Because they tether the time of salvation to its instrument, they obscure²³ the heterogeneity of Pauline salvation (namely, that salvation is both 'by faith' and 'in baptism').²⁴

Things (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010); Greg Nichols, *Lectures in Systematic Theology Volume 3: Doctrine of Christ* (Self-Published, 2018). In total, twenty-two systematic theologies were examined including Grudem's own work

²¹ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 569.

²² *Ibid.*, 789. None of the passages referenced in support of their claim (John 1:12; 3:16; Acts 16:31; Rom 3:21-30; 4:5; 10:9-10; Gal 2:16; Phil 3:9) are inconsistent with water baptism being the occasional condition.

²³ As a result, such texts as Acts 2:38 and 22:16 are stripped of their soteriological shine through coarse exegesis. One example is MacArthur and Mayhue's pressed interpretation of the preposition εἰς (*eis*) in Acts 2:38. Following fellow anti-sacramentalists Julius R. Mantey and A. T. Robertson, the editors supplant the traditional reading, "for the purpose of," with the linguistically impoverished "because of." Such imposed exposition is necessary, in part, due to the perceived contradiction in confirming the conditional function of baptism if faith is the sole means. For a fuller assessment of this problematic preposition see Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012) 975. See also, Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 369-371; Ralph Marcus, "On Causal *Eis*," *JBL* 70 (Jun. 1951) 129-130; Ralph Marcus, "The Elusive Causal *Eis*," *JBL* 71 (March 1952) 43-44. For a showcase of similarly strained, baptismal exegesis, see Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 496-504.

²⁴ For an illustration of Paul's distinction (between faith and baptism) without dissociation see Col 2:12: συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγήρθητε διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν (*syntaphentes autō en tō baptisμō, en ō kai sunēgerthēte dia tēs pisteōs tēs energeias tou theou tou egeirantos auton ek nekron*), "having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead"). See also John Calvin, *The Consensus Tigurinus* (1549), trans. Henry Beveridge, Article 9: "Wherefore, though we distinguish, as we ought, between the signs and the things signified, yet we do not disjoin the reality from the signs, but acknowledge that all who in faith embrace the promises there offered receive Christ spiritually."

Another seemingly clear statement of the non sequitur is found in Rolland McCune’s systematic theology. He contends:

It is the ‘objective God-righteousness of Jesus Christ’ that is credited to the believer in a judicially constitutive act of God at the time of saving faith. It occurs at initial faith *because a person can be justified only through faith* in Jesus Christ (Rom 4:9-13).²⁵

Like MacArthur and Mayhue, McCune appears to conflate the *how* and *when* of grace reception, contending that because faith is the instrument by which salvation is appropriated, one receives this redemption the moment one believes. Therefore, water baptism “has symbolic value only” because “no spiritual power is transferred to the candidate *by* the ordinance.”²⁶ [emphasis added]

Non-sequitur statements can also occur in the reverse (namely, if baptism is not the means, then it cannot be a condition). For example, Millard J. Erickson, in his *Christian Theology*, argues:

The act of baptism conveys no direct spiritual benefit or blessing. In particular, we are not regenerated *through* baptism, for baptism *presupposes* faith and the salvation to which faith leads. It is, then, a testimony that one *has already been regenerated*.²⁷ [emphasis added]

Because baptism is not the means or cause of salvation, Erickson concludes it cannot be a condition. Similarly, Cottrell’s defeater prevents Augustus Strong from seeing baptism can be both a sign and the occasion without being the means: “The Scriptures represent baptism to be not the means but only the sign of regeneration, and *therefore* to presuppose and *follow* regeneration.”²⁸ [emphasis added]

APPEALS TO SPECIOUS EVIDENCE. A second potential form of Cottrell’s non sequitur concerns appeals to specious evidence. While many scholars insist initial faith occasions salvation, their supporting citations fall short of establishing this temporal utility.²⁹ Wayne Grudem, for example, expels water baptism from the *ordo salutis*

²⁵ Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity, Volume Three: The Doctrines of Salvation, the Church, and Last Things* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010) 100-101.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 272-273.

²⁷ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990) 1096.

²⁸ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium* (Valley Forge: Judson, 1969) 821.

²⁹ See for example, Garrett, Jr., *Systematic Theology*, 289-290; Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, 496; Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 982n26; MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 785; John Miley, *Systematic Theology* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1989) 318-319; Edgar Young Mullins, *The Christian Religion: In Its Doctrinal Expression* (Philadelphia: Roger Williams, 1917) 389-392; Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 324-325; H. Orton Wiley, *Christian Theology Volume II* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1966) 393-394.

because “justification . . . takes place at the point of saving faith.” However, the biblical data Grudem marshals to buttress this belief (for example, Rom 3:25, 26, 28; 4:26; Gal 2:16; Eph 2:8-9) speak merely to the means of salvation (namely, that grace comes διὰ (*dia*, “through”) or ἐκ (*ek*, “from”) πίστεως (*πίστεως*, “faith”) not its occasion.³⁰

And while a time element may be assumed by the apostle in such texts, it is unlikely—at least for these interpreters—for the following reasons. Firstly, for exegetes of the “old perspective,” Paul’s primary concern in these passages is to contrast two systems of salvation (grace and law) and the means consistent with appropriating each (faith and works, respectively). Thus, the apostle is laboring to demonstrate how God’s righteousness is to be received (*by* grace *through* faith as opposed to *by* law *through* works), not *when* this reception takes place (whether *in* faith, *in* baptism, or *in* a particular law work).³¹

Secondly, in all three letters, Paul states that baptism is the moment a person’s mystical union with the Messiah occurs (Rom 6:1-11; Gal 3:26-27; Eph 2:4-6; compare Col 2:11-14).³² Given this, it seems strange that these systematicians do not feel pressed to provide a more robust foundation for their assertion that faith alone conditions salvation.

On the contrary, John Miley boasts that faith as the sole requisite is so “openly true” that “mere reference to a few texts will suffice.” Such confidence seems remiss unless something like the non sequitur is operating in the background.³³ These scholars seem to assume that if faith is the means (as Paul abundantly professes) it is also the moment.

ASSUMPTIONS OF A NECESSITAS MEDII. When refuting the occasionist position, theologians often point to ‘dry’ salvation accounts in ruling out baptism’s conditional nature.³⁴ They reason that if the thief on the cross (Luke 23:43) or the pious

³⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 982n26.

³¹ For paradigmatic examples of the “old perspective” on Paul, see Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) and John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960). For more recent studies, see Jack Cottrell, *Romans, Volumes 1 and 2* (Joplin: College Press, 1996); Colin G. Cruse, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012); Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018); Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).

³² For Paul’s soteriological use of baptism in Romans 6, see Moo, *Romans*, 378-401. For a sacramental reading of Galatians 3:26-27, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 146-160. For baptismal allusions in Ephesians 2:4-6, see Cottrell, *Baptism*, 141-143.

³³ John Miley, *Systematic Theology*, 318. Miley’s minimal textual support is similar to Grudem’s: Rom 3:21-26; 4:3, 23-25; Gal 3:24. A similar confidence is perhaps present in James Petigru Boice, *Abstract of Systematic Theology* (Louisville: SBTS, 2013) 363, who merely asserts the Scriptures teach salvation at the moment of faith.

³⁴ See for example, Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 981-982. See also Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology Volume 3 Spirit-Given Life: God’s People, Present and Future* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 285; MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 784-785.

centurion (Acts 10:44-48) could be washed without water, then redemption cannot be dependent on ritual cleansing.

However, such is only the case if the act of ablution has a *necessitas medii* rather than a *necessitas precepti*. If baptism is merely the moment of salvation (rather than the means), then its necessity is relative. Such proof-texts lose their polemical force because only when a condition has absolute necessity do exceptions, such as the unimmersed thief, serve as counterexamples.

Given its proper function, baptism can be at the same time necessary (normative) and unnecessary (a *necessitas non absoluta*).³⁵ Yet the assumption remains that for baptism to take part in the drama of redemption it must be absolutely necessary. One possible explanation for this default mindset is a failure to distinguish between Roman-Catholic sacramentalism, which affirms baptism's *necessitas medii*, and other expressions of it that do not.

The exact principle behind this presupposition is difficult to decipher, and while a missing distinction between the *how* and *when* of grace reception is certainly a contender—for such a conflation would bestow on baptism a *necessitas medii*—without further evidence, it is impossible to favor it over competing theories.

CONCLUSION

The preceding findings, limited as they are, suggest that Cottrell's non sequitur has contributed to some credo-baptists dismissing the sacramental significance of baptism. And by insisting that faith is not only the exclusive instrument of initial salvation but also its sole condition, these scholars have transgressed the soteriological traditions of their Protestant predecessors.³⁶

But, if the doctrinal descendants of the 16th-century Reformation have been duped by the non sequitur, what about those of its 18th-century reappraisal? If Zwingli's progeny have pressed the doctrine of *sola fide* too far in order to avoid contradiction, could it be that Campbell's posterity have not pressed it far enough so as to preserve baptism's soteriological status? Inquiry along such lines may prove fruitful in terms of rapprochement, for there are few ways to foster a friendship faster than through the discovery of a mutual enemy. **ScJ**

³⁵ Beasley-Murray, *Baptism*, 296-305.

³⁶ While both Luther and Calvin professed the primacy of faith, neither denied baptism's appropriating function. For Luther's view on baptism as the "trusting place," see Jonathon D. Trigg, *Baptism in the Theology of Martin Luther* (Boston: Brill, 2001) 30-31; 75-81. For Calvin's affirmation of baptism's occasional nature, see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (vol. 1; ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; 2 vols.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011) 4.15.14: "For this analogy or similitude is the surest rule of the sacraments: that we should see spiritual things in physical, as if set before our very eyes. . . . And [God] does not feed our eyes with a mere appearance only, but leads us to the present reality and effectively performs what it symbolizes." See also, *Institutes* 4.14.17: "God therefore truly executes whatever he promises and represents in signs."