

It seems clear that Luther is caught in a flat-out self-contradiction when he stresses in one and the same writing both that no one can believe for another and that infants, who are unable to believe, are aided by the faith of the church.

Thus he says in one place, "Who can receive or apply, in behalf of another, the promise of God, which demands the personal faith of each one individually? Can I give to another the promise of God, even if he does not believe? Can I believe for another, or cause another to believe? . . . Therefore, let this irrefutable truth stand fast: Where there is a divine promise, there every one must stand on his own feet; his own personal faith is demanded, he will give an account for himself and bear his own load" (*LW* 36: 48 f.). A few pages later, however, he argues that "[i]nfants are aided by the faith of others, namely, those who bring them for baptism. . . . [T]hrough the prayer of the believing church which presents it, a prayer to which all things are possible [Mk 9:23], the infant is changed, cleansed, and renewed by in-poured faith. . . . What obstacle cannot be removed by the faith of the church and the prayer of faith?" (73 f.).

The answer, obviously, is that the one, irremovable obstacle is that "where there is a divine promise, there every one must stand on his own feet." Small wonder that the absurd notion of "infant faith" came to have a certain appeal—namely, as a way of obviating the self-contradiction that Luther allows himself to fall into.

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