

**THESE LIVING WATERS:**  
**COMMON AGREEMENT ON MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF BAPTISM**  
**A REPORT OF THE CATHOLIC-REFORMED DIALOGUE IN THE UNITED STATES**  
**2004-2007**  
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## **1. Introduction**

### A SEASON OF ENGAGEMENT

The twentieth century was one of intense dialogue among churches throughout the world. In the mission field and in local communities, in regional ecumenical bodies and in bilateral discussions between churches, Christians made commitments to engage each other not only in cooperative activity but in theological deliberation. The Roman Catholic Church and churches of the Reformed tradition have been no exceptions. This report on baptism is offered in the context of more than forty years of dialogue between the Reformed churches in the United States and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (now the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops). The relationships in the United States form only a part of our context, however, and our dialogue has been enriched by encounters and relationships around the world.

### OUR GLOBAL ROMAN CATHOLIC AND REFORMED CONTEXT

Important ecumenical events of the past forty years have influenced our theological perspectives as well as our maturing ability to understand each other. Liturgical renewals, encouraged by relationships with the Roman Catholic Church, have engendered in many Reformed Christians a deeper appreciation of our common roots. These renewals have heightened awareness of the richness of our common liturgical tradition. Roman Catholic seminaries have developed a renewed focus on the preaching of the Word in the sacramental liturgy, which is a strong emphasis in the Reformed tradition. In addition, in recent decades, Roman Catholics have come to read Reformed theologians with new lenses. The discovery of new source material—both patristic and biblical—has greatly enhanced our collective ability to affirm a common heritage. More than ever, ecumenical prayer services include a ritual for the

reaffirmation of our baptismal vows, a reminder of that which binds us to each other as kindred in Christ, acknowledging our one calling through our one baptism, claimed by one God.

Earlier in our history, movements within our traditions sought to provide bridges between us. In the German Reformed community, for example, theologians of the Mercersburg liturgical movement made explicit commitments to rebuilding a relationship with the Roman Catholic Church as one element in manifesting the full, visible unity of the church. After Vatican II, Roman Catholic dioceses established diocesan ecumenical offices that nurtured the formation of “living-room dialogues” in which many Reformed church members participated, strengthening relationships across the United States and the world.

Churches in relationship through the ecumenical movement also have sought to articulate joint beliefs about baptism. Our practices and our theologies have varied widely, but even without complete consensus, important convergences and deeper understandings have emerged. As a result of numerous dialogues, a growing familiarity with baptismal theology and practice among churches has made a profound contribution to the church’s ability to claim its vision of unity. As recently as 2002, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in the Vatican urged ongoing study and dialogue of many theological issues for the strengthening of Roman Catholic and Reformed church relationships, most especially urging a focus on baptism as basic to our Christian identity.

Landmark studies have offered us encouragement and guidance along the way. The 1982 World Council of Churches document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* presented the churches with an important opportunity to engage in dialogue on these matters. Through such studies, Christians came to appreciate more deeply their own and each other’s baptismal expressions and

theology.

More recently, in the Eighth Report of the Joint Working Group between the Vatican and the World Council of Churches (2005), Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox Christians explored the meaning and practice of baptism. While the 2005 report was much broader in ecclesial scope than the one we offer here, it reflects many issues found in our own bilateral dialogue, and it urges, as we do, further study in areas of continuing difference.

#### OUR REGIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

The international arena is only one among many vital settings for dialogue and reflection between Reformed and Roman Catholic Christians. Official discussions at the national level in the United States have been equally important in advancing mutual understanding. Topics in the past forty years have included theological, liturgical, and ethical issues. These issues have been explored primarily in service of the pastoral needs of our churches, but at the same time, sound pastoral practice rests on solid theological foundations. This report, succeeding the report *Interchurch Families*, grew from a recognition that our pastoral customs reflect our different theological and ecclesial traditions—differences that must be understood if we are to relate to each other in healthy ways.

In the United States, members of our traditions encounter each other locally through common service and community worship experiences. Learning in local settings has been both intentional (through the formation of discussion groups between congregations and parishes) and informal (as neighbors work together on projects for the common good). Common work and intentional dialogue, where it has occurred consistently, has enabled members of both of our traditions to respond to community concerns effectively and deepen appreciation for the different

gifts each tradition brings to common public life.

Finally, the family has been a vital setting for dialogue between Roman Catholic and Reformed Christians in the United States. Increasingly, marriage and the mobility of extended families have contributed to an intimate encounter between the traditions—which can be sometimes a joy and sometimes a vexation. Families are the settings where the gifts that each tradition brings can be most concretely received, but they also are the places where our differences can be most keenly felt and where the pain of our divisions might have the most significant results. It has been important, therefore, in official settings, to approach with utmost care topics that affect the experience of our members and the pastoral leaders who serve them.

In all of these settings, both the Reformed and the Roman Catholic churches have affirmed the value of ecumenical engagement and increased mutual understanding. Through our ongoing encounter, we have come to know each other's ecclesial characteristics, value each other's strengths, and make commitments to deeper relationships.

We hope this study will provide an occasion for ongoing dialogue among Roman Catholic and Reformed lay and ordained leaders, both in places of longtime engagement and in settings where it will be entirely new. Such dialogue can contribute to the common witness of the church on the local level and make ecumenical ideas a lived reality of Christian faith.

#### OUR HOPE

It is precisely the gift of our unity in the church of Jesus Christ through our baptisms that enables us to come to the dialogue table not just as acquaintances but as kindred—as members of one family in Christ—to consider in-depth matters of baptismal theology and practice. The theological reflection in this report is intended to provide a sound basis on which our

communions can express in tangible ways a mutual recognition of each other's baptisms. We have acknowledged areas of agreement and of difference. Through our engagement, we have experienced our own faith traditions more clearly by seeing ourselves through the lenses of our partners. Through dialogue, we have become reacquainted with our own traditions, Scripture, and the sacraments. We have had the opportunity to examine, and, perhaps most important, to correct, past misunderstandings and caricatures. As our relationships have deepened, we have celebrated areas of theological consensus. We give thanks for the patient and careful dialogue that has brought our traditions closer together, we note those places where consensus has yet to be achieved but where ongoing dialogue holds promise for closer convergence, and we acknowledge those aspects of our theology and practice where there is no convergence but where the commitment to the eventual full, visible unity of the church will be well served by strengthened mutual understanding.

Through an honest desire to understand each other and therefore to acknowledge both the limits and the possibilities of what we can accomplish together, we believe we can make an enduring statement about what we hold in common.

We offer this report not simply as an academic study to be reviewed by those with a particular interest in the theology of baptism but to the entire constituency of our churches as a discernment of where the Holy Spirit is leading us together. We pray hopefully that each encounter may move us to deeper recognition and into a more faithful relationship with the triune God. Ultimately our unity is not something we create but is a gift given us by God. Its visible manifestation is something for which our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ prayed (John 17), and we know that the earliest witnesses to the Christian faith proclaimed both the present reality



and the eschatological hope of one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Ephesians 4). Where we have fallen short of answering the call to that full, visible unity, we confess our culpability and the enduring scandal of division within the body of Christ.

And so in celebration of what we hold in common and in testimony to our desire to make God's gift of unity more visible, we offer our common witness in the following common agreement.

## **2. Common agreement on mutual recognition of baptism**

1. Together we affirm that, by the sacrament of baptism, a person is truly incorporated into the body of Christ (I Cor. 12:13 and 27; Eph. 1:22-23), the church. Baptism establishes the bond of unity existing among all who are part of Christ's body and is therefore the sacramental basis for our efforts to move towards visible unity.
2. Together we affirm that baptism is the sacramental gateway into the Christian life, directed toward the fullness of faith and discipleship in Christ.
3. Together we affirm that incorporation into the universal church by baptism is brought about by celebrating the sacrament within particular Christian communities.
4. Together we affirm that baptism is to be conferred only once, because those who are baptized are decisively incorporated into the body of Christ.
5. Together we affirm that baptism is a sacrament of the church, enacted in obedience to the mission confided to it by Christ's own word. For our baptisms to be mutually recognized, water and the scriptural trinitarian formula "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28: 19-20) must be used in the baptismal rite.

6. Together we affirm that the validity of baptism depends on its celebration according to the apostolic witness by the church and its authorized ministers.
7. Together we affirm, as a sign of our unity and as a witness to ecumenical commitment, the practice of inviting the presence and, where appropriate, the participation of members of our respective communions in the celebration of baptism. At the same time, we affirm our responsibility to respect the integrity of the distinct baptismal practices of the communions in which the rite of baptism is administered.
8. Given our mutual recognition of baptism, we encourage using baptismal registers in the local church community and, when requested by another church for a pastoral need in the life of an individual, providing written attestations of baptism, including the liturgical formula used. Such cooperation and mutual accountability honors the dignity of the sacrament of baptism.

We rejoice at the common faith we share and affirm in this document. We understand that the journey toward full, visible unity depends on openness to the grace of God and humility before the initiatives of God's Spirit among us. Because of these convictions, we encourage Roman Catholic and Reformed pastoral leaders to continue their commitment to regular dialogue about theology and pastoral practice in all settings, from the local to the international setting. Pastoral leaders engaged in such dialogue embody our hopes for unity, collaborative effort, and common witness. We believe that respectful dialogue can provide a strong witness to the wider church about our commitment to a relationship in Christ and can stand as a safeguard against the unreflective judgments that have, at certain times in our history, diminished and distorted our

relations.

### **3. Historical overview: Perspectives on sacramentality**

The following sections describe both the history and theology of baptismal rites in the Reformed and Roman Catholic communions. Two distinct investigatory methods are evident in the work that follows: (1) a historical approach (especially Section II), narrating each communion's self-understanding about sacramental practice as developed over a given timeline, and (2) a liturgical approach (especially Section IIIA) that offers each communion's own account of the church's interaction with God in the celebration of the rites. (The observations that follow are made only of Roman Catholic and not of Eastern Christian baptismal rites.)

#### *Introduction*

The Reformed and Catholic communions share a common tradition about sacrament. They rejoice over what they uphold together and they understand where they evaluate the tradition differently. Their common tradition begins with the apostle Paul and the Greek word *mysterion* ("mystery") as found in Paul's letters (e.g., 1 Cor. 2:1; 4:1; Rom. 16:25). There the word referred to God's hidden plan for salvation. The developing Pauline tradition (e.g., Eph. 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; Col. 1:26-27; 2:2) took up this theme and proclaimed that this mystery is embodied in Christ, in whose sufferings we share (e.g., Col. 1:24-2:3).<sup>1</sup> From there, early North African, Latin translations of the Greek New Testament translated *mysterion* with the word *sacramentum*. In this context, *sacramentum* referred to the redeeming work of God that was known through Jesus.

The writings of the North African theologian Tertullian (ca. 160-ca. 230), including what

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Günther Bornkamm, *Mysterion*, in Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Vol. IV (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1967) 803ff.

may be the earliest work on sacramental theology (*De Baptismo*), continued the connection between *mysterion* and *sacramentum*.<sup>2</sup> In *De Spectaculis*, Tertullian calls the Eucharist a sacrament (3:10), and in *Adversus Marcionem*, he calls baptism a sacrament several times, as he also does in *De Baptismo*. Furthermore, Tertullian does not limit his understanding of sacrament simply to baptism and Eucharist; he calls charity “the highest sacrament of the faith” (*De Patientia* 12:133-34), and he uses *sacramentum* in relation to martyrdom (*Scorpiace* ch. 9).

The word *sacrament* carried two principal meanings by the early third century. It referred to Jesus because God’s redeeming presence was known through the man Jesus—what church tradition broadly calls the incarnation. *Sacrament* also referred to certain rituals of the church because in them, likewise through the physical, God’s redeeming presence was known. The much-beloved biblical passage that symbolically connected Jesus as sacrament to the church’s sacraments was the scene of blood (symbolizing the Eucharist) and water (symbolizing baptism) flowing from the wounded side of Christ (John 19:34). Many of the early church theologians allegorically interpreted this scene as referring to the birth of the church through the issuance of Christ’s blood and water, that is, through the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> To the idea of sacrament Tertullian also added the faithful human response to God’s redeeming work that comes to us through the *sacramentum*. For a general introduction to this material and helpful bibliography, see Thomas M. Finn, “Sacraments,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York & London: Garland, 1990), 811-815. For *sacramentum*, see the discussion by Josef Finkenzeller, *Die Lehre von den Sakramenten in allgemeinen: Von der Schrift bis zur Scholastik* (Freiburg: Herder, 1980), 4-37, esp. 10-13, 25-30; also see, J. de Ghelinck, S.J., *Pour l’histoire du mot “sacramentum” I. Les Anténicéens* (Louvain: Spicelgium sacrum Lovaniense, 1924), esp. 12-18, 144-152. For a classic, late-nineteenth century Protestant view on sacrament, see Ferdinand Kattenbusch, “Sakrament,” in *Real-Encyklopädie für Theologie und Kirche* 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1896-1913), 17:349-381. Kattenbusch denies a proper theological and etymological connection between and *sacramentum* but agrees that Tertullian first made the connection, probably based on North African, Latin translations of the New Testament (349-351). Also see Kevin W. Irwin, “Sacrament” in Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins, and Dermot A. Lane (eds.), *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press/A Michael Glazier Book, 1989, 1991) 910-22.

<sup>3</sup> See Finkenzeller, *Lehre*, 22-23; cf. Saint John Chrysostom, *Catechesis* 3, 13-19; Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus*, PG 8, 299 and Ambrose of Milan, *In Luc.* 2, 85-89: PL 15, 1666-1668.

By the fourth century the words *mysterion* and *sacramentum* gained prominence as the rite of Christian initiation, and catechetical teachings about baptism and Eucharist flourished in the post-Constantinian period. The writings of Ambrose (339-397), Cyril of Jerusalem (c.315-386), Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350-428), and other patristic theologians speak about baptism and Eucharist from a neoplatonic perspective in which the physical sign of the sacrament could be distinguished from the spiritual reality signified in it yet truly participative in that same spiritual reality. Leo the Great (d. 461) would summarize this most notably in his homily for Ascension Day: “And so the sight of our Redeemer today passes into mystery (*sacramentum*).”<sup>4</sup> In other words, what Jesus had done in history had passed into the sacrament, or mystery, celebrated by the church each day in the liturgy. Perhaps the most influential among these theologians was the North African bishop Augustine of Hippo (354-430), for whom physical realities were the windows through which the spiritual realities reach us.<sup>5</sup> Augustine also has a notable chapter in the tenth book of *The City of God* that essentially exegetes the meaning to Romans 12:1-3. There he argues that the communion of Christian lives given in love is offered to God as its sacrifice through Christ “the great High Priest (*sacerdotum magnum*; cf. Hebrews 4:14 and following) who offered himself to God in His passion for us.” Augustine then closes the chapter by asserting that this is the sacrifice of Christians: the many, the one body in Christ. And this likewise is the sacrifice that the church repeatedly celebrates by the sacrament of the altar,

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Leo the Great, *Sermon 74:2* (*Corpus Christianorum* [CCL]) 138A, 457: *Quod itaque Redemptoris nostri conspicuum fuit, in sacramenta transivit*. For a full discussion of the relation between *sacramentum* and *mysterium* in the Latin tradition, see Y. Congar, *Le “mysterion” appliqué aux sacrements, traduit par “sacramentum” dans l’église ancienne* in *Un peuple messianique* (Paris: Cerf, 1974), 47-55. See also Louis Bouyer’s *The Christian Mystery*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), especially 5-18 and 31-171 for a treatment of “mystery” in the liturgy.

<sup>5</sup> For a summary of Augustine on sacrament as a sacred sign, see Finkenzeller, *Lehre*, 39-43. For a wider treatment, see Edward J. Kilmartin, S.J., *The Eucharist in the West*, ed. Robert J. Daly, S.J. (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 3-61.

noted by the faithful, in which she shows that she herself is offered in the offering that she makes to God.<sup>6</sup>

These two senses of sacrament—as Jesus himself and as the sacraments of the church—continued into the medieval period, and Latin theologians gradually synthesized the two ideas of sacrament into an integrated theology. The basic medieval concept was that the church is the body of the crucified, resurrected, and glorified Lord and that God’s grace continues to come to us through Christ just as it did in the incarnation. Only now the grace that comes through Christ comes through the sacraments, most especially the Eucharist, by which Jesus Christ continues to be present in the church. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), for example, gave a thorough exposition of eucharistic theology and sacrifice (*Summa Theologica*, III, 73-83) that was a feature of an entire ecclesial world-view that was, so to speak, eucharistic.<sup>7</sup> For Aquinas, the whole world was related to and dependent upon the grace of God, known in creation, proclaimed in salvation history, and present once and still in Jesus Christ, Word made flesh, the one mediator, who has

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<sup>6</sup> De civitate dei 10.6; Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 47.278-9. Hoc est sacrificium christianorum: multi unum corpus in Christo. Quod etiam sacramento altaris fidelibus noto frequentat ecclesia, ubi et demonstratur, quod in ea re, quam offert, ipsa offeratur (CSEL 47.279.52-55)

<sup>7</sup> For a summary of Aquinas’s eucharistic teaching and bibliographic references, see David N. Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery* (New York: Crossroads, 1994), 163-240, esp. 208-240 (also see, 269-290). For a thorough entrance to the vast literature on Thomas Aquinas, see Otto Pesch, “Thomas von Aquino/Thomismus/Neothomismus,” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (New York; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2002). In English, see Thomas O’Meara, *The Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), particularly the annotated bibliography, 290-296. Also see Kilmartin, *Eucharist in the West*, 247-266; Erwin Iserloh, “Abendmahl: III/2. Mittelalter,” *Theologisches Realenzyklopädie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), 1:95-97; E. Mangenot, “Eucharistie du XII<sup>e</sup> a la fin du XV<sup>e</sup> siècle,” *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* (Paris, 1913), 5:1304-1320 and following. For excellent shorter studies more accessible to those not trained in scholastic theology, see Owen Cumings, “Medieval Eucharistic Theology,” Emmanuel (March, 1993): 73-79; Gary Macy, *The Banquet’s Wisdom* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 104-109; Herbert McCabe, “Eucharistic Change,” *Priests & People* 8/6 (1994): 217-221; Raymond Moloney, *The Eucharist* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), 139-150; David Power, “Eucharist,” in *Systematic Theology II: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, John P. Galvin (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 277-280. For an informative Catholic perspective on the sacraments in genera, and thus the place of Thomas within this development, see Regis A. Duffy, “Sacraments in General,” in *Systematic Theology II*, 183-210.

united believers into his reign, the body of Christ. Into this triune God one was baptized, and by the very being of this God one was nourished during life's spiritual journey. Christ instituted the Eucharist, Aquinas argued, because he desired to remain present in the church in a sacramental manner available to faith, unlike a mere corporeal presence available to the senses. The whole economy of salvation, which comes to the individual as spiritual nourishment through faith in Christ's passion, is thus effectively realized now in the sacrament, which is Christ's activity in the church itself.<sup>8</sup>

The late medieval period and particularly the various reforming efforts in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries inherited the traditions that connected sacrament to the church and to the rites that constituted the church and existed through the church. The Protestant reformers continued to affirm that the true church was ultimately the body of Christ, just as they continued to affirm the sacraments that Jesus Christ instituted. The theological arguments by which they connected sacrament, church, and Jesus Christ constructed the tradition differently, however, than did the late medieval church as it moved into the Council of Trent.

#### a. Sacramentality

##### *i. Roman Catholic view*

Sacramentality is a key theological principle of Catholic ecclesial life. It applies not only to the seven sacraments and to the liturgy but is used in reference to the church as a whole. In recent Catholic theology, the notion of sacramentality functions as a foundational principle for Catholic thought and experience because it is related to the principles of mediation and communion as well as to the theology of grace. Grounded in the doctrines of creation,

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<sup>8</sup> See David N. Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery* (New York: Crossroads, 1994), 163—240, esp. 208—238.

incarnation, and the resurrection of the body, sacramentality has much to do with how creation elevated by grace is able to mediate the divine presence even as that presence is personal. It is an affirmation of the capacity of finite creation to be a means for God's manifestation and self-communication.

Divine revelation attests to the sacramental principle. In the history of salvation, the "economy of Revelation," is "realized in deeds and words, which are intrinsically bound up with each other" (*Dei Verbum*, 2). Because the works performed by God show the reality signified by the words and the words proclaim the works, so, too, signs and symbols derived from creation and human culture are used by the church in its liturgical life. The liturgy is at the heart of the church's life, as expressed in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council: "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium* 11). The liturgy also is a work of the holy trinity, and through the mystery of Christ the high priest, it embraces both human and divine action. Therefore liturgy is "an 'action' of the *whole Christ* (*Christus totus*)" (CCC 1136), that is, a work of the risen Christ and his church.

The trinitarian nature of the liturgy proceeds from the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit (their "joint mission"<sup>9</sup>), which culminates in the incarnation of the Son and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. By virtue of the incarnation, the assumed human nature of Christ is inseparably united to the eternal Son of God in the hypostatic union and thus serves the divine Word as a "living organ of salvation." So too, by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit "in a similar way, does the visible social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in

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<sup>9</sup> "In their joint mission, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct but inseparable. To be sure, it is Christ who is seen, the visible image of the invisible God, but it is the Spirit who reveals him." CCC 689.



building up the body” (*Lumen Gentium* 8).

Sacramentality consists of the coalescence of divine and human elements in the life of the church, whereby God acts through the visible organs of the church, especially the sacraments. Catholics, therefore, speak of the church itself analogously as a sacrament, in that the “Church, then, both contains and communicates the invisible grace she signifies” (CCC 774). In Christ, the church is “a sign and instrument both of a closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (*Lumen Gentium* 1).

Sacramentality is consistent with the doctrine of creation whereby God speaks through the visible creation, making it possible for human intelligence to read traces of the Creator in the material cosmos (CCC 1147). A solid theological anthropology, then, needs underscore the social being of humanity and how signs and symbols are intrinsic to communication through language, gestures, and actions (CCC 1146). They are the means for “expressing the action of God who sanctifies men, and the action of men who offer worship to God” (CCC 1148). As in God’s covenant with Israel, in which both cosmic and social symbols are taken up in liturgical life, Jesus himself often illustrated his preaching with physical signs and symbolic gestures—for example, the use of spittle to heal the blind man (John 9:6). So too, since Pentecost, “the Holy Spirit carries on the work of sanctification” through the sacramental signs of the church (CCC 1152), in what has been called its “sacramental economy” or “dispensation” (CCC 1076).

*ii. Reformed view*

From within the longstanding Western conversation in which *sacrament* referred both to the church, which is the body of Christ, and to the sacraments constituting the church, the Reformed tradition asserts that the true church, invisible to human eyes but visible to God’s eyes,

is composed of God's faithful people gathered as the body of Christ. So the Westminster Confession (IX.4) says, "By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit all believers being vitally united to Christ, who is the Head, are thus united one to another in the Church, which is his body (cf. Larger Catechism, Q. 64-66; Scots Confession XVI; Second Helvetic Confession XVII). Reformed theology calls neither the visible nor the invisible church a sacrament.

Reformed theology applies the word *sacrament* to the two divinely instituted signs, baptism and Lord's Supper, to which God attaches the promise of grace (for example, Scots Confession XXI; Heidelberg Catechism Q. 68; Second Helvetic Confession XIX; Belgic Confession, Art. 34; Westminster Confession XXVII). In a loose sense, the true *visible* church might be called sacramental because its two marks, the preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments, both communicate God's real self-giving in Jesus Christ, but such language would be historically foreign to the Reformed tradition. Likewise, although some church rites, such as ordination, penance, and marriage, are God-given and useful (Second Helvetic Confession XIX) and although some simple church rites that are not contrary to the Word of God might be useful ceremonies (Second Helvetic Confession XXVII), the Reformed tradition has never considered such rituals to be sacramentals in the way that the sign of the cross, palms, ashes, incense, or candles were seen as a means of grace in the medieval church.

By contrast, the Reformed tradition has considered the created order to be sacramental insofar as the word connotes God's self-communication—even though Reformed theology typically has refrained from such language. For example, Calvin believed that God accommodates God's self in order that we might know who God is. God desires to span the distance between Creator and creation and meets us where we are, communicating to us as we so

need, because we otherwise are incapable of knowing God (e.g., Commentary on Exodus 3:2, Commentary on Romans 1:19, Commentary on 1 Corinthians 2:7). The essence of God itself, of course, we can never know (*Institutes of the Christian Religion* 1.13.21), but God's activity and will can be seen in creation itself:

Consequently we know the most perfect way of seeking God, and the most suitable order, is not for us to attempt with bold curiosity to penetrate to the investigation of his essence, which we ought more to adore than to search out meticulously, but for us to contemplate him in his works whereby he renders himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates himself to us (*Institutes* 1.5.9).

Creation can clearly be means by which God communicates to us because God daily discloses himself in the entire working of the universe, so that we cannot open our eyes without being compelled to see him . . . on each of his works he has engraved sure marks of his glory, so clear and prominent that even uncultured and dim-witted people cannot plead ignorance as an excuse (*Institutes* 1.5.1).

The universe has become, says Calvin, "a kind of mirror (*speculi*) in which we are able to see him, so far as it concerns us to know him" (Geneva Catechism Q. 25; OS 1.77.25-7).

Furthermore, God's beneficent glory also is reflected by human culture, so that the human mind, even though "fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented with God's excellent gifts" (*Institutes* 2.2.15). Thus Calvin acknowledges that law, philosophy, rhetoric, medicine, and mathematics were true and glorious achievements of ancient cultures because God's grace was at work in the ancients and through these achievements God's beneficence can be seen (*Institutes* 2.2.15). Likewise, through every age moral people have existed whose upright character can be contrasted with those less moral. The moral qualities exemplified are "special graces of God" (*speciales Dei gratias*) that show divine beneficence. (*Institutes* 2.3.3-4). The Canons of Dort put the point this way:

There is, to be sure, a certain light of nature remaining in man after the fall, by

virtue of which he retains some notions about God, natural things, and the difference between what is moral and immoral, and demonstrates certain eagerness for virtue and for good outward behavior. But this light of nature is far from enabling man to come to a saving knowledge of God and conversion to him—so far, in fact, that man does not use it rightly even in matters of nature and society (III/IV, art. 4).

Human moral achievements, both individually and culturally, count not to our glory but to our condemnation because, as Calvin saw the matter, they are done not from thanksgiving that glorifies God, who was the source of such special graces, but were done from our own self-interest (*Institutes* 2.3.4). Thus the Canons of Dort say straightforwardly we “suppress” this light of God in “unrighteousness” and in so doing we render ourselves “without excuse before God” (III/IV Art. 4; cf. Belgic Confession Art. 14).

Finally, the Reformed tradition also understands that within the created order God has given certain signs that enable our confidence in God’s promises. Calvin says that such signs can be through natural elements or even through miracles, and he calls such signs sacraments (*sacramenti nomen; Institutes* 4.14.18). Among natural signs, God used “the tree of life as a guarantee of immortality” to Adam and Eve. So, too, God gave the rainbow to Noah as a pledge of grace toward the earth. Although both tree and rainbow began as natural objects, when they were “inscribed by the Word of God” (*inscripta fuerunt verbo Dei*) they “began to be what previously they were not” (*inciperent esse quod prius non erant*). Among the miracles that were divinely given signs, Calvin notes the light in the smoking firepot (Gen. 15:17), the fleece with dew (Judges 6:37-8), and the shadow of the sundial going backwards (2 Kings 20:9-11) (*Institutes* 4.14.18). These signs were not humanly invented but were given by God, and Calvin differentiates these from the “ordinary” sacraments that God instituted among God’s people,

both of the old law and those instituted by Christ in the new law (*Institutes* 4.14.19-26).

## b. Sacraments

### *i. Roman Catholic view*

The sacraments then, especially the Eucharistic sacrifice, are the center of the church's liturgical life.<sup>10</sup> Christ's work in the liturgy enables the pilgrim church to participate "as by a foretaste, in the heavenly liturgy" such that before the *parousia* (arrival), the Holy Spirit dispenses the mystery of salvation in and through the church's prayer and sacraments (CCC 1112). The sacraments are sacraments of Christ founded in the saving mysteries of Christ's life so that "what was visible in our Savior has passed over into his mysteries" (St. Leo the Great quoted in CCC 1115). The sacraments are sacraments of the church "by her" and "for her" and are instances of the principle of sacramentality. Also, though, "the sacraments make the Church," in that they manifest and communicate to human beings the mystery of communion with the triune God (CCC 1118). The sacraments are sacraments of faith because they presuppose faith (prepared by the Word of God) and through words and objects they nourish, strengthen, and express faith (CCC 1122-1123). The sacraments are sacraments of salvation because they "confer the grace that they signify" (CCC 1127), bestowing the grace necessary for salvation (CCC 1129). The sacraments are sacraments of eternal life because in "the sacraments of Christ the Church already receives the guarantee of her inheritance and even now shares in everlasting life" (CCC 1130).

Catholics also speak of the validity and efficacy of the sacraments, the latter having been a sore point of contention during the Reformation. For a sacrament to be valid, it must be

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<sup>10</sup> There are seven sacraments in the Roman Catholic Church: baptism; confirmation; Eucharist, reconciliation, or penance; anointing of the sick; matrimony; and holy orders.

administered according to the intention of the church to confer the grace of Christ, by a proper minister, and with the form and matter of the particular sacrament. The ministers must be validly ordained except in the case of matrimony, where the minister witnesses the sacrament that is conferred by the spouses upon each other, or in baptism, where in the case of an emergency (not the normative administration of baptism) anyone may baptize if he or she does so with the church's intention. The form and matter of the sacrament embrace the appropriate objects: for example, water, bread, wine, oil, etc., and their corresponding words or sacramental formulae (based on the New Testament accounts) of the Last Supper words of institution for the sacrament of the Eucharist and the Trinitarian formula for baptism.

Sacramental efficacy concerns the conferral of grace in the sacramental act:

The “sacraments act *ex opere operato* (literally “by the very fact of the action’s being performed”), i.e., by virtue of the saving work of Christ, accomplished once for all. It follows that ‘the sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God.’ From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them” (CCC 1128).

Catholics understand in this principle the guarantee of Christ’s salvific action in the sacraments not because of any notion that the sacraments are magical in nature—an unfortunate characterization—but because Christ established the sacraments and his Spirit acts through them. It underscores the church’s firm conviction about the priority of grace and her dependence on Christ. Nor does this mean that the faith of the minister and recipients of the sacraments is unimportant. In sacraments, the posture of the recipient may be interpreted as the disposition of

the one receiving the sacraments so as to not place any obstacle, such as impenitence, in the way of reception and more positively to receive the sacraments in faith, hope, and love and cooperate with the grace received to bear fruit.

Efficacy also includes the grace proper to each sacrament, that is, sacramental grace, and in the case of baptism, confirmation, and holy orders, the reception of an indelible spiritual sign, mark, seal, or character of the specific sacrament imprinted on the soul. This sacramental character consecrates the person to Christ according to the particularity of the sacrament and underscores the nonrepeatability of the sacrament. In baptism and confirmation, one is consecrated to the common priesthood of the faithful, and in holy orders, to the ministerial priesthood.

In summary, the sacraments of the church are the principle means of grace instituted by Christ, and through them Christ acts in the church. Sacraments are “‘powers that come forth’ from the Body of Christ, which is ever-living and life-giving. They are actions of the Holy Spirit at work in his Body, the Church. They are ‘the masterworks of God’ in the new and everlasting covenant” (CCC 1116), with each imparting its own specific grace.

The means of grace also include sacramentals—“sacred signs instituted by the Church...[that] prepare men to receive the fruit of the sacraments and sanctify different circumstances of life” (CCC 1677)—such as blessings, exorcisms, and sacred signs, objects and gestures, including, for example, holy water, the sign of the cross, altars, vestments, incense, rosaries, and the like, many of which inform expressions of popular piety. Popular piety engages the common priesthood of the faithful and embraces the material universe in its use of signs for worship, devotion, and pious and spiritual exercises. The theological principle that accounts for

the efficacy of grace in sacramentals is *ex opere operantis* (“from the work of the worker”). Although God is still the source of grace, its imparting in sacramentals is proportioned to the holiness and faith of the believer practicing them. One may also speak of *ex opere operantis Ecclesiae*, because it is the church that acts or prays not only in the sacraments but also in nonsacramental liturgy, for example, the Liturgy of the Hours, and in various forms of devotional prayer that the church encourages. All of these are ways in which grace is offered by Christ in the Holy Spirit and increased through grace’s faithful reception by believers and their fruitful cooperation with it.

#### *ii Reformed view*

The Reformed tradition argued at the time of the Protestant Reformation and still maintains that worship ought to be done according to Scripture. For some in the tradition, only those practices that Scripture warranted could be done:

But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture (Westminster Confession XXIII).

For other parts of the tradition, rites not prescribed by Scripture still could be celebrated for our benefit so long as they did not go against Scripture. As the Second Helvetic Confession pastorally puts the matter, “a few moderate and simple rites, that are not contrary to the Word of God, are sufficient for the godly” (XXVII).

The Reformed tradition thus counts the dominically instituted sacraments as two: baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Scots Confession XXI, Heidelberg Catechism Q. 68, Second Helvetic Confession XIX, Belgic Confession Art. 34, Westminster Confession XXVII). To these



sacraments the Reformed tradition applies the longstanding hermeneutic of *signum-res* (sign-thing) to explain what a sacrament is. To the outer sign God attaches an inner reality, and the Reformed tradition typically understands that inner reality as ultimately Christ himself (Tetrapolitan Confession XVII-XVIII, First Basel Confession VI, Second Basel Confession (First Helvetic Confession) 20 and 22 (Supper), Scots Confession XXI, Second Helvetic Confession XIX, French Confession, XXXIV-XXXVI, Belgic Confession Art. 33). As the Second Helvetic Confession says,

the principle thing which God promises in all sacraments and to which all the godly in all ages direct their attention (some call it the substance [*substantiam*] and matter [*materiam*] of the sacraments) is Christ the Savior (XIX).

Some Reformed voices express the object signified with a proximate description, such as “holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him” (Westminster Confession XXVII). Actual discussions of baptism and the Lord’s Supper typically describe a person’s baptismal “ingrafting in Christ (Westminster Confession XXVIII.1) and/or assert that in the supper believers “really and indeed . . . receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all the benefits of his death” (Westminster Confession XXIX.7).

Reformed theology distinguishes between the validity and the efficacy of the sacraments. The sacraments are to be administered by ordained ministers of the church (Scots Confession XXII; Second Helvetic Confession XVIII, XIX; Large Catechism Q. 169), and when so administered with the proper sign and divine promise of grace as the church intentionally follows the mandate of Scripture, the sacrament validly offers what the sign signifies:

Two things are necessary for the right administration of the sacraments. The first is that they should be ministered by lawful ministers . . . and the second is that

they should be ministered in the elements and manner which God has appointed. Otherwise they cease to be the sacraments of Christ Jesus (Scots Confession XXII).

In a long discussion, the Second Helvetic Confession contrasts validly offered sacraments with their efficacy, which is linked to “the condition of those who receive them”:

For we know that the value [i.e., fruitfulness] of the sacraments depends on faith and upon the truthfulness and pure goodness of God. For as the Word of God remains the true Word of God, in which, when it is preached, not only bare words are repeated, but at the same time the things signified or announced in words are offered by God, even if the ungodly and unbelievers hear and understand the words yet do not enjoy the things signified, because they do not receive them by true faith; so the sacraments, which by the Word consist of signs and the things signified, remain true and inviolate sacraments, signifying not only sacred things, but, by God offering, the things signified, even if unbelievers do not receive the things offered (XIX).

Thus while under right administration sacraments validly offer the divine reality that the signs signify, their efficacy applies only to those who receive the sacraments in faith. Calvin’s 1545 Geneva Catechism (no. 329) simply asserts that when the sacraments are offered, “[m]any do close the way by their perverseness and so make it worthless for themselves. Thus its fruit reaches only the faithful. Yet from that nothing of the nature of the sacrament disappears (*nihil sacramenti naturae decedit*).”

Finally, the Reformed tradition holds that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are not strictly speaking the first sacraments that God gave to God’s people. God granted sacraments in the old dispensation, and the “sacraments of the ancient people were circumcision, and the Paschal Lamb, which was offered up” (Second Helvetic Confession XIX). The Reformed tradition generally ascribes to these sacraments the same ultimate reality signified by the sacraments instituted by Jesus Christ (Westminster Confession XXVII.7), for in each case Christ “is the

chief thing and very substance of the sacraments in both” (Second Helvetic Confession XIX). The Reformed tradition argues, thus, that there is an ultimate unity of covenant between old and new. As Calvin put the matter, “the covenant with all the patriarchs is so much not different from ours in substance and reality (*substantia et re*) that it is absolutely one and the same thing (*Institutes* 2.10.2).

This covenant unity exists because the patriarchs “had and knew Christ the mediator, through whom they were joined (*coniungerentur*) to God and were partakers of his promises” (*Institutes* 2.10.2). Thus Calvin rejected “that scholastic dogma (to mention this in passing) which notes so great a difference between the sacraments of the old and new law, as though the old did nothing but foreshadow the grace of God, but the latter truly conferred it as a present reality” (*Institutes* 4.14.23).

At the same time, some Reformed confessions also try to distinguish the sacraments that were given “under the Law” (Scots Confession XXI) from those given under the new dispensation. The Second Helvetic Confession asserts that “a great difference” exists between the signs. The new signs are “are more firm and lasting,” “more simple and less laborious,” and “belong to a more numerous people.” Further, “both the substance and promise” (*et rem et promissionem*) have been “fulfilled or perfected” in Christ, and “a greater abundance of the Spirit” follows (XIX).

### *c. Summary*

In our traditions’ different accounts of sacramentality it is evident that this theological concept weighs more heavily in the Roman Catholic than in the Reformed tradition. Perhaps this is most clear in our respective understandings of ecclesiology. As we have seen in the Catholic

section, the notion of the church as sacrament emerged in theology and in the conciliar documents of the Second Vatican Council and has been used in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Reformed theologians have been less apt to appropriate this ecclesiological model. It is interesting that the following statement appeared in the 1976 Report of the U.S. Presbyterian & Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue, titled *The Unity We Seek*: “We see the Church as called to be a sign—a sacrament—of that unity which God has willed for his creation and disclosed in Jesus Christ.”

At the international level, however, things are quite different. In the second phase (1984-1990) of the dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the final report, *Towards a Common Understanding of the Church*, described two conceptions of the church: the church as *creatura Verbi* (creation of the Word) for the Reformed tradition and the church as sacrament of grace for Roman Catholics. What the document says in its Questions and Reflections section is worth quoting in full:

112. We are agreed in recognizing the radical dependence of the church in receiving the transcendent gift which God makes to it, and we recognize that gift as the basis of its activity of service for the salvation of humanity. But we do not yet understand the nature of this salutary activity in the same way. The Reformed commonly allege that Catholics appropriate to the church the role proper to Christ. Roman Catholics, for their part, commonly accused the Reformed of holding the church apart from the work of salvation and of giving up the assurance that Christ is truly present and acting in his church. Both these views are caricatures, but they can help to focus attention on genuine underlying differences of perspective, of which the themes of *creatura verbi* and *sacramentum gratiae* serve as symbols.

113. The two conceptions, “the creation of the word” and “sacrament of grace,” can in fact be seen as expressing the same instrumental reality under different aspects, as complementary to each other or as two sides of the same coin. They can also be poles of a creative tension between our churches. A particular point at which this tension becomes apparent is reached when it is asked how the questions of the continuity and order of the church through the ages appear in light of these two concepts.

Although we did not discuss these texts, the tension they describe often surfaced in our discussions. We recognize that they penetrate to the heart of our different understandings of sacramentality. It also can be noted that World Council of Churches' 2005 Faith and Order Paper, *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*, was able to affirm that church is a "Gift of God, a Creation of the Word and Holy Spirit," and can even speak of the "Church as a Sign and Instrument of God's Intention and Plan for the World." However, it could not agree on the church as sacrament, confining that concept to a box in the text that articulates alternative views. With this in mind, we hope that our reflections on baptism may be a further stepping stone to a common understanding of the church and sacramentality.

#### **4: Baptismal rites**

##### *a. Our common early history*

Just as Roman Catholic and Reformed churches share a common tradition about the theology of sacrament, so also we have in common the history of baptismal practice and reflection up until the sixteenth century. Our respect for common biblical and patristic sources has in recent decades become a central impetus for convergence, if not complete agreement, about the celebration of baptism in our communions. For this reason, it is useful to review briefly the early history of the church's baptismal rites, as well as the medieval developments that preceded our separation.<sup>11</sup>

The liturgical form of baptism in the New Testament period is not known with precision.

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<sup>11</sup> For more detailed description of the history that follows, see Maxwell Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1999) and Edward Yarnold, S.J., *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of the R.C.I.A.* 2d ed. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994).

However, it would seem that Matthew 28:19-20 reflects actual baptismal practice, sanctioned by the way it is placed on the lips of the risen Christ. The expressions “baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 19:5) at times are interpreted as referring to a liturgical formula but might in fact simply refer to the rite of baptism in the same way that the phrase “the breaking of the bread” is used to refer to the Eucharist. Some suggestions of early Christian baptismal practice are attested in the Didache (9:5), which is possibly as early as 60 C.E., as an indication of how liturgical praxis would emerge from its home in apostolic Judaism.

Though the New Testament records few details about baptismal practice in the earliest days of Christianity, it is clear that new converts to Christianity were initiated into Christ and the church by baptism, a ritual washing that was eventually connected with the command of Jesus himself (Matt. 28:19-20). Baptism seems at first to have been modeled on the actions of John the Baptist (John 1:31,33; Acts 1:22), which symbolized repentance, or *teshuvah*. John’s baptism also bore some continuity with either the ritual washing, or *mikvah*, of second-temple Judaism, Jewish proselyte baptism as used from at least the first century B.C.E., or the more isolationist, Essene-style baptism, which was eschatological (see *Serekh ha-Yahad*, or “Community Rule Scroll”). John himself presaged baptisms by Jesus when he distinguished his own as merely a water baptism, versus the spirit or fire baptism to be given by the promised one (Matt. 3:11 and Luke 3:16; John 1:33). Jesus would then use the word *baptism* to describe either a sharing in his sufferings for those who would follow him (Matt. 20:22-23 and Mark 10:38) or as a name for his own rite of washing with water, but offered by his disciples (John 4:1-2)—at first only to Jews. Later the apostles would adapt John’s practices to Jesus’ injunctions to baptize gentiles as well (Matt. 28:19-20), with Paul then developing the term typologically by contrasting the Israelites’

“baptism into Moses” (1 Cor. 10:2) with baptism into Jesus Christ. In sum, New Testament accounts provide several controlling images for baptism, with two of these particularly important in the patristic era. Those images also have re-emerged as central themes in recent reforms of baptism: (1) baptism as new birth through water and the Spirit (John 3) and (2) baptism as union with Christ in his death and resurrection (Romans 6).

New Testament texts are ambiguous about whether baptism was extended only to adults or might have included children. When Paul and others are said to have baptized an entire “household” (*oikos*), there is no doubt that men and women, married and widowed, and those who were free were included (1 Cor.1:16; Acts 16:15; 11:14; 16:31). But did such baptisms also embrace slaves and children? Early church figures such as Tertullian (c.160-c.240 C.E.; *De spect.* 4, *De corona mulites* 3, *De anima* 35) speak warmly of the baptism of children, but there seems to be no clear, universal understanding about the matter in the immediate subapostolic period.

The New Testament suggests mixed baptismal practices. While it is clear, for example, that the Lord’s injunction in Matthew 28:19-20 involves a declarative formula for baptism, it is equally clear in Acts 2:38, 8:16, 10:48, and 19:5 that “baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus” was commonplace in many early Jewish-Christian communities.<sup>12</sup> The same practice is found in the baptismal sections of the *Didache* 9.5 (c. 60 C.E.), where Christian praxis would emerge slowly from its home in apostolic Judaism.

In the second and third centuries, sources reveal varying patterns of development in baptismal practices. Justin Martyr’s (100-165 C.E.) account of baptism in Rome, found in his

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<sup>12</sup> Though this term might have been the common expression for a fuller ritual expression of baptism (see *fractio panis*).

*First Apology* (61,65), describes a water baptism whose language is built around Eastern Christian notions of illumination.

In Syria (*Didascalia apostolorum* 9.12; c.250 C.E.), there was strong emphasis on prebaptismal anointing associated with the assimilation of the baptized into the royal and priestly offices of Christ. The baptism itself was accompanied by the trinitarian formula and led directly to Eucharist. In North Africa, Tertullian described a process that included vigils and fasts, renunciation of Satan, threefold creedal profession of faith at baptism, postbaptismal anointing, prayer with laying on of hands associated with the gift of the Spirit, and participation in the Eucharist (*De spect.* 4, *De corona mulieres* 3, *De anima* 35) . The contested *Apostolic Tradition*, 21 (attributed to Hippolytus of Rome, c. 215 C.E.) describes three years of catechesis, including prayer, fasting, and exorcism, and a formal rite of admission to the catechumenate, accompanied by careful interrogation about lifestyle, all leading up to baptism at a vigil (perhaps an Easter vigil). This baptismal rite included renunciation of Satan, full body anointing with the “oil of exorcism,” or “oil of the catechumens,” threefold creedal questioning accompanying baptismal immersions, postbaptismal anointing with the oil of thanksgiving, entrance into the assembly, at which the bishop offered the laying on of hands with prayer and yet another anointing, and finally, participation in the Eucharist (see the fifth-century Syrian *Canons of Hippolytus*, 19.133). The timing of baptism also differed, some eastern sources suggesting January 6 as the preferred date; others, forty days after January 6 (after a period of fasting); and some western sources choosing Easter or Pentecost.

Baptismal practices underwent significant change in the fourth century, after Constantine’s rise to power and legitimizing of Christianity as the empire’s legal religion. Again,



there are differences between eastern and western baptismal practices. In the East, according to the writings of Cyril of Jerusalem (350-387 C.E.; *Mystagogical Catechesis*, 1.2;2.3;1.9;2.2;3.1 and 5.1), John Chrysostom (349-407 C.E.; *Hom. de bap.* II, 11, 12, 18, 21, 22, 24, 25-27), and Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 C.E.; *Hom. de bap.*, II, III), baptismal practice generally included the following elements:

- Easter baptism and the forty day season of Lent for prebaptismal catechesis on Scripture, Christian life, and the creed for those preparing for baptism;
- “Scrutinies” (examination of baptismal candidates for evidence of sin and evil remaining in their lives) and daily exorcisms during this period of final catechesis;
- Development of renunciation and profession of faith by the candidates;
- Ceremonial presentation (*traditio*) and recitation (*redditio*) of the creed by the candidates;
- Reinterpretation of the prebaptismal anointing as exorcism, purification, and/or preparation for combat with Satan;
- Use of Romans 6 as basis for baptism as entrance into the tomb with Christ, signified by the passive formula “N. is baptized . . .”;
- Postbaptismal anointing associated with the gift and seal of the Holy Spirit ;
- Mystagogical catechesis (preaching that expounds on the mysteries that the newly baptized have experienced at baptism) during Easter week.

Of course, prebaptismal rites were widely used, but they varied from one congregation to another, as the homilies of the church fathers attest (compare the rites and catechesis for

catechumens as described by Quodvultdeus [c. 450] in his *de Symbolo*, 1,2,3 with those of Leo the Great [d. 446], *Homilia* 16.6). At this point, there is no uniform, fixed baptismal formula in the West; instead, there is frequent use of three creedal questions and their responses at the moment of baptism. The correspondence between the use of the invocation and the styles of baptismal immersions was even more varied (de Puniet, *Baptême*, in *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie* (Paris, 1910) 2: col. 305-306).

This developed pattern did not survive much beyond the fourth century in either East or West. Once the vast majority of adults in the Roman Empire were baptized as Christians (after the early medieval period), there was no longer a need for an extended period of prebaptismal catechesis. In addition, the teachings of Augustine (354-430 C.E.) strongly shaped baptismal theology and practice in the West in two ways: first, his argument for infant baptism based on the need to be cleansed of original sin led to an emphasis on early infant baptism as the norm (*De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum* and *De spiritu et littera*) Second, his argument with the Donatists over the practice of rebaptism led to a focus on the sacramental elements (water, wine, bread) and their objective validity apart from the moral character of the one administering them (*Contra epistulam Parmeniani*, PL 43). As a result, medieval Western baptismal practice included baptizing infants as soon as possible, the permission for anyone to baptize (not only a priest), and a focus on the validity of the sacrament rather than on the extended drama of the fourth-century rites.

The baptismal rite for infants in the medieval era became in essence a compressed version of the rite for adults. Godparents or ministers responded to the questions on behalf of the children, who could not do so themselves. The rituals of handing over the creed and the Lord's

Prayer eventually were eliminated, while other elements of the fourth-century rites (admission to the catechumenate, exorcisms, administration of salt, and clothing with a white garment) remained, but adapted for use with an infant. Other elements of the baptismal rites were reinterpreted.

The timing of baptism also shifted: though Easter and Pentecost had been the preferred occasions for baptism in the fourth century, the emphasis on baptizing infants as soon as possible led to the administering of baptism within a few days of an infant's birth, no matter the season of the year. Gregory the Great (540-604 C.E.) even allows for a single immersion of adult or child in water, accompanied by the Trinitarian formula (*Epist.*1.43). By the eighth century, the *Missale Gothicum* (260) called for the use of a declarative baptismal formula, taken from Matthew 28:19-20, marking a definitive end to the question-and-answer style of the Latin fathers.

A final significant development in baptismal rites in the West was the separation of three liturgical acts: baptism, the anointing that came to be known as confirmation, and first communion. Once the postbaptismal anointing became a sacrament reserved for the bishop, it was commonly celebrated at a time separated—sometimes by several years—from the water baptism. This rite of confirmation was interpreted differently by writers in the medieval period but gradually came to be associated with the giving of the Holy Spirit. Though the rite of confirmation was celebrated as a separate sacrament, priests continued to anoint the baptized with chrism immediately after water baptism, symbolizing participation in the royal and priestly anointing of Christ. The timing of first communion varied considerably: in the early medieval period, it was usually given at the time of baptism, but in the eleventh century, first communion usually was postponed until age seven or later because of increasing reverence for the

sacramental species (the observable manifestations of the elements). In 1281, the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Peckham, insisted that no one should come to communion until he or she had been confirmed, while in Spain and southern Gaul for a time, the unity of the three rites of initiation was preserved in their original order (see *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae II: Constiutiones Peckham*, p. 54).

At the dawn of the sixteenth century, though there was not absolutely uniform practice in the western church, a common baptismal order looked like this:

### Sarum Rite of Baptism (1543)

*The following rite of baptism can be found in the Sarum Manual printed in Rouen in 1543, the final edition of its kind for use in England before the break with Rome and the issuance of the Book of Common Prayer in 1549. Thus the Sarum rite given here represents the shape of the baptismal rite before a universal rite for baptism would be imposed by Rome after the Council of Trent.*

#### I. Entrance Rites

- A. Interrogatories at the door of the Church
- B. Signing of the head and chest of the baptizand; giving of name by godparents
- C. Exorcism of salt
- D. Giving of salt to baptizand
- E. Prayer for assignment of guardian angel
- F. Exorcism
- G. Ephphetha ceremony
- H. Recitation of Our Father, Hail Mary and Creed by godparents

#### II. Rites at the Baptismal Font

- A. Recitation of Our Father, Hail Mary and Creed by godparents
- B. Litany of the Saints
- C. Blessing of water in the font
- D. Mixing of oil and chrism with baptismal water
- E. Renunciation of Satan by godparents
- F. Anointing with oil of catechumens
- G. Baptismal promises taken by godparents
- H. Baptism
- I. Anointing with chrism
- J. Clothing with white garment
- K. Presentation of lighted candle
- L. Confirmation, if a bishop is present
- M. Giving of holy communion, if baptizand is at least seven years of age
- N. Reading of the Gospel of Mark 9:17-29; reading of prologue of the Gospel of John 1:1-14.

Source: A.J. Collins, *Manuale ad usum percelebris ecclesiae Sarisburiensis* (Henry Bradshaw Society, XCIX). 1960

## b. Historical developments: the Reformation

In the sixteenth century, Protestants sought to reform the church according to Scripture and with attention to the early-church sources they had available at the time. In light of these sources, they retained the central practice of baptism with water in the triune name of God but amended the medieval baptismal rites in the following major ways:

1. They emphasized that the Word of God engrafts believers into the body of Christ. Thus, baptism was understood as a visible form of that Word, conveying and communicating the grace of God only as it is administered in conjunction with the proclamation of the Word.<sup>13</sup> There could be no baptism unless there also was proclamation of the Word. Also, because of their focus on the power of the Word of God, reformers emphasized the need to administer the sacrament of baptism, as with all of the rites of the church, in the vernacular. That which was not understood could not be properly received and thus could not be efficacious.
2. They focused attention on the water as the primary and only essential symbolic element. Thus, they eliminated elements of the rite that were deemed nonessential and nonscriptural: elements such as oil, salt, spittle, and candles. A related concern was to clarify that baptism itself is a sign and promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.<sup>14</sup>
3. They focused attention on the ecclesial dimension of the sacrament. Thus they emphasized the importance of baptizing in the context of the gathered

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<sup>13</sup> See John Riggs, unpublished paper, July 2006, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> See H.O. Old, *The Shaping of the Reformed Baptismal Rite in the Sixteenth Century* (Eerdmans, 1992), 178.

community and strongly resisted the practice of private baptism.<sup>15</sup> Because Reformed Protestants denied that baptism was necessary for salvation, emergency baptisms were eliminated, and only ordained ministers were permitted to administer baptism, within the body of the church.

4. They focused attention on the connection between baptism and nurture in Christian faith. As a result, many reformers were concerned to choose appropriate godparents for infants to be baptized and charging them with helping to raise the baptized child in the faith, though at other times the parents themselves were admonished to raise the child in the faith. Some Reformed rites also include admonitions to the congregation to assist in Christian nurture.

The implications of these revisions to baptismal practice were twofold: on the one hand, baptism was no longer understood to be necessary for salvation or engrafting into Christ, but on the other hand, Protestant reformers in various ways sought to highlight water baptism as a real means of grace that conveyed what it signified: forgiveness of sins and regeneration. These four emphases (centrality of the Word, focus on water, ecclesial nature of baptism, and connection of baptism and ongoing nurture) have continued to be central principles in Reformed baptismal practice, though they have not always received equal attention or led to the same outcome.

Though Martin Luther is not strictly speaking a part of the Reformed Protestant family, his reforms clearly influenced the liturgical developments in the Reformed tradition. In his baptismal liturgies, we can see increasing focus on the water as the central element in baptism, as well as emphasis on the Word in connection with the rite. His first vernacular reformed rite of

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<sup>15</sup> J.D.C. Fisher, "Initiation: Lutheran, Anglican and Reformed Rites," in *The Study of Liturgy*, revised edition (1992), 155-157. The following historical summary is informed in part by Fisher's essay.

baptism retained much of the medieval baptismal rite of Magdeburg, which was widely used in his time, though in his epilogue, he made it clear that elements such as “breathing under the eyes, signing with the cross, placing salt in the mouth, putting spittle and clay on the ears and nose” were not central to baptism (First *Taufbüchlein*, 1523). In his second *Taufbüchlein* (1526), Luther trimmed many more elements of the medieval rite, focusing even more strongly on the water.<sup>i</sup> His interest in the central symbol of water also can be seen in his Flood Prayer, in which the flood and exodus are interpreted as types of baptism. This liturgical element became commonplace in many Reformed liturgies that followed. In addition to the focus on water, Luther regarded the Word as central to baptism because it constituted God’s promise to which the sign of water was attached. Therefore, the most important liturgical elements in his view were the Word and the Flood Prayer. Though Luther retained some patristic elements (exorcism, for example) that later Reformed leaders rejected, his emphasis on the Word and the symbol of water influenced the development of later Reformed baptismal services.

Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich produced an order for baptism in 1525 that purported to remove “all the additions, which have no foundation in the word of God.”<sup>ii</sup> Zwingli eliminated cleansing, exorcism, renunciation, and even profession of faith, all of which had been present in Luther’s second baptismal rite. Here, too, we can see the focus on water as the central symbol of baptism, as well as the Word as both divine promise and norm for liturgical reform. His was a very simple service that clarifies the centrality of faith to the understanding of baptism and offers a clear scriptural warrant for infant baptism (and was born out of Zwingli’s struggle with the Anabaptists). In the same year in Strassburg, Martin Bucer published his revised baptismal rite, which likewise focuses the prayer on the gift of faith and new life in Christ.<sup>iii</sup> In Bucer’s rite we



also see a feature that became important in many later Reformed baptismal services: the charge to families and/or godparents to raise the child in the faith. Both of these features point to the common Reformed concern to link baptism with ongoing nurture in Christian faith.

During his years in Strassburg (1538-1541), John Calvin surely learned from Bucer's practice of baptism. When Calvin himself produced an order of baptism for the church in Geneva in 1542, however, his order bore little resemblance to Bucer's. Calvin specified that children were to be brought to the church either on Sunday afternoon at the time for catechism or on a weekday after the morning preaching. These instructions suggest the importance of connecting baptism with preaching or teaching, and they also reveal a lingering concern to baptize the child as soon as possible after birth, an ironic impulse given his denial that baptism was necessary for salvation.<sup>iv</sup> By Calvin's time, the baptismal exhortation had become a central feature of Reformed baptismal rites, presenting careful teaching on the nature, use, and significance of baptism, including why it was appropriate to baptize infants (against the Anabaptists).

John Knox patterned his baptismal service after Calvin's, including the opening address and the charge to godparents. In 1556 he produced the "Forme of Prayers" for his Scottish congregation in Geneva.<sup>v</sup> The language of the postbaptismal prayer, original with Knox, was echoed in the 1645 Westminster Directory and in later generations of Reformed baptismal services in this stream of the Reformed tradition.

In 1566, the Reformed Church in Holland adopted a baptismal liturgy based on the rite used in Heidelberg in the early 1560s.<sup>vi</sup> Like the other sixteenth-century Reformed liturgies, it included a strong emphasis on teaching, together with parental promises to nurture the child in the faith, followed by baptism and prayer of thanksgiving. This liturgy was later included in the

liturgy adopted at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). Versions of this baptismal service were used by both streams of Dutch-American Reformed churches (both RCA and CRC) until the early twentieth century and continue to be used in some Christian Reformed churches in English translation.

Though these sixteenth-century Reformed orders of baptism show variation in language and ordering of elements, they share the common concerns stated earlier: attention to the Word (particularly clear in explicit scriptural warrant for liturgical practice), emphasis on the water as central symbol and sign of God's grace, concern to locate baptism in the church in connection with public worship, and emphasis on the connection of baptism and ongoing nurture of the faith (as illustrated by admonitions to parents and/or godparents). We also see through the sixteenth century in Reformed congregations a growth in exhortation/instruction as a part of the baptismal service. Though baptismal instruction might well have been intended by Zwingli and Bucer, by the time we reach Calvin, Knox, and the Heidelberg-Dutch traditions, this element is firmly ensconced as a part of the baptismal service. These four sixteenth-century Reformed baptismal themes continue to exercise major influence on Reformed rites to the present.

#### c. Historical developments: Roman Catholic

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) left the actual revision of the rites of the sacraments to the judgment of the pope and his curia as the agents of reform.<sup>16</sup> It would take the major efforts of Pius V (1504-1572) and Paul V (1552-1621) to help realize the required changes. Session 7 of that council addressed fourteen principal concerns about baptism that were intended to answer the claims of reformers who had posed new understandings about long-held baptismal belief.

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<sup>16</sup> See Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy* (Collegeville, Minn: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 5.

These same concerns would influence the shape of baptismal rites only gradually, if at all, during the fifty-year period after the council.

Among concerns about the rite of baptism was the necessity for the use of water rather than the acceptance of a baptism of the Spirit in its place (Session 7:c.2). In addition, the council reaffirmed that baptism may be validly administered by anyone, including heretics, as long as they held “the intention of doing what the church does” (*cum intentione faciendi, quod facit ecclesia*) in baptism (Session 7:c.4). The council denied that the only appropriate age for baptism is adulthood (Session 7:cc.12; cf. cc.13 and 14). Last, Trent clearly taught that children who are baptized need not be rebaptized when they reach the ability to profess their own faith, because the church professed faith on their behalf at their baptisms (Session 7: c.13).

Implicit in several of the canons from the Council of Trent (Session 7: cc. 12, 13, 14, 14) is an argument about whether baptism is efficacious for those not able to freely profess their own faith but instead have it professed by others on their behalf. This understanding had been rejected vigorously by the Anabaptists but defended as authentically Christian by Calvin in 1536 (*Institutes* 4.16), in Luther’s *Sermon on the Third Sunday after the Epiphany* of 1525, and in Bucer’s *Grund und Ursach* of 1521. It is important to note, however, that the Reformed understanding of paedobaptism and its place in the believing community did not correspond to Roman teaching, despite the common appearance of baptismal-ritual elements in both traditions.

Differences on paedobaptism between the Roman Catholic and Reformed churches of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries appear to lie more centrally in the question of the rite as a sign and seal of God’s promise of grace. In the Reformed tradition, infant baptism is not essential to salvation, because it cannot bring about the assent of the individual to the action of God; that

is, it can not produce an act of faith. What is more, in Reformed theology, grace is presumed to be available to every child of a believing Christian by virtue of being born into the covenant. Roman Catholic belief, in contrast, saw paedobaptism as the only path to salvation for a child, who by definition is completely dependent upon the church (as represented through parents and godparents), which professes faith on the infant's behalf. In Catholic teaching, the rite of baptism accomplishes *ex opere operato* ("by the work worked") what it signifies because of the intention to do what the church does in obedience to Christ.

It is noteworthy that while the Council of Trent addressed issues of grace and its effects on a personal profession of faith (Session 6, *Decree on Justification*, c.5; cc.3; Session 6, c.16), none of the canons about the shape of baptism reflect this discussion. It appears that the reform of the rites of baptism as directed by the council and implemented by successive popes proceeded without reference to this issue in its unresolved state with the Reformed churches. Instead, the entire controversy, with its immense implications, is left outside of Roman Catholic sacramental reform.

The result was predictable: a slow but steady articulation of baptism in the Reformed churches generated a change of shape in their baptismal rites, while little perceptible change occurred in the Roman rite, which maintained its distance from the Reformed churches' questions. Even when the Reformation gained momentum throughout Europe, Roman Catholic reform appeared to insulate its sacramental reforms from the influence of the debates on covenant theology, free will, and prevenient grace, so crucial to subsequent liturgical development in the Reformed churches.

As the accompanying Comparative Chart on the Shape of Roman Catholic Baptismal

Rites Between 1543 and 1614 demonstrates, local baptismal rites such as those found in England in 1543 (the Sarum Rite) changed only slightly between the time of the Reformation and the implementation of the sacramental reforms introduced by the Council of Trent. The effort of both of the reforming popes who came after Trent—Pius V, pope from 1566 to 1572, and Paul V, pope from 1605 to 1621—was to strengthen Catholic rites against doctrinal error and to bring them gradually into greater uniformity with Roman practice. As a result, the overall effect of the council’s changes on the Sarum Rite was minimal. Ironically, the reformation of the Church of England would use this same Sarum Rite as the basis of many of its own liturgies, as found, for example, in the baptismal ceremony included in the first edition of the Book of Common Prayer (1549).

d. Comparative chart on the shape of Roman Catholic baptismal rites between 1543 and 1614

Sarum Rite of Baptism on the eve of the Reformation in England (1543)	Roman Rite of Baptism revised by Paul V following the Council of Trent (1614)
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*The following rite of baptism can be found in the Sarum Manual printed in Rouen in 1543, the final edition of its kind for use in England before the break with Rome and the issuance of the Book of Common Prayer in 1549. As such, the Sarum Rite given here represents the shape of the baptismal rite before a universal rite for baptism would be imposed by Rome after the Council of Trent.*

I Entrance rites

- A. Interrogatories at the door of the church
- B. Signing of the head and chest of the baptizand; giving of name by godparents
- C. Exorcism of salt
- D. Giving of salt to baptizand
- E. Prayer for assignment of guardian angel
- F. Exorcism
- G. Ephphetha ceremony
- H. Recitation of Our Father, Hail Mary, and Creed by godparents

II Rites at the baptismal font

- A. Recitation of Our Father, Hail Mary, and Creed by godparents
- B. Litany of the saints
- C. Blessing of water in the font
- D. Mixing of oil and chrism with baptismal water
- E. Renunciation of Satan by godparents
- F. Anointing with oil of catechumens
- G. Baptismal promises taken by godparents
- H. Baptism

*The following rite of baptism was placed in the ritual of Pope Paul V (1614) and formed by taking the adult rite of baptism and abbreviating it for use with an infant. This rite became the most widely used one for infant baptism between 1614 and the reforms introduced by Pope Paul VI in 1969. Adult baptism was not reconsidered within the Roman rite until the promulgation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (1972).*

I Entrance rites

- A. Interrogatories at the door of the church
- B. Minor exorcism
- C. Exsufflation and the signing of the baptizand's forehead
- D. The imposition of hands
- E. Blessing of baptizand with salt on the tongue
- F. Exorcism

II Rites at entrance to baptistry

- A. Recitation of the creed by parents and godparents
- B. Exorcism
- C. Ephphetha ceremony
- D. Renunciation of Satan answered by godparents
- E. Anointing with oil of catechumens

III Rites at the Font

- A. Baptismal promises taken on behalf of the baptizand
- B. Baptism
- C. Anointing with chrism

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Anointing with chrism</li> <li>J. Clothing with white garment</li> <li>K. Presentation of lighted candle</li> <li>L. Confirmation, if a bishop is present</li> <li>M. Giving of holy communion, if baptizand is at least seven years of age</li> <li>N. Reading of the Gospel of Mark 9:17-29; reading of prologue of the Gospel of John 1:1 -14.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>D. Clothing with white garment</li> <li>E. Lighting of baptismal candle</li> </ul>
<p>Source: A.J. Collins, <i>Manuale ad usum percelebris ecclesiae Sarisburiensis</i> (Henry Bradshaw Society, XCIX). 1960</p>	<p>Source: Paulus V, <i>Rituale Romanum</i> (1614)</p>

e. Development of baptismal rites after the Reformation

*i. Reformed*

Narrating the development of baptismal rites in the Reformed tradition since the sixteenth century is a challenge. First, the Reformed tradition is not a single church with a single rite, but a family of churches with common theological convictions that developed different practices in various parts of Europe and North America (this document will not attempt a history of Reformed churches in other parts of the world). Second, baptismal rites have held different authority in different Reformed churches. For instance, the Dutch Reformed churches have tended to adopt official liturgies that are required for use, while churches stemming from the Westminster Directory tradition have tended to adopt official guidelines that permit significant flexibility in execution. For these reasons, what follows is intended to be not comprehensive, but suggestive of the development in baptismal practice in Reformed churches.

Baptismal practice in the Dutch Reformed churches remained relatively stable from 1566

until the liturgical revisions of the twentieth century. For the Reformed churches in North America that trace their roots to Great Britain, the most significant liturgical development in the seventeenth century was in England with the introduction in 1645 of the Westminster Directory for Worship.

The Westminster Directory begins its section on baptism with a statement that it is neither to be unnecessarily delayed nor administered in private but administered only by a “Minister of Christ” and “in the place of Publique Worship, and in the face of the congregation, where the people may most conveniently see and heare.”<sup>vii</sup> The pattern is similar to the order of baptism in Genevan liturgy, with a lengthy instruction, exhortation of parents, scriptural warrant, and prayer preceding water baptism. New in this rite is the explicit admonition of the congregation “to improve and make the right use of their baptisme,” a theme that was at best implicit in sixteenth-century rites. Stan Hall says, “two features of this Directory rite, parental promise and use of scriptural warrant, set the precedent for virtually all of the later Presbyterian baptismal rites.”<sup>17</sup> Another feature of this rite that lingered until the mid-twentieth century is the insistence that the minister was to baptize without any additional ceremony (e.g., no consignation). This Westminster form, revised slightly, prevailed in Presbyterian churches in the United States until the early twentieth century.

The scriptural warrant, already present in the sixteenth-century rites, exemplifies the Reformed concern for the *centrality of the Word* in connection with the sacrament. The stipulation that baptism is to be done “without additional ceremony” echoes the focus on *water* as the primary symbolic element, signifying both God’s grace of forgiveness and the giving of

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<sup>17</sup> Hall, 74.



the Holy Spirit. The admonition of the congregation signals the *ecclesial setting* so important to Reformed baptismal understanding, and the exhortation to parents embodies the *link between baptism and ongoing nurture* in the faith. So all the major themes that drove sixteenth-century reform continued to shape baptismal practice in the Westminster Directory, even though there was a move away from authorized liturgies toward increased local freedom in liturgical practice.

In 1788, the newly formed Presbyterian Church in the United States adopted a revised version of the Westminster Directory for Worship.<sup>18</sup> This version introduced two changes to the 1645 text. First, the American Directory added a chapter on integrating baptized children and previously unbaptized persons into the communion of the church. The change shows new attention to the connection among baptism, catechesis, and the Lord's Supper as well as growing awareness of the possibility of adults presenting themselves for baptism. Previously unbaptized persons were to be accepted after baptism and public profession of faith. Second, the American version removed the detailed descriptions of prayers in the 1645 version, so the description of the rite (though not necessarily the rite itself) was briefer than in the original.

On the American frontier, baptism came to be associated with evangelical conversion, especially during the second Great Awakening. American Reformed churches reacted to this movement in various ways. Some (as represented by New England Congregationalist Horace Bushnell in his treatise *Christian Nurture*) strengthened their defense of infant baptism, arguing that faith is best nurtured in the context of families rather than through sudden conversion. Bushnell and others emphasized the connection between baptism and ongoing nurture, a theme that had been prominent in Reformed baptismal practice since the sixteenth century. However,

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<sup>18</sup> See Hall, 125.

with more adults who had not been baptized as infants coming for baptism, Reformed churches also were compelled to address the practice of adult baptism. This growing interest can be seen in several nineteenth-century Reformed liturgical publications (including Charles Shields' 1864 republication of the 1661 Savoy Liturgy "in agreement with the Directory for Public Worship,"<sup>19</sup> the 1868 Directory of the United Presbyterian Church of North America,<sup>20</sup> and the 1894 PCUS Directory for Worship<sup>21</sup>).

In addition, the nineteenth century saw increased interest in set forms for worship, perhaps in response to the freedom of the revival tradition and the minimalism of the 1788 Presbyterian Directory. This movement is evident in the introduction of set baptismal forms in various revisions of the Directory for Worship (the 1894 PCUS Directory<sup>22</sup> and the PCUSA Directory<sup>23</sup>) and also in the Mercersburg movement in the German Reformed church, a predecessor tradition of the United Church of Christ. This movement, centered in the Reformed seminary at Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, was led particularly by theologian John Williamson Nevin. Though it did not have a broad effect on German Reformed church practice at the time, Mercersburg represented a desire to claim a sacramental theology and practice more deeply informed by both early and Reformation church sources. Furthermore, in the last half of the twentieth century, the Mercersburg movement reemerged as a significant influence on many

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<sup>19</sup> Charles Shields, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other rites and ceremonies of the church as amended by the Presbyterian Divines in the Royal Commission of 1661 and in Agreement with the Directory for Public Worship of the Presbyterian Church in the United States* (New York: Randolph & Co., 1864).

<sup>20</sup> The UPNA was a small Presbyterian denomination that united with the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. to form the UPCUSA in 1957. The UPCUSA united with the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1983 to form the current PC(USA). See Hall, 280.

<sup>21</sup> Hall, 218 n. 109 and 220.

<sup>22</sup> Hall, 217-218.

<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, this was not a universal movement; the 1868 UPNA Directory, for example, significantly abbreviated the texts of its earlier directory, removing all prayer instructions and condensing the exhortations.

Reformed churches in this dialogue as they sought to recover a deeper appreciation of liturgical forms and of the centrality of the sacraments.<sup>24</sup>

Another concern that continued in some Reformed churches was the connection of prayer with the water of baptism. While the 1645 Westminster Directory had said prayer “was to be joined with the word of institution, for sanctifying the water to this spiritual use,” no mention of water appeared in Presbyterian Directories until the mid-twentieth century, out of concern for too high a regard for the efficacy of the sign itself.<sup>25</sup>

Reformed baptismal practices in the nineteenth century thus showed general continuity with practices of earlier centuries, with emerging attention to adult baptism, increased use of set liturgical forms in a tradition that did not require them, and some renewed attention to the water itself in the prayer at baptism.

In the early twentieth century, both major streams of the Dutch-American Reformed tradition revised their baptismal rites, but these did not significantly change the existing practices of baptism. The Reformed Church in America approved a new abridged form for baptism in 1906, though the older, unabridged form also continued to be printed.<sup>viii</sup> This follows closely the 1566 order, though the prayer in the revised version now precedes the instruction. In 1912, the Christian Reformed Church translated the 1566 baptismal order into English and continued to

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<sup>24</sup> For more on Nevin and Mercersburg, see John Williamson Nevin, *The Anxious Bench* (1843) in *Catholic and Reformed: Selected Theological Writings of John Williamson Nevin*, Eds. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr. & George Briker (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1978) 17-126 and “Editorial Introduction to Vindication of the Revised Liturgy” and “Vindication of the Revised Liturgy (1867)” in *Catholic and Reformed*, 311-403. Secondary sources include D.G. Hart, *John Williamson Nevin: High Church Calvinist* (Phillipsburg NJ: P & R Publishing, 2005); Richard E. Wentz, *John Williamson Nevin: American Theologian* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1997); Sam Hamstra, Jr. “Nevin on Regeneration” in *Reformed Confessionalism in Nineteenth-Century America*. Eds. Sam Hamstra, Jr. & Arie J. Griffioen (Lanham MA: The American Theological Association, 1995) 153-167; and John B. Payne, “Nevin on Baptism” in *Reformed Confessionalism in Nineteenth-Century America*, 125-151.

<sup>25</sup> See Hall, 281f. Shields, however, shows another Reformed response, including a prayer to sanctify the water in both the infant and adult rites of baptism.

use that liturgy until the 1960s.

*ii. Roman Catholic*

As the centuries after Trent drew the Roman Catholic Church into the modern period, her baptismal liturgy remained fixed in form through the final revisions made by Paul V in the *Rituale Romanum* of 1614. Even as the Second Vatican Council approached its opening days in 1962, there was little public discussion of the need for the reform of baptism in particular, though other sacraments such as the Eucharist were being talked about for reform.<sup>26</sup> The lack of attention to baptism was despite work done locally in the church in France highlighting the need to revive a more meaningful catechumenate drawn from the example of adult believership in the early church.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile in the Reformed Churches, a highly influential discussion on baptism, its form, and theology had emerged among theologians such as Karl Barth<sup>28</sup> and Oscar Cullmann.<sup>29</sup> The influence of this discussion can be seen especially on baptismal documents in Presbyterian churches in the 1970s. However, the work of these two giants would not influence the Roman Catholic Concilium reformers, first assembled in 1965, who were yet several years away from issuing a revised order of infant baptism in 1969. Instead, Roman Catholic reform concentrated on the pastoral need for an adult catechumenate based on a new reading of relevant biblical and patristic sources, while the Reformed churches explored further the larger question of baptism's meaning in connection with the act of adult faith.

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<sup>26</sup> See Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 5-13.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Alois Stenzel, *Die Taufe: eine genetische Erklärung der Tauf liturgie* (Verlag Felizian Rauch, Innsbruck, 1958) or Burhard Neunheuser, *Baptism and Confirmation*, trans. J.J. Hughes (Herder and Herder, New York 1964).

<sup>28</sup> *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism*, trans. Ernst A. Payne (London, SCM Press, 1948).

<sup>29</sup> *Baptism in the New Testament*, trans. J.K.S. Reid (London: SCM Press, 1950).

On the eve of the Second Vatican Council, then, both communities were ready to inaugurate a process of recovering meaning from ancient sources, hoping thereby to gain a more authentic practice and understanding of baptism. Both communities focused their attention on biblical and patristic texts and rites as points of departure for ritual reforms. Yet while both traditions were poised to look at the same sources, they were looking for answers to different questions with different points of departure, theological hermeneutics, and methods. As a result, the emergence of baptismal rites that share many common features in both communities appears to reflect differing theological understandings, thus raising the question of the extent to which theological divergences need further exploration.

f. Twentieth-century convergence in scholarship and ritual structures

*i. Reformed*

In 1957, two streams of the Reformed church family, the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church, came together to form the United Church of Christ. This new church, bringing together New England Congregationalism with its Puritan heritage and German Reformed Protestantism with its pietist heritage, has been ecumenically oriented from the beginning. Though congregations are free to shape liturgical forms at the local level, the UCC as a denomination has attended closely to the ecumenical biblical and historical scholarship that led to the liturgical-renewal movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This ecumenical commitment significantly shaped the order of baptism found in the UCC's 1986 Book of Worship. In fact, the order of baptism "rests significantly on an ecumenical liturgical consensus found in the 1982 Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry . . . document more than on any one former

tradition.”<sup>30</sup> Though not required for use, the 1986 Book of Worship reflects Reformed baptismal themes that have been central since the sixteenth century: connection of baptism with proclamation of the Word; focus on water as the central symbol of baptism,<sup>31</sup> ecclesial setting of baptism, and connection of baptism with ongoing nurture, signified by congregational promises and the option of including baptismal sponsors in the service.

In the 1960s, both the CRC and the RCA moved to revise their rites more substantially than they had done before. The RCA in 1968 adopted revised rites after several years of drafting and evaluation of provisional orders.<sup>ix</sup> The CRC, a few years later in 1976, adopted a similar revised order.<sup>x</sup> Both revised orders reflect similar concerns: to state more clearly the biblical institution for baptism, to present more clearly the covenantal basis for baptism, and to make more explicit the congregation’s responsibility to nurture baptized children.<sup>32</sup>

Though the RCA published another alternate order for baptism in *Worship the Lord* in 1987, the next major revision of the baptismal forms came in 1994 for both the RCA and the CRC. It is significant that in both cases, there is a single form, or outline, provided, which can be used for either infant or adult baptism. There are no longer two separate rites.<sup>xi</sup> This is particularly striking because the Roman Catholic revisions of this era went in the opposite direction, clarifying two different orders for infant and adult baptism. The CRC form is explicitly intended to be more flexible, permitting local adaptation. Both of these recent baptismal orders reflect awareness of the ecumenical liturgical movement, with greater attention to the symbolic

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<sup>30</sup> Sid Fowler, “A Tipping Point: Forming a United Church of Christ Order of Baptism,” unpublished paper prepared for the U.S. Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue, April 11, 2005.

<sup>31</sup> The introduction to the order for baptism in the UCC Book of Worship says, “Water is an essential element of baptism. Its presence and use should be boldly dramatized in the service.” (Book of Worship, 1986, 130.)

<sup>32</sup> See “Changes in CRC Baptismal Rites”, unpublished paper by Lyle D. Bierma and Ronald J. Feenstra, April 1, 2005.

value of water and inclusion of ancient elements such as renunciations, affirmations, and a prayer of thanksgiving over the water. At the same time, these new rites show continuing Reformed sensibilities in their opening words of institution, their emphasis on covenant, and the inclusion of promises by both parents/baptizands and congregation to nurture the baptized in the faith. The theme of baptismal nurture has been present in Reformed baptismal rites since the sixteenth century and has only gotten stronger in recent years.

In the Presbyterian stream of North American Reformed churches, there have been two interwoven liturgical developments in the twentieth century: revisions to the Directory for Worship, the constitutional document governing worship in Presbyterian churches, and revisions to the Book of Common Worship, a liturgical resource recommended but not required for use in Presbyterian churches. These two documents have not always developed in tandem, but by the end of the twentieth century, they came to express a common understanding of the theology and practice of baptism.

In the early part of the twentieth century, the official Directory for Worship in the major Presbyterian denominations described a baptismal theology and practice nearly identical to the Westminster Directory of 1645 as abbreviated in America in 1788. Even as this directory pattern remained in place, liturgical resources approved by the church began to appear for the first time in the Book of Common Worship of 1906, with revisions in 1932 and 1946. During the first half of the twentieth century, baptismal rites in the Book of Common Worship showed increased involvement of the congregation, increased attention to congregational nurture of the baptized, increased attention to the christological basis of baptism, and a decrease in instruction and exhortation, with corresponding expansion of the prayer before baptism. These shifts in

baptismal patterns in the Book of Common Worship eventually were reflected in the Directory for Worship as well.

During the 1960s and 1970s, revisions to both directory and worship resources continued to show the effects of ecumenical liturgical scholarship, particularly the movement toward a single baptismal service suitable with modification for both adults and infants, and the move in 1971 to link baptism more closely to admission to the table. In 1970, the *Worshipbook* provided a single baptismal service that required modification to adapt it for infants. In 1971, a revision of the UPCUSA worship directory introduced a major change, affirming that baptism alone admits one to the Lord's Supper (no longer requiring public profession of faith at confirmation). Both of these moves reflect ecumenical liturgical scholarship of the time, the first being an effort to make baptism more clearly a single rite, whether for adults or infants, and the second an effort to reflect the early-church connection of baptism with celebration of the Lord's Supper.

A substantial 1973 revision to the UPCUSA directory asserted that "baptism marks a new beginning of participation in Christ's ministry for all people." The theological foundation for baptism was now Jesus' own baptism (rather than the covenant of God or forgiveness/cleansing). This shift of emphasis has continued into current worship-directory statements on baptism. The doctrinal portion of the chapter on baptism, however, introduced a more dramatic and controversial change. It suggested "two equally appropriate occasions for baptism—either at infancy, or in later years at the emergence of personal faith." This reflects the influence of Karl Barth's theology in *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism* (1965), in which he argued that baptism of mature Christians reflects more clearly than does baptism of infants the meaning of baptism. Here, for the first time in U.S. Reformed churches, "believer baptism" was



recognized as a possibility for people raised within the church. This language remained for only a few years in the directory but reveals much ferment in baptismal reflection and practice among Presbyterian churches at that time.

In 1983, the reunion of two denominations to form the Presbyterian Church (USA) prompted the need for a new Directory for Worship. That directory, adopted in 1989, is the current constitutional document guiding worship life in the PC(USA). The outline of the baptismal rite in this directory is identical to the pattern in the 1993 Book of Common Worship.<sup>xii</sup> The other significant change in the 1989 directory is the inclusion of blessing and optional anointing. Though the 1989 directory includes a caution that nothing should overshadow the central act of baptizing with water, other actions “deeply rooted in the history of baptism” are permitted.<sup>33</sup> The 1946 Book of Common Worship had introduced a trinitarian blessing after water baptism, but the 1989 book elaborates on that practice in a clear attempt to move toward a shared ecumenical pattern informed by early-church baptismal practice. The service of baptism in the 1993 Book of Common Worship, which is provided in the appendix and discussed in more detail below, parallels the 1989 Directory for Worship, though the terminology is slightly different.

### ***Method in reform of Reformed baptismal rites***

The revisions of baptismal rites in the twentieth century have proceeded differently for the Reformed bodies represented in this dialogue. They have shared concerns, however, to promote 1) fuller participation of the people, 2) greater attention to the symbolic use of water, and 3) greater appreciation for baptism as central to Christian identity, a mark that both

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<sup>33</sup> Directory for Worship, W-3.3603.

distinguishes the church from the world and calls the church into mission in and for the world.

While the Roman Catholic church has placed a central focus on the restoration of the ancient catechumenate in its baptismal reforms since Vatican II, Reformed churches have focused on revisions of the central baptismal rites and services of reaffirmation or renewal of baptism. Some Reformed churches also have begun exploring the possibilities of the catechumenate model as a process of forming new Christians and reiterating baptism as a central symbol of Christian identity. For many Reformed Christians, the catechumenate holds promise for the following reasons:

- It focuses on baptism, which has been a central Reformation mark of the church.
- It brings people by stages into the church, providing liturgical boundary markers to celebrate the gradual inclusion of the new Christian into the body of Christ.
- It provides a clear structure for accompanying people along the life of faith through sponsors, catechists, and the whole congregation praying for the catechumens.
- It is ritually full, something for which many seekers and church members are hungering. The process of leading someone to baptism—and leading a congregation to repeated reaffirmations of that baptism—involves the whole person: body, mind, and soul.

As Reformed Christians continue the work of adapting the catechumenate model to a Reformed context, a couple of issues are emerging as central:

- *God's grace and human response.* The chief issue in Reformed baptismal discussions generally continues to be how to maintain our historic emphasis on

baptism as God's gracious action while also attending to the human dimension of the sacrament. Faithful Reformed people disagree on how to manage this balance. This basic issue underlies many of the questions that arise in baptismal debates: When is it permissible to refuse to baptize someone? Is any such refusal a denial of the generosity of God's grace? With regard to the catechumenate, how much should we require of those preparing for baptism? Should catechesis precede or follow the act of baptism? Baptism is God's act of cleansing, redeeming, and renewing, and it also is the welcoming of a new Christian into community. Reformed theology always encourages attention first to God's action, but there is increased concern about how people receive God's action—how God works not only in the act of baptism narrowly construed but also through the life of the community of faith to form new Christians in lives of gratitude. Some Reformed believers object to the language of Christian initiation, claiming that such an idea focuses too much on the human community into which one is initiated at baptism. This discomfort points to the debate in the Reformed tradition over how to maintain a focus on the radical priority of God's action while also attending to the shape of human living in response to that grace.

- A related question is the *relationship between baptism and faithful living*. How is baptism related to sanctification, the ongoing life of faith? The promises of nurture made by the congregation at an infant's baptism are necessary but not sufficient to answer this question. Some Reformed Christians are seeking to recover Calvin's emphasis on the link between baptism and discipline—the

structure of the faithful life. This moves the discussion from the question of what constitutes valid baptism (which allows for a minimalist celebration) to how baptism shapes a life of faithfulness (which focuses on a more extensive process of preparation for and celebration of baptism). The Reformed understanding of discipline might provide a way to talk about catechumenate in a Reformed context, and it also might constitute a fruitful contribution to the ecumenical conversation about Christian initiation.

### ***Conclusions regarding Reformed practices of baptism***

Though Reformed churches during the course of 500 years have exhibited diversity of baptismal practice and theology, an examination of baptismal liturgies suggests continuing consensus on the four themes that shaped Reformed baptismal concerns in the sixteenth century:

- Focus on the *Word of God* as that which joins us to the body of Christ. The intimate connection of baptism with the proclamation of the Word has been maintained steadily for five centuries, as has the commitment to communicate the significance of baptism in the language of the people.
- *Centrality of water*. If anything, this emphasis has grown clearer in recent years. Reformed churches have paid increased attention to the symbolic value of water and developed a shared appreciation for the connection of baptismal water with biblical narratives of creation, flood, and exodus as well as Jesus' own baptism. Though some Reformed churches now permit and even embrace additional symbols such as postbaptismal anointing (a change from sixteenth-century practice), these additional acts always are connected to the central symbol of

water.

- *Ecclesial dimension* of baptism: Since the sixteenth century, there has been gradual movement toward greater congregational involvement, as embodied in the congregational promises included in all the current Reformed rites. This is in keeping with the impulse to understand baptism as an ecclesial act.
- Connection of *baptism and nurture*: in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this theme often was embodied in extended exhortations to the parents (and godparents/sponsors) to raise their baptized children in the faith. Contemporary baptismal rites have moved away from such exhortations but continue to emphasize the importance of ongoing nurture of the baptized through promises made by congregations, parents, and baptismal sponsors, as well as in postbaptismal prayers for continued growth in faith.

At the same time, the twentieth century has brought some significant shifts in Reformed baptismal practice, particularly the move from ordinance to symbol as the primary lens for understanding sacramental practice in general and baptism in particular. One result of this shift is the diminished length of time devoted to instruction on the nature of baptism during the liturgy, and, recently, an increased focus on prayers over the water, shifting the tone of the event from teaching to proclamation and prayer.

## *ii. Roman Catholic*

### ***Overview of the reform of Roman Catholic baptismal rites after the Second Vatican Council***

The reform of the Roman Rite that began in 1963 with the promulgation of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* at the Second Vatican Council was unique in Catholic liturgical history. Its starting

point was a desire to see the participation of the faithful. In most previous reforms, the liturgy was changed to accommodate a development in the articulation of dogma, as in the addition of language to the Nicene Creed to clearly state belief in the dual natures of Christ as God and man. However, in its most recent renewal of liturgical life, the Roman Catholic Church sought to examine liturgical celebrations in answer to the question, How can these rites be made more accessible to the participation of the lay faithful?

This intention was made clear in the language of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 14, which set “full, conscious and active participation” of the faithful as the end and goal of the process of revision that would follow. This reform, then, was undertaken essentially for pastoral reasons, emphasizing in turn that all liturgical renewal was ordered to bring about a deepening of the life of the church (SC 14).

The reform of the Roman Rite on this occasion was guided by nine important principles, found in council documents:

- (1) that liturgy sanctifies every event in the life of the faithful “with the divine grace which flows from the paschal mystery of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ” (SC 61; see also 5);
- (2) that liturgy must be understood as the “source and summit” of the life of the church (SC 10, *Lumen Gentium* 11) rather than as a mere external act unessential to its life and mission in the world;
- (3) that every rite should build the full, conscious, and active participation of minister and faithful alike (SC 14, 21, 30) and that to promote such participation, liturgical education is to be assiduously pursued (see SC 14-20);

- (4) that all liturgical acts are communal and ecclesial by nature and should be celebrated accordingly (SC 26);
- (5) that liturgical celebrations should aim for unity but not uniformity from one local church to another (SC, 23, 37-38);
- (6) that any change effected should in some way be an “organic growth” (SC 23) in harmony with the history and theology of the liturgy in the Latin West;
- (7) that each reformed rite should recover the primary role of the celebration of the Word of God as its foundation (SC 7, 24, 35, 51, 56);
- (8) that rites should be appropriately simplified, reducing, for example, wherever necessary redundancies and superfluities that could distract from the essential meaning of the liturgy (SC 34, 50); and
- (9) that the entire reform should be guided by the tradition of Christian life and worship as found in biblical and patristic sources (SC 50).

### ***Specific issues in the reform of baptismal rites after Vatican II***

Several issues governed the reform of Roman Catholic baptismal rites after the Second Vatican Council. Each of these would help answer pastoral and historical questions about the shape and use of the rites for the church in the modern world. Principal among these was the restoration of an adult catechumenate and baptism through the implementation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. At the same time, infant baptism was reformed to distinguish it more clearly from the adult rite. The reorientation of the two rites relative to each other is a major feature of the reform of baptism since the Second Vatican Council.

The RCIA retrieved much of the understanding of gradual conversion found in the rites

of the catechumenate in the early church. The reformed rites of 1972 restore this same emphasis on conversion and initiation into Christian life as a process rather a single, discrete act. Accordingly, the reformers of the initiation rites sought to reestablish baptism as the gateway sacrament to the other rites of the church.

The RCIA now includes four continuous periods in the life of the candidate: (1) a period of evangelization and precatechumenate, in which the candidate explores the message of the Gospel and its values under the direction of a deacon, priest or catechist who invites the interested party to join in prayer and the reading of the Scriptures on a regular basis; (2) the catechumenate, in which candidates express a clear intention to seek baptism and the church responds by accepting them into a structured process of conversion that assists them toward this goal; (3) a period of purification and enlightenment, usually during Lent, in which the elect more immediately and intensely prepare for initiation; and (4) the celebration of the sacraments of initiation (baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist), which is followed by *mystagogia*, or a final period of postbaptismal catechesis on the rites and growth in the faith. In the catechumenate proper, frequent celebrations of the Word of God, of prayers of exorcism and blessing, and then of the formal steps of the rite of enrollment and election are mandated.

Immediately before baptism is celebrated—usually during Lent, which precedes Holy Saturday and the Easter Vigil—candidates enter their final stage of preparation, known as “scrutinies.” This last step is built around intense prayer, strengthened by exorcism, to assist candidates to put aside all sinful ways and to grow in their desire for life in Christ. During the scrutinies, customarily celebrated during the third, fourth, and fifth Sundays of Lent, the creed and the Lord’s Prayer are presented to the candidates for their close study and memorization, to



be publicly professed before the day of baptism. On Holy Saturday, catechumens complete a less formal set of rites, the Rites of Preparation, which help them to be ready for the sacraments they will receive that same night at the Easter Vigil. A brief outline of the reformed rites for adult catechumenate and baptism is given here:

*Chart of the RCIA Rites of 1972*

<b>Rites and Stages of Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, 1972</b>
Pre-catechumenate A. Period of evangelization and exploration of Christian life B. Informal welcoming into a Catholic community C. Instruction and prayer, together with exorcism offered on a regular basis D. Episcopal conferences may devise an informal way in which to recognize and accept the personal intention of the interested party to pursue baptism; no formal rites to be used at this stage.

## Catechumenate

- A. Rite of acceptance into the Order of Catechumens
  - A. Reception of candidates at the door of the church at the start of Sunday Mass
  - B. Greeting of candidates
  - C. Opening dialogue of candidates called by name
  - D. Affirmation by sponsors
  - E. Signing of the foreheads of the candidates
  - F. Concluding prayer
  - G. Liturgy of the Word at Sunday Mass
  - H. Presentation of a bible and cross to candidates with optional exsufflation and exorcism
  - I. Prayers for new catechumens
  - J. Dismissal of catechumens before Liturgy of the Eucharist
- B. Rites belonging to the period of the catechumenate celebrated during Sunday Mass
  - A. Celebration of the Word of God
  - B. Minor exorcisms
  - C. Prayer of blessings over the catechumens
  - D. Anointing of catechumens
  - E. Rites of election or enrollment of names
    - a. Liturgy of the Word at Sunday Mass
    - b. Homily
    - c. Presentation of the catechumens by sponsors
    - d. Affirmation of the godparents
    - e. Invitation and enrollment of names of catechumens
    - f. Act of admission or election
    - g. Intercessions for the elect
    - h. Prayer over the elect
    - i. Dismissal of the elect from the assembly before the celebration of the liturgy of the Eucharist
  - F. Period of purification and enlightenment
    - a. Third Sunday of Lent: first scrutiny
      - i. Liturgy of the Word
      - ii. Homily
      - iii. Presentation of the creed
      - iv. Exorcism
      - v. Dismissal of the elect
    - b. Fourth Sunday of Lent: second scrutiny
      - i. (as above for first scrutiny)
    - c. Fifth Sunday of Lent: Third Scrutiny
      - i. (as above for first and second scrutinies)
      - ii. Presentation of the Lord's Prayer to the catechumen
  - G. Preparation Rites on Holy Saturday during the day
    - a. Recitation of the creed
    - b. Reading from Scripture

- c. Homily
- d. Prayer before recitation
- e. Recitation of the Lord's Prayer
- f. Ephphetha rite
- g. Choosing of baptismal name by the catechumen
- h. Blessing prayer
- i. Dismissal

Rites of baptism, confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil

- A. Following the Liturgy of the Word proper, the rites of baptism and confirmation
  - 1. Presentation of the catechumens
  - 2. Invitation to prayer
  - 3. Litany of the saints
  - 4. Prayer over the water
  - 5. Profession of faith
  - 6. Renunciation of sin
  - 7. Baptism
  - 8. Anointing
  - 9. Clothing with a white garment
  - 10. Presentation of lighted candle
  - 11. Confirmation
    - a. invitation and prayer
    - b. laying on of hands
    - c. anointing with chrism

Period of mystagogia, or postbaptismal catechesis

- A. This period is to be marked by intense prayer and the practice of Christian living in the lives of the catechumens.
- B. No formal rites are prescribed for this period.
- C. Sunday Masses in the Easter Season have been customarily devoted to gatherings of the newly baptized in which the entire community that has received them affirms and supports their new life in Christ.
- D. Bishops are encouraged to meet with the baptized for anniversary celebrations of their baptism.
- E. Godparents are reminded of their ongoing duty to support the Christian life of their godchildren.

In 1962, on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, the baptismal rites in place had concentrated the attention of the faithful more on the personal rather than the communal or ecclesial nature of worship. Hence both infant and adult baptisms were regularly held outside of the celebration of the Eucharist, most often for the immediate family only. These same

tendencies characterized much of the sacramental celebration of the Roman Rite at the time. With the advent of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, however, the fundamentally ecclesial nature of the liturgy—and hence the demand for its public and communal celebration—was recovered as a part of the liturgical reform. Accordingly, in the revised rites, the celebration of baptism of infants within Sunday Mass (Baptism of Children 9) and the celebration of adult baptisms at the Easter Vigil (RCIA 17, 23) are now considered normative.

The uniting of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation is among the features of the RCIA that reintroduce profoundly traditional and pneumatological elements into the reformed rites. The reform thus attempts to strengthen the paschal nature of baptism (see RCIA 4, 8; Baptism for Children 9). Finally, the new rites make clear that prebaptismal and postbaptismal life in the church differs radically according to the experience of those baptized and their community. Therefore, catechesis appropriate to each must continually be developed.

Along with the restoration of the adult catechumenate via the RCIA and adult baptism, the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council also revised the rites of infant baptism to reflect more clearly how those rites were intended for those who could not speak for themselves and were an act of the family and the community who supported the baptized. The text of *Sacrosanctum Concilium* itself called for a threefold reform of the rites along these pastoral lines: “The rite for the baptism of infants is to be revised, and should be adapted to the circumstance that those to be baptized are, in fact, infants. The roles of parents and godparents, and also their duties, should be brought out more sharply in the rite itself. The baptismal rite should contain adaptations, to be used at the discretion of the local ordinary, for occasions when a very large number are to be baptized together. Moreover, a shorter rite is to be drawn up,

especially for mission lands, for use by catechists, but also by the faithful in general when there is danger of death, and neither priest nor deacon is available” (SC 68, 69).

In contrast to the reform of infant baptism drawn up by the popes who implemented the directives of the Council of Trent, the revised rites of infant baptism of 1969 show marked differences over those of 1614. Here is a comparison of the two rites:

***Comparative Chart of the Rites of Infant Baptism, 1614 and 1969***

Rite of Infant Baptism, 1614	Rite of Infant Baptism, 1969
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*The following rite of baptism was placed in the ritual of Pope Paul V (1614) and formed by taking the adult rite of baptism and abbreviating it for use with an infant. This rite became the most widely used one for infant baptism between 1614 and the reforms introduced by Pope Paul VI in 1969. Adult baptism as a frequent practice did not re-emerge in the Roman Rite until the promulgation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (1972).*

**I Entrance rites**

- A. Interrogatories at the door of the church of parents and godparents
- B. Minor exorcism
- C. Exsufflation and the signing of the baptizand's forehead
- D. The imposition of hands
- E. Blessing of baptizand with salt
- F. Exorcism

**II Rites at entrance to baptistry**

- A. Recitation of the creed by parents and godparents
- B. Exorcism
- C. Ephphetha ceremony
- D. Renunciation of Satan answered by godparents
- E. Anointing with oil of catechumens

**III Rites at the font**

- A. Baptismal promises taken on behalf of the infant
- B. Baptism
- C. Anointing with chrism
- D. Clothing with white garment
- E. Lighting of baptismal candle

*The following rite was promulgated in 1969 and was meant to highlight those elements of reform directed by the Second Vatican Council in Sacrosanctum Concilium 68 and 69. Its use is separate from that of the rite for baptism of adults; the two may never be interchanged. The usual place for the celebration of infant baptism is the Sunday Mass of the community into which the child is baptized and which parents live.*

**I Entrance rites**

- A. Greeting at the door of the church
- B. Interrogatories of parents and godparents
- C. Signing of the forehead of the infant by parents and godparents

**II Rites at the font during Sunday Mass**

- A. Liturgy of the Word
- B. Intercessions
- C. Litany of the saints
- D. Exorcism
- E. Anointing with oil
- F. Blessing of the water
- G. Renunciation of sin
- H. Baptismal promises taken on behalf of the infant
- I. Profession of faith by parents and godparents
- J. Baptism

	K. Anointing with chrism L. Clothing with white garment M. Presentation of lighted candle N. Ephephata ceremony
Source: Paulus V, <i>Rituale Romanum</i> (1614)	Source: Paulus VI, <i>Ordo Baptismi Parvulorum</i> (1969)

The essential differences between the rites reformed by the Council of Trent and those of the Second Vatican Council are three: (1) infant baptism is set within a celebration of the Liturgy of the Word, ideally found within the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist of the family's home community; (2) exorcism is de-emphasized and (3) the shortened rites of 1969 focus the attention of the parents and godparents on their acts of faith and renunciation of the devil as essential prerequisites to the baptismal act itself. In effect, without the faith of the parents and godparents who support the infant, baptism loses its meaning as a sacrament of faith professed (by an adult candidate) or spoken for (in the case of a child). It also is evident that the main lines of this rite remain unchanged from its predecessor of nearly 500 years.

In addition, the reformed rites for infant baptism also helped to clarify the roles of the godparents as secondary to those of the parents, who must function as first teachers of the faith to their children (see Baptism for Children 5, 6). Godparents supply this need when parents can no longer provide it. As well, the rites now emphasize what can be called the "paschal character" of baptism, that is, the celebration of baptism as an entrance into the mystery of Christ's own death and resurrection to the Father, cleansing the child of original sin and orienting him or her to a new life in Christ, strengthened for the profession of faith and the practice of virtue (see SC 6, LG 1). This emphasis on the paschal character of every sacrament has been made explicit in all

the reformed rites and texts of the liturgy since the Second Vatican Council.

In sum, the reform of the Roman Catholic rites of baptism have been conducted with careful attention to restoring them to a communal setting within which the Liturgy of the Word is an essential component and profession of faith by the church suffuses the celebration for all involved. Cultural adaptation of the rites is permitted according to guidelines given both by the Holy See and the local Episcopal conference (SC 63, 64, 65), including the formation of a rite for the reception of already baptized persons into full communion with the Catholic Church.

### *Pre- and postbaptismal rites*

Roman Catholic baptismal rites include both prebaptismal and postbaptismal elements that help to prepare for and delineate the mystery experienced in baptism. The prebaptismal rites of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults are intended, as described above, to invite and stimulate a desire for God; membership in Christ's body, the church; and the ability to profess faith.<sup>34</sup> The lead-up of the extended catechumenate now in place in the reformed rites of adult baptism is the fertile ground for enabling the grace of baptism to take root deeply in the hearts of those well prepared to receive it. Conversion is work: none who desires to be baptized can be expected to prepare him- or herself apart from a community that will give them membership and belonging. The prebaptismal rites also serve the valuable purpose of acquainting the catechumen with the community he or she will call home for at least some time through the period of *mystagogia*. Likewise, the community must prepare itself to admit new members and thereby deepen its own commitment by expanding yet again the boundaries of its love and mission.

The postbaptismal elements, whether of the adult or infant rites, have a single overall

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<sup>34</sup> See LG 11 on the effects of baptism; see also Can. 849 in the 1983 Code of Canon Law.



purpose: they serve to unfold, explain and detail major aspects of what has just happened in water baptism. Though not essential to the sacramental action of God just experienced, they nevertheless make clear to all—minister, witnesses, family and community members—that the new Christian now enjoys the rights and obligations of membership in Christ’s body.

When anointed with chrism, the newly baptized and confirmed are sealed in their priestly role to participate in the Eucharist and in their ability to share in marriage and holy orders. Clothing with a white garment signals the beauty and sin-free quality of their new lives now lived in Christ, washed clean of original and actual sin. Like the linen garments worn by the baptized of long ago, white-colored clothing also serves as a reminder and pledge against the temptation to sin, which will never leave their lives. The presentation of the lighted candle is a joining of their commitment to live according to the light of Christ as symbolized by the great Easter candle of the vigil at which the adults were baptized. This candle also solemnizes their vow-taking, as in many other Roman Catholic rites, such as weddings, monastic vows, the consecration of virgins or the annual renewal of baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil. Finally, the Ephphetha ceremony brings with it the special grace to hear the Word of God and speak it as a part of the mission and life of the baptized. With this rite, which orients the new believer to the preaching of the Word in life, word, and deed, the rite for baptism closes on an evangelical imitation of Christ, who came to serve and not to be served (Matt. 20.28).

### ***Method in the reform of the Roman Catholic baptismal rites***

As mentioned above, Roman Catholic liturgy was reformed after the Second Vatican Council according to goals never before adopted by the church. Specifically, the revision of rites and texts was made with the overarching purpose of deepening the “full, conscious and active

participation” of the faithful in God’s action in the liturgy (SC 14). Inherently this goal carried new methodological considerations, demanding a theological and liturgical understanding of the rite and texts unlike any previously needed.

The council gave some direction for the development of this method in its statements that there was no further need for “uniformity” but only for “unity” in the reformed rites (SC 23) and that the existing rites from Trent should be simplified and made easier and clearer for the faithful to understand (SC 21, 50, 62), eliminating “elements which, with the passage of time, came to be duplicated, or were added with but little advantage” (SC 50). The new method of reform would demand a re-appreciation of the rites that concentrated on the needs of the believer through the lens of a relatively new category, that of participant (SC 14) in the sacred mysteries.

Implicit in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*’s discussion of enhanced participation is a turn to the subjectivity of the believer interacting with the church and Christ in the celebration of God’s action in rite and sacrament. The tools needed to complete this kind of reform would differ from those used in previous liturgical reforms. In the past, the liturgy achieved its organic growth primarily from the development of doctrine in the face of schism, heresy, or political strife. But the Second Vatican Council opened a door to organic growth in the liturgy centered on the experience of the believer in the act of worship.<sup>35</sup>

In SC 23, the Roman Catholic Church introduced methodological changes in establishing standards for organic growth in the liturgy that were startling for many. There it names five

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<sup>35</sup> SC 14: “This full and active sharing on the part of the whole people is of paramount concern in the process of renewing the liturgy and helping it to grow” / *Quae totius populi plena et actuosa participatio, in instauranda et fovenda sacra liturgia, summopere est attendenda*; SC 23: “In order that healthy tradition can be preserved while yet allowing room for legitimate development, thorough investigation—theological, historical and pastoral—of the individual parts of the liturgy up for revision is always to be the first step” / *Ut sana traditio retineatur et tamen via legitimae progressionis aperiatur et adhibita cauta ut novae formae ex formis iam exstantibus organice quodammodo crescant*).

principles that directly affected the way in which the reform of the baptismal rites—for both adults and children—were to be accomplished. They included (1) the preservation of tradition that yet allows for development through a historical, theological, and pastoral understanding of the liturgy; (2) determining the general structure and intent of any part of the liturgy before revising it; (3) evaluating and using the experience of liturgical renewal and special concessions in practice granted up until the council and even beyond to guide the reform of the rites; (4) the grounding of all changes in the “real and proven need” of the church; and (5) the promotion of continuity in liturgical growth from old to new forms.

These five points of method were intensified with the final steps toward reform approved by the council. In sections 38 and 39 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the council says that adaptations of the liturgy according to local cultures are permitted and can be devised and then submitted by episcopal conferences to the Holy See for approbation.

The effect of implementing these principles for reform can be seen in the way in which the modern rites have been simplified and their new expression devised to reflect the proven tradition of the early church, in which the deepening conversion of the believer was of great importance. When it comes to baptismal rights, reform has been based on work in the modern historical, theological, behavioral, and pastoral sciences that was encouraged by the Second Vatican Council itself. No previous reform sought the same goals this one did or achieved them with tools unique to the modern age.

#### **Chart with full texts of rites (see Appendix A)**

##### g. Critical comparison of Roman Catholic and Reformed rites

A comparison of the current printed liturgies of Reformed and Roman Catholic churches

in this dialogue reveal strong similarities arising from the common ecumenical liturgical movement of the twentieth century, which itself emerged from shared biblical and historical scholarship in the early part of the century. Even so, some differences remain. This report offers structural and thematic reflections based on a comparison of the printed baptismal orders. A chart with the full texts of all the current rites can be found in the appendix. It is important to note that the comparison of rites in the appendix focuses on the Roman Catholic rite of paedobaptism, not the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. As noted earlier, the current Reformed rites may be used for either infants or people of mature faith. This represents a reversal of practice from an earlier era, when Reformed churches had separate rites for adults and children and Roman Catholic churches had a single rite to be used for both.

### *Similarities*

All the Reformed and Roman Catholic baptismal rites, according to written form if not always in practice, follow the reading and proclamation of the Word. Baptism is thus always understood as a response to the proclaimed Word. This is significant, because it represents a change from earlier practice, when baptisms often were conducted privately, apart from the liturgy of the Word (Roman Catholic) or before the reading and proclamation of the Word (some Reformed).

All the baptismal rites include the following elements, though not always in the same order:

- renunciations by candidates or parents of those to be baptized;
- profession of faith (usually the Apostles' Creed);
- promises by parents, sponsors/godparents (if present), and congregation;

- baptismal prayer at the font (variously titled “Blessing and Invocation of God over Baptismal Water” [RC], “Prayer of Thanksgiving” [CRC], “Prayer of Baptism” [UCC], “Baptismal Prayer of Thanksgiving” [RCA], and “Thanksgiving over the Water” [PCUSA]);
- baptism with water “in(to) the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>36</sup> The UCC provides the option of the alternate words “*you are baptized* in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” This appears to be the central text of the baptismal rite in every case;
- postbaptismal anointing, laying on of hands and/or declaration and blessing without laying on of hands;
- prayers for the baptized.

From this it appears that all the rites have a basic common structure, though it has been appropriated in different ways.

Furthermore, there is remarkable agreement in the thematic content of both traditions’ rites. In our analysis of the rites, texts were read for five kinds of statements: (1) *images*, such as those which variously describe baptismal water; (2) *commitments*, such as an expression for the desire for baptism; (3) *effects*, such as the gifts from the Holy Spirit received through baptism; (4) *formulae*, such as the interrogatories before baptism, or the adaptation of a berekah-style prayer form and (5) *biblical doctrine*, such as the notion of original sin. Some categories overlap in their functions within the rites, such as formulae used to elicit a commitment or images that

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<sup>36</sup> The CRC alone has “into” rather than “in”: “I baptize you *into* the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

carry doctrinal meaning.

Here is a more detailed description of the similarities among the rites:

- The majority of the images employed and the authority for their use appear to be derived from the gospels and the Old Testament, while the effects are almost all Pauline in their theological roots.
- Much of the language that accompanies ritual acts—such as the epiclesis, the blessings, the formulae and the commitments—seem to derive from patristic sources both in vocabulary and rhetorical structure.
- Certain texts, such as the use of a *berekah*-style prayer of blessing over the water, represent a retrieval of Jewish influence in the reform of Christian liturgies that has been under way since the early 1960s.
- The language of Pauline participationism describes the soteriological aspects of the sacramental action in the rites. As well, Pauline ecclesiology of the body in large measure shapes the notion of church within the rites, and Pauline virtue-vice language, as taken from wisdom literature and first-century Judaism, seems to inform much of the effects and commitments while reflecting the style of modern personalism.
- There is a remarkable similarity in the kind of syntax, vocabulary and general expression used in the rites, characterized by biblical redolence, simplicity, directness, and succinctness. This is all the more noteworthy when one considers that the Roman Catholic rites are a translation of a Latin original. This would

suggest some degree of interaction and even dependency among the reformers of the rites.

### *Differences*

- The Roman Catholic rite includes baptismal elements early in the liturgy (reception of children, intercessions, prebaptismal anointing), while the Reformed baptismal rites are contained in a particular portion of the overall liturgy. While references to baptism, such as the prayers of intercession, might be included at other points in the Reformed services, this is not explicit in the written rites.
- The Roman Catholic rite also contains several explanatory rites not present in any of the Reformed rites: white garment, lighted candle, and ephphetha.
- The Reformed rites all begin with Scripture or scriptural statements on the meaning of baptism. This is significant, because it points to the Reformed concern to provide biblical warrant for the sacrament.
- Within the Reformed family, the CRC exhibits a different structure leading up to baptism: a statement on baptism is followed by the prayer of thanksgiving, then come the renunciations and profession of faith. All other Reformed rites include the renunciations and profession of faith before the prayer of thanksgiving.
- The Reformed rites in various ways exhibit tension around the practice of postbaptismal anointing or laying on of hands. The CRC and UCC suggest that laying on of hands is optional; the CRC, RCA, and PCUSA include signing with the cross as optional; the PCUSA suggests anointing as optional. All of this

underscores a Reformed concern that the sign of water and the Word not be overshadowed by additional ritual gestures.

- Although almost all the rites have alternate expressions for all of the images, effects, commitments, formulae, and doctrine of the other churches, there are a few exceptions, such as the terms original sin and covenant. These exceptions might prove to be distinctive points of identity for individual communities and their liturgical expressions.

#### h. Conclusion: Similar rites with different hermeneutics

The numerous common elements in the baptismal rites of the Reformed and Roman Catholic churches surveyed in this study might initially suggest that there has been a significant sharing of doctrine, method, and practice between the two communities. In some instances, identical wordings and rites are evident in baptismal liturgies, as found, for example, in the berakah-style blessing over the baptismal water or in the use of the traditional biblical formula that accompanies the baptismal washing. No fewer than five such components can be found shaping the baptismal rites and texts now in use for each of these churches (see Appendix 1 and 2).

Indeed, many of the methods used in the reform of these rites appear to be products of a common liturgical-renewal movement. Authors such as James F. White, who has published seminal studies on the reform of protestant liturgies during the past 40 years, has established this very point.<sup>37</sup> In addition, Roman Catholic and Protestant churches undertook joint studies of the biblical and patristic elements of their liturgies in the decades after the Second Vatican Council

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<sup>37</sup> James White, "Roman Catholic and Protestant Worship in Relationship" in *Christian Worship in North America* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1997), 3-15.



in repeated efforts to achieve visible communion where possible in their sacramental practices, especially in the celebration of baptism.<sup>38</sup>

Ecumenical journals such as *Studia Liturgica* have effectively served as common platforms from which liturgical dialogue among churches is promoted. Organizations such as the International Consultation on English Texts and the English Language Liturgical Consultation worked hand in hand with the Roman Catholic International Commission on English in the Liturgy to produce texts of great value in drawing the liturgies of Protestant and Catholic communities together.

Among the most prestigious of these groups is *Societas Liturgica*, founded by Wiebe Vos, a pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church, who saw the need for Roman Catholic and Reformed churches to draw closer through a deepened appreciation of common biblical and patristic roots in the liturgy.

While twentieth-century renewals of Reformed and Roman Catholic liturgies appear to have developed a shared liturgical theology, it is not clear that systematic or dogmatic theologians from the two traditions understand the reforms in the same way. Perhaps the most significant critique of the difference in understanding of baptism between systematic and liturgical theologians in the Reformed churches can be found John W. Riggs' *Baptism in the Reformed Tradition*.<sup>39</sup> There, Riggs maintains that the reform of baptismal rites completed in the Reformed churches since the 1972 appearance of the Roman Catholic Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults is notably out of harmony with established Reformed theologies of baptism.

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, *Made, Not Born: New Perspectives on Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate*, the Murphy Center for Liturgical Research (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976).

<sup>39</sup> Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.

Five of the most common theological and structural elements that characterize the recently renewed baptismal rites of both churches—(1) baptism as a response to the Word of God, (2) the use of the gospels as a source for baptismal images, (3) the use of Pauline literature as a source for the language of baptismal action and effects, (4) the recovery of patristic ritual elements, and (5) the adoption of common biblical texts in the rites themselves—must then be read in at least two ways by Reformed theologians: through the lens of either liturgical or systematic theology. While such differing approaches to Reformed baptismal rites might pose challenges internally to Reformed communities, the use of water through immersion, infusion, or sprinkling while pronouncing the biblical formula of baptism as reflected in Matthew 28.19 remain in place as essentials in the rites of both the Reformed and Roman Catholic communities.

In a mark of unity, both traditions have agreed that, in order to deepen their relationship as believers in Christ, any examination of their baptismal doctrines and practices must begin with an acknowledgement of commonly used biblical and patristic sources. In addition, both groups seem to have developed a common method for the retrieval of texts and rites essential to their discussions through the best of form and redaction criticisms, yielding accurate texts and ritual histories.

However, both communities appear to interpret these same sources with hermeneutics conditioned by a priori confessional and dogmatic assumptions. This is most true in the reading of central texts from Augustine's works on baptism, faith, justification, sacrament, and original sin.<sup>40</sup> The reconciliation of approaches to the reading of Augustine might open a path for

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<sup>40</sup> See *De baptismo*; *De doctrina christiana*; *De libero arbitrio*; *De peccatorum meritis et remissione peccatorum et de baptismo parvulorum*; *de predestinatione sanctorum*; *De correctione donatarum*; *Ad Simplicianum* (1.2) and

exchange and understanding between both traditions in a new way.

The result of these divergent approaches is predictable: widely varying readings of common sources lead to differing uses of the same rites and texts brought forward into recently revised baptismal liturgies. Essentially, the Roman Catholic and Reformed churches agree on which texts and rites are central to baptismal belief and practice but reserve much of their interpretive use of these sources within the bounds of their separate communal confessions.

## **5. Theology of baptism: Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Common perspectives**

Alongside the developments in baptismal rites during and since the sixteenth century, it is also important to consider both Roman Catholic and Reformed theologies of baptism. As with the baptismal rites, so too in baptismal theology: both traditions have much in common even as they also differ on key issues. The study of the theology of baptism in this chapter is designed to highlight both the common elements and the differences.

This chapter is organized this way: after introductory questions on baptism, it turns to an examination of the nature of baptism and then looks at connections between baptism and the church, baptism and those who receive it, and baptism and other significant Christian doctrines. Within each section, basic questions about baptism serve to focus the discussion on specific issues. We hope that this structure will allow readers to focus on the main questions first and then examine subsidiary questions that interest them.

Each topic in this chapter is introduced by a question. In response to each question, there is a common statement that expresses what this dialogue has agreed that we can say together as

well as statements articulating both the Roman Catholic and Reformed positions.

The statements from each tradition were developed first and became the basis for the common statements. In the common statements, we try to state as much as we hold in common even when the language that we typically use on each side is not held in common.

In the dialogue, deciding what to use as source material for the two traditions' positions proved challenging. Should we use only documents that have been officially approved or also statements by leading theologians from each perspective? If the latter, which theologians should we take to be authoritative? Not only because it would be difficult to decide which theologians to use but also because theologians' statements have no official standing in any church in this dialogue, it seemed best to limit our sources to officially approved documents. For the Roman Catholic tradition, this meant using statements from church councils (primarily from the Council of Trent through the Second Vatican Council), papal teaching, and the recent Catechism of the Catholic Church. For the Reformed tradition, it meant using the confessions that the Reformed churches in this dialogue include in their official books of confessions or their denominational list of confessions. The matter of using confessions is complicated on the Reformed side not only because the Reformed churches in this dialogue stem from two branches of the Reformed tradition (Scottish and continental) and have different lists of confessions, but also because the Reformed churches adhere to their confessions in different ways. For some in this dialogue, the confessions carry the weight of tradition, and church members might disagree with them today. For other members of the Reformed delegation, the confessions continue to state the faith of the church. Despite these complications, the Reformed representatives to the dialogue thought it best to use the official conciliar, catechetical, and confessional statements of their churches as the

basis for stating a Reformed view.

a. What is baptism?

*i. Common statement*

Baptism is a sacrament of the church in which a person is effused with or immersed in water, accompanied by the trinitarian formula that the person is baptized “in(to) the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19-20). Baptism is the first of the sacraments that a person receives. It is a means of grace through which God works in a person and that marks the reception of a person into the life and mission of Christ’s church.

*ii. Roman Catholic statement*

Baptism is the door to life and to the kingdom of God (RCIA 1). Therefore it is the first sacrament. It constitutes the beginning of Christian life, and, by being baptized, one is incorporated into the church. It is administered with water and in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Through it those born in sin are forgiven all sins, original and actual, and are regenerated into the new life of Christ. Baptism, the cleansing with water by the power of the living Word, makes us sharers in God’s own life and his adopted children (RCIA 8).

*iii. Reformed statement*

Baptism is a sacrament ordained by Jesus Christ. Christ commanded his followers “to preach the Gospel and to baptize ‘in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’” (Matt. 28:19, Second Helvetic Confession 5.185). This sign of initiation, in which God’s elect people are consecrated to God, involves washing or sprinkling with “visible water” (Second Helvetic Confession 5.185, 188). In baptism, a person is admitted into the visible church and given “a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of

remission of sins, and of this giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in newness of life” (Westminster Confession of Faith 6.154). Those who are baptized have been received into God’s church, set apart from other people and religions in order to be dedicated to God, and promised that God will be their God forever (Belgic Confession Art. 34).

b. Why does the church baptize?

*i. Common statement*

The church baptizes in obedience to the command of Christ (Matt. 28:19, Mark 16:16) in order to initiate people into the life of the church.

*ii. Roman Catholic statement*

“Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritualis ianua*), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments” (CCC 1213).

With these words the Catechism of the Catholic Church introduces the sacrament of baptism.

The church baptizes in obedience to the command of Christ (Matt 28:19, Mark 16:16) in order to initiate people into the life of the church, the new life that God offers in Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world. In the fourth gospel, Jesus declares, “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly” (John 10:10). Likewise the early church, when it proclaimed the gospel of Christ, understood its mission in similar terms:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us (1 John 1:1-2).

Baptism imparts the new life in Christ. As the sacrament of regeneration, baptism not only signifies new birth in Christ but “actually brings about the birth of water and the Spirit

without which no one ‘can enter the kingdom of God’” (CCC 1215). Therefore the necessity of baptism is seen in its effects, namely, freedom from sin and rebirth as a son or daughter of God (that is, our adoption by grace). This new filial relation with God brought about by the adoption of grace also constitutes the baptized as members of Christ who are incorporated into the church and are made sharers in its mission. Baptism, therefore, is the privileged means of grace through which a person becomes a Christian (Mark 10:15; John 3:5).

#### *Reformed statement*

Reformed churches baptize because Jesus Christ ordained, or instituted, baptism.<sup>41</sup> According to the Gospel of Matthew, after his resurrection, Jesus sent his disciples into the world to “make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20, NRSV). Christians have, in response to this commission, seen baptism as a mark of commitment to the Lord and membership in the church: “The universal practice of baptism by the apostolic Church from its earliest days is attested in letters of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, and the writings of the Fathers” (Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, Baptism I.1). Because Christian baptism is grounded in Christ’s instruction in his Word, Reformed Christians attempt to follow biblical practices and teachings surrounding baptism.

#### THE NATURE OF BAPTISM

c. What does baptism effect or signify?

##### *i. Common statement*

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<sup>41</sup> Westminster Confession 30.1, Westminster Larger Catechism Q.&A. 165, Evangelical Catechism Q.&A. 115-17.

Baptism is the divinely appointed means of grace by which Christ acts through a visible, sacramental act of the church to signify the forgiveness of sins, regeneration, and being united to and engrafted into the church, the body of Christ.

*ii. Roman Catholic statement*

Baptism, the first of the sacraments, is the font, or source, of both Christian and ecclesial life. The meaning of baptism communicates what is distinctive in Catholic theology but also serves as the basis for a common ecumenical witness with other churches and ecclesial communities. Along with the World Council of Churches 1982 Faith and Order document Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, the Catholic Church can affirm that the meaning of water baptism has to do with participation in Christ's death and resurrection (what Catholics call the paschal mystery); with conversion, pardoning, and cleansing; with the reception of the gift of the Spirit; with incorporation into the body of Christ; and with the kingdom of God (BEM 3-7). In the more recent "Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism," a document of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, baptism is identified with initiation into the life of faith, incorporation into the church, and with continual growth in Christ, including the call to holiness (paragraphs 34, 59, 71, 77). It is in light of these ecumenical insights that the particularities of a Catholic theology of baptism must be understood.

In many ways, Christian initiation guides Christian maturation. As with the other sacraments, baptism is a means of grace. As each sacrament imparts its own specific sacramental grace, so does baptism. Its two principal effects are "purification from sins and new birth in the



Holy Spirit” (CCC 1262). Yet the sacrament embraces all the elements of becoming a Christian:

The fruit of Baptism, or baptismal grace, is a rich reality that includes forgiveness of original sin and all personal sins, birth into the new life by which man becomes an adoptive son of the Father, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit. By this very fact the person baptized is incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, and made a sharer in the priesthood of Christ (CCC 1279).

The Roman Catholic Church has traditionally affirmed the necessity of baptism for salvation, specifically “for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have the possibility of asking for this sacrament” (CCC 1257). One also may receive salvation through a “baptism of blood,” by suffering death for the faith before one is baptized. In a broader sense, God is not bound by the sacraments. Because “the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partakers, in a way known to God, of the paschal mystery” (*Gaudium et Spes* 62), non-Christians can be saved. This may also be understood as a baptism of desire—something that catechumens intentionally express before their actual baptism. In the case of non-Christians, the assumption is that baptism would be desired had the person known of its necessity. Of course, the question of how salvation is offered to non-Christians is beyond the scope of this document, although it is something that the Catholic Church considers a possibility without committing itself to an affirmation that other religions give access through their own rites to Christian salvation. Salvation is always mediated through Christ. How a non-Christian responds to divine grace is a matter of conscience and the light one has received. How that might entail the practice of another religious tradition is left to theological inquiry as long as the centrality of Christ and the paschal mystery is not displaced.

“Baptism is [also] the sacrament of faith” (CCC 1253). This encompasses both the faith of the church and that of each believer. The Catholic emphasis on cooperation with grace and the

importance of good works does not negate the continual necessity of faith. Faith itself is “a gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him” (CCC 153), something that clearly bespeaks the priority of grace:

Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and “makes it easy for all to accept and believe the truth” (*Dei Verbum*, 5).

At the same time, assistance by divine grace does not exclude that faith is “an authentically human act . . . [and that t]rusting in God and cleaving to the truths he has revealed are contrary neither to human freedom nor to human reason” (CCC 154). As a theological virtue, it relates Christians who have the Trinity as “their origin, motive, and object” (CCC 1812) directly to God. One must persevere in faith. Apart from works, faith is dead (James 2:26), and when deprived of hope and love (the other two theological virtues), it “does not unite the believer to Christ and does not make him a living member of his Body” (CCC 1815).

The theology of baptism is a window into the entire Christian life. Its elaboration can unfold the manifold riches of Christ for those who through baptism are united with him in his death and resurrection. This journey into the Christian life is also the way of discipleship. The paschal mystery is manifested in the lives of those who, knowing the power of Christ’s resurrection, are made conformable to his death by sharing in his sufferings (Phil. 3:10).

### *iii. Reformed statement*

As a sacrament, baptism offers a visible word that speaks to God’s people. It speaks by means of actions accompanied by words that describe spiritual realities and assure God’s people. Baptism signifies certain spiritual realities. It is a “sign and seal” of the covenant of grace, of

being ingrafted into Christ, “of regeneration, of remission of sins,” and of beginning “to walk in newness of life” (Westminster Confession of Faith 6.154). Baptism is “the sign of new life through Jesus Christ,” uniting “the one baptized with Christ and with his people” (BEM, Baptism II.2). As “the sign and seal of God’s grace and covenant in Christ,” baptism “points us back to the grace of God expressed in Jesus Christ,” and the water of baptism “links us to the goodness of God’s creation and to the grace of God’s covenants with Noah and Israel” (PCUSA Directory for Worship W-2.3002-03). Baptism is a sacrament that claims people as “children of God, disciples of Christ, and members of Christ’s church” (UCC Toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A Statement of Commitment).

Baptism gives a person a new identity. “In Baptism a person is sealed by the Holy Spirit, given identity as a member of the church, welcomed to the Lord’s Table, and set apart for a life of Christian service” (PCUSA Directory for Worship W-4.2001). Baptism is therefore not only a sign of spiritual realities and a means by which God dispenses grace; it also is the sign of admission into the visible church: “In Holy Baptism God imparts the gift of the new life unto man, receives him into his fellowship as his child, and admits him as a member of the Christian Church” (Evangelical Catechism [UCC] Q. & A. 118).

In baptism God “signifies to us that just as water washes away the dirt of the body when it is poured on us . . . so too the blood of Christ does the same thing internally, in the soul, by the Holy Spirit. It washes and cleanses it from its sins and transforms us from being the children of wrath into the children of God” (Belgic Confession Art. 34). Baptism’s use of an external washing to signify an internal one serves to reinforce the promise of God to forgive sins. In baptism, Christ “gave the promise that, as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so

certainly his blood and his Spirit wash away my soul's impurity, in other words, all my sins" (Heidelberg Catechism Q.&A. 69). Baptism assures us that God "freely cleanses us from our sins by the blood of his Son, and in him adopts us to be his sons, and by a holy covenant joins us to himself, and enriches us with various gifts, that we might live a new life" (Second Helvetic Confession 5. 187).

Baptism signifies our being "engrafted into Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of his righteousness, by which our sins are covered and remitted" (Scots Confession 3.21). Although many Reformed Christians have hesitated to say that baptism effects forgiveness of sins or regeneration, others come close to such a view. Thus the Westminster Confession of Faith says that, although the "efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost," but it adds that this grace is conferred "to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth to, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time" (Westminster Confession 6.159).

Baptism also signifies a dying and rising with Christ: "Baptism with water represents not only cleansing from sin, but a dying with Christ and a joyful rising with him to new life" (Confession of 1967 9.511). "By baptism, Christians are immersed in the liberating death of Christ where their sins are buried, where the 'old Adam' is crucified with Christ, and where the power of sin is broken," and they are "raised here and now to a new life in the power of the resurrection of Christ, confident that they will also ultimately be one with him in a resurrection like his" (BEM, Baptism II.3).

In sum, baptism uses water to signify cleansing from sin and regeneration. Reformed

confessions speak of baptism as “the washing of rebirth and the washing away of sins,” noting that, in baptism, God “wants to assure us, by this divine pledge and sign, that the washing away of our sins spiritually is as real as physical washing with water” (Heidelberg Catechism Q.&A. 71, 73). “For in baptism the sign is the element of water, and that visible washing which is done by the minister; but the thing signified is regeneration and the cleansing from sins” (Second Helvetic Confession 5. 178-79).

Although baptism is a means of grace that signifies justification and cleansing from sin, it is not required in order for a person to be justified before God. Justification is an act by which God remits someone’s sins, absolves the person from guilt and punishment, receives the person into favor, and pronounces the person just (Rom. 8:33; Second Helvetic Confession 5.106). In justification, God “forgives us our sins for Jesus’ sake, counts the merit of Christ as belonging to us, and accepts us as his children” (UCC Evangelical Catechism Q.&A. 81). Justification occurs “‘freely’ or ‘by grace,’” apart from works and on the basis of Jesus Christ’s work of redemption (Belgic Confession Art. 23). In justification, God pardons sins and accepts people as righteous, “not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone; not by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is the gift of God” (Westminster Confession of Faith 6.068-69). Because justification is not based on our merits but only on the “obedience of Christ crucified, which is ours when we believe in him,” it “is enough to cover our sins and to make us confident, freeing the conscience from the fear, dread, and terror of God’s approach” (Belgic Confession Art. 23).

Similarly, although baptism both signifies regeneration and serves as a means of grace moving God's people to rebirth, baptism is not required in order for a person to be regenerated in Jesus Christ. Regeneration is the rebirth of water and the Spirit, a rebirth that enables entrance into the kingdom of God (John 3:3-6). This rebirth is a "new creation" and a "making alive" that, like the work of creation or the raising of the dead, "God works in us without our help" (Canons of Dort III/IV Art. 12). In regeneration, God's grace "does not act in people as if they were blocks and stones; nor does it abolish the will and its properties or coerce a reluctant will by force, but spiritually revives, heals, reforms, and—in a manner at once pleasing and powerful—bends it back" (Canons of Dort III/IV Art. 16). Although regeneration is God's supernatural work, God has chosen to bring about that work by such means as "the holy admonitions of the gospel, under the administration of the Word, the sacraments, and discipline" (Canons of Dort III/IV Art. 17).

d. How is Christian baptism related to the biblical economy of salvation?

*i. Common statement*

The biblical economy of salvation roots Christian baptism. The water of baptism echoes the water of creation, of the flood, of the Red Sea during Israel's exodus, and of Jesus' own baptism. Baptism is the sign of God's covenant with the church, a covenant that not only stretches back to God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants but also binds those who are members of this covenant to God as God's children.

*ii. Roman Catholic statement*

Both the theology and liturgical praxis of baptism situate it within the biblical economy of salvation. The consecratory prayer over the water refers to the waters of creation, the Red Sea

at the time of the exodus, and the River Jordan, wherein Jesus was baptized. It culminates with the water and blood that flowed from Christ's side as he hung upon the cross. This rich imagery associates the paschal sacrifice of Christ with God's creative and redemptive action throughout history. So too, by the power of the Spirit, the waters of baptism are unsealed as a fountain of new life. Baptism also is consistent with the covenantal language used in Scripture to express God's fidelity to creation and his people. Although the word *covenant* is not used explicitly in the Roman Catholic Rite of Baptism, it is implied and can be understood in light of Catholic teaching.

Covenant is a part of the "divine plan of Revelation . . . realized simultaneously 'by deeds and words which are intrinsically bound up with each other' and shed light on each other" (CCC 53). "Again and again you offered a covenant to man, and through the prophets taught him to hope for salvation" the church prays in Eucharistic Prayer IV of the Roman Missal. "God made an everlasting covenant with Noah and with all living beings (Gen. 9:16). It will remain in force as long as the world lasts (CCC 71). . . .

"God chose Abraham and made a covenant with him and his descendants. By the covenant God formed his people and revealed his law to them through Moses. Through the prophets, he prepared them to accept the salvation destined for all humanity (CCC 72). . . . God has revealed himself fully by sending his own Son, in whom he has established his covenant forever. The Son is his Father's definitive Word; so there will be no further Revelation after him" (CCC 73). This new and definitive covenant in Jesus Christ is at the heart of the gospel, the church, and its sacramental life, especially the Eucharist, and is the basis for Christian prayer—"Christian prayer is a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ. It is the action of

God and of man, springing forth from both the Holy Spirit and ourselves, wholly directed to the Father, in union with the human will of the Son of God made man” (CCC 2564).

*iii. Reformed statement*

Christian baptism is deeply rooted in God’s dealings with ancient Israel. The washing and transformation that occur in baptism happen not “by the physical water but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God, who is our Red Sea, through which we must pass to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh, who is the devil, and to enter the spiritual land of Canaan” (Belgic Confession Art. 34).

Baptism is a sign of God’s covenant. The covenant is the means by which God’s people are bound to God, and baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, says the Westminster Confession (6.154). “In baptism, the church celebrates the renewal of the covenant with which God has bound his people to himself” (Confession of 1967 9.511). Thus, those who are baptized in the name of Christ have been “enrolled, entered, and received into the covenant and family, and so into the inheritance of the sons of God” (Second Helvetic Confession 5.187).

Some Reformed Christians speak of both a covenant of works and a covenant of grace; others speak only of a covenant of grace. The covenant of works is understood by those who affirm it to be a covenant made by God with the first humans, “wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience” (Westminster Confession 6.038). The fall into sin left humans incapable of perfect obedience and therefore unable to attain life with God. The covenant of works, if one existed, was ineffective.

Given humanity’s plight, God made a covenant of grace, “wherein he freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved,



and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe” (Westminster Confession 6.039). The covenant of grace also can be called a testament, with Jesus Christ as the testator bequeathing “the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it” (Westminster Confession 6.040).

Some Reformed Christians believe that although this covenant, or testament, was administered differently before and after the appearance of the promised Messiah, there is one covenant of grace, not two. Thus, since the appearance of Christ, “the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper” (Westminster Confession 6.041-42). Baptism thus was ordained by Jesus Christ “not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace” (Westminster Confession 6.154). Baptism signifies and seals “our ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the Lord’s” (Westminster Shorter Catechism 7.094).

Through water, baptism stands for God’s ancient covenant of grace: “The water of Baptism symbolizes the waters of Creation, of the Flood, and of the Exodus from Egypt. Thus, the water of Baptism links us to the goodness of God’s creation and to the grace of God’s covenants with Noah and Israel” (PCUSA Directory for Worship W-2.3003).

Baptism echoes circumcision, the sign of the covenant for ancient Israel: “As circumcision was the sign and symbol of inclusion in God’s grace and covenant with Israel, so Baptism is the sign and symbol of inclusion in God’s grace and covenant with the Church” (PCUSA Directory for Worship W-2.3004).

e. What is the relationship among baptism, faith, and discipleship?

*i. Common statement*

Baptism is an important source for a life of Christian faith and discipleship. For those baptized as infants, faith and discipleship are the expected fruit of baptism. For those baptized as adolescents or adults, typically faith and discipleship precede baptism. Nevertheless, both infant and adult baptism are intended to nurture Christian faith and discipleship. Working with the Word of God, the sacraments—including baptism—nourish the faith of God’s people and motivate them to follow God’s will as Christ’s disciples.

*ii. Roman Catholic statement*

The “whole organism of the Christian’s supernatural life has its roots in baptism” (CCC 1266). This idea embraces a life of discipleship through growth in the theological and moral virtues and the prompting and power of the Holy Spirit in graces and gifts—all of which is based upon the efficacy and fruitfulness of sacramental grace. Sacramental efficacy insures the conferral of grace in the sacramental act:

Sacraments act *ex opere operato* (literally “by the very fact of the action’s being performed”), i.e., by virtue of the saving work of Christ, accomplished once for all. It follows that “the sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the recipient, but by the power of God.” From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them” (CCC 1128).

In sacraments, the disposition of the one receiving the sacraments should not place any obstacle—for example, impenitence—in the way of reception. More positively, the believer is exhorted to receive the sacraments in faith, hope, and love and to cooperate with the grace

received in order to bear fruit in Christ.

Discipleship follows baptism. For adults who are baptized using the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, culminating at the Easter Vigil, baptism is followed by a period of mystagogy wherein the mysteries of the faith continue to be assimilated through the grace of baptism and one's relationship with Christ. For all the faithful, this is represented and celebrated in the fifty days of the Easter season, ending with Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit. As a lifelong process of discipleship, baptism continues to highlight the Christian's deepening union with Christ in his death and resurrection:

The faithful Christian who has “kept the seal” until the end, remaining faithful to the demands of his baptism, will be able to depart this life “marked with the sign of faith,” with his baptismal faith, in expectation of the blessed vision of God—the consummation of faith—in the hope of resurrection (CCC 1274).

*iii. Reformed statement*

Baptism nourishes Christian faith and discipleship. A life of faith and discipleship involves trusting God and accepting grace: “Faith is complete trust in God and willing acceptance of his grace in Jesus Christ” (Evangelical Catechism [UCC] Q.&A. 80). The main components of genuine Christian faith are knowledge and assurance. Faith involves a form of knowledge: “Christian faith is not an opinion or human conviction, but a most firm trust and a clear and steadfast assent of the mind, and then a most certain apprehension of the truth of God presented in the Scriptures and in the Apostles’ Creed, and thus also of God himself, the greatest good, and especially of God’s promise and of Christ who is the fulfillment of all promises” (Second Helvetic Confession 5.112). In addition to this firm knowledge, faith also involves a deep assurance of the heart: “True faith is not only a knowledge and conviction that everything

God reveals in his Word is true; it is also a deep-rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel, that, out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ, not only others, but I too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation” (Heidelberg Catechism Q.&A. 21).

Faith does not arise from our own “natural powers,” but is kindled in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Scots Confession 3.12, Belgic Confession Art. 22). The Spirit ordinarily creates faith in people’s hearts through the preaching of the gospel (or ministry of the Word), then confirms and strengthens that faith through preaching as well as through the sacraments and prayer (Heidelberg Catechism, Q.&A. 65, Westminster Confession of Faith 6.078). Because faith is bestowed on people by God, not in the sense that God gives the potential to believe and awaits our choice but in the sense that God produces in people “both the will to believe and the belief itself,” faith is a gift of God (Canons of Dort II Art. 14).

How does baptism nourish faith? Word and sacraments work together, like a letter with an imprinted seal, to ground faith: “Now faith rests only upon the Word of God; and the Word of God is like papers or letters, and the sacraments are like seals which only God appends to the letters” (Second Helvetic Confession 5.172). Because God has ordained sacraments “to nourish and sustain our faith” and because the Lord’s Supper testifies to us that, “just as truly as” we hold, eat, and drink the visible bread and wine of the sacrament so truly do we receive Jesus Christ’s body and blood, faith can be seen as “the hand and mouth of our souls” (Belgic Confession Art. 33, 35).

Baptism is a call to Christian discipleship: “The Baptism which makes Christians partakers of the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection implies confession of sin and

conversion of heart” (BEM, Baptism II.4). Luther says that baptism with water “signifies that the old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil lusts, should be drowned by daily sorrow and repentance and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth daily and rise up, cleansed and righteous, to live forever in God’s presence” (Luther’s Small Catechism). The Heidelberg Catechism speaks of baptism as being washed with Christ’s blood and Spirit, noting that being washed with Christ’s blood signifies God’s forgiveness of sins and that being washed with Christ’s Spirit “means that the Holy Spirit has renewed me and set me apart to be a member of Christ so that more and more I become dead to sin and increasingly live a holy and blameless life” (Heidelberg Catechism Q.&A. 70). In baptism, Jesus Christ, through the Spirit, washes away sins and frees people from their control. Baptism therefore signifies that one day we will rise with Christ in glory and may walk even now in newness of life (Study Catechism 1998 of the PCUSA Q.&A. 72).

Baptism nourishes the life of faith and discipleship not only of the person being baptized but also of those who witness this demonstrated word of grace. Throughout their lives and especially when tempted or when witnessing the baptism of others, those who have been baptized must “improve their baptism” by considering baptism’s meaning and benefits, being humbled by their having fallen short of and gone contrary to the grace of baptism, receiving assurance of pardon, drawing strength from Christ’s death and resurrection for their own mortifying of sin, and endeavoring to live as those who have been given to Christ and baptized by the Spirit (Westminster Larger Catechism Q.&A. 167).

BAPTISM AND THE CHURCH

f. What implications does baptism have for the church?

*i. Common statement*

Baptism is the sacramental bond that effects membership in the visible church. As an ecclesial sacrament, it also is the basis for the real communion that Christians enjoy in their churches and among various ecclesial communities as they strive to overcome separation and division in a more full and perfect communion.

*ii. Roman Catholic statement*

Baptism is ecclesially mediated and is the basis for incorporation into the church. The people of God of the new covenant are brought into being from the font of baptism. It creates a communion that “transcends all the natural or human limits of nations, cultures, races, and sexes” (CCC 1267). All the baptized share in the common priesthood of believers, itself a participation in the priesthood of Christ, including his prophetic and royal missions. From this proceeds “the apostolic and missionary activity of the People of God” (CCC 1270). As the sacramental bond of communion, baptism “constitutes the foundation of communion among all Christians, including those who are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church” (CCC 1271). Thus baptism serves as the basis for ecumenism, as *Unitatis Redintegratio*, Vatican II’s Decree on Ecumenism, says: “For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in some, though imperfect communion with the Catholic Church” (3). And in terms of full ecclesial intentionality of baptism,

Baptism, therefore, constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all those who through it are reborn. But baptism, of itself, is only a beginning, a point of departure, for it is wholly directed toward the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ. Baptism is thus ordained toward a complete profession of faith, a complete incorporation into the system of salvation such as Christ himself willed it to be, and finally, toward a complete integration into Eucharistic communion (UR 22).

*iii. Reformed statement*

Christian baptism is a “basic bond of unity” that brings Christians “into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place” (BEM, Baptism II.6). This “one baptism into Christ constitutes a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship” (BEM, Baptism II.6).

Baptism is the means by which “individuals are publicly received into the church to share in its life and ministry”; conversely, when it baptizes people, “the church becomes responsible for their training and support in Christian discipleship” (Confession of 1967 9.51).

g. Who may baptize and with what means and formula?

*i. Common statement*

In order for a baptism to be valid, it must be administered by someone authorized to do so, using water and the trinitarian formula. Typically baptism is administered by an ordained minister or priest in a worship service, using water (either dipping the baptizand into the water or pouring or sprinkling the water on the baptizand) and following the command of Jesus to baptize people of all nations “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). The Roman Catholic Church allows nonordained people to administer baptism and permits baptism to occur outside a worship service; Reformed churches do not allow such exceptions. Some Reformed churches allow—at least in practice—the use of alternate formulations of the trinitarian formula (for example, “in the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sanctifier”); other Reformed churches as well as the Roman Catholic Church do not. With one exception, the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed churches in

this dialogue accept any baptism of a member of one of the other ecclesiastical bodies in this dialogue as long as the baptism was recognized as valid by the ecclesiastical communion in which the person was a member. The exception is that the Roman Catholic Church does not recognize as valid a baptism in which any of the following is lacking: intent to do what the church does when it baptizes, use of water, and use of the triune name as given in Matt. 28:19.

*ii. Roman Catholic statement*

Baptism must be administered with water and in the name of the triune God because “entry into the life of the Most Holy Trinity through configuration to the Paschal mystery of Christ” is signified and enacted in the sacrament (CCC 1239). Therefore the validity of baptism has to do with the very mystery of the faith, the mystagogy of communion with the Trinity. Consequently, the most expressive form of baptism is triple immersion in baptismal water, the latter consecrated by a prayer of epiclesis (an invocation for the Father to send the Holy Spirit upon the water to give the grace of the Son). However, pouring also accepted.

The formula differs between the Latin church and the Eastern Catholic churches. The minister in the Latin church says, “N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” An Eastern Rite priest uses a variation of this: “The servant of God, N., is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” As for the ministers of baptism, a distinction is made between ordinary and extraordinary situations, with the ecclesial intentionality of the sacrament preserved in both cases, either directly through the sacramental representation of Christ in the ordained minister who administers the sacrament or indirectly through action that conforms to the church’s understanding of it:



The ordinary ministers of Baptism are the bishop and priest and, in the Latin Church, also the deacon. In case of necessity, anyone, even a non-baptized person, with the required intention, can baptize, by using the Trinitarian baptismal formula. The intention required is to will to do what the Church does when she baptizes. The Church finds the reason for this possibility in the universal saving will of God and the necessity of Baptism for salvation (CCC 1256).

*iii. Reformed statement*

Sacraments must be administered by “lawful ministers” who have been “appointed to preach the Word, unto whom God has given the power to preach the gospel, and who are lawfully called by some Kirk” (Scots Confession 22, Westminster Confession 30.2). Because baptism is rooted in and declares Christ’s faithfulness, points to the faithfulness of God, and involves a congregational reaffirmation of faith and pledge “to provide an environment of witness and service,” baptism should “always be celebrated and developed in the setting of the Christian community” (BEM, Baptism IV.12). Therefore, within Reformed churches, only an ordained minister of the Word, functioning within the context of the church, may baptize.

Because the church has received the sacrament of baptism from God as a means of grace, the church baptizes by using Christ’s words of institution, baptizing people of all nations “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19; quoted by Heidelberg Catechism Q.&A. 71 and by the PCUSA Study Catechism 1998 Q.&A. 75).

Following Christ’s example and instruction, Christians baptize with water, into which a person may be dipped or which may be poured or sprinkled on a person (Second Helvetic Confession 20, Westminster Confession 30.3). Because the sacraments should be celebrated in their “original simplicity,” the sacrament of baptism should not be “adulterated” by adding human devices such as “exorcism, the use of burning lights, oil, salt, spittle, and such other

things” as baptizing twice per year “with a multitude of ceremonies” (Second Helvetic Confession 20, Scots Confession 22).

Reformed Christians consider a sacrament to be valid if it includes the biblical words of institution and the biblical sign (that is, water or bread and the fruit of the vine), if it is performed by someone who would be authorized by a Christian church to perform the sacrament, if the church’s authorities sanction the sacrament, if the recipient (or the parent[s], in cases of infant baptism) requests or intends to receive the sacrament, and if it is performed in a worship service (or, if that is not practicable, connected in some way to the worshiping community).

#### RECIPIENTS OF BAPTISM

h. Why do people need to be baptized?

*i. Common statement*

Although God created the human race righteous and holy, bearing God’s image, the fall of humanity into sin has so infected the race that all human beings are born sinful, alienated from God, and subject to death and misery. Sin has ruined our connection with God, other human beings, and other creatures, leaving us slaves to sin as well as guilty of it and helpless to save ourselves from our plight. We therefore need the forgiveness and new life from God that are effected (according to the Roman Catholic Church) or signified (according to Reformed churches) by baptism.

*ii. Roman Catholic statement*

The necessity of baptism in bringing about regeneration and adoption figures greatly in the divine economy of salvation because of the consequences of original sin, which subjected

humanity to sin and death. Original sin is “an essential truth of the faith” (CCC 388). It is, “so to speak, the ‘reverse side’ of the Good News that Jesus is the Savior of all men” (CCC 389) and cannot be ignored without undermining the faith itself. The Catholic Church, therefore, understands the fall of humanity as a historical event preceded by the fall of the angels. “The account of the fall in Genesis 3 uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place *at the beginning of the history of man*. Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that the whole of human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents” (CCC 390).

Through their own personal sin, Adam and Eve “lost the original holiness and justice . . . received from God, not only for . . . [themselves] . . . but for all human beings” (CCC 416). They universally transmitted to their descendants the wound of their own sin such that Pope Paul VI could confess in his 1968 Solemn Profession Faith: Credo of the People of God (quoted in CCC 419), “We therefore hold, with the Council of Trent, that original sin is transmitted with human nature, ‘by propagation, not by imitation’ and that it is . . . ‘proper to each’ (Solemn Profession, 16). More precisely “original sin is called ‘sin’ only in an analogical sense: it is a sin ‘contracted’ and not ‘committed’—a state and not an act” (CCC 404). The loss of original justice and holiness leads to another consequence of original sin: “[H]uman nature is weakened in its powers, subject to ignorance, suffering and the domination of death, and inclined to sin (this inclination is called ‘concupiscence’)” (CCC 418).

It is important to register that for Catholics, concupiscence is not sin itself. Sin always requires a free act of the will. Concupiscence is the tendency toward sin present in human nature after the fall. This inclination to sin—metaphorically speaking, “the tinder for sin” (*fomes*

*peccati*—also remains after baptism. Despite the deprivation caused by original sin the Catholic Church rejoices that the “victory that Christ won over sin has given us greater blessings than those which sin had taken from us” (CCC 420). This reality provides a spiritual lesson for the newly baptized, so that with the help of Christ’s grace they “may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life. This is the struggle of *conversion* directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us” (CCC 1426).

In addition to washing away original sin, baptism also remits the temporal punishment caused by any personal sin. The consequences of sin or its deleterious effects upon a person are remitted. However, “certain temporal consequences of sin remain in the baptized, such as suffering, illness, death, and such frailties inherent in life as weaknesses of character” (CCC 1264), along with concupiscence.

An important aspect of the Catholic understanding of the human condition (the church’s theological anthropology) is the prelapsarian state of humanity. Although created in grace—the state of original holiness and justice that enabled friendship and intimacy with God as well as harmony in the human condition, interiorly, socially, and with all of creation—humans lost that grace as one of the effects of the fall. Therefore original holiness and justice were indeed a grace and not a quality intrinsic to human nature. It was a gift from God. Nevertheless, humanity was constituted in this state. Without pursuing the many nuances and lively theological debates that inform the Catholic understanding of the relationship between nature and grace, it is sufficient to say that from a Catholic perspective, the grace of original holiness and justice would be compromised—especially with regard to the gratuity, freedom, and the supernatural character of divine grace—if it were understood to be an essential dimension of human nature and not as a

gift given with creation. Because baptism effects the new creation in Christ through regeneration and justification, grace restores the holiness and justice lost in the fall. This is a marvelous work of divine mercy and grace. With St. Augustine, the Catechism of the Catholic Church agrees that “the justification of the wicked is a greater work than the creation of heaven and earth” and even “surpasses the creation of the angels in justice, in that it bears witness to a greater mercy” (CCC 1994). Or, as the apostle Paul expresses the superabundance of grace, “where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more” (Rom. 5: 20b).

*iii. Reformed statement*

People need to be baptized because all are sinners, born subject to sin and willing participants in the human race’s sinful rejection of God. All are therefore alienated from God and subject to death and misery.

Although God created the human race “in true righteousness and holiness” and bearing God’s image, the fall into sin “has so poisoned our nature that we are born sinners—corrupt from conception on” (Heidelberg Catechism Q.&A. 7). Original sin is an inherited corruption whereby, through the fall into sin, human beings have come “under the power of satan, sin, and death” and therefore are “inclined to do evil” (Evangelical Catechism of the UCC, Q.&A. 24, 25). Original sin is an innate, transmitted corruption that “has been derived or propagated in us all from our first parents, by which we, immersed in perverse desires and averse to all good, are inclined to all evil” (Second Helvetic Confession 5.037). Original sin is “so vile and enormous in God’s sight that it is enough to condemn the human race, and it is not abolished or wholly uprooted even by baptism” (Belgic Confession Art. 15).

Original sin contains several facets, including “the guilt of Adam’s first sin, the want of

that righteousness wherein he was created, and the corruption of his nature, whereby he is utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to all evil, and that continually” (Westminster Larger Catechism 7.135). In short, unless we are born again, “we are so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined toward all evil” (Heidelberg Catechism Q.&A. 8). Having been born with original sin and apart from the regenerating work of the Spirit, we are both unable and unwilling to return to God or to begin to reform ourselves: “Therefore, all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath, unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin; without the grace of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform” (Canons of Dort III/IV Art. 3).

Although original sin has turned us from God and leaves us incapable of reforming ourselves, it has not extinguished all sense of God or morality: “There is, to be sure, a certain light of nature remaining in man after the fall, by virtue of which he retains some notions about God, natural things, and the difference between what is moral and immoral, and demonstrates a certain eagerness for virtue and for good outward behavior. But this light of nature is far from enabling man to come to a saving knowledge of God and conversion to him” (Canons of Dort III/IV Art. 4).

A recent study catechism nicely captures the ways in which sin has distorted both ourselves and all our relations with others: “Although we did not cease to be with God, our fellow human beings, and other creatures, we did cease to be for them; and although we did not lose our distinctive human capacities completely, we did lose the ability to use them rightly, especially in relation to God. Having ruined our connection with God by disobeying God’s will,

we are persons with hearts curved in upon ourselves. We have become slaves to the sin of which we are guilty, helpless to save ourselves, and are free, so far as freedom remains, only within the bounds of sin” (PCUSA Study Catechism 1998, Q.&A. 20).

i. Who can receive baptism?

*i. Common statement*

Anyone who, having been outside the household of faith, accepts the Christian faith and participates in catechetical instruction not only may, but should, be baptized. In addition, infants of believing parents should be baptized.

*ii. Roman Catholic statement*

Quoting from the Code of Canon Law of the Latin Church (Canon 864) the Catechism of the Catholic Church says, “Every person not yet baptized and only such a person is able to be baptized” (1246). The same applies for the Eastern Catholic churches (Canon 679). There are two implications that one can draw from these canons. First, they highlight the missional dimension of the church, called to proclaim the gospel to all nations. All people are called to faith and baptism. Second, any person validly baptized in another church or ecclesial community is already a Christian and cannot be baptized again. This underscores the common faith that Catholics share with other Christians.

*iii. Reformed statement*

Churches baptize those who, having come from other religions or from unbelief, “accept the Christian faith and participate in catechetical instruction” (BEM, Baptism IV.11). So those who “profess faith in and obedience unto Christ” should be baptized (Westminster Confession 6.157). But those who are not part of the visible church and therefore are “strangers from the

covenant of promise” should not be baptized “till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him,” although infants with one or both parents who profess faith in and obedience to Christ “are, in that respect, within the covenant, and are to be baptized” (Westminster Larger Catechism Q.&A. 166).

j. Why do we baptize children?

*i. Common statement*

Because God’s promises and covenant extend to the children of those who believe in Jesus Christ, we administer baptism, the sign of the covenant, not only to those who come to faith as adults but also to the infant children of those who believe in Jesus Christ and have established membership in a local parish or congregation. Such baptism recognizes the need of new birth on the part of all people, even infants. It also connects Christian baptism to circumcision, the sign of the covenant in ancient Israel. And it shows that infants, along with their believing parents, are included in the hope of the gospel and belong to the people of God.

*ii. Roman Catholic statement*

The Catholic Church baptizes infants in recognition that children are in need of new birth and that infant baptism particularly manifests the “sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation” (CCC 1250). Because baptism is the sacrament of faith, there is a clear recognition that faith is present for infant baptism as well as for adult baptism. Within the faith of the church, including the faith of the assembly, the faith of the parents and godparents (a true ecclesial function—*officium*) is active on behalf of the child. Christian nurture provided by family and community is important for the faith that must grow after baptism as the child goes on to receive the sacraments of reconciliation, Eucharist, and confirmation at the appropriate ages. First



Communion in particular is an important event for the child to develop a personal relationship with Christ. In this respect, baptism is a beginning, but one the church cannot refuse. “The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth,” says the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1250).

*iii. Reformed statement*

Just as infants in ancient Israel received circumcision, the sign of the covenant, so too infants in the church should be baptized: “We believe our children ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as little children were circumcised in Israel on the basis of the same promises made to our children” (Belgic Confession Art. 34). Because infants as well as adults are in God’s covenant, they should be “received into the Christian church” by this “mark of the covenant” and “distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the Old Testament by circumcision, which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism” (Heidelberg Catechism Q.&A. 74). In short, “baptism does for our children what circumcision did for the Jewish people. This is why Paul calls baptism the ‘circumcision of Christ’” (Belgic Confession Art. 34, quoting Col. 2:11).

In sum, infants, “[a]long with their believing parents, are included in the great hope of the gospel and belong to the people of God. Both forgiveness and faith are promised to them as gifts through Christ’s covenant with his people. These children are therefore to be received into the community by baptism, nurtured in the Word of God, and confirmed at an appropriate time by their own profession of faith” (PCUSA Study Catechism of 1998 Q.&A. 73).

When parents have their children baptized, the parents must “help their children grow in

godly life by Christian teaching and training, by prayer and example” (Evangelical Catechism Q.&A. 121). The church and its minister need evidence of such a commitment before baptizing an infant: “It would be irresponsible to baptize an infant without at least one Christian parent or guardian who promises to nurture the infant in the life of the community and to instruct it in the Christian faith” (PCUSA Study Catechism 1998 Q.&A. 74).

k. Why should someone be baptized only once?

*i. Common statement*

As Jesus Christ died once for all and was raised from the dead (Rom 6:10, Heb. 9:28, 1 Pet 3:18), so too, the Christian is baptized only once, signifying union with Christ in his death and resurrection through the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5-7).

*ii. Roman Catholic statement*

Baptism, along with confirmation and holy orders, is a sacrament that cannot be repeated. This has been associated with the reception of a spiritual mark, or sacramental character. In the case of the first sacrament to be administered, “[b]aptism imprints on the soul an indelible spiritual sign, the character, which consecrates the baptized person for Christian worship” (CCC 1280). Therefore the baptized person by virtue of this seal of the Lord is enabled to exercise the baptismal priesthood, or the common priesthood of the faithful (CCC 1274). It also is a sign of the fullness of redemption to be accomplished in the consummation of faith in the beatific vision and at the parousia, the resurrection of the dead. A sign of hope that marks the person as belonging to Christ, it also cannot be erased even “if sin prevents Baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation” (CCC 1272).

*iii. Reformed statement*

As the sign of rebirth in Christ, baptism should be administered only once to a person: “anyone who aspires to reach eternal life ought to be baptized only once without ever repeating it—for we cannot be born twice” (Belgic Confession Art. 34). “Any practice which might be interpreted as ‘re-baptism’ must be avoided” (BEM, Baptism IV.13).

1. What is the relationship between baptism and confirmation and/or profession of faith?

*i. Common statement*

Those who are baptized as adults are confirmed or profess their faith at the time of their baptism. Those baptized as children should, at an appropriate age, be confirmed or make an ecclesial profession of their faith. While we agree that baptism signifies new birth in water and the Holy Spirit and that no Christian is without the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9), we do not agree that there is a distinct sacramental act to signify and impart the gift of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, all the baptized are heirs of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost.

*ii. Roman Catholic statement*

The overarching framework for baptism is the context of Christian initiation. Along with the sacraments of confirmation and Eucharist, baptism is necessary for the full initiation of the new Christian into Christ and his church. The new life in Christ is received in baptism, strengthened in confirmation, and nurtured by the Eucharist. Although all three sacraments are administered together in the case of adult conversion and for infants in the Eastern Catholic churches, they are separated for the initiation of those baptized as infants in the Latin Church. The sacraments of Eucharist and confirmation are administered at an appropriate age along with the proper catechesis and sacramental preparation. This distinction between baptism and

confirmation does not, however, eliminate their essential complementarity for Christian initiation.

As baptism is clearly associated with the paschal mystery of the Easter Vigil and the reception of the fruits of Christ's saving death and resurrection, so "the effect of the sacrament of Confirmation is the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the day of Pentecost" (CCC 1302). During the Easter Vigil, adult catechumens are baptized, confirmed, and receive the Eucharist for the first time, thus completing their Christian initiation. The Christian faithful also renew their baptismal promises by renouncing sin and Satan and professing the Apostles' Creed. The joint mission of the Son and Holy Spirit is present in both baptism and confirmation, with the latter sacrament understood as the "an increase and deepening of baptismal grace" (CCC 1303). A deeper sense of divine filiation, union with Christ, and increase of the gifts of the Spirit in confirmation render a more perfect bond with the church and a special strength to confess Christ in the world. Therefore the grace of confirmation is a further giving of the Spirit already received in baptism with an eye toward maturity, perfection and mission.

### *iii. Reformed statement*

Those who come to the Christian faith not having been baptized as infants make a profession of their faith and are confirmed at the same time that they are baptized. Those who have been baptized as infants, having been received into the community of the church and "nurtured in the Word of God," are to be "confirmed at an appropriate time by their own profession of faith" (PCUSA Study Catechism 1998 Q.&A. 73).

Although one should be baptized only once, that "baptism is profitable not only when the

water is on us and when we receive it but throughout our entire lives” (Belgic Confession Art. 34). Thus, in the case of those baptized as infants, God’s promises to be God to that child lead to the church’s expectation that God will work in that child through the Holy Spirit and that the child will respond to the Spirit’s work in faith. The church then expects that, once they reach an age of maturity, baptized children who have responded to the Spirit’s work in faith will profess that faith publicly in the context of the church.

Because confirmation was not instituted by Jesus, the Protestant Reformers did not accept confirmation as a sacrament. Still, many Reformers desired some ritual by which children who had been baptized would publicly appropriate the baptismal promises that were spoken on their behalf. Thus the Reformed tradition adapted the earlier rite of confirmation into a catechetical practice for children that included the laying on of hands. Upon completion of this rite, children were typically admitted to the Lord’s Supper, thus connecting two fragmented pieces of patristic initiation, confirmation and first communion. Within the Reformed tradition, infant baptism, young-adult confirmation, and then first communion became a standard pattern for many churches. In recent years, several Reformed churches have begun allowing or advocating the pattern of infant baptism, communion at a young age, and then confirmation during adolescence.

#### BAPTISM AND OTHER DOCTRINES

m. What is the relationship between baptism and election?

*i. Common statement*

Those who are baptized are part of God’s elect people, the Christian church. A person’s being baptized is not a guarantee that the person is predestined or elected to salvation.

*ii. Roman Catholic statement*

The catechumenate for those preparing for baptism ends with the Rite of Election at the beginning of Lent. The candidates are thus called the elect:

For a person to be enrolled among the elect, he must have enlightened faith and the deliberate intention of receiving the sacraments of the Church. After the election, he is encouraged to advance toward Christ with even greater generosity (RCIA 134).

This differs, however, from the theological discussion over the doctrine of election understood as predestination. The Roman Catholic Church has not precisely defined the doctrines of election and predestination, although the doctrine exists and has led to considerable theological debate. There are certain negative parameters to be observed. The Council of Trent states:

“No one, moreover, so long as he is in this mortal life, ought so far to presume as regards the secret mystery of divine predestination, as to determine for certain that he is assuredly in the number of the predestinate; as if it were true, that he that is justified, either cannot sin any more, or, if he do sin, that he ought to promise himself an assured repentance; for except by special revelation, it cannot be known whom God hath chosen unto Himself” (Decree on Justification, Chapter XII).

This is confirmed by the canons of the same decree:

“If any one saith, that he will for certain, of an absolute and infallible certainty, have that great gift of perseverance unto the end, unless he have learned this by special revelation; let him be anathema” (Canon 16).

“If any one saith, that the grace of Justification is only attained to by those who are predestined unto life; but that all others who are called, are called indeed, but receive not grace, as being, by the divine power, predestined unto evil; let him be anathema” (Canon 17).

The Decree on Justification along with other decrees, for example, the Condemnation of Cornelius Jansen, thus excludes positive reprobation based upon the unconditional predestination

of the unjust and any denial of the universality of the divine will for salvation, the scope of the atonement, and extent of the offer of grace. In congruence with these statements, the Catholic doctrine of grace denies its irresistibility and affirms the freedom of the will both before grace (although wounded by sin) and under the influence of grace. Positive assessments of predestination include the following propositions articulated by the Rev. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange:

(1) Predestination to the first grace is not because God foresaw our naturally good works, nor is the beginning of salutary acts due to natural causes; (2) predestination to glory is not because God foresaw we would continue in the performance of supernaturally meritorious acts apart from the special gift of final perseverance; (3) complete predestination, in so far as it comprises the whole series of graces from the first up to glorification, is gratuitous or previous to foreseen merits.<sup>2</sup>

The knotty issue of how grace and freedom are related and the nature of efficacious grace—a heated dispute between Dominicans and Jesuits, the *Congregatio de Auxiliis* controversy—was put to rest by Pope Paul V in 1607 when he forbade both sides from censuring the other. It therefore remains an open theological question. The Council of Quierzy in 853 best sums up what the church can say in the most general terms: “that certain ones are saved, is the gift of the one who saves; that certain ones perish, however, is the deserved punishment of those who perish” (Chapter 3).

Practically, many Catholics have taken the advice of St. Ignatius Loyola in his *Spiritual Exercises*:

Granted that it be very true that no one can be saved without being predestined and without having faith and grace, still we must be very cautious about the way

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<sup>2</sup> Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *Predestination*, translated by Dom Bede Rose. (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1939; reprint, Rockford, Ill.: Tan, 1998), p. 10.

in which we speak of all these things and discuss them with others (“Rules for Thinking with the Church,” SE 14).

*iii. Reformed statement*

Some in the Reformed tradition, including Calvin, speak of two types of election: God’s election of a people, such as ancient Israel or the Christian church, and God’s election of individuals to salvation. Membership in the former leads to the hope or expectation, but not the guarantee, that one is elect in the latter sense. Baptism is the sign of membership in God’s elect people, the church, but not a guarantee that one is elect to salvation.

Election to salvation is an eternal, divine decision to choose some people to be the recipients of special, saving grace. In some contexts, the term *predestination* is synonymous with election, and in others it encompasses both election and reprobation (an eternal divine decision that results in everlasting death and punishment for some people). The doctrine of election is closely tied to the teaching that salvation is a free gift of God (Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29).

Although some have held that divine election to salvation is based on God’s foreknowledge of a person’s faith or life, traditional Reformed confessions hold that, in election, God has chosen people for salvation “freely, and of his mere grace,” “without any consideration of their works” (Second Helvetic Confession 5.052; Belgic Confession Art. 16; Canons of Dort I:9).

From before the foundation of the world, God has elected people to salvation in Christ and on the basis of Christ’s work: “Therefore, although not on account of any merit of ours, God has elected us, not directly, but in Christ, and on account of Christ, in order that those who are now ingrafted into Christ by faith might also be elected” (Second Helvetic Confession 5.053; see



also Scots Confession 3.08, Belgic Confession Art. 16, Canons of Dort I:7). God not only elected us in Christ but “appointed him to be our head, our brother, our pastor, and the great bishop of our souls” (Scots Confession 3.08).

This divine election to salvation in Christ was for the purpose that we should be “holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ . . . to the praise of his glorious grace” (Eph. 1:4-6; quoted by Second Helvetic Confession 5.054). Furthermore, election shows both God’s mercy and God’s justice. God’s having graciously saved people from perdition shows that God is merciful, while God’s “leaving others in their ruin and fall into which they plunged themselves” shows God’s justice (Belgic Confession Art. 16).

Because Christ did not say how few or many would be saved (Luke 13:23-24) and because we do not know who is elect, we should have a good hope for all: “Although God knows who are his, and here and there mention is made of the small number of elect, yet we must hope well of all, and not rashly judge any man to be a reprobate” (Second Helvetic Confession 5.055-56). Regarding election, then, we should speak with care and with awareness of our limited knowledge. These affirmations have a solid foundation: “No one will be lost who can be saved. The limits to salvation, whatever they may be, are known only to God. Three truths above all are certain. God is a holy God who is not to be trifled with. No one will be saved except by grace alone. And no judge could possibly be more gracious than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ” (PCUSA Study Catechism 1998 Q.&A. 49).

n. What is the relationship between baptism and grace?

*i. Common statement*

Baptism is a sacrament of grace. Baptism signifies both the unmerited favor of God and the imparting of divine life that is God's self-communication to us.

*ii. Roman Catholic statement*

With other Christians, Catholics believe that baptism is a sign of new life in Christ. It also is an instrument of the divine grace it signifies. The grace of baptism includes the grace of justification, enabling the new believer to believe, hope in and love God—acts of the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity—and to respond to the promptings and power of the Holy Spirit through imparting the traditional sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit (wisdom, knowledge, understanding, counsel, fortitude, piety, and fear of the Lord [Is. 11:2-3a]). Through cooperation with the grace of baptism, the Christian also grows more Christlike through the increase and maturation of the moral virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude (CCC 1266).

Grace is essential to the Catholic understanding of justification and sanctification, and in a profound sense, one may confess that all is of grace. A summary of the traditional Catholic distinctions in the understanding of different types of grace—habitual and actual—is given in the Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Grace is a *participation in the life of God* . . . The grace of Christ is the gratuitous gift that God makes to us of his own life, infused by the Holy Spirit into our soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it. . . . Sanctifying grace [or deifying grace] is an habitual gift, a stable and supernatural disposition that perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God, to act by his love. *Habitual grace*, the permanent disposition to live and act in keeping with God's call, is distinguished from actual graces which refer to God's interventions, whether at the beginning of conversion or in the course of the work of sanctification" (1997, 1999-2000).

Catholic theology, especially in its scholastic genre, had a penchant to elaborate even

further on the differences among various graces. These include the distinction between uncreated grace and created grace, that is, between God himself and the grace that God bestows. For example, there is a distinction between God's self-bestowal in the incarnation in the person of the divine Son and the humanity of Christ that has received the fullness of grace. There also is a distinction between the indwelling of the Trinity in the just person and sanctifying grace that transforms the believer and between the divine essence that is beheld in the beatific vision and the light of glory that enables that seeing. Sanctifying grace, therefore, is a supernatural created gift—distinct from God—that is infused by God and inhering in the person as an accidental mode of being perfecting the soul (which is a substance). Sanctifying grace, also known as habitual grace, is an infused supernatural habit given by God distinct from an innate or an acquired habit.

There also are elaborations of actual graces, as in graces that illuminate the intellect or strengthen the will (grace of illumination and grace of inspiration); prevenient grace (or operating grace) preceding the act of the will (including grace that prepares and disposes one for justification); subsequent grace (or cooperating grace) that accompanies and supports the volitional act; sufficient grace, enabling a person to accomplish a salutary act; and efficacious grace that secures such an accomplishment. There also are sacramental graces (proper to each sacrament), graces of state accompanying “the responsibilities of the Christian life and of the ministries within the Church” (CCC 2004), and special, or charismatic, graces, that is, charisms, or gifts, that build up the church in the service of charity and are therefore “oriented toward sanctifying grace and are intended for the common good” (CCC 2003).

The Catholic doctrine of grace builds on the notion of God's action and our participation

with God in our own sanctification, based on Philemon 2:12b-13: “work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For God is the one who, for his good purpose, works in you both to desire and to work.” It also should be stated that without grace, one is capable by the light of reason and free will (although wounded by sin) to know religious and moral truths and perform morally good actions. One cannot, however, attain salvation in the absence of grace.

The fruit of grace in baptism entails regeneration, the “birth into the new life of Christ . . . by which man becomes an adoptive son of the Father, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit.” It also is the beginning of the “whole organism of the Christian’s supernatural life,” namely “the renewal of the inner man” (CCC 1266, 1279, 2019) and is therefore accompanied by justification and sanctification.

The Catholic doctrine of justification has been the subject of much ecumenical work, as reflected in the 1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, promulgated by the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation. In its specifically Catholic articulation, justification may be defined as including “not only the remission of sins, but also the sanctification and renewal of the interior man.” Following upon God’s merciful initiative of offering forgiveness, justification also is “*the acceptance of God’s righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. Righteousness (or ‘justice’) here means the rectitude of divine love*” (CCC 1991).

Justification may be parsed according to its causes and was dogmatically established at the Council of Trent (1545-1563):

“The causes of this justification are: the final cause is the glory of God and of Christ and life everlasting; the efficient cause is the merciful God who *washes and sanctifies* gratuitously, signing and anointing *with the holy Spirit of promise, who is the pledge of our inheritance*; the meritorious cause is His most beloved only begotten, our Lord Jesus Christ, who, *when we were enemies, for the exceeding charity wherewith he loved us*, merited for us justification by His most

holy Passion on the wood of the cross and made satisfaction for us to God the Father; the instrumental cause is the sacrament of baptism, which is the sacrament of faith, without which no man was ever justified; finally, the single formal cause is the justice of God, not that by which He Himself is just, but that by which He makes us just, that, namely, with which we being endowed by Him, are *renewed in the spirit of our mind*, and not only are we reputed but we are truly called and are just, receiving justice within us, each one according to his own measure, which the Holy Ghost distributes to every one as He wills, and according to each one's disposition and cooperation” (Decree on Justification VII).

Although justification by faith alone is rejected, because all the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love are infused with sanctifying grace (Decree on Justification Canon IX)—one may broadly speak of “justification through faith” and “sanctification through charity” (CCC 2001). These virtues have to do with our collaboration with the grace of God, and in that respect, “faith is the beginning of human salvation, the foundation and root of all justification” (Decree on Justification VIII).

### *iii. Reformed statement*

Baptism signifies God’s gracious love. Grace is an unmerited gift of God by which fallen humans are adopted as God’s children and granted the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 3:24; Second Helvetic Confession 5.107, Heidelberg Catechism Q.&A. 33,56). God grants forgiveness of sins to fallen people and grants to them “the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ” as an act of grace (Heidelberg Catechism Q.&A. 60,70).

Although the grace of forgiveness and regeneration are signified by baptism, forgiveness and regeneration do not necessarily occur at the time of baptism. God’s grace and salvation are not so tied to baptism that one cannot be “regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.” Nevertheless, “by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such

(whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time" (Westminster Confession 6.158-59).

Reformed Christians consider the efficacy of baptism, like the Lord's Supper, to depend on God's grace, working through the Spirit and the words of institution. Sacraments, even when rightly used, do not themselves have the power to confer grace. Moreover, the efficacy of a sacrament does not "depend on the piety or intention of him that doth administer it, but upon the work of the Spirit, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers" (Westminster Confession 6.151; see also Westminster Shorter Catechism 7.091). Because baptism "signifies the beginning of life in Christ, not its completion, "[t]he efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in his appointed time" (Westminster Confession 6.159).

o. What is the relationship between baptism and sanctification?

*i. Common statement*

Baptism signifies the beginning of sanctification, the universal call to holiness for all those joined to Christ. The communication and reception of grace always is a transformative event for one's relationship to God and consequently in one's own person.

*ii. Roman Catholic statement*

Sanctification is the increase of sanctifying grace (or an increase of justification received [Chapter X of the Decree on Justification of the Council of Trent]). Infused by the Holy Spirit,

sanctifying grace heals the soul of sin and makes it holy (the sanative, or medicinal, and elevating dimensions of grace), uniting the soul to God in Christ. In this way, a person is made pleasing to God and can grow in grace through the increase of the theological and moral virtues in one's life, also known as the increase of justification through cooperation in good works enabled by grace. Moved by the Holy Spirit, who is the master of the interior life, a person can genuinely merit eternal life by responding to the call to Christian perfection, the fullness of divine charity. A person also prays for the grace of final perseverance even as he or she makes spiritual progress that bears fruit in a more intimate union with Christ.

Merit is an important dimension of the Catholic understanding of sanctification. It is a consequence of the divine initiative to associate human beings in process of their own salvation:

“The fatherly action of God is first on his own initiative, and then follows man's free acting through his collaboration, so that the merit of good works is to be attributed in the first place to the grace of God, then to the faithful. Man's merit, moreover, itself is due to God, for his good actions proceed in Christ, from the predispositions and assistance given by the Holy Spirit” (CCC 2008).

Although “*no one can merit the initial grace* of forgiveness and justification, at the beginning of conversion . . . [m]oved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, *we can then merit* for ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and charity, and for the attainment of eternal life” (CCC 2010). Thus are all baptized people called to holiness and to that spiritual progress that “tends toward ever more intimate union with Christ” (CCC 2014). Catholics therefore even speak of Christian perfection—but of a perfection that eschews false notions of triumphalism. “The way of perfection passes by way of the Cross . . . [and t]here is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle” (CCC 2015).

*iii. Reformed statement*

Baptism calls God's people to live in ways that reflect the new life they have received in Christ. Sanctification is the newness of life and progress in doing good that appears in those who have been buried with Christ and renewed by the Holy Spirit (Heidelberg Catechism Q.&A. 70). Those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus 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 [they] too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3-4). Thus, faith, produced in God's people by hearing God's Word and by the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerates believers and makes them new creatures in Christ, freeing them from slavery to sin (2 Cor. 5:17; Belgic Confession Art. 24). It is, moreover, "impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being, seeing that we do not speak of an empty faith but of what Scripture calls 'faith working through love,' which leads a man to do by himself the works that God has commanded in his Word" (Belgic Confession Art. 24, quoting Gal. 5:6).

So when faith bears fruit, leading believers to do what God has commanded in his Word, "these works, proceeding from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable to God, since they are all sanctified by his grace. Yet they do not count toward our justification—for by faith in Christ we are justified, even before we do good works" (Belgic Confession Art. 24). "Moreover, although we do good works, we do not base our salvation on them; for we cannot do any work that is not defiled by our flesh and also worthy of punishment. And even if we could point to one, memory of a single sin is enough for God to reject that work" (Belgic Confession Art. 24). Basing our salvation on "the merit of the suffering and death of our Savior" has the benefit of avoiding the doubt, uncertainty, and torment of conscience that would come from basing our salvation on our good works (Belgic Confession Art. 24).



The growth of baptized believers in the Christian life of faith both bears witness to the liberating Gospel of Christ and “has ethical implications which not only call for personal sanctification, but also motivate Christians to strive for the realization of the will of God in all realms of life” (BEM, Baptism III.10).

p. What is the relationship between baptism and the assurance of salvation?

*i. Common statement*

Baptism is a sacrament intended to provide assurance to God’s people. For Roman Catholics, baptism always is the assurance of grace imparted and therefore of one’s entry into God’s salvific purposes. Therefore all the baptized may take comfort and hope in the salvation yet to be consummated that God through his Word and Spirit initiates in baptism. For Reformed Christians, baptism is a means God uses to assure believers of God’s forgiveness and of God’s gracious presence.

*ii. Roman Catholic statement*

While Catholics believe that grace always is offered and even infused in baptism, they may differ with Reformed Christians on the assurance of grace. The assurance of grace cannot be considered in the Catholic perspective as the assurance or certainty of salvation. The Council of Trent anathematized such assurance as articulated in the language it understood to be used by the Protestant Reformers. Hence the following canons from the council’s Decree on Justification:

If anyone says that in order to obtain the remission of sins it is necessary for every man to believe with certainty and without any hesitation arising from his own weakness and indisposition that his sins are forgiven him, let him be anathema (Canon 13).

If anyone says that man is absolved from his sins and justified because he firmly believes that he is absolved and justified, or that no one is truly justified except

him who believes himself justified, and that by this faith alone absolution and justification are effected, let him be anathema (Canon 14).

Eternal salvation is a matter of perseverance in grace and is the object of the virtue of hope. Therefore experiences of grace—for example, spiritual consolations—would not be interpreted as the witness of the Spirit assuring one of salvation. If the assurance of grace is intended answer whether a person may be certain that he or she is in a state of grace, again the answer would be no. That is, it could not be matter of absolute certitude. The same Tridentine decree states:

For as no pious person ought to doubt the mercy of God, the merit of Christ and the virtue and efficacy of the sacraments, so each one, when he considers himself and his own weakness and indisposition, may have fear and apprehension concerning his own grace, since no one can know with the certainty of faith, which cannot be subject to error, that he has obtained the grace of God (Chapter IX).

The only exception would be by a special privilege of revelation. However, one may on the basis of conjecture (not certainty) be assured of receiving divine grace and abiding in it. Thomas Aquinas says, “things are known conjecturally by signs; and thus any one may know he has grace, when he is conscious of delighting in God, and of despising worldly things, and inasmuch as a man is not conscious of any mortal sin.” This can even entail a “certain sweetness” in spiritual experience, although “this knowledge is imperfect” (*Summa Theologiae* IIae. 112.5).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church in answering this question outlines the difference (although not a necessary separation) between the ontological state of grace and psychological awareness of grace:

Since it belongs to the supernatural order, grace *escapes our experience* and cannot be known except by faith. We cannot therefore rely on our feelings or our works to conclude that we are justified and saved. However, according to the Lord's words—"Thus you will know them by their fruits"—reflection on God's blessings in our life and in the lives of the saints offers us a guarantee that grace is at work in us and spurs us on to an ever greater faith and an attitude of trustful poverty (CCC 2005).

A pleasing illustration of this attitude is found in the reply of St. Joan of Arc to a question posed as a trap by her ecclesiastical judges: "Asked if she knew that she was in God's grace, she replied: 'If I am not, may it please God to put me in it; if I am, may it please God to keep me there,'" (CCC 2005).

Faith, it must be emphasized, is a theological virtue supernaturally infused and abiding in the soul amid the consolations and desolations of the spiritual life.

### *iii. Reformed statement*

Baptism is one of the means by which God assures us of forgiveness and of God's gracious presence in and with us. Reformed Christians hold that, despite our sin, those whose sins are forgiven and who have been made new creatures in Christ may approach God with confidence and assurance. Because no one "loves us more than Jesus Christ," who, being in the form of God, emptied himself and made himself like us (Phil. 2:6-8; Heb. 2:17), was tempted in all things as we are, made a "single offering" that "perfected for all time those who are sanctified," and intercedes on our behalf, we may now have confidence to approach God "with a true heart in full assurance of faith," holding fast "to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful" (Heb. 4:14-16; 10:14, 19-22). According to Hebrews, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

The assurance that believers have, like faith itself, is the work of the Holy Spirit: “Our faith and its assurance do not proceed from flesh and blood, that is to say, from natural powers within us, but are the inspiration of the Holy Ghost” (Scots Confession 3.12). The work of the spirit in people’s hearts functions as a sort of testimony of God’s love and forgiveness, thereby providing assurance to God’s people: “We are assured of our justification by the testimony of the Holy Spirit” (Evangelical Catechism [UCC] Q.&A. 85).

The assurance believers have is an important part of true faith:

True faith is not only a knowledge and conviction that everything God reveals in his Word is true; it is also a deep-rooted assurance, created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel, that, out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ, not only others, but I, too, have had my sins forgiven, have been made forever right with God, and have been granted salvation (Heidelberg Catechism Q.&A. 21).

God has instituted sacraments as means for assuring us of forgiveness and of God’s gracious presence in and with us: “The sacraments are visible words which uniquely assure and confirm that no matter how greatly I may have sinned, Christ died also for me, and comes to live in me and with me” (PCUSA Study Catechism of 1998, Q.&A. 69). In the end, however, neither the minister nor the sacrament of baptism confers grace; rather, “our Lord gives what the sacrament signifies—namely the invisible gifts and graces,” cleansing us of sin, renewing and filling our hearts with comfort, “giving us true assurance of his fatherly goodness,” and replacing our sinful self with a new self (Belgic Confession Art. 34).

The assurance of salvation that believers have, then, “comes not by inquisitive searching into the hidden and deep things of God, but by noticing within themselves, with spiritual joy and holy delight, the unmistakable fruits of election pointed out in God’s Word—such as a true faith in Christ, a childlike fear of God, a godly sorrow for their sins, a hunger and thirst for

righteousness, and so on” (Canons of Dort I, Art. 12). As God’s people receive this assurance, they have “greater cause to humble themselves before God, to adore the fathomless depth of his mercies, to cleanse themselves, and to give fervent love in return to him who first so greatly loved them” (Canons of Dort I, Art. 13).

God provides assurance to believers to the end that they will not only know forgiveness but also have courage, comfort, and hope in serving God: “God promises to all who trust in the gospel forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, the presence of the Holy Spirit in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in that kingdom which has no end” (Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ, adapted by Robert Moss).

#### 6. Pastoral recommendations: tangible expressions of mutual recognition of baptism

In our agreement, we have given the grounds for formal mutual recognition of the validity of our baptisms. The following are recommended for the consideration of our communions on the basis of the ecumenical commitments that bring us to the dialogue table. *It is understood that these recommendations should be implemented in accordance with existing regulations.*

1. We recommend that our local communities maintain the custom of keeping baptismal records and providing baptismal certificates when requested at various times in the Christian lives of our members. Compatibility in the form and content of these documents would be a sign of ecumenical cooperation and a safeguard of the validity of what we celebrate together as Christians.
2. We recommend that prominence be given to the placement of the baptismal font and water near the worshipping assembly as a sign of continuity in faith.

3. We recommend the practice of inviting members of our respective communions to reaffirm their baptisms together at times of prayer for Christian unity.
4. We recommend, where the custom of baptismal sponsors, witnesses, or godparents has been maintained, that these be selected from our respective communities of faith as a sign that Christians belonging to our communions are truly members of the body of Christ. This is particularly important when welcoming interchurch families and their congregations to celebrations of baptism.
5. We recommend the active participation of the families of those to be baptized in the selection of readings, intercessory prayers, and music as a way of giving tangible evidence of the unity that we share in Christ.
6. Mindful that the active participation of clergy and laity of the respective communions of the spouses is at present allowed in interchurch weddings, we also recommend the practice of inviting clergy or lay guests to offer prayers, proclaim Scripture readings, preach, and/or confer blessings in the rite of baptism, maintaining respect for the rites of each communion.
7. We recommend the participation of clergy in local ministerial associations to facilitate pastoral dialogues that foster ecumenical cooperation at baptism and at other important times in the faith journeys of Christians. Ministerial associations can be a means for fostering lifelong spiritual accompaniment in faith both for clergy and for the laity whom they serve. In addition, such associations might find other creative, symbolic ways to foster local ecumenical sharing.

8. At the funeral rites of members of our communions, including those of other Christians with whom we are in ecumenical dialogue, we recommend the use of a prayer or rite (for example, sprinkling of the casket, the white pall, etc.) as a final commendation that calls to mind the enduring gift of grace received in baptism.
9. We recommend the use of baptismal liturgical options already in our official ritual books that enhance ecumenical awareness on the local level.
10. Mindful that in many instances local congregations might not be able to implement all these recommendations now, we recommend a patient and prudent process of discernment among laity and clergy. We recognize that the journey toward full, visible unity depends on openness to the grace of God and humility before the initiatives of God's Spirit among us, which are themselves based on baptism. Let us above all work to promote works of charity and service not only to those who are of the household of the faith but also to all people and to all of creation.

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## 8. Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> The resulting simple three-part structure was

1. cleansing-signation-flood prayer.
  2. exorcism-reading of Mark 10:13-16-Lord's Prayer.
  3. renunciation-profession-baptism-Lord's Prayer.
- Afterward, the child is vested in a white robe.

For Luther's rites, see *Luther's Works* 53 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 106-109 or J.D.C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: The Reformation Period* (London: SPCK, 1970), 6-16 and 23-25. See also John Riggs, *Baptism in the Reformed Tradition: An Historical and Practical Theology* (Westminster John Knox, 2002), 11-13.

<sup>ii</sup> His order was as follows:

- "Our help is in the name of the Lord . . . ."
- Presentation and naming of the child,  
Prayer for faith and regeneration (partly based on Luther's Flood Prayer).  
Reading of Mark 10:13-16.  
Naming (again) and baptism in the triune name.  
Clothing in white robe.  
Benediction (Fisher, 129-131).

<sup>iii</sup> It followed this order:

- Presentation.  
Invitation to prayer.  
Lord's Prayer.  
Apostles' Creed.  
Prayer for the gift of faith and for regeneration.  
Reading of Mark 10:13-16.  
Exhortation on the gospel.  
Charge to the godparents to "teach this child Christian order, discipline and fear of God."  
Naming of the child and baptism in the triune name (pouring).  
Benediction.

("A Rite of Baptism, Used at Strassburg, 1525-1530," in Fisher, 34-37).

<sup>iv</sup> His order was as follows:

- Invocation "Our help is in the name of the Lord . . . ."
- Presentation.  
Baptismal exhortation, including reference to John 3 (Jesus' words to Nicodemus), an outline of the plan of redemption, and discussion of the meaning of baptism, with emphasis on washing rather than death and resurrection. (Calvin discusses baptism as a sure witness of both justification and sanctification, suggesting that baptism applies to us the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection. The exhortation concludes with a discussion of infant baptism, including Matthew's version of the blessing of the children [Matt. 19:13-15].)  
Invocation followed by Lord's Prayer (no reference to water).  
Admonition to the godparents, including paraphrase of the creed.  
Baptism in the triune name.  
Benediction.

(See Fisher essay in *The Study of Liturgy*, 156-157; Fisher, *Christian Initiation*, 113-117; H.O. Old, *The Shaping of the Reformed Baptismal Rite in the Sixteenth Century* [Eerdmans, 1992], 172.)

<sup>v</sup> Knox's order was as follows:

- Presentation.  
Exhortation, beginning with defense of infant baptism (including references to circumcision, as well as scriptural allusions to 1 Cor. 7:14 and Mark 10), and then proceeding to clarify that baptism is not necessary for salvation yet performed is out of obedience to Christ's command to teach us that Christ's blood washes away sins and signifies regeneration.  
Admonition to parents (and godparents) to raise the baptized child in the faith.

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Profession of faith by father (or godfather), using Apostles' Creed.

Prayer that God will sanctify and receive the infant into "the number of thy children," come to full mature confession of faith, and after death be received into heaven, concluding with the Lord's Prayer.

Baptism in the triune name.

Postbaptismal prayer giving thanks for God's goodness and praying for continued favor toward us and "tuition and defence" of the infant baptized that by the "holy sprite, working in his harte" that s/he may "so prevayle against Satan, that in the end, obeyning the victorie, he may be exalted into the libertie of thy kindome."

(See William D. Maxwell, *The Liturgical Portions of the Genevan Service Book* [Faith Press, 1965], 105-120.)

<sup>vi</sup> It has the following structure:

Instruction on the meaning of baptism, including the themes of cleansing from sin, adoption into the covenant, and call to live in obedience to God.

Invocation (Luther's Flood Prayer from 1523).

Address to the parents, including promise to teach the faith to the children.

Baptism in the triune name.

Prayer of thanksgiving.

("Baptism of Children," from CRCNA baptism forms.)

<sup>vii</sup> The outline of the service is as follows:

Presentation of the child by the father (or other Christian friend).

Instruction on the meaning of baptism "touching on the Institution, Nature, Use, and ends of this Sacrament," including the several things signified and sealed by it: "that it is a Seale of the Covenant of Grace, of our Ingrafting into Christ, and of our Union with him, of Remission of Sins, Regeneration, Adoption, and Life eternal" (The instruction goes on to explain the reasons for infant baptism [as did the sixteenth-century rites], the responsibilities of the baptized to "fight against the Devill, the World and the Flesh," cautions against tying the grace of baptism to the moment of its administration, and denies that baptism is necessary for salvation.).

Admonition of the congregation to "looke back to their Baptisme; to repent of their seins against their covenant with God; to stir up their faith; to improve and make the right use of their baptisme; and of the Covenant, sealed thereby betwixt God and their soules."

Exhortation of the parent to bring up the child in the Christian religion, requiring a "solemn promise for the performance of his duty."

Scriptural institution.

Prayer "for sanctifying the Water to this spirituall use" (The prayer includes petition that God would join the baptism of the Spirit with the baptism of water, making the sacrament a seal of all the promises mentioned in the instruction. Specific mention of water in the prayer does not appear in the American adaptation of the Directory [1788], nor in Presbyterian baptismal liturgies, until the late twentieth century. An exception is Charles Shields' 1864 publication of the 1661 Book of Common Prayer, which apparently did enjoy use in some American Presbyterian churches in the nineteenth century.)

Baptism in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost by pouring or sprinkling.

Prayer of thanksgiving (includes thanksgiving for God's faithfulness and graciousness as well as prayer that the one baptized will be received by God into "his fatherly tuition and defence," so that if the child dies in infancy, God will receive him into glory, and if the child should live, that God will "make his Baptisme effectual to him . . . that by faith he may prevail against the devil, the world, and the flesh." This prayer echoes the language of Knox's postbaptismal prayer.).

(The Westminster Directory being A Directory for the Publique Worship of God in the Three Kingdomes [1644], with an introduction by Ian Breward [Grove Books, 1980], 19-21.)

<sup>viii</sup> The 1906 form for baptism of infants has the following structure:

Prayer of thanksgiving for the covenant and for appointing the sacrament of baptism to be its sign and seal and petition to receive it with true faith.

Instruction on the doctrine of baptism.

Vows by parents.

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Baptism in the triune name.  
Prayer of thanksgiving and intercessions for child, parents, and all children of the church.  
Lord's Prayer.

<sup>ix</sup> The 1968 order for baptism of infants is as follows:

Words of institution (Matt. 28:18-20).  
Instruction on the meaning of the sacrament (revision of 1906).

Prayer of thanksgiving for the covenant and petition to sanctify the sacrament to be the sign and seal of that covenant. Includes also self-offering of congregation.

Apostles' Creed.  
Vows by Parents.  
Vows by Congregation.  
Baptism in triune name.  
(Optional declaration that the child is received into the church.)  
Prayer of thanksgiving and intercession for child and parents.

<sup>x</sup>

Words of institution (Matt. 28:18-20)  
Statement of scriptural promises (Gen 17:7, Jer. 31:33-34, Matt. 26:28, Acts 2:38-39, 2 Tim. 2:11-12)  
Instruction on the meaning of the sacrament  
Prayer of preparation, including references to flood, exodus, and Jesus' baptism, and prayer for faith and hope in the promises.  
Vows by parents.  
Vows by congregation.  
(Mark 10:14.)  
Baptism in triune name.  
Hymn.  
Prayer of thanksgiving and intercession for parents, congregation, and child.

<sup>xi</sup> The RCA form is as follows:

Words of institution.  
Statement on the meaning of baptism.  
Presentation.  
Vows (renunciations and affirmations).  
Vows by the congregation.  
Apostles' Creed.  
Prayer of Thanksgiving, including references to creation, flood, exodus, and baptism of Jesus and prayer for the Holy Spirit to be poured out.  
(Optional statement at the baptism of children.)  
Baptism in the triune name.  
Declaration and blessing (statement of receiving the baptized into the church).  
Prayer of thanksgiving and intercession for the baptized.  
Welcome and blessing by the congregation.

The CRC structure follows:

Words of institution.  
The Covenant of Baptism.  
God's covenant promises (including several options, all attending to a broad range of baptismal meanings)  
Prayer of thanksgiving, including references to creation, flood, exodus, and Jesus' baptism, and prayer for faith.

Our covenant promises.  
Promises by parents OR renunciations and affirmations by adults.  
Creed.

Baptism in the triune name.  
Blessing, including prayer of thanksgiving and intercession for God's nurture of the baptized.

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Welcome, including congregational promise.  
xii The outline is as follows:

“Commitments and vows.”

Prayer.

The act of baptizing with water and the triune name.

“Other actions,” including blessing and optional anointing; and welcoming. The expansion of the prayer might be the most significant development in this rite, including thanksgiving for God’s covenant faithfulness, praise for God’s reconciling acts, and petition “that the Holy Spirit attend and empower the Baptism, make the water a water of redemption and rebirth, equip the church for faithfulness.”

(W-3.3604c).