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2 **These Living Waters**

3  
4 **BAPTISM DOCUMENT**  
5 **7<sup>TH</sup> ROUND REFORMED-CATHOLIC DIALOGUE**  
6  
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57  
58 1. Introduction

59 A SEASON OF ENGAGEMENT

60 The 20<sup>th</sup> century was one of intense dialogue among churches throughout the world. In the  
61 mission field and in local communities, in regional ecumenical bodies and in bilateral  
62 discussions between churches, Christians made commitments to engage each other not only in  
63 cooperative activity but theological deliberation. The Roman Catholic Church and churches of  
64 the Reformed tradition have been no exceptions. This report on baptism is offered in the context  
65 of more than forty years of dialogue between the Reformed churches in the United States and the  
66 National Conference of Catholic Bishops (now the United States Conference of Catholic  
67 Bishops). The relationships in the United States form only a part of our context, however, and  
68 our dialogue has been enriched by encounter and relationships around the world.

69  
70 OUR GLOBAL ROMAN CATHOLIC AND REFORMED CONTEXT

71 Important ecumenical events of the last forty years have influenced our theological perspectives  
72 as well as our maturing ability to understand each other. Liturgical renewals, encouraged by  
73 relationships with the Roman Catholic Church, have engendered in many Reformed Christians a  
74 deeper appreciation of our common roots. These renewals have heightened awareness of the  
75 richness of our common liturgical tradition. Roman Catholic seminaries have developed a  
76 renewed focus on the preaching of the word in the context of the sacramental liturgy, a strong  
77 emphasis in the Reformed tradition. In addition, in recent decades Roman Catholics have come  
78 to read Reformed theologians with new lenses. The discovery of new source material – both  
79 patristic and biblical – has greatly enhanced our collective ability to affirm a common heritage.  
80 More than ever before, ecumenical prayer services include a ritual for the reaffirmation of our  
81 baptismal vows, a reminder of that which binds us to each other as kindred in Christ,  
82 acknowledging our one calling through our one baptism, claimed by one God.

83  
84 Earlier in our history, movements within our traditions sought to provide bridges between us. In  
85 the German Reformed community, for example, theologians of the Mercersburg liturgical  
86 movement made explicit commitments to rebuild relationship with the Roman Catholic Church  
87 as one element in manifesting the full visible unity of the church. Roman Catholic dioceses, in  
88 the aftermath of Vatican II, established diocesan ecumenical offices which nurtured the  
89 formation of “living room dialogues” in which many Reformed church members participated,

90 enhancing relationships across the United States and the world.

91  
92 Churches in relationship through the ecumenical movement have also sought to articulate  
93 specific beliefs about baptism. Our practices and our theologies have varied widely, but even  
94 without complete consensus there have emerged important experiences of convergence and  
95 deeper understanding. As a result of numerous bilateral dialogues, a growing familiarity with  
96 baptismal theology and practice among churches has made a profound contribution to the  
97 church's ability to claim its vision of unity. As recently as 2002 the Pontifical Council for  
98 Promoting Christian Unity in the Vatican urged ongoing study and dialogue of many theological  
99 issues for the enhancement of Roman Catholic and Reformed church relationships, most  
100 especially urging a focus on baptism as a basic to our Christian identity.

101  
102 Some landmark studies have offered us encouragement and guidance along the way. The 1982  
103 World Council of Churches document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* presented the churches  
104 with an important opportunity to engage in dialogue on these important matters. Through those  
105 studies, Christians came to appreciate more deeply their own and each other's baptismal  
106 expressions and theology.

107  
108 More recently, in the Eighth Report of the Joint Working Group between the Vatican and the  
109 World Council of Churches (2005), Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox Christians explored the  
110 meaning and the practice of this sacrament. While this important study was much broader in  
111 ecclesial scope than the one we offer here, it reflects many issues found in our own bilateral  
112 dialogue, and it urges, as we do, further study in those areas of ongoing difference.

113  
114 OUR REGIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

115 The international arena is only one among many vital settings for dialogue and reflection  
116 between Reformed and Roman Catholic Christians. Official discussions in national church  
117 settings in the United States have been equally important in advancing mutual understanding.  
118 Topics in the last forty years have included theological, liturgical and ethical issues. These  
119 issues have been explored with a consistent expectation that they are in primary service to the  
120 pastoral settings of all of our churches. Sound pastoral practice, however, rests on solid  
121 theological foundations. The current report, succeeding one on *Interchurch Families*, grew from  
122 a recognition that our pastoral customs reflect our different theological and ecclesiological  
123 traditions – differences which must be understood if we are to relate to each other in healthy  
124 ways.

125  
126 In the United States, members of our traditions also encounter each other in local settings  
127 through common service and community worship experiences. Learning in those settings has  
128 been both intentional (through the formation of discussion groups between congregations and  
129 parishes) as well as informal (as neighbors work together on projects for the common good).  
130 Common work and intentional dialogue, where it has occurred consistently, has enabled  
131 members of both of our traditions to respond to community concerns effectively and deepen  
132 appreciation for the different gifts each brings to common public life.

133  
134 Finally, the family has been a vital setting for dialogue between Roman Catholic and Reformed

135 Christians in the United States. Increasingly, marriage and the mobility of extended families  
136 have contributed to this intimate encounter between the traditions, an experience which can be  
137 both a joy and sometimes also confusing. Families are the settings where the gifts that each  
138 tradition brings can be most concretely received, but also the place where our differences can be  
139 most keenly felt, and where the pain of our divisions may have the most significant impact. It  
140 has been important, therefore, in official settings, to approach with utmost care those topics  
141 which affect the experience of our members and the pastoral leaders who serve them.

142  
143 In all of these settings, both the Reformed and the Roman Catholic churches have affirmed the  
144 value of ecumenical engagement and increased mutual understanding. Through our ongoing  
145 encounter we have come to know each other's ecclesial characteristics, value each other's  
146 strengths, and make commitments to deeper relationships.

147  
148 We hope this study will provide an occasion for ongoing dialogue among Roman Catholic and  
149 Reformed lay and ordained leaders, both in those places of longtime engagement, and in those  
150 settings where it will be entirely new. Such dialogue can contribute to the common witness of  
151 the church on the local level, and make ecumenical ideas a lived reality of Christian faith.

#### 152 153 OUR HOPE

154 It is precisely the gift of our unity in the church of Jesus Christ through our baptisms which  
155 enables us to come to dialogue tables not just as acquaintances but as kindred – as members of  
156 one family in Christ – to consider in depth these matters of baptismal theology and practice.

157  
158 The theological reflection in this report is intended to provide a sound basis on which our  
159 communions can express, in tangible ways, a mutual recognition of each other's baptisms. We  
160 have acknowledged areas of agreement and of difference. Through active engagement we have  
161 experienced our own faith tradition more clearly by seeing ourselves through the lenses of our  
162 partners. Through dialogue we have become reacquainted with our own tradition, the scriptures,  
163 and the sacraments. We have had the opportunity to examine, and, perhaps most important, to  
164 correct, past misunderstandings and caricatures. As our relationships have deepened we have  
165 celebrated those areas of theological consensus and we give thanks for the patient and careful  
166 dialogue which has brought our traditions closer together; we note those places where consensus  
167 has yet to be achieved but where ongoing dialogue holds promise for closer convergence; and we  
168 acknowledge those aspects of our theology and practice where there is no convergence but where  
169 the commitment to the eventual full, visible unity of the church will be well-served by enhanced  
170 mutual understanding.

171  
172 Through an honest desire to understand each other, and therefore to acknowledge both the limits  
173 and the possibilities of what we can accomplish together, we believe we can make an enduring  
174 statement about what we hold in common.

175  
176 We offer this report not simply as an academic study to be reviewed by those with a particular  
177 interest in the theology of baptism but to the entire constituency of all of our churches as a  
178 discernment of where the Holy Spirit is leading us together. We offer a prayer of hope that each  
179 encounter may move us to even deeper recognition and into a more faithful relationship with the

180 Triune God. Ultimately our unity is not something we create but is a gift given us by God. Its  
181 visible manifestation is something for which our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ prayed (John 17),  
182 and we know that the earliest witnesses to the Christian faith proclaimed both the present reality  
183 and the eschatological hope of one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Ephesians 4). Where we  
184 have fallen short of answering the call to that full visible unity, we confess our culpability and  
185 the enduring scandal of division within the body of Christ.

186  
187 And so in celebration of what we hold in common, and in testimony to our desire to make God's  
188 gift of unity more visible, we offer our common witness in the following Common Agreement.

189  
190 2.

191  
192 COMMON AGREEMENT ON MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF BAPTISM  
193 Roman Catholic-Reformed Church dialogue

- 194  
195 1. Together we affirm that, by the sacrament of Baptism, a person is truly incorporated into  
196 the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13 and 27; Ephesians 1:22-23), the church. Baptism  
197 establishes the bond of unity existing among all who are part of Christ's body and is  
198 therefore the sacramental basis for our efforts to move towards visible unity.  
199  
200 2. Together we affirm that Baptism is the sacramental gateway into the Christian life,  
201 directed toward the fullness of faith and discipleship in Christ.  
202  
203 3. Together we affirm that incorporation into the universal church by baptism is brought  
204 about by celebrating the sacrament within a particular Christian community.  
205  
206 4. Together we affirm that Baptism is to be conferred only once, because those who are  
207 baptized are decisively incorporated into the Body of Christ.  
208  
209 5. Together we affirm that baptism is a sacrament of the church, enacted in obedience to the  
210 mission confided to it by Christ's own word. For our baptisms to be mutually  
211 recognized, water and the scriptural Trinitarian formula "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit"  
212 (Matthew 28: 19-20) must be used in the baptismal rite.  
213  
214 6. Together we affirm that the validity of Baptism depends on its celebration according to  
215 the apostolic witness by the church and its authorized ministers.  
216  
217 7. Together we affirm, as a sign of our unity and as a witness to ecumenical commitment,  
218 the practice of inviting the presence and, where appropriate, the participation of members  
219 of our respective communions in the celebration of Baptism. At the same time, we affirm  
220 our responsibility to respect the integrity of the distinct baptismal practices of the  
221 communions in which the rite of Baptism is administered.  
222  
223 8. Given our mutual recognition of Baptism, we encourage using baptismal registers in the  
224 local church community and, when requested by another church for a pastoral need in the

225 life of an individual, providing written attestations of Baptism, including the liturgical  
226 formula used. Such cooperation and mutual accountability honors the dignity of the  
227 sacrament of Baptism.  
228

229 We rejoice at the common faith we share and affirm in this document. We understand that the  
230 journey toward full, visible unity depends on openness to the grace of God and humility before  
231 the initiatives of God’s Spirit among us. Because of these convictions, we encourage Roman  
232 Catholic and Reformed pastoral leaders to continue their commitment to regular dialogue about  
233 theology and pastoral practice from local to international settings. Pastoral leaders engaged in  
234 such dialogue embody our hopes for unity, collaborative effort, and common witness. We  
235 believe that respectful dialogue can provide a strong witness to the wider church about our  
236 commitment to a relationship in Christ and can stand as a safeguard against the unreflective  
237 judgments that have, at certain times in our history, diminished and distorted our relations.  
238

### 239 3. Historical Overview: Perspectives on Sacramentality 240

241 The following sections describe both the history and theology of baptismal rites in the Reformed  
242 and Roman Catholic communions. Two different investigatory methods are evident in the work  
243 that follows: (1) *an historical approach* (especially Section II), narrating each communion’s self  
244 understanding relative to sacramental practice, as developed over a given timeline, and (2) *a*  
245 *liturgical approach* (especially Section IIIA) that offers each communion’s own account of the  
246 Church’s interaction with God in the celebration of the rites themselves. The observations which  
247 follow are made only of Roman Catholic and not of Eastern Christian baptismal rites.”  
248

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255 follow are made only of Roman Catholic and not of Eastern baptismal rites.  
256

#### 257 *Historical Introduction*

258 The Reformed and Catholic communions share a common tradition about sacrament.  
259 They rejoice over what they uphold together and they understand where they evaluate the  
260 tradition differently. Their common tradition begins with the apostle Paul and the Greek word  
261 *mysterion* (“mystery”) as found in Paul’s letters (e.g., 1 Cor. 2:1; 4:1; Rom 16:25). There the  
262 word referred to God’s hidden plan for salvation. The developing Pauline tradition (e.g., Eph.  
263 1:9; 3:3, 4, 9; Col. 1:26-27; 2:2) took up this theme and proclaimed that this “mystery” is  
264 embodied in Christ, in whose sufferings we share (e.g., Col. 1:24-2:3).<sup>1</sup> From there, early North  
265 African, Latin translations of the Greek New Testament translated *mysterion* with the word  
266 *sacramentum*. In this context, *sacramentum* referred to the redeeming work of God that was

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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, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967) 803ff.

267 known through Jesus.

268 The writings of the North African theologian Tertullian (ca. 160-ca. 230), including what  
269 may be the earliest work on sacramental theology (*De Baptismo*), continued the connection  
270 between *mysterion* and *sacramentum*.<sup>2</sup> In *De Spectaculis* Tertullian calls the Eucharist a  
271 sacrament (3:10), and in *Adversus Marcionem* he calls Baptism a sacrament several times, as he  
272 also does in *De Baptismo*. Furthermore, Tertullian does not limit his understanding of sacrament  
273 simply to Baptism and Eucharist; he calls charity “the highest sacrament of the faith” (*De*  
274 *Patientia* 12:133-34), and he uses *sacramentum* in relation to martyrdom (*Scorpiace*, ch. 9).

275 The word sacrament carried two principal meanings by the early third century. It referred  
276 to Jesus because God’s redeeming presence was known through the man Jesus – what the *fides*  
277 *historica* broadly calls the incarnation. Sacrament also referred to certain rituals of the church  
278 because likewise through the physical, God’s redeeming presence was known. The much-  
279 beloved biblical passage that symbolically connected Jesus as sacrament to the church’s  
280 sacraments was the scene of blood (symbolizing the Eucharist) and water (symbolizing Baptism)  
281 flowing from the wounded side of Christ (Jn. 19:34). Many of the early church theologians  
282 allegorically interpreted this scene as referring to the birth of the Church through the issuance of  
283 Christ’s blood and water, that is, through the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.<sup>3</sup>

284 By the fourth century the words *mysterion* and *sacramentum* gained prominence as the  
285 rite of Christian initiation, and the catechetical teachings about baptism and Eucharist, flourished  
286 in the post-Constantinian period. The writings of Ambrose (339-397), Cyril of Jerusalem (c.  
287 315-386), Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350-428), and other patristic theologians, speak about  
288 baptism and Eucharist from a Neoplatonic perspective in which the physical sign of the  
289 sacrament could be distinguished from the spiritual reality signified in it, yet truly participative  
290 in that same spiritual reality. Leo the Great (d. 461) would summarize this most notably in his  
291 homily for Ascension Day: “And so the sight of our Redeemer today passes into mystery  
292 (*sacramentum*)”<sup>4</sup> -- which meant that what Jesus had done in history, had passed into  
293 “sacrament” or “mystery” celebrated by the Church each day in the liturgy. Perhaps the most  
294 influential among these theologians, however, stands the North African bishop, Augustine of

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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 Publishing, Inc, 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-Encyclopädie für Theologie und Kirche* 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Leo the Great, *Sermon* 74:2 (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.

295 Hippo (354-430), for whom physical realities were the windows through which the spiritual  
296 realities reach us.<sup>5</sup> Augustine also has a notable chapter in the tenth book of *The City of God* that  
297 essentially exegetes the meaning to Rom. 12:1-3. There he argues that the communion of  
298 Christian lives given in love is offered to God as its sacrifice through Christ “the great High  
299 Priest (*sacerdotum magnum*, Cf. Hebrews 4:14 *et pass.*) who offered himself to God in His  
300 passion for us.” Augustine then closes the chapter by asserting that [t]his is the sacrifice of  
301 Christians: the many, the one body in Christ. And this likewise is the sacrifice that the church  
302 repeatedly celebrates by the sacrament of the altar, noted by the faithful, in which she shows that  
303 she herself is offered in the offering that she makes to God.<sup>6</sup>

304 The two senses of sacrament, as Jesus himself and as the sacraments of the church,  
305 continued into the medieval period and Latin theologians gradually synthesized the two ideas of  
306 sacrament into an integrated theology. The basic medieval concept was that the church is the  
307 body of the crucified, resurrected, and glorified Lord, and God’s grace continues to come to us  
308 through Christ just as it did in the incarnation. Only now the grace that comes through Christ  
309 comes through the sacraments, most especially the Eucharist, by which Jesus Christ continues to  
310 be present in the church. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), for example, gave a thorough  
311 exposition of eucharistic theology and sacrifice (cf. *Summa Theologica*, III, 73-83) that was a  
312 feature of an entire ecclesial world-view that was, so to speak, eucharistic.<sup>7</sup> The whole world  
313 was related to and dependent upon the grace of God, known in creation, proclaimed in salvation  
314 history, and present once and still in Jesus Christ, Word made flesh, the one mediator, who has  
315 united believers into his reign, the Body of Christ. Into this triune God one was baptized, and by  
316 the very being of this God one was nourished during life’s spiritual journey. Christ instituted the  
317 Eucharist, argued Thomas, because he desired to remain present in the church, in a sacramental  
318 manner available to faith, unlike a mere corporeal presence available to the senses. The whole  
319 economy of salvation, which comes to the individual as spiritual nourishment through faith in  
320 Christ’s passion, is thus effectively realized now in the sacrament that is Christ’s activity in the

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<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, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 3-61.

<sup>6</sup> *De civitate dei* 10.6; CSEL 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, IN: 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, *passim*. 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 general, and thus the place of Thomas within this development, see Regis A. Duffy, “Sacraments in General,” in *Systematic Theology II*, 183-210.



321 church itself.<sup>8</sup>

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

330

331 3.a. Sacramentality

332 i. A Catholic View

333

334 Sacramentality is a key theological principle of Catholic ecclesial life. It applies not only  
335 to the seven sacraments and to the liturgy but is used in reference to the Church as a whole. In  
336 recent Catholic theology the notion of sacramentality functions as a foundational principle for  
337 Catholic thought and experience since it is related to the principles of mediation and communion  
338 as well as the theology of grace. Grounded in the doctrines of creation, incarnation, and the  
339 resurrection of the body, it has much to do with how creation elevated by grace is able to mediate  
340 the divine presence even as that presence is personal, hence grounded in the Trinitarian  
341 economy. It is an affirmation of the capacity of finite creation to be a means for God's  
342 manifestation and self-communication.

343 Divine revelation attests to the sacramental principle. In the history of salvation, the  
344 "economy of Revelation," is "realized in deeds and words, which are intrinsically bound up with  
345 each other" (*Dei Verbum*, 2). Since the works performed by God show forth the reality signified  
346 by the words and the words proclaim the works, so too, signs and symbols derived from creation  
347 and human culture are utilized by the Church in its liturgical life. The liturgy is at the heart of  
348 the Church's life as expressed in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, The Constitution on the Sacred  
349 Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council: "the liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of  
350 the Church is directed; it is also the fount from which all her power flows" (*Sacrosanctum*  
351 *Concilium* 11). It is also a work of the Holy Trinity and through the mystery of Christ the High  
352 Priest it embraces both human and divine action. Therefore, liturgy is "an 'action' of the *whole*  
353 *Christ (Christus totus)*" (CCC 1136), that is, a work of the risen Christ and his Church.

354 The trinitarian nature of the liturgy proceeds from the missions of the Son and the Holy  
355 Spirit (their "joint mission"<sup>9</sup>) that culminates in the incarnation of the Son and the outpouring of  
356 the Holy Spirit. By virtue of the incarnation, the assumed human nature of Christ is inseparably  
357 united to the eternal Son of God in the hypostatic union and thus serves the divine Word as a  
358 "living organ of salvation." So too, by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit "in a similar way, does  
359 the visible social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ, who vivifies it, in building up  
360 the body" (*Lumen Gentium* 8).

361 Sacramentality consists of the coalescence of divine and human elements in the life of the  
362 Church whereby God acts through the visible organs of the Church especially the sacraments.

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

<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.

363 Catholics, therefore, speak of the Church analogously as a sacrament, in that the “Church, then,  
364 both contains and communicates the invisible grace she signifies” (CCC 774). In Christ the  
365 Church is “a sign and instrument both of a closely knit union with God and of the unity of the  
366 whole human race” (*Lumen Gentium* 1).

367 Sacramentality is consistent with the doctrine of creation whereby God speaks through  
368 the visible creation making it possible for human intelligence to read traces of the Creator in the  
369 material cosmos (CCC 1147). A solid theological anthropology needs underscore the social  
370 being of humanity and how signs and symbols are intrinsic to communication through language,  
371 gestures, and actions (CCC 1146). They are the means for “expressing the action of God who  
372 sanctifies men, and the action of men who offer worship to God” (CCC 1148). Consistent with  
373 God’s covenant with Israel, wherein both cosmic and social symbols are taken up in Israel’s  
374 liturgical life, Jesus himself often illustrated his preaching with physical signs and symbolic  
375 gestures, e.g., the use of spittle to heal the blind man (Jn 9: 6). So too, since Pentecost, “the Holy  
376 Spirit carries on the work of sanctification” through the sacramental signs of the Church (CCC  
377 1152), what has been called its “sacramental economy” or “dispensation” (CCC 1076).

378  
379 *ii. A Reformed View*

380 From within the long-standing Western tradition where sacrament referred both to the  
381 church, which is the body of Christ, and to the sacraments constituting the church, the Reformed  
382 tradition asserts that the true church, invisible to human eyes but visible to God’s eyes, is  
383 comprised of God’s faithful people gathered as the body of Christ. So *The Westminster*  
384 *Confession* (IX.4) says, “By the indwelling of the Holy Spirit all believers being vitally united to  
385 Christ, who is the Head, are thus united one to another in the Church, which is his body (cf.,  
386 *Larger Catechism*, Qq. 64-66; *Scots Confession* XVI; *Second Helvetic Confession* XVII).  
387 Reformed theology calls neither the visible nor the invisible church a sacrament.

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

400 By contrast, the Reformed tradition has considered the created order to be “sacramental,”  
401 insofar as the word connotes God’s self-communication, even if Reformed theology typically has  
402 refrained from such language. For example, Calvin believed that God accommodates God’s self  
403 in order that we might know who God is. God desires to span the distance between Creator and  
404 creation and meets us where we are, communicating to us as we so need, because we otherwise  
405 are incapable of knowing God (e.g., Com. Ex. 3:2; Com. Rom. 1:19; Com. 1 Cor. 2:7). The  
406 essence of God itself, of course, we can never know (*Inst.* 1.13.21), but God’s activity and will,  
407 however, can be seen in creation itself:

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

414  
415           Creation can clearly be means by which God communicate to us because God

416  
417           daily discloses himself in the entire working of the universe, so that we cannot  
418           open our eyes without being compelled to see him . . . on each of his works he has  
419           engraved sure marks of his glory, so clear and prominent that even uncultured and  
420           dim-witted people cannot plead ignorance as an excuse (*Inst.* 1.5.1)

421  
422           The universe has become, says Calvin, “a kind of mirror (*speculi*) in which we are able to see  
423           him, so far as it concerns us to know him” (*Geneva Catechism* Q. 25; *OS* 1.77.25-7).

424           Furthermore, human culture also reflects God’s beneficent glory so that the human mind,  
425           even though “fallen and perverted from its wholeness, is nevertheless clothed and ornamented  
426           with God’s excellent gifts” (*Inst.* 2.2.15). And thus Calvin acknowledges that law, philosophy,  
427           rhetoric, medicine, and mathematics were true and glorious achievements of ancient cultures  
428           because God’s grace was at work in the ancients and through these achievements God’s  
429           beneficence can be seen (*Inst.* 2.2.15). Likewise, through every age moral people have existed  
430           whose upright character can be contrasted with those less moral. The moral qualities  
431           exemplified are “special graces of God” (*speciales Dei gratias*) that show forth divine  
432           beneficence. (*Inst.* 2.3.3-4). The Canons of Dort put the issue this way:

433  
434           There is, to be sure, a certain light of nature remaining in man after the fall, by  
435           virtue of which he retains some notions about God, natural things, and the  
436           difference between what is moral and immoral, and demonstrates a certain  
437           eagerness for virtue and for good outward behavior. But this light of nature is far  
438           from enabling man to come to a saving knowledge of God and conversion to him  
439           – so far, in fact, that man does not use it rightly even in matters of nature and  
440           society (III/IV, art. 4).

441  
442           Human moral achievements, both individually and culturally, count not to our glory but  
443           to our condemnation because, as Calvin saw the matter, they are done not from thanksgiving that  
444           glorifies God, who was the source of such special graces, but were done from our own self-  
445           interest (*Inst.* 2.3.4). Thus the Canons of Dort say straightforwardly we “suppress” this light of  
446           God in “unrighteousness” and in so doing we render ourselves “without excuse before God”  
447           (III/IV, art. 4; cf. *Belgic Confession*, art. 14).

448           Finally, the Reformed tradition also understands that within the created order God has  
449           given certain signs that enable our confidence in God’s promises. Calvin says that such signs  
450           can be through natural elements, or even through miracles, and he calls such signs “sacraments”  
451           (*sacramenti nomen*; *Inst.* 4.14.18). Among natural signs, God used “the tree of life as a  
452           guarantee of immortality” to Adam and Eve. So, too, God gave the rainbow to Noah as a pledge

453 of grace towards the earth. Although both tree and rainbow began as natural objects, when they  
454 were “inscribed by the Word of God” (*inscripta fuerunt verbo Dei*) they “began to be what  
455 previously they were not” (*inciperent esse quod prius non erant*). Among the miracles that were  
456 divinely given signs, Calvin notes the light in the smoking fire pot (Gen. 15:17), the fleece with  
457 dew (Judges 6:37-8), and the shadow of the sundial going backwards (2 Kgs. 20:9-11) (*Inst.*  
458 4.14.18). These signs were not humanly invented but were given by God, and Calvin  
459 differentiates these from the “ordinary” sacraments that God instituted among God’s people,  
460 both of the old law and those instituted by Christ in the new law (*Inst.* 4.14.19-26).

461

462 3.b. Sacraments.

463 i. Sacraments from a Roman Catholic perspective

464 The sacraments then, especially the Eucharistic sacrifice, are the center of the Church’s  
465 liturgical life.<sup>10</sup> Christ’s work in the liturgy enables the pilgrim Church to participate “as by a  
466 foretaste, in the heavenly liturgy” such that before the *parousia* the Holy Spirit dispenses the  
467 mystery of salvation in and through the Church’s prayer and sacraments (*CCC* 1112). The  
468 sacraments are sacraments of Christ founded in the saving mysteries of Christ’s life so that “what  
469 was visible in our Savior has passed over into his mysteries” (St. Leo the Great quoted in *CCC*  
470 1115). The sacraments are sacraments of the Church “by her” and “for her” effectively  
471 instantiating the principle of sacramentality. For the Church “the sacraments make the Church”  
472 in that they manifest and communicate to human beings the mystery of communion with the  
473 triune God (*CCC* 1118). The sacraments are sacraments of faith because they presuppose faith  
474 (prepared by the Word of God) and through words and objects they nourish, strengthen and  
475 express faith (*CCC* 1122-1123). The sacraments are sacraments of salvation because they  
476 “confer the grace that they signify” (*CCC* 1127), bestowing the grace necessary for salvation  
477 (*CCC* 1129). The sacraments are sacraments of eternal life because in “the sacraments of Christ  
478 the Church already receives the guarantee of her inheritance and even now shares in everlasting  
479 life (*CCC* 1130).

480 Catholics also speak of the validity and efficacy of the sacraments, the latter having been  
481 a sore point of contention during the Reformation. For a sacrament to be valid it must be  
482 administered according to the intention of the Church to confer the grace of Christ, by a proper  
483 minister, and with the form and matter of the particular sacrament. The ministers must be validly  
484 ordained except in the case of matrimony where the minister witnesses the sacrament that is  
485 conferred by the spouses upon each other or in baptism where in the case of an emergency (not  
486 the normative administration of baptism) anyone may baptize if they do so with the Church’s  
487 intention. The form along with the matter of the sacrament embraces the appropriate objects: for  
488 example, water, bread, wine, oil, etc., and their corresponding words or sacramental formulae  
489 (based on the New Testament accounts) of the Last Supper words of institution for the sacrament  
490 of the Eucharist and the Trinitarian baptismal formula.

491 Sacramental efficacy concerns the conferral of grace in the sacramental act.

492 The “sacraments act *ex opere operato* (literally: “by the very fact  
493 of the action’s being performed”), i.e., by virtue of the saving work  
494 of Christ, accomplished once for all. It follows that ‘the sacrament  
495 is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or the

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<sup>10</sup> There are seven sacraments in the Catholic Church: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation or Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Matrimony, and Holy Orders.

496 recipient, but by the power of God.’ From the moment that a  
497 sacrament is celebrated in accordance with the intention of the  
498 Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in and through it,  
499 independently of the personal holiness of the minister.  
500 Nevertheless, the fruits of the sacraments also depend on the  
501 disposition of the one who receives them” (CCC 1128).  
502

503 Catholics understand in this principle the guarantee of Christ’s salvific action in the  
504 sacraments not because of any notion that the sacraments are magical in nature, an unfortunate  
505 characterization, but because Christ established the sacraments and his Spirit acts through them.  
506 It underscores the Church’s firm conviction about the priority of grace and her dependence on  
507 Christ. Nor does this mean that the faith of the minister and recipients of the sacraments is  
508 unimportant. In sacraments the posture of the recipient may be interpreted as the disposition of  
509 the one receiving the sacraments so as to not place any obstacle in the way of reception, such as  
510 impenitence, and more positively to receive the sacraments in faith, hope and love, and cooperate  
511 with the grace received to bear fruit.

512 Efficacy also includes the grace proper to each sacrament, i.e., sacramental grace, and in  
513 the case of Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders, the reception of an indelible spiritual sign,  
514 mark, seal, or character of the specific sacrament imprinted on the soul. This sacramental  
515 character consecrates the person to Christ according to the particularity of the sacrament and  
516 underscores the non-repeatability of the sacrament. In Baptism and Confirmation one is  
517 consecrated to the common priesthood of the faithful, and in Holy Orders to the ministerial  
518 priesthood.

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

524 The means of grace also include sacramentals—“sacred signs instituted by the  
525 Church...[that] prepare men to receive the fruit of the sacraments and sanctify different  
526 circumstances of life” (CCC 1677)—such as blessings, exorcisms, and sacred signs, objects  
527 and gestures including, for example, holy water, the sign of the cross, altars, vestments, incense,  
528 rosaries, etc., many of which inform the variety of expressions of popular piety. The latter  
529 engages the common priesthood of all the faithful and embraces the material universe in its use  
530 of signs for worship, devotion, and pious and spiritual exercises. The theological principle that  
531 accounts for the efficacy of grace in sacramentals is *ex opere operantis* (“from the work of the  
532 worker”). Although God is still the source of grace, its impartation in sacramentals is  
533 proportioned to the holiness and faith of the believer engaged in their practice. One may also  
534 speak of *ex opere operantis Ecclesiae* since it is the Church that acts or prays not only in the  
535 sacraments but also in non-sacramental liturgy, e.g., the Liturgy of the Hours, and in various  
536 forms of devotional prayer that the Church encourages. All of these are ways in which grace is  
537 offered by Christ in the Holy Spirit and increased through its faithful reception by believers and  
538 their fruitful cooperation with it.  
539

540 3.b.

541 ii A Reformed View

542 The Reformed tradition historically argued at the time of the Protestant Reformation, and  
543 still theologically maintains, that worship ought to be done according to scripture. For some of  
544 the tradition, only those practices could be done that scripture warranted:

545

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

551

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

556

557 The Reformed tradition thus counts the dominically instituted sacraments as two, baptism  
558 and the Lord’s Supper (e.g., *Scots Confession XXI*; *Heidelberg Catechism Q. 68*; *Second*  
559 *Helvetic Confession XIX*; *Belgic Confession*, art. 34; *Westminster Confession XXVII*). To these  
560 sacraments the Reformed tradition applies the long-standing hermeneutic of *signum-res* to  
561 explain what a sacrament is. To the outer sign God attaches an inner reality; and the Reformed  
562 tradition typically understands that the inner reality that inheres to the sign is ultimately Christ  
563 himself (e.g., *Tetrapolitan Confession*, XVII-XVIII; *First Basel Confession*, VI; *Second Basel*  
564 *Confession (First Helvetic Confession)*, 20 and 22 (Supper); *Scots Confession XXI*; *Second*  
565 *Helvetic Confession XIX*; *French Confession*, XXXIV-XXXVI; *Belgic Confession*, art. 33). As  
566 the *Second Helvetic Confession* says,

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

570

571 Some Reformed voices express the object signified with a proximate description, such as  
572 “holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ  
573 and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him” (*Westminster Confession XXVII*). When  
574 one reaches the actual discussion of baptism and Supper, however, one typically finds there the  
575 description of a person’s baptismal “ingrafting in Christ (*Westminster Confession XXVIII.1*), or  
576 that in the Supper “really and indeed . . . receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all the  
577 benefits of his death” (*Westminster Confession* , XXIX.7).

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

583

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

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

589  
590 In a long discussion, the *Second Helvetic Confession* contrasts validly offered sacraments with  
591 the efficacy that includes “the condition of those who receive them.”

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

602  
603 Thus while under right administration sacraments validly offer the divine reality that the signs  
604 signify, the efficacy applies only to those who receive the sacraments in faith. Calvin’s 1545  
605 *Geneva Catechism* (no. 329) simply asserts that when the sacraments are offered “[m]any do  
606 close the way by their perverseness and so make it worthless for themselves. Thus its fruit  
607 reaches only the faithful. Yet from that nothing of the nature of the sacrament disappears (*nihil*  
608 *sacramenti naturae decedit*).”

609 Finally, the Reformed tradition holds that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are not strictly  
610 speaking the first sacraments that God gave to God’s people. God granted sacraments in the old  
611 dispensation, and the “sacraments of the ancient people were circumcision, and the Paschal  
612 Lamb, which was offered up” (*Second Helvetic Confession* XIX). The Reformed tradition  
613 generally ascribes to these sacraments the same ultimate reality signified as those signified by the  
614 sacraments instituted by Jesus Christ (*Westminster Confession* XXVII.7), for in each case Christ  
615 “is the chief thing and very substance of the sacraments in both” (*Second Helvetic Confession*  
616 XIX). The Reformed tradition argues that there is an ultimate unity of covenant between old and  
617 new. As Calvin put the matter,

618 The covenant with all the patriarchs is so much not different from ours in  
619 substance and reality (*substantia et re*) that it is absolutely one and the same thing  
620 (*Inst.* 2.10.2)

621  
622 This covenant unity exists because the patriarchs “had and knew Christ the mediator,  
623 through whom they were joined (*coniungerentur*) to God and were partakers of his promises”  
624 (*Inst.* 2.10.2). Thus, Calvin rejected “that scholastic dogma (to mention this in passing) which  
625 notes so great a difference between the sacraments of the old and new law, as though the old did  
626 nothing but foreshadow the grace of God, but the latter truly conferred it as a present reality”  
627 (*Inst.* 4.14.23).

628 At the same time, some Reformed confessions also try to distinguish the sacraments that  
629 were given “under the Law” (*Scots Confession* XXI) from those given under the new  
630 dispensation. The *Second Helvetic Confession* asserts that “a great difference” exists between

631 the signs. The new signs are “are more firm and lasting,” “more simple and less laborious,” and  
632 “belong to a more numerous people.” Further, “both the substance and promise” (*et rem et*  
633 *promissionem*) have been “fulfilled or perfected” in Christ, and “a greater abundance of the  
634 Spirit” follows (XIX).

635  
636 3. c. Summary

637  
638 In our respective accounts of sacramentality it is evident that this theological concept  
639 weighs more heavily in the Catholic than in the Reformed tradition. Perhaps this is most clear in  
640 our respective understandings of ecclesiology. As we have seen in the Catholic section, the  
641 notion of the Church as sacrament emerged in theology, in the conciliar documents of the Second  
642 Vatican Council, and has been utilized in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Reformed  
643 theologians have been less apt to appropriate this ecclesiological model. It is interesting that the  
644 following statement appeared in the 1976 Report of the U.S. Presbyterian & Reformed-Roman  
645 Catholic Dialogue, entitled *The Unity We Seek*.

646  
647           ...we see the Church as called to be a sign—a sacrament—  
648           of that unity which God has willed for his creation and  
649           disclosed in Jesus Christ.

650  
651 However at the international level things are quite different.

652  
653 In the second phase (1984-1990) of the Dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church  
654 and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Final Report entitled *Towards a Common*  
655 *Understanding of the Church*, two respective conceptions of the Church were examined: the  
656 Church as “*Creatura Verbi*” for the Reformed tradition and the Church as “Sacrament of Grace”  
657 for Roman Catholics. In their “Questions and Reflections” on these distinct ecclesiologies the  
658 document states what is worth quoting in full.

659  
660           112. We are agreed in recognizing the radical dependence  
661           of the church in receiving the transcendent gift which God  
662           makes to it, and we recognize that gift as the basis of its  
663           activity of service for the salvation of humanity. But we do  
664           not yet understand the nature of this salutary activity in the  
665           same way. The Reformed commonly allege that Catholics  
666           appropriate to the church the role proper to Christ. Roman  
667           Catholics, for their part, commonly accused the Reformed  
668           of holding the church apart from the work of salvation and  
669           of giving up the assurance that Christ is truly present and  
670           acting in his church. Both these views are caricatures, but  
671           they can help to focus attention on genuine underlying  
672           differences of perspective, of which the themes of *creatura*  
673           *verbi* and *sacramentum gratiae* serve as symbols.

674  
675           113. The two conceptions, “the creation of the word” and



676 “sacrament of grace,” can in fact be seen as expressing the  
677 same instrumental reality under different aspects, as  
678 complementary to each other or as two sides of the same  
679 coin. They can also be poles of a creative tension between  
680 our churches. A particular point at which this tension  
681 becomes apparent is reached when it is asked how the  
682 questions of the continuity and order of the church through  
683 the ages appear in light of these two concepts.  
684

685 Although we did not discuss these texts the tension stated often surfaced in our  
686 discussions. We recognize that the comments of the international dialogue penetrate to the heart  
687 of our distinct understandings of sacramentality. It can also be noted that World Council of  
688 Churches 2005 Faith and Order Paper, *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the*  
689 *Way to a Common Statement* was able to affirm that Church is a “Gift of God, a Creation of the  
690 Word and Holy Spirit,” and can even speak of the “Church as a Sign and Instrument of God’s  
691 Intention and Plan for the World.” However, it could not agree on the Church as sacrament,  
692 confining that concept to a box in the text that articulates alternative views. With this in mind  
693 we hope that our text on baptism may be a further stepping stone to a common understanding of  
694 the Church and sacramentality.  
695

#### 696 Section 4: Baptismal rites

##### 697 a. Common early history

699 Just as Roman Catholic and Reformed churches share a common tradition about the  
700 theology of sacrament, so also we have in common the history of baptismal practice and  
701 reflection up until the sixteenth century. Our respect for common biblical and patristic sources  
702 has in recent decades become a central impetus for convergence, if not complete agreement,  
703 relative to the celebration of baptism in our communions. For this reason, it is useful to review  
704 briefly the early history of the church’s baptismal rites, as well as the medieval developments  
705 that preceded our separation.<sup>1</sup>

706 The liturgical form of baptism in the New Testament period is not known with precision.  
707 However, it would seem that Matthew 28:19-20 reflect actual baptismal practice, sanctioned by  
708 the way it is placed on the lips of the Risen Christ. The expressions “baptism in the name of the  
709 Lord Jesus (Acts 2:38; 8:16; 19:5) though at times interpreted as referring to a liturgical formula,  
710 may in fact simply refer to the rite of baptism in the same way that the term “the breaking of the  
711 bread” is used to refer to the Eucharist. Some suggestions of early Christian baptismal practice  
712 are attested in the Didache (9:5) which is possibly as early as 60 C.E., as an indication of how  
713 liturgical praxis would emerge from its home in apostolic Judaism.

714 Though the New Testament records few details about baptismal practice in the earliest  
715 days of Christianity, it is clear that new converts to Christianity were initiated into Christ and the  
716 church by baptism, a ritual washing that was eventually connected with the command of Jesus  
717 himself (Matt. 28:19-20). Baptism seems, at first, to have been modeled on the actions of John  
718 the Baptist (cf. Jn.1.31, 33 and Acts 1.22) which symbolized repentance or *teshuvah*, and bore  
719 some continuity with either the ritual washing or *mikvah* of second temple Judaism, Jewish  
720 proselyte baptism as used from at least the first century B.C.E., or the more isolationist Essene-

721 style baptism which was eschatological in character (cf. *Serekh ha-Yahad* or “Community Rule  
722 Scroll”). However, it was John himself who would presage the baptism of Jesus by  
723 distinguishing his own as merely a “water” baptism versus the “spirit” or “fire” baptism to be  
724 given by the promised one (Mt. 3.11 and Lk.3.16; Jn.1.33). Jesus would then use the term  
725 “baptism” to describe either a sharing in his sufferings for those who would follow him (cf. Mt.  
726 20.22-23 and Mk. 10.38) or as a name for his own rite of washing with water, but offered by his  
727 disciples (Jn.4.1-2) at first only to Jews. Later, the apostles would adapt John’s practices to the  
728 injunctions of Jesus to baptize gentiles as well (cf. Matt. 28. 19-20), with Paul then developing  
729 the term typologically by contrasting the Israelites’ “baptism into Moses” (1 Cor. 10.2) over and  
730 against baptism into Christ Jesus. In sum, New Testament accounts provide several controlling  
731 images for baptism, with two of these particularly important in the patristic era, only to re-  
732 emerge as central themes in recent reforms of baptism: (1) baptism as new birth through water  
733 and the Spirit (John 3) and (2) baptism as union with Christ in his death and resurrection  
734 (Romans 6).

735 New Testament texts are ambiguous about whether baptism was extended only to adults,  
736 or may have included children, as well. When Paul and others are said to have baptized an entire  
737 “household” (*oikos*), there is no doubt that it included men and women, married and widowed,  
738 and those who were free (cf. 1 Cor.1.16; Acts 16.15;11.14;16.31). But did it also embrace slaves  
739 and children ? Early Church figures such as Tertullian (c.160-c.240 C.E.) (cf. *De spect.* 4; *De*  
740 *corona mulites* 3; *De anima* 35) speak warmly of the baptism of children, but there seems to be  
741 no clear answer to the question of a universal understanding about the matter in the immediately  
742 sub-apostolic period. The probability of other mixed practices in the performance of baptism are  
743 also suggested in the New Testament. While it is clear, for example, that the Lord’s injunction at  
744 Mt. 28. 19-20 involves a declarative formula for baptism, it is equally clear in Acts. 2.38, 8.16,  
745 10.48 and 19.5 that “baptism in the name of the Lord Jesus” was commonplace in many early  
746 Jewish-Christian communities<sup>11</sup>. The same practice is found in the baptismal sections of the  
747 *Didache* 9.5 (c. 60 C.E.), where Christian praxis would emerge slowly from its home in apostolic  
748 Judaism.

749 In the second and third centuries, sources reveal varying patterns of development in  
750 baptismal practices. Justin Martyr’s (100-165 C.E.) account of baptism in Rome, found in his  
751 *First Apology* (61, 65), describes a water baptism whose language is built around Eastern  
752 Christian notions of illumination.

753 In Syria (*Didascalia apostolorum*,9.12) (c.250 C.E.?), there was strong emphasis on pre-  
754 baptismal anointing associated with the assimilation of the baptized into the royal and priestly  
755 offices of Christ. The baptism itself was accompanied by the Trinitarian formula and led directly  
756 to Eucharist. In North Africa, Tertullian (c.160-c.240 C.E.) described a process that included  
757 vigils and fasts, renunciation of Satan, threefold creedal profession of faith at baptism, post-  
758 baptismal anointing, prayer with laying on of hands associated with the gift of the Spirit, and  
759 participation in the eucharist (see *De spect.* 4; *De corona mulites* 3; *De anima* 35) . The  
760 contested *Apostolic Tradition*, 21 (attributed to Hippolytus of Rome, ca. 215 C.E.) describes  
761 three years of catechesis, including prayer, fasting, and exorcism, and a formal rite of admission  
762 to the catechumenate accompanied by careful interrogation about lifestyle, all leading up to  
763 baptism at a vigil (perhaps the Easter Vigil). This baptismal rite included renunciation of Satan,

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<sup>11</sup> Though this term may have been the common expression for a fuller ritual expression of baptism (cf. *fractio panis*).

764 full body anointing with the “oil of exorcism (or: oil of the catechumens),” threefold creedal  
765 questioning accompanying baptismal immersions, post-baptismal anointing with the “oil of  
766 thanksgiving”, entrance into the assembly at which the bishop offered the laying on of hands,  
767 with prayer, and yet another anointing, and finally, participation in the eucharist (cf. the 5<sup>th</sup>  
768 century Syrian *Canons of Hippolytus*, 19.133). The timing of baptism also differed, some Eastern  
769 sources suggesting January 6 as the preferred date, others forty days after January 6 (following a  
770 period of fasting), and some Western sources choosing Easter or Pentecost.

771 Baptismal practices underwent significant change in the fourth century, following  
772 Constantine’s rise to power and legitimating of Christianity as the legal religion of the empire.  
773 Again, there are differences between Eastern and Western baptismal practices. In the East,  
774 according to the writings of Cyril of Jerusalem (fl. 350-387 C.E.) (*Mystagogical Catechesis*,  
775 1.2;2.3;1.9;2.2;3.1 and 5.1); John Chrysostom (fl. 349-407 C.E.) (*Hom. De bap.* II, 11, 12, 18,  
776 21, 22, 24, 25-27), and Theodore of Mopsuestia (fl. 350-428 C.E.) (*Hom.de bap.*,II, III)  
777 baptismal practice generally included the following elements:

- 778 • Easter baptism, and the forty day season of Lent for pre-baptismal catechesis on  
779 scripture, Christian life, and the creed for those preparing for baptism
- 780 • “Scrutinies” (examination of baptismal candidates for evidence of sin and evil  
781 remaining in their lives) and daily exorcisms during this period of final  
782 catechesis
- 783 • Development of renunciation and profession of faith by the candidates
- 784 • Ceremonial presentation (*traditio*) and recitation (*redditio*) of the Creed by the  
785 candidates
- 786 • Reinterpretation of the pre-baptismal anointing as exorcism, purification, and/or  
787 preparation for combat with Satan
- 788 • Use of Romans 6 as basis for baptism as entrance into the tomb with Christ,  
789 signified by the passive formula “N. is baptized . . .”
- 790 • Post-baptismal anointing associated with the gift and seal of the Holy Spirit
- 791 • Mystagogical catechesis (preaching that expounds on the mysteries which the  
792 newly baptized have experienced at baptism) during Easter week

793  
794 Of course, pre-baptismal rites were widely used, but varied from one local church to another, as  
795 the homilies of the Fathers attest (e.g., compare the rites and catechesis for catechumens as  
796 described by Quodvultdeus [c. 450] in his *de Symbolo*, 1,2,3 with those of Leo the Great [d.446]  
797 *Homilia* 16.6). At this point, there was no uniform practice in the West regarding a fixed  
798 baptismal “formula”, but instead, there is frequent use of three creedal questions and their  
799 responses at the moment of baptism. The correspondence between the use of the invocation and  
800 the styles of baptismal immersions was even more varied (cf. de Puniet, *Baptême* in *Dictionnaire*  
801 *d’Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie* (Paris, 1910) 2: col. 305-306).

802  
803 This developed pattern did not survive much beyond the fourth century in either East or  
804 West. Once the vast majority of adults in the Roman Empire were baptized as Christians (after  
805 the early medieval period), there was no longer a need for an extended period of pre-baptismal  
806 catechesis. In addition, the teachings of Augustine (354-430 C.E.) strongly shaped baptismal  
807 theology and practice in the West in two ways: first, his argument for infant baptism based on the  
808 need to be cleansed of original sin led to an emphasis on early infant baptism as the norm (*De*

809 *peccatorum merities er remissione et de baptismo parvulorum* and *De spiritu et littera*) Second,  
810 his argument with the Donatists over the practice of rebaptism led to a focus on the sacramental  
811 elements (water, wine, bread) and their objective validity apart from the moral character of the  
812 one administering them (*Contra epistulam Parmeniani*, PL 43) As a result, medieval Western  
813 baptismal practice included baptizing infants as soon as possible, the permission for anyone to  
814 baptize (not only a priest), and a focus on the validity of the sacrament rather than the extended  
815 drama of the fourth century rites.

816 The baptismal rite for infants in the medieval era became in essence a compressed  
817 version of the rite for adults. Godparents or ministers responded to the questions on behalf of the  
818 children who could not do so themselves. The rituals of handing over the creed and the Lord's  
819 Prayer eventually were eliminated, while other elements of the fourth century rites (admission to  
820 the catechumenate, exorcisms, administration of salt and the clothing with the white garment)  
821 remained, but adapted for use with an infant. Other elements of the baptismal rites were  
822 reinterpreted. The timing of baptism also shifted; though Easter and Pentecost had been the  
823 preferred occasions for baptism in the fourth century, the emphasis on baptizing infants as soon  
824 as possible led to the practice of administering baptism within a few days of an infant's birth, no  
825 matter the season of the year. Gregory the Great (540-604 C.E.) even allows for a single  
826 immersion of adult or child in water, accompanied by the Trinitarian formula (*Epist.* 1.43). By the  
827 eighth century, the *Missale Gothicum*, [260] called for the use of a declarative baptismal  
828 formula, taken from Mt. 28.19-20, marking a definitive end to the previous question and answer  
829 style of the Latin fathers.

830 A final significant development in baptismal rites in the West was the separation of three  
831 liturgical acts: baptism, the anointing that came to be known as confirmation, and first  
832 communion. Once the post-baptismal anointing became a sacrament reserved for the bishop, it  
833 was commonly celebrated at a time separated—sometimes by several years—from the water  
834 baptism. This rite of confirmation was interpreted differently by writers in the medieval period,  
835 but gradually came to be associated with the giving of the Holy Spirit. Though the rite of  
836 confirmation was celebrated as a separate sacrament, however, priests continued to anoint the  
837 baptized with chrism immediately following water baptism, symbolizing participation in the  
838 royal and priestly anointing of Christ. The timing of first communion varied considerably: in the  
839 early medieval period it was usually given at the time of baptism, but in the eleventh century first  
840 communion was usually postponed until age seven or later, because of increasing reverence for  
841 the sacramental species. In 1281, the Archbishop of Canterbury, John Peckham, insisted that no  
842 one should come to communion until they had been confirmed, while in Spain and southern Gaul  
843 for a time the unity of the three rites of initiation was preserved in their original order (see  
844 *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae II: Constiutiones Peckham*, p. 54).

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

847

Sarum Rite of Baptism (1543)
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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 following 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

848

#### 849 **4. b. Historical Developments: The Reformation**

850

851 In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Protestant reformers sought to reform the church according to scripture  
852 and with respectful attention to the early church sources they had available at the time. In light  
853 of these sources, they retained the central practice of baptism with water in the triune name of  
854 God, but amended the medieval baptismal rites in the following major ways:

- 855 • They emphasized that the *Word of God* engrafts believers into the body of  
856 Christ. Thus baptism was understood as a visible form of that Word, conveying  
857 and communicating the grace of God only as it is administered in conjunction  
858 with the proclamation of the Word.<sup>ii</sup> There could be no baptism unless there  
859 was also proclamation of the Word. Also, because of their emphasis on the  
860 power of the Word of God, reformers emphasized the need to administer the  
861 sacrament of baptism, as all of the rites of the church, in the vernacular. That  
862 which was not understood could not be properly received and thus could not be  
863 efficacious.
- 864 • They focused attention on the *water* as the primary and only essential symbolic  
865 element. Thus they eliminated elements of the rite that were deemed non-  
866 essential and non-scriptural: elements such as oil, salt, spittle, and candles.  
867 Related to this was their concern to clarify that baptism itself is a sign and  
868 promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.<sup>iii</sup>
- 869 • They focused attention on the *ecclesial dimension* of the sacrament. Thus they  
870 emphasized the importance of baptizing in the context of the gathered  
871 community, and strongly resisted the practice of private baptism.<sup>iv</sup> Because  
872 Reformed Protestants denied that baptism was necessary for salvation,  
873 “emergency baptisms” were eliminated, and only ordained ministers were  
874 permitted to administer baptism, within the body of the church.
- 875 • They focused attention on the *connection between baptism and nurture* in  
876 Christian faith. As a result of this, many reformers were concerned to choose  
877 appropriate godparents for infants to be baptized, and charging them with  
878 helping to raise the baptized child in the faith, though at other times the parents  
879 themselves were admonished to raise the child in the faith. Some Reformed  
880 rites also include admonitions to the congregation to assist in Christian nurture.

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

889 Though Martin Luther is not strictly speaking a part of the Reformed Protestant family,  
890 his reforms clearly influenced the liturgical developments in the Reformed tradition. In his  
891 baptismal liturgies, we can see increasing focus on the water as the central element in baptism, as  
892 well as emphasis on the Word in connection with the rite. His first vernacular reformed rite of  
893 baptism retained much of the medieval baptismal rite of Magdeburg, which was widely used in  
894 his time, though in his “epilogue” he made it clear that elements such as “breathing under the  
895 eyes, signing with the cross, placing salt in the mouth, putting spittle and clay on the ears and  
896 nose” were not central to baptism (First *Taufbüchlein*, 1523). In his second *Taufbüchlein* (1526),  
897 Luther trimmed many more elements of the medieval rite, focusing even more strongly on the  
898 water.<sup>v</sup> His interest in the central symbol of water can also be seen in his “Flood Prayer,” in  
899 which the flood and exodus are interpreted as types of baptism. This liturgical element became

900 commonplace in many Reformed liturgies that followed. In addition to the focus on water,  
901 Luther regarded the Word as central to baptism, since it constituted God’s promise to which the  
902 sign of water was attached. Therefore, the most important liturgical elements in his view were  
903 the word and the flood prayer. Though Luther retained some patristic elements (e.g., exorcism)  
904 that later Reformed leaders rejected, his emphasis on the Word and the symbol of water  
905 influenced the development of later Reformed baptismal services.

906 Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich produced an order for baptism in 1525 that purported to remove  
907 “all the additions, which have no foundation in the word of God.”<sup>vi</sup> Zwingli eliminated  
908 cleansing, exorcism, renunciation, and even profession of faith, all of which had been present in  
909 Luther’s second baptismal rite. Here too we can see the focus on water as the central symbol of  
910 baptism, as well as the Word as both divine promise and norm for liturgical reform. His was a  
911 very simple service that clarifies the centrality of faith to the understanding of baptism and offers  
912 a clear scriptural warrant for infant baptism, born out of Zwingli’s own struggle with the  
913 Anabaptists. In the same year in Strassburg, Martin Bucer published his revised baptismal rite,  
914 which likewise focuses the prayer on the gift of faith and new life in Christ.<sup>vii</sup> In Bucer’s rite we  
915 also see a feature that became important in many later Reformed baptismal services: the  
916 admonition or charge to families and/or godparents to raise the child in the faith. Both of these  
917 features point to the common Reformed concern to link baptism with ongoing nurture in  
918 Christian faith.

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

930 John Knox patterned his baptismal service after Calvin’s, including the opening address  
931 and the charge to godparents. In 1556 he produced the “Forme of Prayers” for his Scottish  
932 congregation in Geneva.<sup>ix</sup> The language of the post-baptismal prayer, original with Knox, was  
933 echoed in the 1645 Westminster Directory and in later generations of Reformed baptismal  
934 services in this stream of the Reformed tradition.

935 In 1566, the Reformed Church in Holland adopted a baptismal liturgy based on the  
936 baptismal rite used in Heidelberg in the early 1560s.<sup>x</sup> Like the other Reformed 16<sup>th</sup> century  
937 liturgies, it included a strong emphasis on teaching, together with parental promises to nurture  
938 the child in the faith, followed by baptism and prayer of thanksgiving. This liturgy was later  
939 included in the *Liturgy* adopted at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). Versions of this baptismal  
940 service were used by both streams of the Dutch-American Reformed church (both RCA and  
941 CRC) until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and continues to be used in some Christian Reformed  
942 Churches in English translation.

943  
944 Though these 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformed orders of baptism show variation in their language

945 and ordering of elements, they share the common concerns stated earlier: attention to the Word  
946 (particularly clear in explicit scriptural warrant for liturgical practice); emphasis on the water as  
947 central symbol and sign of God’s grace; concern to locate baptism in the church in connection  
948 with public worship; and emphasis on the connection of baptism and ongoing nurture of the faith  
949 (as illustrated by admonitions to parents and/or godparents). We also see through the 16<sup>th</sup>  
950 century a growth in exhortation/instruction as a part of the baptismal service in Reformed  
951 congregations. Though baptismal instruction may well have been intended by Zwingli and  
952 Bucer, this element is firmly ensconced as a part of the baptismal service by the time we reach  
953 Calvin, Knox, and the Heidelberg-Dutch traditions. These four themes that shaped reform of  
954 rites in the 16<sup>th</sup> century continue to exercise major influence in Reformed rites up to the present.  
955

#### 956 **4. c. Historical developments: Roman Catholic**

957  
958 The Council of Trent (1545-1563) left the actual revision of the rites of the sacraments to  
959 the judgment of the Pope and his curia as the agents of reform (see Annibale Bugnini, *The*  
960 *Reform of the Liturgy* [Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990] 5). It would take the major effort  
961 of Pius V (1504-1572) and Paul V (1552-1621) to help realize the required changes. Session 7  
962 of that council addressed fourteen principal concerns about baptism which were intended to  
963 answer the claims of some reformers who had posed new understandings about long-held  
964 baptismal belief. These same concerns would influence the shape of baptismal rites only  
965 gradually, if at all, during the fifty year period following the Council.

966 Among the concerns which touched on the rite of baptism itself was the necessity for the  
967 use of water in baptism, rather than the acceptance of a kind of “baptism of the spirit” in its place  
968 (Sess.7:c.2). In addition, the Council re-affirmed that baptism may be validly administered by  
969 anyone, including heretics, as long as they held “the intention of doing what the church does”  
970 (*cum intentione faciendi, quod facit ecclesia*) in baptism (Sess.7:c.4). The Council denied that  
971 the only appropriate age for baptism is adulthood (Sess.7:cc.12; cf. cc.13 and 14). Lastly, Trent  
972 clearly taught that children who are baptized need not be re-baptized when they reach the ability  
973 to profess their own faith, since the Church professed faith on their behalf at their baptisms  
974 (Sess.7:c.13).

975 Implicit in several of the canons from the Council of Trent (Sess. 7:cc. 12, 13, 14, 14) is  
976 an argument about whether baptism is efficacious for those not able to freely profess their own  
977 faith, but instead have it professed by others on their behalf. This practice had been rejected  
978 vigorously by the Anabaptists, but defended as authentically Christian by John Calvin in 1536  
979 (*Institutes* 4.16); in Martin Luther’s *Sermon on the Third Sunday after the Epiphany* of 1525 and  
980 in Martin Bucer’s *Grund und Ursach* of 1521. It is to be noted, however, that the Reformed  
981 understanding of paedobaptism and its place within the believing community did not correspond  
982 with that of Roman teaching, despite the appearance of common ritual elements used by both  
983 churches.

984 Differences on paedobaptism between the Roman Catholic and Reformed churches of  
985 the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries appear to lie more centrally in the question of the rite as a  
986 sign and seal of God’s promise of grace. In the Reformed tradition, infant baptism is not essential  
987 to salvation, since it can not bring about the assent of the individual to the action of God, i.e., it  
988 can not produce an act of faith. What is more, within Reformed theology, grace is presumed to  
989 be available to every child of a believing Christian, by virtue of being born into the covenant.



990 Roman Catholic belief, in contrast, saw paedobaptism as the only path for the salvation for a  
991 child, who by definition is completely dependent upon the Church (as represented through  
992 parents and godparents) but which professes faith on the infant's behalf. In Catholic teaching,  
993 the rite of baptism accomplishes *ex opere operato* what it signifies, because of the intention to do  
994 what the churches does in obedience to Christ.

995 It is noteworthy that while the Council of Trent addressed issues of grace and its effects  
996 on a personal profession of faith (Session 6, *Decree on Justification*, chapter 5; canon 3; Session  
997 6, chapter 16), none of the canons relative to the shape of baptism proper reflect this discussion.  
998 In effect, it appears that the reform of the rites of baptism as directed by the Council and  
999 implemented by successive popes proceeded without reference to this issue in its unresolved  
1000 state with the Reformed churches. Instead, the entire controversy, with its immense  
1001 implications, is left outside of the Roman Catholic sacramental reform.

1002 The result was predictable: a slow but steady articulation of baptism in the Reformed  
1003 churches generated a change of shape in their baptismal rites, while little perceptible change  
1004 occurred in the Roman Rite, which maintained its distance from the Reformed churches'  
1005 questions. Even when the Reformation as a whole gained momentum throughout Europe, the  
1006 Catholic Reform appeared to insulate its sacramental reforms from the influence of the debates  
1007 on covenant theology, free will and prevenient grace, so crucial to subsequent liturgical  
1008 development in the Reformed Churches.

1009 As the accompanying "Comparative Chart on the Shape of Roman Catholic Baptismal  
1010 Rites Between 1543 and 1614" demonstrates, local baptismal rites such as found in England  
1011 (Sarum Rite) in 1543, changed only slightly between the time of the Reformation and the  
1012 implementation of the sacramental reforms introduced by the Council of Trent. The effort of  
1013 both of the reforming popes who followed Trent – Pius V, pope from 1566 to 1572, and Paul V,  
1014 pope from 1605 to 1621 -- was to strengthen Catholic rites against doctrinal error and to bring  
1015 them gradually into greater uniformity with Roman practice. As a result, the overall effect of the  
1016 Council's changes on the Sarum rite was minimal. Ironically, the Reformation of the Church of  
1017 England would use this same Sarum Rite as the basis of many of its own liturgies, as found, for  
1018 example, in the baptismal ceremony included in the first edition of the Book of Common Prayer  
1019 (1549).

1020 **4. d. Comparative Chart on the Shape of**  
1021 **Roman Catholic Baptismal Rites**  
1022 **Between 1543 and 1614**  
1023

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 following 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

- O. Recitation of Our Father, Hail Mary and Creed by godparents
- P. Litany of the Saints
- Q. Blessing of water in the font
- R. Mixing of oil and chrism with baptismal water
- S. Renunciation of Satan by godparents
- T. Anointing with oil of catechumens
  
- U. Baptismal promises taken by godparents
- V. Baptism
- W. Anointing with chrism
- X. Clothing with white garment
- Y. Presentation of lighted candle

*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

<p>Z. Confirmation, if a bishop is present</p> <p>AA. Giving of holy communion, if baptizand is at least seven years of age</p> <p>BB. Reading of the Gospel of Mark 9.17-29; reading of prologue of the Gospel of John 1.1-14.</p>	<p>D. Clothing with white garment</p> <p>E. Lighting of baptismal candle</p>
<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>

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**4. e. Development of baptismal rites after the Reformation:**  
**i. Reformed**

Narrating the development of baptismal rites in the Reformed tradition from the sixteenth century to the present presents a particular 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 (for purposes of this document, we will not recount the history of Reformed churches in other parts of the world). Second, baptismal rites have held different authority in different Reformed churches; e.g. the Dutch Reformed churches have tended to adopt official liturgies which are required for use, while churches stemming from the Westminster Directory tradition have tended to adopt official guidelines for liturgical practice that permit significant flexibility in the details. For these reasons, what follows is not intended to be comprehensive, but suggestive of the general trajectories of development in baptismal practice in Reformed churches during this period.

As noted earlier, baptismal practice in the Dutch Reformed churches remained relatively stable from 1566 until the liturgical revisions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For the Reformed churches in North America that trace their roots to Great Britain, the most significant liturgical development in the 17<sup>th</sup> century was in England with the introduction of the Westminster Directory for Worship.

The Westminster Directory for Worship (1645) begins its section on baptism with a statement that it is not to be unnecessarily delayed nor administered in private, but 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>xi</sup> The pattern is similar to the order of baptism in Genevan liturgy, with 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 only implicit in 16<sup>th</sup> century rites. According to Stan Hall, “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>xii</sup> Another feature of this rite that lingered until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century is the insistence that the minister was to baptize without any additional ceremony (e.g., no consignation<sup>12</sup>). This Westminster form, revised slightly, prevailed in Presbyterian churches in the U.S. until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>12</sup> Consignation means:

1057 The scriptural warrant, already present in the 16<sup>th</sup> century rites, exemplifies the Reformed  
1058 concern for the *centrality of the Word* in connection with the sacrament. The stipulation that  
1059 baptism is to be done “without additional ceremony” echoes the focus on *water* as the primary  
1060 symbolic element, signifying both God’s grace of forgiveness and the giving of the Holy Spirit.  
1061 The admonition of the congregation signals the *ecclesial setting* so important to Reformed  
1062 baptismal understanding, and the exhortation to parents embodies the *link between baptism and*  
1063 *ongoing nurture* in the faith. Thus all of the major themes that drove the 16<sup>th</sup> century reform  
1064 continued to shape baptismal practice in the Westminster Directory, even though there was a  
1065 move away from authorized liturgies and toward increased local freedom in liturgical practice.

1066 In 1788, the newly formed Presbyterian Church in the United States adopted a revised  
1067 version of the Westminster Directory for Worship.<sup>xiii</sup> This version introduced two changes to the  
1068 1645 text. First, the American Directory added a chapter on integrating baptized children and  
1069 previously unbaptized persons into the communion of the church. This shows new attention to  
1070 the connection between baptism, catechesis, and the Lord’s Supper, as well as growing  
1071 awareness of the possibility of adults presenting themselves for baptism. Previously unbaptized  
1072 persons were to be accepted following baptism and public profession of faith. Second, the  
1073 American version removed the detailed descriptions of prayers which had been in 1645 version,  
1074 so the description of the rite (though not necessarily the rite itself) was briefer than in the  
1075 original.

1076 On the American frontier, baptism came to be associated with evangelical conversion,  
1077 especially during the second Great Awakening. American Reformed churches reacted to this  
1078 movement in various ways. Some (like New England Congregationalist Horace Bushnell in his  
1079 treatise *Christian Nurture*) strengthened their defense of infant baptism, arguing that faith is best  
1080 nurtured in the context of families rather than expecting sudden conversion. Bushnell and others  
1081 emphasized the connection between *baptism and ongoing nurture*, a theme that had been  
1082 prominent in Reformed baptismal practice since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. However, with more adults  
1083 coming for baptism who had not been baptized as infants, Reformed churches were also  
1084 compelled to address the practice of adult baptism. This growing interest can be seen in several  
1085 19<sup>th</sup> century Reformed liturgical publications (including Charles Shields’ 1864 republication of  
1086 the 1661 Savoy Liturgy “in agreement with the Directory for Public Worship,”<sup>xiv</sup> the 1868  
1087 Directory of the United Presbyterian Church of North America,<sup>xv</sup> and the 1894 PCUS Directory  
1088 for Worship<sup>xvi</sup>).

1089 In addition, the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw increased interest in set forms for worship, perhaps in  
1090 response to freedom of the revival tradition and the minimalism of the 1788 Presbyterian  
1091 Directory. This movement is evident in the introduction of set baptismal forms in various  
1092 revisions of the Directory for Worship (the 1894 PCUS Directory<sup>xvii</sup> and the PCUSA  
1093 Directory<sup>xviii</sup>), and also in the Mercersburg movement in the German Reformed church, a  
1094 predecessor tradition of the United Church of Christ. This movement, centered in the Reformed  
1095 seminary at Mercersburg, Pennsylvania, was led particularly by theologian John Williamson  
1096 Nevin. Though it did not have a broad effect on German Reformed church practice at the time,  
1097 Mercersburg represented a desire to claim a sacramental theology and practice more deeply  
1098 informed by both early and Reformation church sources. Furthermore, in the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup>  
1099 century, the Mercersburg movement re-emerged as a significant influence on many Reformed  
1100 churches in this dialogue seeking to recover a deeper appreciation of liturgical forms and of the  
1101 centrality of the sacraments.<sup>xix</sup>

1102 Another concern that continued in some Reformed churches was the connection of prayer  
1103 with the water of baptism. While the 1645 Westminster Directory had said that prayer “was to be  
1104 joined with the word of institution, for sanctifying the water to this spiritual use,” no mention of  
1105 water appeared in Presbyterian Directories until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, out of concern for too high  
1106 a regard for the efficacy of the sign itself.<sup>xx</sup>

1107 Reformed baptismal practices in the 19<sup>th</sup> century thus showed general continuity with  
1108 practices of prior centuries, with emerging attention to adult baptism, increased usage of set  
1109 liturgical forms in a tradition that did not require them, and some renewed attention to the water  
1110 itself in the prayer at baptism.

1111 In the early twentieth century, both major streams of the Dutch-American Reformed  
1112 tradition revised their baptismal rites, but these did not significantly change the existing practices  
1113 of baptism. The Reformed Church in America (RCA) approved a new abridged form for  
1114 baptism in 1906, though the older unabridged form also continued to be printed.<sup>xxi</sup> This follows  
1115 closely the 1566 order, though the prayer in this revised version now precedes the instruction. In  
1116 1912, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) translated the 1566 baptismal order into English,  
1117 but continued to use that same liturgy until the 1960s.

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#### 1119 **4. e. Development of baptismal rites after the Reformation:**

##### 1120 **ii. Roman Catholic**

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1122 As the centuries following Trent drew the Catholic Church into the modern period, her  
1123 baptismal liturgy remained fixed in form through the final revisions made by Paul V in the  
1124 *Rituale Romanum* of 1614. Even as the Second Vatican Council approached its opening days in  
1125 1962, there was little public discussion of the need for the reform of baptism in particular, though  
1126 other sacraments such as Eucharist had been widely considered from this point of view (see  
1127 Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy* [Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990] 5-13).  
1128 This, despite work done locally in the church in France, highlighting the need to revive a more  
1129 meaningful catechumenate drawn from the example of adult believership in the early church (see  
1130 e.g., Alois Stenzel, *Die Taufe: eine genetische Erklärung der Tauf liturgie* [Verlag Felizian  
1131 Rauch, Innsbruck, 1958] or Burhard Neunheuser, *Baptism and Confirmation*, trans. J.J. Hughes  
1132 [Herder and Herder, New York 1964]).

1133 Meanwhile in the Reformed Churches, a highly influential discussion on baptism, its  
1134 form and theology had emerged between theologians such as Karl Barth (*The Teaching of the  
1135 Church Regarding Baptism*, trans. Ernst A. Payne [London, SCM Press, 1948]) and Oscar  
1136 Cullmann (*Baptism in the New Testament*, trans. J.K.S. Reid [London: SCM Press, 1950]). The  
1137 influence of this discussion can be seen especially on baptismal documents in Presbyterian  
1138 churches in the 1970s. However, the work of these two giants would not influence the  
1139 Concilium reformers, first assembled in 1965, who were yet several years away from issuing a  
1140 revised order of infant baptism in 1969. Instead, Roman Catholic reform concentrated on the  
1141 pastoral need for an adult catechumenate based on a new reading of relevant biblical and patristic  
1142 sources, while the Reformed Church explored further the larger question of baptism’s meaning in  
1143 connection with the act of adult faith.

1144 On the eve of the Second Vatican Council, then, both communities were ready to  
1145 inaugurate a process of recovering meaning from ancient sources, hoping thereby to recover a  
1146 more authentic practice and understanding of baptism. Both communities focused their attention

1147 on biblical and patristic texts and rites as a point of departure for ritual reforms. As it turned out,  
1148 however, both Churches were poised to look at the same sources but in answer to different  
1149 questions, with different points of departure, theological hermeneutics and methods. As a result,  
1150 the emergence of baptismal rites which share many common features in both communities,  
1151 nonetheless appear to reflect differing theological understandings, thus raising the question of the  
1152 extent to which theological divergences need further exploration.

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#### 1155 **4 f. 20<sup>th</sup> century convergence in scholarship and ritual structures:**

##### 1156 **i. Reformed**

1157

1158 In 1957, two streams of the Reformed church family, the Congregational Christian  
1159 Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church, came together to form the United Church  
1160 of Christ (UCC). This new church, bringing together both New England Congregationalism with  
1161 its Puritan heritage and German Reformed Protestantism with its Pietist heritage, has been  
1162 ecumenically oriented from the beginning. Though congregations are free to shape liturgical  
1163 forms at the local level, the UCC as a denomination has attended closely to the ecumenical  
1164 biblical and historical scholarship that led to the liturgical renewal movement of the 1960s and  
1165 1970s. This ecumenical commitment significantly shaped the order of baptism found in the 1986  
1166 *Book of Worship*. In fact, the Order of Baptism “rests significantly on an ecumenical liturgical  
1167 consensus found in the 1982 *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (BEM) document more than on  
1168 any one former tradition.”<sup>xxii</sup> Though not required for use, this 1986 liturgical resource reflects  
1169 Reformed baptismal themes that have been central since the 16<sup>th</sup> century: connection of baptism  
1170 with proclamation of the Word; focus on water as the central symbol of baptism<sup>xxiii</sup>; ecclesial  
1171 setting of baptism; and connection of baptism with ongoing nurture, signified by congregational  
1172 promises and the option of including baptismal sponsors in the service.

1173 In the 1960s, both the CRCNA and the RCA moved to revise their rites more  
1174 substantially than they had done ever before. The RCA in 1968 adopted revised rites after  
1175 several years of drafting and evaluation of provisional orders.<sup>xxiv</sup> The CRC, a few years later in  
1176 1976, adopted a similar revised order.<sup>xxv</sup> Both revised orders reflect similar concerns: to state  
1177 more clearly the biblical institution for baptism, to present more clearly the covenantal basis for  
1178 baptism, and to make more explicit the congregation’s responsibility to nurture baptized  
1179 children.<sup>xxvi</sup>

1180 Though the RCA published another alternate order for baptism in *Worship the Lord* in  
1181 1987, the next major revision of the baptismal forms came in 1994, for both the RCA and the  
1182 CRC. It is significant that in both cases, there is a single form or outline provided, which can be  
1183 used for either infant or adult baptism. There are no longer two separate rites.<sup>xxvii</sup> This is  
1184 particularly striking, since the Roman Catholic revisions of this era went in the opposite  
1185 direction, clarifying two different orders for infant and adult baptism. The CRC form is  
1186 explicitly intended to be more flexible, permitting local adaptation. Both of these recent  
1187 baptismal orders reflect awareness of the ecumenical liturgical movement, with greater attention  
1188 to the symbolic value of water and inclusion of ancient elements such as renunciations,  
1189 affirmations, and a prayer of thanksgiving over the water. At the same time, these new rites  
1190 show continuing Reformed sensibilities in their opening words of institution, their emphasis on  
1191 covenant, and the inclusion of promises by both parents/baptizands and congregation to nurture

1192 the baptized in the faith. This theme of baptismal nurture has been present in Reformed  
1193 baptismal rites since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and has only gotten stronger in recent years.

1194 In the Presbyterian stream of North American Reformed churches, there have been two  
1195 interwoven liturgical developments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: revisions to the Directory for Worship,  
1196 the constitutional document governing worship in Presbyterian churches, and revisions to the  
1197 Book of Common Worship, a liturgical resource recommended but not required for use in  
1198 Presbyterian churches. These two documents have not always developed in tandem, but by the  
1199 end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they came to express common understanding of the theology and the  
1200 practice of baptism.

1201 In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the official Directory for Worship in the major  
1202 Presbyterian denominations described a baptismal theology and practice nearly identical to the  
1203 Westminster Directory of 1645, as abbreviated in America in 1788. Even as this Directory  
1204 pattern remained in place, liturgical resources approved by the church began to appear for the  
1205 first time in the Book of Common Worship (hereafter BCW) of 1906, with revisions in 1932 and  
1206 1946. Over the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, baptismal rites in the BCW showed increased  
1207 involvement of the congregation, increased attention to congregational nurture of the baptized,  
1208 increased attention to the Christological basis of baptism, and a decrease in instruction and  
1209 exhortation, with corresponding expansion of the prayer before baptism. These shifts in  
1210 baptismal patterns in the BCW were eventually reflected in the Directory for Worship as well.

1211 During the 1960s and 1970s, revisions to both Directory and worship resources continued  
1212 to show the effects of ecumenical liturgical scholarship, particularly the movement toward a  
1213 single baptismal service suitable, with modification, for both adults and infants, and the move (in  
1214 1971) to link baptism more closely to admission to the table. In 1970, the *Worshipbook* provided  
1215 a single baptismal service that required modification to adapt it for infants. In 1971, a revision of  
1216 the UPCUSA Directory introduced a major change, affirming that baptism alone admits one to  
1217 the Lord's Supper (no longer requiring public profession of faith at "confirmation"). Both of  
1218 these moves reflect ecumenical liturgical scholarship of the time, the first being an effort to make  
1219 baptism more clearly a single rite, whether for adults or infants, and the second an effort to  
1220 reflect the early church connection of baptism with celebration of the Lord's Supper.

1221 A substantial 1973 revision to the UPCUSA Directory claimed that "baptism marks a  
1222 new beginning of participation in Christ's ministry for all people." The theological foundation  
1223 for baptism was now Jesus' own baptism (rather than the covenant of God or  
1224 forgiveness/cleansing). This shift of emphasis has continued into current Directory statements  
1225 on baptism. The doctrinal portion of the chapter on baptism, however, introduced a more  
1226 dramatic and controversial change. It suggested "two equally appropriate occasions for  
1227 baptism—either at infancy, or in later years at the emergence of personal faith." This reflects the  
1228 influence of Barth's theology in *The Teaching of the Church Regarding Baptism* (1965), in  
1229 which he argued that baptism of mature Christians reflects more clearly the meaning of baptism  
1230 than does baptism of infants. Here for the first time in U.S. Reformed churches, "believer  
1231 baptism" was recognized as a possibility for persons raised within the church. This language  
1232 remained for only a few years in the Directory, but reveals much ferment in baptismal reflection  
1233 and practice among Presbyterian churches at that time.

1234 In 1983, reunion of the two former denominations to form the present PC(USA)  
1235 prompted the need for a new Directory for Worship. That Directory, adopted in 1989, is the  
1236 current constitutional document guiding worship life in the PC(USA). The outline of the

1237 baptismal rite in this Directory is identical to the pattern in BCW 1993<sup>xxviii</sup>. The other significant  
1238 change in the 1989 Directory is the inclusion of blessing and optional anointing. Though the  
1239 1989 Directory includes a caution that nothing should overshadow the central act of baptizing  
1240 with water, other actions “deeply rooted in the history of baptism” are permitted.<sup>xxix</sup> The 1946  
1241 BCW had introduced a Trinitarian blessing following water baptism, but this 1989 development  
1242 elaborates on that practice, a clear attempt to move toward a shared ecumenical pattern informed  
1243 by early church baptismal practice. The service of baptism in the 1993 BCW, which is provided  
1244 in the appendix and discussed in more detail below, parallels the 1989 Directory, though the  
1245 terminology is slightly different.

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### 1247 *Method in reform of Reformed baptismal rites*

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1249 The revisions of Reformed baptismal rites in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have proceeded differently  
1250 for the bodies represented in this dialogue. However, they have shared concerns to promote 1)  
1251 fuller participation of the people, 2) greater attention to the symbolic use of water, and 3) greater  
1252 appreciation for baptism as central to Christian identity, a mark that both distinguishes the  
1253 church from the world and calls the church into mission in and for the world.

1254 While the Roman Catholic church has placed a central focus on the restoration of the  
1255 ancient catechumenate in its baptismal reforms since Vatican II, Reformed churches have  
1256 focused on revisions of the central baptismal rites and services of reaffirmation or renewal of  
1257 baptism. In addition, some Reformed churches have begun exploring the possibilities of the  
1258 catechumenate model as a process of forming new Christians and reiterating baptism as a central  
1259 symbol of Christian identity. For many Reformed Christians, the catechumenate holds promise  
1260 for the following reasons:

- 1261 • It focuses on baptism, which has been a central Reformation “mark of the  
1262 church”.
- 1263 • It brings people by stages into the church, providing liturgical boundary markers  
1264 to celebrate the gradual inclusion of the new Christian into the body of Christ.
- 1265 • It provides a clear structure for accompanying people along the life of faith,  
1266 through sponsors, catechists, and the whole congregation praying for the  
1267 catechumens.
- 1268 • It is ritually full, something that many seekers and church members are hungering  
1269 for. The process of leading someone to baptism—and leading a congregation to  
1270 repeated reaffirmations of that baptism—involves the whole person, body,  
1271 mind, and soul.

1272 As Reformed Christians continue the work of adapting the catechumenate model to a Reformed  
1273 context, several issues are emerging as central to our reflection:

- 1274 • *God’s grace and human response.* The chief issue in Reformed baptismal  
1275 discussion generally continues to be how to maintain our historic emphasis on  
1276 baptism as God’s gracious action while also attending to the human dimension  
1277 of the sacrament. Faithful Reformed people disagree on how to manage this  
1278 balance. This basic issue underlies many of the particular questions that arise in  
1279 baptismal debates: for instance, when is it permissible to refuse to baptize  
1280 someone? Is any such refusal a denial of the generosity of God’s grace? With  
1281 regard to the catechumenate, how much should we require of those preparing



1282 for baptism? Should catechesis precede or follow the act of baptism? Baptism  
1283 is God's act of cleansing, redeeming, and renewing, and it is also the welcoming  
1284 of a new Christian into community. Reformed theology always encourages  
1285 attention first to God's action, but there is increased concern about how persons  
1286 receive God's action -- how God works not only in the act of baptism narrowly  
1287 construed, but also through the life of the community of faith to form new  
1288 Christians in lives of gratitude. Some Reformed object to the language of  
1289 "Christian initiation," claiming that such a term focuses too much on the human  
1290 community into which one is initiated at baptism. This discomfort points to the  
1291 debate in the Reformed tradition over how to maintain a focus on the radical  
1292 priority of God's action while also attending to the shape of human living in  
1293 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 minimalist celebration) to how baptism shapes a life of faithfulness (which focuses on a more expansive process of preparation for and celebration of baptism). The Reformed understanding of discipline may provide a way to talk about catechumenate in a Reformed context, and it may also constitute a fruitful contribution to the ecumenical conversation about Christian initiation.

### 1307 ***Conclusions regarding Reformed practices of baptism***

1308 Though Reformed churches over the course of 500 years have exhibited diversity of  
1309 baptismal practice and theology, an examination of baptismal liturgies suggests continuing  
1310 consensus on the four themes that shaped Reformed baptismal concerns in the 16<sup>th</sup> 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 more clear in recent years, with increased attention to the symbolic value of water and 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 post-baptismal anointing (a change from 16<sup>th</sup> century practice), these additional acts are always connected to the central symbol of water.
- *Ecclesial dimension* of baptism: Since the 16<sup>th</sup> 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 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries this was often

1327 embodied in extended exhortations to the parents (and godparents/sponsors) to  
1328 raise their baptized children in the faith. Contemporary baptismal rites have  
1329 moved away from such exhortation, but continue to emphasize the importance  
1330 of ongoing nurture of the baptized through promises made by congregations,  
1331 parents, and baptismal sponsors, as well as post-baptismal prayers for continued  
1332 growth in faith.

1333 At the same time, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has brought some significant shifts in Reformed  
1334 baptismal practice, particularly the move from ordinance to symbol as the primary lens for  
1335 understanding sacramental practice in general, and baptism in particular. One result of this shift  
1336 is the diminished length of time devoted to instruction on the nature of baptism in the context of  
1337 the liturgy, and (most recently) the increased focus on prayers over the water, shifting the tone of  
1338 the event from teaching to proclamation and prayer.

#### 1339 4. f. 20<sup>th</sup> century convergence in scholarship and ritual structures:

##### 1340 ii. Roman Catholic

##### 1341 *Overview of the reform of Roman Catholic baptismal rites following the Second Vatican* 1342 *Council (1962-1965)*

1343 The reform of the Roman Rite that began in 1963 with the promulgation of *Sacrosanctum*  
1344 *Concilium* (SC) at the Second Vatican Council was unique in Catholic liturgical history. Its  
1345 starting point was a generalized desire to see the participation of the faithful as its goal. In most  
1346 previous reforms, the liturgy was changed to accommodate a development in the articulation of  
1347 dogma, such as with the addition of language to the Nicene Creed to clearly state belief in the  
1348 dual natures of Christ as God and man. However, in her most recent renewal of liturgical life,  
1349 the Roman Catholic Church sought to examine liturgical celebrations in answer to the question,  
1350 How can these rites be made more accessible to the participation of the lay faithful ?

1351 This intention was made clear in the language of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14 which set  
1352 “full, conscious and active participation” of the faithful as the end and goal of the process of  
1353 revision which would follow. This reform, then, was undertaken essentially for pastoral reasons,  
1354 emphasizing, in turn, that all liturgical renewal was ordered to bring about a deepening of the  
1355 life of the Church itself (SC, 14).

1356 The reform of the Roman Rite on this occasion was guided by nine important principles,  
1357 each found within the Council documents:

1358 (1) that liturgy sanctifies every event in the life of the faithful “with the divine grace  
1359 which flows from the paschal mystery of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ” (SC no.  
1360 61; see also no. 5).

1361 (2) that liturgy must be understood as the “source and summit” of the life of the Church  
1362 (SC no. 10, *Lumen Gentium*, 11), rather than as a mere external act unessential to her life and  
1363 mission in the world;

1364 (3) that every rite should enhance the full, conscious, and active participation of minister  
1365 and faithful alike (SC 14, 21, 30) and to promote this participation by the faithful, liturgical  
1366 education is to be assiduously pursued (see SC nos. 14-20);

1367 (4) that all liturgical acts are communal and ecclesial by nature and should be celebrated  
1368 accordingly (SC, 26);

1372 (5) that liturgical celebrations should aim for unity but not uniformity from one local  
1373 church to another (SC, 23, 37-38);

1374 (6) that whatever changes were effected, they should in some way be an “organic  
1375 growth” (SC, 23) in harmony with the history and theology of the liturgy in the Latin West;

1376 (7) that each reformed rite should recover the primary role of the celebration of the Word  
1377 of God as its foundation (SC, 7, 24, 35, 51, 56);

1378 (8) that rites should be appropriately simplified, reducing, for example, wherever  
1379 necessary, redundancies and superfluties which could distract from the essential meaning of the  
1380 liturgy (SC, 34, 50) and

1381 (9) that the entire reform should be guided by the tradition of Christian life and worship  
1382 as found in biblical and patristic sources (SC, 50).

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### 1384 *Specific Issues in the Reform of the Baptismal Rites following Vatican II*

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1386 Several issues governed the reform of Roman Catholic baptismal rites following the Second  
1387 Vatican Council. Each of these would help to answer a variety of pastoral and historical  
1388 questions about the shape and use of the rites for the Church in the modern world. Principal  
1389 among these was the restoration of an adult catechumenate and baptism through the  
1390 implementation of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA). At the same time, infant  
1391 baptism was reformed to distinguish it more clearly from the adult rite. Hence, the re-orientation  
1392 of both rites relative to each other became a major feature of the reform of baptism since the  
1393 Second Vatican Council.

1394 The RCIA retrieved much of the understanding of gradual conversion found in the rites of  
1395 the catechumenate in the early church. The reformed rites of 1972 restore this same emphasis on  
1396 conversion and initiation into Christian life as a “process” rather a single, discrete act.  
1397 Accordingly, the reformers of the initiation rites sought to re-establish baptism as the gateway  
1398 sacrament to the other rites of the Church.

1399 The RCIA now includes four continuous periods in the life of the candidate: (1) period of  
1400 evangelization and pre-catechumenate, in which the candidate explores the message of the  
1401 Gospel and its values under the direction of a deacon, priest or catechist, who invites the  
1402 interested party to join in prayer and the reading of the Scriptures on a regular basis; (2) the  
1403 catechumenate, in which candidates express a clear intention to seek baptism, as the Church  
1404 responds by accepting them into a structured process of conversion which assists them towards  
1405 this goal; (3) period of purification and enlightenment, usually during Lent, in which the elect  
1406 more immediately and intensely prepare for initiation; and (4) the celebration of the sacraments  
1407 of initiation (namely, baptism, confirmation and Eucharist), which is followed by *mystagogia* or  
1408 a final period of post-baptismal catechesis on the rites and growth in the faith. In the  
1409 catechumenate proper, frequent celebrations of the word of God, of prayers of exorcism and  
1410 blessing, and then of the more formal steps of the rite of enrollment and election are mandated.

1411 Immediately before baptism is celebrated – usually during the period of Lent which precedes  
1412 Holy Saturday and the Easter Vigil – the candidates enter their final stage of preparation known  
1413 as “scrutinies”. This last step is built around intense prayer, strengthened by exorcism, to assist  
1414 the candidates to put aside all sinful ways and to grow in their desire for life in Christ. During the  
1415 scrutinies, customarily celebrated during the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent, the Creed  
1416 and the Lord’s Prayer are presented to the candidates for their close study and memorization, to

1417 be publicly professed before the day of baptism. On Holy Saturday, catechumens complete a less  
1418 formal set of rites known as “Rites of Preparation” which help them to be ready for the  
1419 sacraments they will receive that same night at the Easter Vigil. A brief outline of the reformed  
1420 rites for adult catechumenate and baptism (RCIA) is given here:

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**Chart of the RCIA Rites of 1972**

#	Rites and Stages of RCIA ( <i>Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults</i> ) 1972
1	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

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Recitation of the Creed</li> <li>b. Reading from Scripture</li> <li>c. Homily</li> <li>d. Prayer before recitation</li> <li>e. Recitation of the Lord's Prayer</li> <li>f. Ephphetha rite</li> <li>g. Choosing of baptismal name by the catechumen</li> <li>h. Blessing prayer</li> <li>i. Dismissal</li> </ul>
3	<p>Rites of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist at the Easter Vigil</p> <p>A. Following the Liturgy of the Word proper, the rites of baptism and confirmation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Presentation of the catechumens</li> <li>2. Invitation to prayer</li> <li>3. Litany of the saints</li> <li>4. Prayer over the water</li> <li>5. Profession of faith</li> <li>6. Renunciation of sin</li> <li>7. Baptism</li> <li>8. Anointing</li> <li>9. Clothing with a white garment</li> <li>10. Presentation of lighted candle</li> <li>11. Confirmation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. invitation and prayer</li> <li>b. laying on of hands</li> <li>c. anointing with chrism</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
4.	<p>Period of Mystagogia or Post-baptismal Catechesis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. This period is to be marked by intense prayer and the practice of Christian living in the lives of the catechumens</li> <li>B. No formal rites are prescribed for this period</li> <li>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</li> <li>D. Bishops are encouraged to meet with the baptized for anniversary celebrations of their baptism</li> <li>E. Godparents are reminded of their on-going duty to support the Christian life of their godchildren</li> </ul>

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On the eve of the Second Vatican Council, the baptismal rites in place in 1962 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 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.

1432 Accordingly, in the revised rites, the celebration of baptism of infants within Sunday Mass  
1433 (Baptism of Children, no. 9) and the celebration of adult baptisms at the Easter Vigil (RCIA no.  
1434 17, 23) are now considered normative.

1435 The uniting of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, now taken as normative, is  
1436 among the feature of the RCIA which re-introduce profoundly traditional and pneumatological  
1437 elements into the reformed rites. The reform thus attempts to strengthen the paschal nature of  
1438 the sacrament of baptism (see RCIA nos. 4, 8; Baptism for Children no. 9). Finally, the new rites  
1439 make clear that pre-baptismal and post-baptismal life in the Church differs radically according to  
1440 the experience of the baptized and their community; hence, catechesis appropriate to each must  
1441 be continually developed.

1442 Along with the restoration of the adult catechumenate (RCIA) and adult baptism, the  
1443 liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council also revised the rites of infant baptism to reflect  
1444 more clearly how the rite was intended for those who could not speak for themselves and, as  
1445 such, was an act of the family and the community that supported them. The text of *Sacrosanctum*  
1446 *Concilium* itself called for a three-fold reform of the rites along these pastoral lines: “The rite for  
1447 the baptism of infants is to be revised, and should be adapted to the circumstance that those to  
1448 be baptized are, in fact, infants. The roles of parents and godparents, and also their duties, should  
1449 be brought out more sharply in the rite itself. The baptismal rite should contain adaptations, to be  
1450 used at the discretion of the local ordinary, for occasions when a very large number are to be  
1451 baptized together. Moreover, a shorter rite is to be drawn up, especially for mission lands, for use  
1452 by catechists, but also by the faithful in general when there is danger of death, and neither priest  
1453 nor deacon is available” (SC, 68, 69).

1454 In contrast to the reform of infant baptism drawn up by the popes who implemented the  
1455 directives of the Council of Trent, the revised rites of infant baptism of 1969 show marked  
1456 differences over those of 1614. A brief comparative chart is given here of the two rites.

1457 **Comparative Chart of the Rites of**  
1458 **Infant Baptism, 1614 and 1969**

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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

*The following rite was promulgated in 1969 and was meant to highlight those elements of reform directed by the Second Vatican Council in SC 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



E. Lighting of baptismal candle	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)

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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 essential meaning as a sacrament of faith professed (by the adult candidate) or spoken for (in the case of a child). It is also 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, nos. 5, 6). Godparents supply this need when parents can no longer provide it. Lastly, the rites now emphasize what can be called the “paschal character” of baptism, i.e., 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 it to a new life in Christ, strengthened for the profession of faith and the practice of virtue (see SC no. 6; LG no. 1). This same conscious 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 rites of baptism within the Roman Catholic Church 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 the profession of faith by the Church suffuses the celebration for all involved. Finally, 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 post baptismal rites***

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Roman Catholic baptismal rites include both pre-baptismal and post-baptismal elements which help to prepare for and delineate the mystery experienced in baptism. In effect, the pre-baptismal rites within the RCIA are intended, as described above, to invite and stimulate a desire for God, membership in Christ’s body, the Church, and in the ability to profess faith (see LG no. 11 on the effects of baptism; see also Can. 849 in the 1983 Code of Canon Law). 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 themselves apart from a community which will give them membership and belonging. The pre-baptismal 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 post baptismal elements, whether of the adult or infant rites, have a single overall 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 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 marked in many other rites within the Roman Catholic Church either for 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 in imitation of Christ who came to serve and not to be served (cf. Mt. 20.28).

***Method in the Reform of the Roman Catholic Baptismal Rites***

As mentioned above, the reform of the liturgy following the Second Vatican Council was done according to goals never before adopted in the Roman Catholic 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 the action of God present in the liturgy (SC, 14). Inherently, this goal carried new methodological considerations as well, demanding a theological and liturgical understanding of the rite and texts unlike what was previously needed.

The Council itself would give 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); that all of the existing rites from Trent should be, in effect, simplified and made

1535 easier and clearer for the faithful to understand (SC, 21, 50, 62), eliminating “elements which,  
1536 with the passage of time, came to be duplicated, or were added with but little advantage” (SC,  
1537 50). Now the method of reform would demand a re-appreciation of the rites which concentrated  
1538 on the needs of the believer through the lens of a relatively new category of analysis, i.e., of  
1539 “participant” (cf. SC, 14) in the sacred mysteries.

1540 Implicit within this discussion of enhanced participation within *Sacrosanctum Concilium*  
1541 is a turn to the subjectivity of the believer interacting with the Church and Christ in the  
1542 celebration of God’s action in rite and sacrament. The tools needed to complete this kind of  
1543 reform would differ, however, from previous liturgical reforms introduced over the centuries.  
1544 For in the past, the liturgy achieved its organic growth primarily from the development of  
1545 doctrine in the face of schism, heresy or political strife. But the Second Vatican Council would  
1546 thereby open a door to the organic growth in the liturgy centered upon the experience of the  
1547 believer in the act of worship itself (cf. SC, 14: “This full and active sharing on the part of the  
1548 whole people is of paramount concern in the process of renewing the liturgy and helping it to  
1549 grow” / *Quae totius populi plena et actuosa participatio, in instauranda et fovenda sacra liturgia,*  
1550 *summopere est attendenda;* SC, 23: “In order that healthy tradition can be preserved while yet  
1551 allowing room for legitimate development, thorough investigation --- theological, historical and  
1552 pastoral – of the individual parts of the liturgy up for revision is always to be the first step”/ *Ut*  
1553 *sana traditio retineatur et tamen via legitimae progressionis aperiatur et adhibita cauta ut*  
1554 *novae formae ex formis iam exstantibus organice quodammodo crescant).*

1555 In SC, 23 the Roman Catholic Church introduced a series of methodological changes in  
1556 establishing standards for organic growth within the liturgy which would startle many. There,  
1557 she names five principles which directly affected the way in which the reform of the baptismal  
1558 rites – either for adults or children – were accomplished. They include: (1) the preservation of  
1559 tradition which yet allows for development through an historical, theological and pastoral  
1560 understanding of the liturgy; (2) determining the general structure and intent of any part of the  
1561 liturgy before revising it; (3) evaluating and using the experience of liturgical renewal and  
1562 special concessions in the practice of the liturgy granted up until the Council, and even beyond,  
1563 to guide the reform of the rites; (4) the grounding of all changes in “real and proven need” of the  
1564 Church and (5) the promotion of continuity in liturgical growth from old to new forms.

1565 These five points of method were only intensified with the final steps laid down by the  
1566 Council in its listing of processes to be followed in the reform of the liturgy. For in sections 38  
1567 and 39 of *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the Council states that adaptations of the liturgy according to  
1568 local cultures are permitted, and can be devised and then submitted by Episcopal conferences to  
1569 the Holy See for approbation.

1570 The effect of implementing these principles within the reform of the liturgy can be seen  
1571 in the way in which the modern rites have been simplified and their new expression devised to  
1572 reflect the proven tradition of the early church in which the deepening conversion of the believer  
1573 was of great importance. However, the reform of the baptismal rites in the present case is based  
1574 on work in the modern historical, theological, behavioral and pastoral sciences encouraged by  
1575 the Council itself. No previous reform sought the same goals as did this one, nor achieved it with  
1576 the tools unique to the modern age.

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1578 **Chart with full texts of rites (see Appendix A)**

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1580 **4. g. Critical Comparison of Roman Catholic and Reformed Rites**  
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1582 A comparison of the current printed liturgies of Reformed and Roman Catholic churches in  
1583 this dialogue reveal strong similarities, arising from the common ecumenical liturgical  
1584 movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which itself emerged from shared biblical and historical  
1585 scholarship in the early part of the century. Even so, some differences remain. This report offers  
1586 both structural and thematic reflections arising from comparison of the printed baptismal orders.  
1587 A chart with the full texts of all the current rites can be found in the appendix. It is important to  
1588 note that the comparison of rites in the appendix focuses on the Roman Catholic rite of  
1589 paedobaptism, not the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. As noted earlier, the current  
1590 Reformed rites may be used for either infants or persons of mature faith. This represents a  
1591 reversal of practice from an earlier era, when Reformed churches had separate rites for adults and  
1592 children, while Roman Catholic churches had a single rite to be used for both.

1593  
1594 *Similarities*  
1595

1596 All of the baptismal rites, both Reformed and Roman Catholic, according to written form  
1597 if not always in practice, *follow* the reading and proclamation of the Word. Baptism is thus  
1598 always understood as a response to the proclaimed Word. This is significant, because it  
1599 represents a change from earlier practice, when baptisms were often conducted privately, apart  
1600 from the liturgy of the Word (Roman Catholic) or before the reading and proclamation of the  
1601 Word (some Reformed).

1602 All the baptismal rites include the following elements, though not always in the same  
1603 order:

- 1604 • renunciations by candidates or parents of those to be baptized,
- 1605 • profession of faith (usually the Apostles' Creed),
- 1606 • promises by parents, sponsors/godparents (if present), and congregation,
- 1607 • baptismal prayer at the font (variously titled "Blessing and Invocation of God over  
1608 Baptismal Water" (RC), "Prayer of Thanksgiving" (CRCNA), "Prayer of Baptism"  
1609 (UCC), "Baptismal Prayer of Thanksgiving" (RCA), and "Thanksgiving over the  
1610 Water" (PCUSA)),
- 1611 • baptism with water "in(to) the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy  
1612 Spirit."<sup>xxx</sup> The UCC provides the option of alternate words "*You are baptized in the*  
1613 *name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*" This appears to be the  
1614 central text of the baptismal rite in every case.
- 1615 • post-baptismal anointing, laying on of hands and/or declaration and blessing without  
1616 laying on of hands,
- 1617 • prayers for the baptized.

1618 From this it appears that all the rites have a basic common structure, though it has been  
1619 appropriated in different ways.

1620 Furthermore, there is remarkable agreement in the thematic content of the Reformed and  
1621 Roman Catholic rites. In our analysis of the rites, texts were read for five kinds of statements:  
1622 (1) *images*, such as those which variously describe baptismal water; (2) *commitments*, such as an  
1623 expression for the desire for baptism; (3) *effects*, such as the gifts from the Holy Spirit received  
1624 through baptism; (4) *formulae*, such as the interrogatories prior to baptism, or the adaptation of a

1625 berekah-style prayer form and (5) *biblical doctrine*, such as the notion of original sin. Some  
1626 categories overlap in their functions within the rites, such as formulae used to elicit a  
1627 commitment, or images which carry doctrinal meaning.

1628 Such thematic analysis reveals substantial similarity among the rites.

1629 \* The majority of the images employed, and the authority for their use, appear to be  
1630 derived from the gospels and the Old Testament, while the effects are almost all Pauline in their  
1631 theological roots.

1632 \* Much of the language which accompanies ritual acts – such as the epiclesis, the  
1633 blessings, the formulae and the commitments – seem to derive from Patristic sources, both in  
1634 vocabulary and rhetorical structure.

1635 \* Certain texts, such as the use of a berekah-style prayer of blessing over the water,  
1636 represent a retrieval of Jewish influence in the reform of Christian liturgies, ongoing since the  
1637 early 1960s.

1638 \* The language of Pauline participationism describes the soteriological aspects of the  
1639 sacramental action in the rites; Pauline ecclesiology of the body in large measure shapes the  
1640 notion of church within the rites; Pauline virtue-vice language, as taken from the Wisdom  
1641 literature and first century Judaism, seems to inform much of the effects and commitments, while  
1642 reflecting the style of modern day personalism.

1643 \* There is a remarkable similarity in the kind of syntax, vocabulary and general  
1644 expression used in the rites, characterized by biblical redolence, simplicity, directness, spareness  
1645 of style and succinctness. This is all the more noteworthy when one considers that the RC rites  
1646 are themselves a translation of a Latin original. This would suggest some degree of interaction  
1647 and even dependency between the reformers of the rites.

1648

### 1649 *Differences*

1650

1651 The Roman Catholic rite includes baptismal elements early in the liturgy (reception of  
1652 children, intercessions, pre-baptismal anointing), while the Reformed baptismal rites are  
1653 contained in a particular portion of the overall liturgy. While references to baptism may be  
1654 included at other points in the Reformed services, such as the prayers of intercession, this is not  
1655 explicit in the written rites.

1656 The Roman Catholic rite also contains several “explanatory rites” not present in any of  
1657 the Reformed rites: white garment, lighted candle, and ephphetha.

1658 The Reformed rites all begin with scripture or scriptural statements on the meaning of  
1659 baptism. This is significant, because it points to the Reformed concern to provide biblical  
1660 “warrant” for the sacrament.

1661 Within the Reformed family, the CRC exhibits a different structure leading up to  
1662 baptism: statement on baptism is followed by the prayer of thanksgiving, then the renunciations  
1663 and profession of faith. All other Reformed rites include the renunciations and profession of  
1664 faith before the prayer of thanksgiving.

1665 The Reformed rites in various ways exhibit tension around the practice of post-baptismal  
1666 anointing or laying on of hands. The CRCNA and UCC suggest that laying on of hands is  
1667 optional; CRCNA, RCA, and PCUSA include signing with the cross as optional; the PCUSA  
1668 suggests anointing as optional. All of this underscores a Reformed concern that the sign of water  
1669 and the Word not be overshadowed by additional ritual gestures.

1670 Finally, although almost all the rites have alternate expressions for all of the images, effects,  
1671 commitments, formulae and doctrine of the other churches, there are a few exceptions, such as  
1672 “original sin” and “covenant.” These exceptions may prove to be distinctive points of identity for  
1673 individual communities and their liturgical expressions.

#### 1674 **4. h. Conclusion: Similar rites with different hermeneutics**

1675 The numerous common elements in the baptismal rites of the Reformed and Roman  
1676 Catholic churches surveyed in this study might initially suggest that there has been a significant  
1677 sharing of doctrine, method and practice between both communities. In some instances, identical  
1678 wordings and rites are evident in their baptismal liturgies, as found, for example, in the *berakah*-  
1679 style blessing over the baptismal water, or in the use of the traditional biblical formula that  
1680 accompanies the baptismal washing. No fewer than five such components can be found shaping  
1681 the baptismal rites and texts now in use for each of these churches [see Appendix 1 and 2].

1682 Indeed, many of the methods used in the reform of these rites appear to be products of a common  
1683 liturgical renewal movement. Authors such as James F. White, who has published seminal  
1684 studies on the reform of protestant liturgies over the last 40 years, has established this very point  
1685 (see James White, “Roman Catholic and Protestant Worship in Relationship” in *Christian*  
1686 *Worship in North America* [Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1997] 3-15). In addition, both  
1687 Roman Catholic and Protestant churches undertook joint studies of the biblical and patristic  
1688 elements of their liturgies in the decades immediately following the Second Vatican Council in  
1689 repeated efforts to achieve visible communion where possible in their sacramental practices,  
1690 especially in the celebration of baptism. [See, for example, *Made, Not Born: New Perspectives on*  
1691 *Christian Initiation and the Catechumenate*, The Murphy Center for Liturgical Research (Notre  
1692 Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976).]

1693 Ecumenical journals such as *Studia Liturgica* have effectively served as common  
1694 platforms from which liturgical dialogue between churches is promoted. Organizations such as  
1695 the International Consultation on English Texts (ICET) and the English Language Liturgical  
1696 Consultation (ELLC), worked hand-in-hand with the Roman Catholic ICEL (International  
1697 Commission on English in the Liturgy) to produce texts of great value in drawing the liturgies of  
1698 Protestant and Catholic communities together.

1700 Among the most prestigious of these groups is “Societas Liturgica”, founded by Wiebe  
1701 Vos, a pastor of the Dutch Reformed Church, who saw the need for both Roman Catholic and  
1702 Reformed churches to draw closer together through a deepened appreciation of common biblical  
1703 and patristic roots in the liturgy.

1704 These few reflections would suggest that even though a shared liturgical theology may  
1705 characterize the renewals of both the Reformed and Roman Catholic liturgies of the latter half of  
1706 the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is not clear that systematic or dogmatic theologians understand the  
1707 sacramental reforms of their respective churches in the same way. Perhaps the most significant  
1708 critique of the difference in the understanding of baptism between systematic theologians and  
1709 liturgical theologians in the Reformed churches can be found John W. Riggs’ *Baptism in the*  
1710 *Reformed Tradition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002). There, Riggs maintains  
1711 that the reform of baptismal rites completed in the Reformed churches since the 1972 appearance  
1712 of the Roman Catholic *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA), is notably out of harmony  
1713 with established Reformed theologies of baptism.

1715 Five of the most common theological and structural elements which seem to characterize  
1716 the reformed baptismal rites of both churches as given above– (1) baptism as a response to the  
1717 Word of God; (2) the use of the gospels as a source for baptismal images and (3) the use of  
1718 Pauline literature as a source for the language of baptismal action and effects; (4) the recovery of  
1719 patristic ritual elements and (5) the adoption of common biblical texts in the rites themselves –  
1720 must then be read in at least two ways by Reformed theologians through the lens of either  
1721 liturgical or systematic theology. While these differing interpretations of the Reformed baptismal  
1722 rites may pose challenges internally to Reformed communities, the use of water through  
1723 immersion, infusion or sprinkling, while pronouncing the biblical formula of baptism as reflected  
1724 in Mt. 28.19, remain in place as essentials in the recently revised rites of both the Reformed and  
1725 Roman Catholic communities.

1726 It is a mark of unity that both churches have agreed that, in order to deepen their  
1727 relationship as believers in Christ, any examination of their baptismal doctrines and practices  
1728 must begin with an acknowledgement of commonly used biblical and patristic sources. In  
1729 addition, both sides seem to have developed a common method for the retrieval of texts and rites  
1730 essential to their discussions through the best of form and redaction criticisms, yielding accurate  
1731 texts and ritual histories.

1732 However, both communities appear to interpret these same sources with hermeneutics  
1733 conditioned by confessional and dogmatic assumptions held *a priori*. This is most especially true  
1734 in the reading of central texts from the corpus of Augustine’s works on baptism, faith,  
1735 justification, sacrament and original sin (see *De baptismo*; *De doctrina christiana*; *De libero*  
1736 *arbitrio*; *De peccatorum meritis et remissione peccatorum et de baptismo parvulorum*; *de*  
1737 *predestinatione sanctorum*; *De correctione donatistarum*; *Ad Simplicianum* (1.2) and  
1738 *Confessiones* (7); *Enchiridion*; *Contra Donatistas*; *Expositio quaraundam propositionum ex*  
1739 *epistula apostoli ad Romanos*; *De spiritu et littera*; *Sermones 151-156* and *De gratia Christi et*  
1740 *de peccato originale* ). Indeed, the reconciliation of approaches to the reading of Augustine may  
1741 open a path for exchange and understanding between both churches in a way never before  
1742 achieved.

1743 The result of these distinctive approaches is predictable: widely varying readings of  
1744 common sources lead to differing uses of these same rites and texts brought forward into recently  
1745 revised baptismal liturgies. Essentially, the Roman Catholic and Reformed churches agree on  
1746 which texts and rites are central to baptismal belief and practice, but reserve much of their  
1747 interpretive use of these sources within the bounds of their separate communal confessions.

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## 1749 5. Theology of Baptism

1750

1751 Alongside the developments in baptismal rites during and since the sixteenth century, it is  
1752 also important to consider both Roman Catholic and Reformed theologies of baptism. As with  
1753 the baptismal rites, so too in baptismal theology, both traditions share much in common even as  
1754 they also differ on key issues. The study of the theology of baptism in this chapter is designed to  
1755 highlight both the common elements and the differences.

1756

1757 This chapter is organized into several sections: after some introductory questions on  
1758 baptism, it turns to an examination of the nature of baptism and then looks at connections  
1759 between baptism and the church, baptism and those who receive it, and baptism and other

1760 significant Christian doctrines. Within each section, some basic questions about baptism serve to  
1761 focus the discussion on specific issues. We hope that this organizational structure will allow  
1762 readers to focus on the main questions first and then to examine subsidiary questions that interest  
1763 them.

1764  
1765 Each topic in this chapter is introduced by a question. In response to each question, there  
1766 is a common statement that expresses what this dialogue has agreed that we can say together as  
1767 well as statements articulating both the Roman Catholic and Reformed positions.  
1768 The statements from each side were developed first and became the basis for the common  
1769 statements. In the common statements, we try to state as much as we hold in common even when  
1770 the language that we typically use on both sides is not held in common.

1771  
1772 In the dialogue, deciding what to use as source material for the Roman Catholic and  
1773 Reformed positions proved to be challenging. Should we use only documents that have been  
1774 officially approved or also statements by leading theologians from each side? If the latter, which  
1775 theologians should we take to be authoritative? Not only because it would be difficult to decide  
1776 which theologians to use, but also because theologians' statements have no official standing in  
1777 any church in this dialogue, it seemed best to limit our sources to officially approved documents.  
1778 For the Roman Catholic side, this meant using statements from church councils (primarily from  
1779 the Council of Trent through the Second Vatican Council), papal teaching, and the recent  
1780 Catechism of the Catholic Church. For the Reformed side, it meant using the confessions that the  
1781 Reformed churches in this dialogue include in their official books of confessions or their  
1782 denominational list of confessions. The matter of using confessions is complicated on the  
1783 Reformed side not only because the Reformed churches in this dialogue stem from two branches  
1784 of the Reformed tradition (Scottish and continental) and have different lists of confessions, but  
1785 also because the Reformed churches adhere to their confessions in different ways. For some in  
1786 this dialogue, the confessions carry the weight of tradition, although one might disagree with  
1787 them today. For other members of the Reformed delegation, the confessions continue to state the  
1788 faith of the church. Despite these complications, the representatives to the dialogue thought it  
1789 best to use the official conciliar, catechetical, and confessional statements of our churches as the  
1790 basis for stating the views of each side.

1791  
1792 INTRODUCTION

1793  
1794 **5. a. What Is Baptism?**

1795  
1796 Common Statement

1797  
1798 Baptism is a sacrament of the church in which a person is effused with or immersed in  
1799 water, accompanied by the Trinitarian formula that the person is baptized “in(to) the name of the  
1800 Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19-20). Baptism is the first of the sacraments that  
1801 a person receives. It is a means of grace through which God works in a person and that marks the  
1802 reception of a person into the life and mission of Christ’s Church.

1803  
1804 Roman Catholic Statement



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Baptism is the door to life and to the kingdom of God (*The Rite of Christian Initiation*, 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 (*The Rite of Christian Initiation*, 8).

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 Conf., 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 Conf., 5.185, 5.188). 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).

**5.b. Why Does the Church Baptize?**

Common Statement

The Church baptizes in obedience to the command of Christ (Matt. 28:19, Mk. 16:16) in order to initiate persons into the life of the Church.

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* (CCC) introduces the sacrament of baptism. The Church baptizes in obedience to the command of Christ (Matt 28:19, Mk 16:16) in order to initiate persons 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” (Jn 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 Jn 1:1-2).

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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 her mission. Baptism, therefore, is the privileged means of grace through which a person becomes a Christian. (cf. Mark 10:15; John 3:5)

Reformed Statement

Reformed churches baptize because Jesus Christ ordained or instituted baptism (Westminster Conf., ch. 30.1; Westminster Larger Catechism, Q.&A. 165; Evangelical Catechism, Q.&A. 115-17). 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” (BEM, Baptism I.1). Since Christian baptism is grounded in Christ’s instruction in his Word, Reformed Christians attempt to follow both biblical practices and teachings surrounding baptism.

THE NATURE OF BAPTISM

**5. c. What Does Baptism Effect or Signify?**

Common Statement

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.

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 (BEM)* 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

1895 the Spirit, with incorporation into the Body of Christ, and with the Kingdom of God (*BEM* 3-7).  
1896 In a more recent document of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and  
1897 the World Council of Churches (JWG), “*Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a*  
1898 *Common Baptism*,” baptism is identified with initiation into the life of faith, incorporation into  
1899 the Church, and with continual growth in Christ including the call to holiness (§’s 34, 59, 71,  
1900 77). It is in light of these ecumenical insights that the particularities of a Catholic theology of  
1901 baptism must be understood.

1902  
1903 In many ways the different aspects of Christian Initiation continue to guide the ongoing  
1904 pilgrimage of Christian maturation. As with the other sacraments, baptism is a means of grace.  
1905 As each sacrament imparts its own specific sacramental grace, so too with baptism. Its two  
1906 principal effects are “[p]urification from sins and new birth in the Holy Spirit” (*CCC*, 1262).  
1907 Yet the sacrament embraces all the elements of becoming a Christian.

1908  
1909 “The fruit of Baptism, or baptismal grace, is a rich reality that includes forgiveness of  
1910 original sin and all personal sins, birth into the new life by which man becomes an  
1911 adoptive son of the Father, a member of Christ and a temple of the Holy Spirit. By this  
1912 very fact the person baptized is incorporated into the Church, the Body of Christ, and  
1913 made a sharer in the priesthood of Christ” (*CCC*, 1279).

1914  
1915 The Catholic Church has traditionally affirmed the necessity of baptism for salvation,  
1916 specifically “for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have the possibility of  
1917 asking for this sacrament” (*CCC*, 1257). One may receive salvation through a “baptism of  
1918 blood” by suffering death for the faith before one is baptized. In a broader sense God is not  
1919 bound by the sacraments. Since “the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made  
1920 partakers, in a way known to God, of the paschal mystery” (*Gaudium et Spes* 62), non-Christians  
1921 can be saved. This may also be understood as a “baptism of desire,” something that catechumens  
1922 intentionally express before their actual baptism. In the case of non-Christians the assumption is  
1923 that baptism would be desired had the person known of its necessity. Of course, the question of  
1924 how salvation is offered to non-Christians is beyond the scope of this paper, although it is  
1925 something that the Catholic Church considers a possibility without committing itself to an  
1926 affirmation that other religions give access through their own rites to Christian salvation.  
1927 Salvation is always mediated through Christ. How a non-Christian responds to divine grace is a  
1928 matter of conscience and the light one has received. How that might entail the practice of  
1929 another religious tradition is left to theological inquiry as long as the centrality of Christ and the  
1930 paschal mystery is not displaced.

1931  
1932 “Baptism is [also] the sacrament of faith” (*CCC*, 1253). This encompasses both the faith  
1933 of the Church and that of each believer. The Catholic emphasis on cooperation with grace and  
1934 the importance of good works does not negate the continual necessity of faith. Faith itself is “*a*  
1935 *gift of God, a supernatural virtue infused by him*” (*CCC*, 153), something that clearly bespeaks  
1936 the priority of grace.

1937  
1938 “Before this faith can be exercised, man must have the grace of God to move and assist  
1939 him; he must have the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts

1940 it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and ‘makes it easy for all to accept and believe  
1941 the truth’” (*Dei Verbum*, 5).

1942  
1943 At the same time assistance by divine grace does not exclude that faith is “an  
1944 authentically human act...[and that t]rusting in God and cleaving to the truths he has revealed are  
1945 contrary neither to human freedom nor to human reason” (*CCC*, 154). As a theological virtue, it  
1946 relates Christians directly to God who have the Trinity as “their origin, motive, and object”  
1947 (*CCC*, 1812). One must persevere in faith. Apart from works faith is dead (*Jas* 2:26) and when  
1948 deprived of hope and love (the other two theological virtues) it “does not unite the believer to  
1949 Christ and does not make him a living member of his Body” (*CCC*, 1815).

1950  
1951 The theology of baptism is a window into the entire Christian life. Its elaboration can  
1952 unfold the manifold riches of Christ for those who through baptism are united with him in his  
1953 death and resurrection. This journey into the Christian life is also the way of discipleship. The  
1954 paschal mystery is manifested in the lives of those who knowing the power of Christ’s  
1955 resurrection are made conformable to his death by sharing in his sufferings (*Phil* 3: 10).

1956  
1957 Reformed Statement

1958  
1959 As a sacrament, baptism offers a visible word that speaks to God’s people. It speaks by  
1960 means of actions, accompanied by words, that describe spiritual realities and assure God’s  
1961 people. Baptism signifies certain spiritual realities. It is a “sign and seal” of the covenant of  
1962 grace, of being ingrafted into Christ, “of regeneration, of remission of sins,” and of beginning “to  
1963 walk in newness of life” (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, 6.154). Baptism is “the sign of new  
1964 life through Jesus Christ,” uniting “the one baptized with Christ and with his people” (*BEM*,  
1965 *Baptism* II.2). As “the sign and seal of God’s grace and covenant in Christ,” baptism “points us  
1966 back to the grace of God expressed in Jesus Christ;” and the water of baptism “links us to the  
1967 goodness of God’s creation and to the grace of God’s covenants with Noah and Israel” (*PCUSA*  
1968 *Directory for Worship*, W-2.3002-03). Baptism is a sacrament that claims people as “children of  
1969 God, disciples of Christ, and members of Christ’s church” (*UCC Toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: A*  
1970 *Statement of Commitment*).

1971  
1972 Baptism gives a person a new identity. “In Baptism a person is sealed by the Holy Spirit,  
1973 given identity as a member of the church, welcomed to the Lord’s Table, and set apart for a life  
1974 of Christian service” (*PCUSA Directory for Worship*, W-4.2001). Baptism is therefore not only a  
1975 sign of spiritual realities and a means by which God dispenses grace; it is also the sign of  
1976 admission into the visible church: “In Holy Baptism God imparts the gift of the new life unto  
1977 man, receives him into his fellowship as his child, and admits him as a member of the Christian  
1978 Church” (*Evangelical Catechism (UCC)*, Q. & A. 118).

1979  
1980 In baptism God “signifies to us that just as water washes away the dirt of the body when  
1981 it is poured on us ... so too the blood of Christ does the same thing internally, in the soul, by the  
1982 Holy Spirit. It washes and cleanses it from its sins and transforms us from being the children of  
1983 wrath into the children of God” (*Belgic Conf.*, art. 34). Baptism’s use of an external washing to  
1984 signify an internal one serves to reinforce the promise of God to forgive sins. In baptism Christ

1985 “gave the promise that, as surely as water washes away the dirt from the body, so certainly his  
1986 blood and his Spirit wash away my soul’s impurity, in other words, all my sins” (Heidelberg  
1987 Catechism, Q. & A. 69). Baptism assures us that God “freely cleanses us from our sins by the  
1988 blood of his Son, and in him adopts us to be his sons, and by a holy covenant joins us to himself,  
1989 and enriches us with various gifts, that we might live a new life” (Second Helvetic Confession, 5.  
1990 187).

1991  
1992 Baptism signifies our being “engrafted into Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of his  
1993 righteousness, by which our sins are covered and remitted” (Scots Confession, 3.21). Although  
1994 many Reformed Christians have hesitated to say that baptism effects forgiveness of sins or  
1995 regeneration, others come close to such a view. Thus, the Westminster Confession of Faith says  
1996 that, although the “efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is  
1997 administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance the grace promised is not  
1998 only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost;” but it adds that this grace is  
1999 conferred “to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth to, according to the  
2000 counsel of God’s own will, in his appointed time” (Westminster Confession, 6.159).

2001  
2002 Baptism also signifies a dying and rising with Christ: “Baptism with water represents not  
2003 only cleansing from sin, but a dying with Christ and a joyful rising with him to new life”  
2004 (Confession of 1967, 9.511). “By baptism, Christians are immersed in the liberating death of  
2005 Christ where their sins are buried, where the ‘old Adam’ is crucified with Christ, and where the  
2006 power of sin is broken,” and they are “raised here and now to a new life in the power of the  
2007 resurrection of Christ, confident that they will also ultimately be one with him in a resurrection  
2008 like his” (BEM, Baptism II.3).

2009  
2010 In sum, baptism uses water to signify cleansing from sin and regeneration. Reformed  
2011 confessions speak of baptism as “the washing of rebirth and the washing away of sins,” noting  
2012 that, in baptism, God “wants to assure us, by this divine pledge and sign, that the washing away  
2013 of our sins spiritually is as real as physical washing with water” (Heidelberg Catechism Q.&A.  
2014 71, 73). “For in baptism the sign is the element of water, and that visible washing which is done  
2015 by the minister; but the thing signified is regeneration and the cleansing from sins” (Second  
2016 Helvetic Confession, 5. 178-79).

2017  
2018 Although baptism is a means of grace that signifies justification and cleansing from sin, it  
2019 is not required in order for a person to be justified before God. Justification is an act by which  
2020 God remits someone’s sins, absolves the person from guilt and punishment, receives the person  
2021 into favor, and pronounces the person just (Rom. 8:33; Second Helvetic Confession, 5.106). In  
2022 justification, God “forgives us our sins for Jesus’ sake, counts the merit of Christ as belonging to  
2023 us, and accepts us as his children” (UCC Evangelical Catechism, Q. & A. 81). Justification  
2024 occurs “‘freely’ or ‘by grace,’” apart from works and on the basis of Jesus Christ’s work of  
2025 redemption (Belgic Confession, art. 23). In justification, God pardons sins and accepts people as  
2026 righteous, “not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone; not  
2027 by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their  
2028 righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them, they receiving  
2029 and resting on him and his righteousness by faith; which faith they have not of themselves, it is

2030 the gift of God” (Westminster Confession of Faith, 6.068-69). Since justification is not based on  
2031 our merits, but only on the “obedience of Christ crucified, which is ours when we believe in  
2032 him,” it “is enough to cover our sins and to make us confident, freeing the conscience from the  
2033 fear, dread, and terror of God’s approach” (Belgic Confession, art. 23).

2034  
2035 Similarly, although baptism both signifies regeneration and serves as a means of grace  
2036 moving God’s people to rebirth, baptism is not required in order for a person to be regenerated in  
2037 Jesus Christ. Regeneration is the rebirth of water and the Spirit, a rebirth that enables entrance  
2038 into the kingdom of God (John 3:3-6). This rebirth is a “new creation” and a “making alive” that,  
2039 like the work of creation or the raising of the dead, “God works in us without our help” (Canons  
2040 of Dort, III/IV, art. 12). In regeneration, God’s grace “does not act in people as if they were  
2041 blocks and stones; nor does it abolish the will and its properties or coerce a reluctant will by  
2042 force, but spiritually revives, heals, reforms, and — in a manner at once pleasing and powerful  
2043 — bends it back” (Canons of Dort, III/IV, art. 16). Although regeneration is God’s supernatural  
2044 work, God has chosen to bring about that work by such means as “the holy admonitions of the  
2045 gospel, under the administration of the Word, the sacraments, and discipline” (Canons of Dort,  
2046 III/IV, art. 17).

#### 2047 2048 **5. d. How Is Christian Baptism Related to the Biblical Economy of Salvation?**

##### 2049 2050 Common Statement

2051  
2052 Christian baptism is rooted in the biblical economy of salvation. The water of baptism  
2053 echoes the water of creation, of the Flood, of the Red Sea during the Exodus, and of Jesus’ own  
2054 baptism. Baptism is the sign of God’s covenant with the church, a covenant that not only  
2055 stretches back to God’s covenant with Abraham and his descendants but also binds those who  
2056 are members of this covenant to God as God’s children.

##### 2057 2058 Roman Catholic Statement

2059  
2060 Both the theology and liturgical praxis of baptism situate it within the biblical economy  
2061 of salvation. The consecratory prayer over the water refers to the waters of creation, the Red Sea  
2062 at the time of the Exodus, and those of the Jordan wherein Jesus was baptized. It culminates  
2063 with the water and blood that flows from Christ’s side as he hung upon the cross. This rich  
2064 imagery associates the paschal sacrifice of Christ with God’s creative and redemptive action  
2065 throughout history. So too, by the power of the Spirit the waters of baptism are unsealed as a  
2066 fountain of new life. It is also consistent with the covenantal language utilized in sacred  
2067 scripture to express God’s fidelity to creation and his people. Although the word covenant is not  
2068 used explicitly in the Rite of Baptism it is implied and can be understood in light of Catholic  
2069 teaching.

2070  
2071 Covenant is a part of the “divine plan of Revelation...realized simultaneously ‘by deeds  
2072 and words which are intrinsically bound up with each other’ and shed light on each other” (CCC,  
2073 53). “Again and again you offered a covenant to man, and through the prophets taught him to  
2074 hope for salvation” the Church prays in Eucharistic Prayer IV of the *Roman Missal*. “God made

2075 an everlasting covenant with Noah and with all living beings (cf. *Gen* 9:16). It will remain in  
2076 force as long as the world lasts” (*CCC*, 71)...

2077  
2078 “God chose Abraham and made a covenant with him and his descendants. By the  
2079 covenant God formed his people and revealed his law to them through Moses. Through the  
2080 prophets, he prepared them to accept the salvation destined for all humanity” (*CCC*, 72)...” God  
2081 has revealed himself fully by sending his own Son, in whom he has established his covenant  
2082 forever. The Son is his Father's definitive Word; so there will be no further Revelation after him”  
2083 (*CCC*, 73). This new and definitive covenant in Jesus Christ is at the heart of the Gospel, the  
2084 Church and its sacramental life, especially the Eucharist, and is the basis for Christian prayer—  
2085 —“Christian prayer is a covenant relationship between God and man in Christ. It is the action of  
2086 God and of man, springing forth from both the Holy Spirit and ourselves, wholly directed to the  
2087 Father, in union with the human will of the Son of God made man” (*CCC*, 2564).

2088  
2089 Reformed Statement

2090  
2091 Christian baptism is deeply rooted in God’s dealings with ancient Israel. The washing and  
2092 transformation that occur in baptism happen not “by the physical water but by the sprinkling of  
2093 the precious blood of the Son of God, who is our Red Sea, through which we must pass to escape  
2094 the tyranny of Pharaoh, who is the devil, and to enter the spiritual land of Canaan (Belgic  
2095 Confession, art. 34).

2096  
2097 Baptism is a sign of God’s covenant. The covenant is the means by which God’s people  
2098 are bound to God; and baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace (Westminster Conf.,  
2099 6.154). “In baptism, the church celebrates the renewal of the covenant with which God has  
2100 bound his people to himself” (Confession of 1967, 9.511). Thus those who are baptized in the  
2101 name of Christ have been “enrolled, entered, and received into the covenant and family, and so  
2102 into the inheritance of the sons of God” (Second Helvetic Confession, 5.187).

2103  
2104 Some Reformed Christians speak of both a covenant of works and a covenant of grace;  
2105 others speak only of a covenant of grace. The covenant of works is understood by those who  
2106 affirm it to be a covenant made by God with the first humans, “wherein life was promised to  
2107 Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience”  
2108 (Westminster Conf., 6.038). The fall into sin left humans incapable of perfect obedience and  
2109 therefore unable to attain life with God. The covenant of works, if one existed, was ineffective.

2110  
2111 Given humanity’s plight, God made a covenant of grace, “wherein he freely offered unto  
2112 sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved,  
2113 and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life, his Holy Spirit, to make them  
2114 willing and able to believe” (Westminster Conf., 6.039). The covenant of grace can also be  
2115 called a testament, with Jesus Christ as the testator bequeathing “the everlasting inheritance, with  
2116 all things belonging to it” (Westminster Conf., 6.040).

2117  
2118 Although this covenant or testament was administered differently before and after the  
2119 appearance of the promised Messiah, there is one covenant of grace, not two. Thus, since the

2120 appearance of Christ, “the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of  
2121 the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper”  
2122 (Westminster Conf., 6.041-42). Thus baptism was ordained by Jesus Christ “not only for the  
2123 solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church, but also to be unto him a sign  
2124 and seal of the covenant of grace” (Westminster Conf. 6.154). Baptism signifies and seals “our  
2125 ingrafting into Christ, and partaking of the covenant of grace, and our engagement to be the  
2126 Lord’s” (Westminster Shorter Catechism, 7.094).

2127  
2128 By the use of water, baptism symbolizes God’s ancient covenant of grace: “The water of  
2129 Baptism symbolizes the waters of Creation, of the Flood, and of the Exodus from Egypt. Thus,  
2130 the water of Baptism links us to the goodness of God’s creation and to the grace of God’s  
2131 covenants with Noah and Israel” (PCUSA Directory for Worship, W-2.3003).

2132  
2133 Baptism echoes circumcision, the sign of the covenant for ancient Israel: “As  
2134 circumcision was the sign and symbol of inclusion in God’s grace and covenant with Israel, so  
2135 Baptism is the sign and symbol of inclusion in God’s grace and covenant with the Church”  
2136 (PCUSA Directory for Worship, W-2.3004).

2137  
2138 **5. e. What is the relationship between baptism, faith, and discipleship?**

2139  
2140 Common Statement

2141  
2142 Baptism is an important source for a life of Christian faith and discipleship. For those  
2143 baptized as infants, faith and discipleship are the expected fruit of baptism. For those baptized as  
2144 adolescents or adults, typically faith and discipleship precede baptism. Nevertheless, both infant  
2145 and adult baptism are intended to nurture Christian faith and discipleship. Working with the  
2146 Word of God, the sacraments – including baptism – nourish the faith of God’s people and  
2147 motivate them to follow God’s will as Christ’s disciples.

2148  
2149 Roman Catholic Statement

2150  
2151 The “whole organism of the Christian’s supernatural life has its roots in baptism” (CCC,  
2152 1266). This embraces a life of discipleship through growth in the theological and moral virtues,  
2153 and the prompting and power of the Holy Spirit in graces and gifts. All of this is based upon the  
2154 efficacy and fruitfulness of sacramental grace. Sacramental efficacy insures the conferral of  
2155 grace in the sacramental act.

2156  
2157 The “sacraments act *ex opere operato* (literally: ‘by the very fact of the action's being  
2158 performed’), i.e., by virtue of the saving work of Christ, accomplished once for all. It  
2159 follows that ‘the sacrament is not wrought by the righteousness of either the celebrant or  
2160 the recipient, but by the power of God.’ From the moment that a sacrament is celebrated  
2161 in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts in  
2162 and through it, independently of the personal holiness of the minister. Nevertheless, the  
2163 fruits of the sacraments also depend on the disposition of the one who receives them”  
2164 (CCC, 1128).



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In sacraments the posture of the recipient may be interpreted as informing the disposition of the one receiving the sacraments so as to not place any obstacle in the way of reception, e.g., impenitence. More positively one is exhorted to receive the sacraments in faith, hope and love, and cooperate with the grace received in order to bear fruit in Christ.

Discipleship follows upon baptism. For adults who are baptized using the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) 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 the Solemn Feast of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit. As a life long process of discipleship baptism continues to highlight the Christian’s deepening union with Christ is 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).

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 Conf. of Faith, 6.078). Since 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)

2210 How does baptism nourish faith? Word and sacraments work together, like a letter with  
2211 an imprinted seal, to ground faith: “Now faith rests only upon the Word of God; and the Word of  
2212 God is like papers or letters, and the sacraments are like seals which only God appends to the  
2213 letters” (Second Helvetic Confession, 5.172). Since God has ordained sacraments “to nourish  
2214 and sustain our faith,” and since the Lord’s Supper testifies to us that, “just as truly as” we hold,  
2215 eat, and drink the visible bread and wine of the sacrament, so truly do we receive Jesus Christ’s  
2216 body and blood, faith can be seen as “the hand and mouth of our souls” (Belgic Confession, arts.  
2217 33, 35).

2218  
2219 Baptism is a call to Christian discipleship: “The Baptism which makes Christians  
2220 partakers of the mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection implies confession of sin and  
2221 conversion of heart” (BEM, Baptism II.4). Luther says that baptism with water “signifies that the  
2222 old Adam in us, together with all sins and evil lusts, should be drowned by daily sorrow and  
2223 repentance and be put to death, and that the new man should come forth daily and rise up,  
2224 cleansed and righteous, to live forever in God’s presence” (Luther’s Small Catechism). The  
2225 Heidelberg Catechism speaks of baptism as being washed with Christ’s blood and Spirit, noting  
2226 that being washed with Christ’s blood signifies God’s forgiveness of sins and that being washed  
2227 with Christ’s Spirit “means that the Holy Spirit has renewed me and set me apart to be a member  
2228 of Christ so that more and more I become dead to sin and increasingly live a holy and blameless  
2229 life” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 70). In baptism, Jesus Christ, through the Spirit, washes  
2230 away sins and frees people from their control. Baptism therefore signifies that one day we will  
2231 rise with Christ in glory and may walk even now in newness of life (Study Catechism 1998 of  
2232 the PCUSA, Q. & A. 72).

2233  
2234 Baptism nourishes the life of faith and discipleship not only of the person being baptized  
2235 but also of those who witness this demonstrated word of grace. Throughout their lives, and  
2236 especially when tempted or when witnessing the baptism of others, those who have been  
2237 baptized must “improve their baptism” by considering baptism’s meaning and benefits, being  
2238 humbled by their having fallen short of and gone contrary to the grace of baptism, receiving  
2239 assurance of pardon, drawing strength from Christ’s death and resurrection for their own  
2240 mortifying of sin, and endeavoring to live as those who have been given to Christ and baptized  
2241 by the Spirit (Westminster Larger Catechism, Q.&A. 167).

2242  
2243 BAPTISM AND THE CHURCH

2244  
2245 **5. f. What implications does baptism have for the church?**

2246  
2247 Common Statement

2248  
2249 Baptism is the sacramental bond that effects membership in the visible Church. As an  
2250 ecclesial sacrament it is also the basis for the real communion that Christians enjoy in their  
2251 churches and among the various ecclesial communities as they strive to overcome separation and  
2252 division in a more full and perfect communion.

2253  
2254 Roman Catholic Statement

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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 common priesthood of all 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* (UR), Vatican II’s *Decree on Ecumenism* states:

For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in some, though imperfect communion with the Catholic Church (UR, 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).

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” (The Confession of 1967 of the PCUSA, 9.51).

**5. g. Who May Baptize, and with What Means and Formula?**

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, within 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”

2300 (Matt. 28:19). The Roman Catholic Church allows non-ordained people to administer baptism  
2301 and permits baptism to occur outside a worship service; Reformed churches do not allow such  
2302 exceptions. Some Reformed churches allow – at least in practice – the use of alternate  
2303 formulations of the Trinitarian formula (e.g., “in the name of God the Creator, God the  
2304 Redeemer, and God the Sanctifier”); other Reformed churches as well as the Roman Catholic  
2305 Church do not. With one exception, the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed churches in  
2306 this dialogue accept any baptism of a member of one of the other ecclesiastical bodies in this  
2307 dialogue as long as the baptism was recognized as valid by the ecclesiastical communion in  
2308 which the person was a member. The exception is that the Roman Catholic Church does not  
2309 recognize as valid a baptism in which any of the following is lacking: intent to do what the  
2310 Church does when she baptizes, use of water, and use of the Triune name as given in Matt.  
2311 28:19.

2312

### 2313 Roman Catholic Statement

2314

2315 Baptism must be administered with water and in the name of the Triune God since “entry  
2316 into the life of the Most Holy Trinity through configuration to the Paschal mystery of Christ” is  
2317 signified and enacted in the sacrament (CCC, 1239). Therefore, the validity of baptism has to do  
2318 with the very mystery of the faith, the mystagogy of communion with the Trinity. Consequently,  
2319 the most expressive form of baptism is triple immersion in baptismal water, the latter  
2320 consecrated by a prayer of epiclesis (an invocation for the Father to send the Holy Spirit upon the  
2321 water to give the grace of the Son). However, pouring is also accepted. The formula differs  
2322 between the Latin Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches. The minister in the Latin Church  
2323 says: “N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” An  
2324 Eastern Rite priest utilizes a variation of this: “The servant of God, N., is baptized in the name of  
2325 the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” As for the ministers of baptism a distinction  
2326 is made between ordinary and extraordinary situations with the ecclesial intentionality of the  
2327 sacrament preserved in both cases, either directly through the sacramental representation of  
2328 Christ in the ordained minister who administers the sacrament, or indirectly through action that  
2329 conforms to the Church’s understanding of it.

2330

2331 The ordinary ministers of Baptism are the bishop and priest and, in the Latin Church, also  
2332 the deacon. In case of necessity, anyone, even a non-baptized person, with the required  
2333 intention, can baptize, by using the Trinitarian baptismal formula. The intention required  
2334 is to will to do what the Church does when she baptizes. The Church finds the reason for  
2335 this possibility in the universal saving will of God and the necessity of Baptism for  
2336 salvation. (CCC, 1256).

2337

### 2338 Reformed Statement

2339

2340 Sacraments must be administered by “lawful ministers” who have been “appointed to  
2341 preach the Word, unto whom God has given the power to preach the gospel, and who are  
2342 lawfully called by some Kirk” (Scots Conf., ch. 22; also Westminster Conf., ch 30.2). Since  
2343 baptism is rooted in and declares Christ’s faithfulness, points to the faithfulness of God, and  
2344 involves a congregational reaffirmation of faith and pledge “to provide an environment of

2345 witness and service,” baptism should “always be celebrated and developed in the setting of the  
2346 Christian community” (BEM, Baptism IV.12). Therefore, within Reformed churches, only an  
2347 ordained minister of the Word, functioning within the context of the church, may baptize.  
2348

2349 Since the church has received the sacrament of baptism from God as a means of grace,  
2350 the church baptizes by using Christ’s words of institution, baptizing people of all nations “in the  
2351 name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19; quoted by Heidelberg  
2352 Catechism, Q.&A. 71 and by the Study Catechism 1998 of the PCUSA, Q.&A. 75).

2353 Following Christ’s example and instruction, Christians baptize with water, which may be  
2354 poured or sprinkled on the person, or into which the person may be dipped (2<sup>nd</sup> Helvetic Conf.,  
2355 ch. 20; Westminster Conf., ch. 30.3). Because the sacraments should be celebrated in their  
2356 “original simplicity,” the sacrament of baptism should not be “adulterated” by adding human  
2357 devices such as “exorcism, the use of burning lights, oil, salt, spittle, and such other things” as  
2358 baptizing twice per year “with a multitude of ceremonies” (2<sup>nd</sup> Helvetic Conf., ch. 20; Scots  
2359 Conf., ch. 22).  
2360

2361 Reformed Christians consider a sacrament to be valid if it includes the biblical words of  
2362 institution and the biblical sign (i.e., water or bread and the fruit of the vine), if it is performed by  
2363 someone who would be authorized by a Christian church to perform the sacrament, if the  
2364 church’s authorities sanction the sacrament, if the recipient (or the parent[s], in cases of infant  
2365 baptism) requests or intends to receive the sacrament, and if it is performed in a worship service  
2366 (or, if that is not practicable, connected in some way to the worshiping community).  
2367

## 2368 RECIPIENTS OF BAPTISM

### 2370 **5. h. Why Do People Need to Be Baptized?**

#### 2372 Common Statement

2374 Although God created the human race righteous and holy, bearing God’s image, the fall  
2375 of humanity into sin has so infected the race that all human beings are born sinful, alienated from  
2376 God, and subject to death and misery. Sin has ruined our connection with God, other human  
2377 beings, and other creatures, leaving us slaves to sin as well as guilty of it, and helpless to save  
2378 ourselves from our plight. We therefore need the forgiveness and new life from God that are  
2379 effected (according to the Roman Catholic Church) or signified (according to Reformed  
2380 churches) by baptism.  
2381

#### 2382 Roman Catholic Statement

2384 The necessity of baptism in bringing about regeneration and adoption figures greatly in  
2385 the divine economy of salvation due to the consequences of original sin that subjected humanity  
2386 to sin and death. Original sin is “an essential truth of the faith” (CCC, 388). It is, “so to speak,  
2387 the ‘reverse side’ of the Good News that Jesus is the Savior of all men” (CCC, 389) and cannot  
2388 be ignored without undermining the faith itself. The Catholic Church, therefore, understands the  
2389 Fall of humanity as an historical event preceded by the fall of the angels. “The account of the fall

2390 in *Genesis* 3 uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place *at the*  
2391 *beginning of the history of man*. Revelation gives us the certainty of faith that the whole of  
2392 human history is marked by the original fault freely committed by our first parents” (CCC, 390).  
2393

2394 Through their own personal sin Adam and Eve “lost the original holiness and  
2395 justice...received from God, not only for ...[themselves]...but for all human beings” (CCC,  
2396 416). They universally transmitted to their descendents the wound of their own sin such that  
2397 Pope Paul VI could confess in his 1968 *Solemn Profession Faith: Credo of the People of God*  
2398 (CPG, quoted in CCC, 419), “We therefore hold, with the Council of Trent, that original sin is  
2399 transmitted with human nature, ‘by propagation, not by imitation’ and that it is... ‘proper to each’  
2400 (CPG, 16). More precisely “original sin is called ‘sin’ only in an analogical sense: it is a sin  
2401 ‘contracted’ and not ‘committed’ - a state and not an act” (CCC, 404). The loss of original  
2402 justice and holiness leads to another consequence of original sin. “[H]uman nature is weakened  
2403 in its powers, subject to ignorance, suffering and the domination of death, and inclined to sin  
2404 (this inclination is called ‘concupiscence’)” (CCC, 418).  
2405

2406 It is important to register that for Catholics concupiscence is not sin itself. Sin always  
2407 requires a free act of the will. Concupiscence is the tendency toward sin present in human nature  
2408 after the Fall. This inclination to sin – metaphorically speaking, ‘the tinder for sin’ (*fomes*  
2409 *peccati*) – also remains after baptism. Despite the deprivation caused by original sin the Catholic  
2410 Church rejoices that the “victory that Christ won over sin has given us greater blessings than  
2411 those which sin had taken from us” (CCC, 420). It also provides a spiritual lesson for the newly  
2412 baptized so that with the help of Christ’s grace they “may prove themselves in the struggle of  
2413 Christian life. This is the struggle of *conversion* directed toward holiness and eternal life to  
2414 which the Lord never ceases to call us” (CCC, 1426).  
2415

2416 In addition to washing away original sin baptism also remits the temporal punishment  
2417 due to any personal sin. The consequences of sin or its deleterious effects upon a person are  
2418 remitted. However, “certain temporal consequences of sin remain in the baptized, such as  
2419 suffering, illness, death, and such frailties inherent in life as weaknesses of character” (CCC,  
2420 1264) along with concupiscence.  
2421

2422 An important aspect of the Catholic understanding of the human condition (or theological  
2423 anthropology) is the prelapsarian state of humanity. Although created in grace – the state of  
2424 original holiness and justice that enabled friendship and intimacy with God as well as harmony  
2425 in the human condition, interiorly, socially, and with all of creation – it must be understood that  
2426 the loss of this grace was one of the effects of the Fall. Therefore, “original holiness and justice”  
2427 was indeed a grace and not something intrinsic to human nature. It was a gift from God.  
2428 Nevertheless, humanity was constituted in this state. Without pursuing the many nuances and  
2429 lively theological debates that inform the Catholic understanding of the relationship between  
2430 nature and grace, it is worth stating that from a Catholic perspective the grace of original  
2431 holiness and justice would be compromised – especially with regard to the gratuity, freedom and  
2432 supernatural character of divine grace – if it was understood to be an essential dimension of  
2433 human nature and not as a gift given with creation. Since baptism effects the new creation in  
2434 Christ through regeneration and justification, grace restores the holiness and justice lost in the

2435 Fall. This is a marvelous work of divine mercy and grace. With St. Augustine the *Catechism of*  
2436 *the Catholic Church* agrees that “the justification of the wicked is a greater work than the  
2437 creation of heaven and earth” and even “surpasses the creation of the angels in justice, in that it  
2438 bears witness to a greater mercy” (CCC, 1994). Or, as St. Paul expresses the superabundance of  
2439 grace, “where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more” (Rom 5: 20b).

2440  
2441  
2442

### 2443 Reformed Statement

2444

2445 People need to be baptized because all are sinners, born subject to sin and willing  
2446 participants in the human race’s sinful rejection of God. All are therefore alienated from God and  
2447 subject to death and misery.

2448

2449 Although God created the human race “in true righteousness and holiness,” and bearing  
2450 God’s image, the fall into sin “has so poisoned our nature that we are born sinners — corrupt  
2451 from conception on” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q.&A. 7). Original sin is an inherited corruption  
2452 whereby, through the fall into sin, human beings have come “under the power of satan, sin, and  
2453 death,” and therefore are “inclined to do evil” (Evangelical Catechism of the UCC, Q.&A. 24,  
2454 25). Original sin is an innate, transmitted corruption “which has been derived or propagated in us  
2455 all from our first parents, by which we, immersed in perverse desires and averse to all good, are  
2456 inclined to all evil” (Second Helvetic Conf., 5.037). Original Sin is “so vile and enormous in  
2457 God’s sight that it is enough to condemn the human race, and it is not abolished or wholly  
2458 uprooted even by baptism” (Belgic Conf., art. 15).

2459

2460 Original sin contains several facets, including “the guilt of Adam’s first sin, the want of  
2461 that righteousness wherein he was created, and the corruption of his nature, whereby he is utterly  
2462 indisposed, disabled, and made opposite unto all that is spiritually good, and wholly inclined to  
2463 all evil, and that continually” (Westminster Larger Catechism, 7.135). In short, unless we are  
2464 born again “we are so corrupt that we are totally unable to do any good and inclined toward all  
2465 evil” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q.&A. 8). Having been born with original sin, and apart from the  
2466 regenerating work of the Spirit, we both unable and unwilling to return to God or to begin to  
2467 reform ourselves: “Therefore, all people are conceived in sin and are born children of wrath,  
2468 unfit for any saving good, inclined to evil, dead in their sins, and slaves to sin; without the grace  
2469 of the regenerating Holy Spirit they are neither willing nor able to return to God, to reform their  
2470 distorted nature, or even to dispose themselves to such reform” (Canons of Dort, III/IV, art. 3).

2471

2472 Although original sin has turned us from God and leaves us incapable of reforming  
2473 ourselves, it has not extinguished all sense of God or morality: “There is, to be sure, a certain  
2474 light of nature remaining in man after the fall, by virtue of which he retains some notions about  
2475 God, natural things, and the difference between what is moral and immoral, and demonstrates a  
2476 certain eagerness for virtue and for good outward behavior. But this light of nature is far from  
2477 enabling man to come to a saving knowledge of God and conversion to him” (Canons of Dort,  
2478 III/IV, art. 4).

2479

2480 A recent study catechism nicely captures the ways in which sin has distorted both  
2481 ourselves and all our relations with others: “Although we did not cease to be with God, our  
2482 fellow human beings, and other creatures, we did cease to be for them; and although we did not  
2483 lose our distinctive human capacities completely, we did lose the ability to use them rightly,  
2484 especially in relation to God. Having ruined our connection with God by disobeying God’s will,  
2485 we are persons with hearts curved in upon ourselves. We have become slaves to the sin of which  
2486 we are guilty, helpless to save ourselves, and are free, so far as freedom remains, only within the  
2487 bounds of sin” (Study Catechism 1998 of the PCUSA, Q.&A. 20).

2488 **5. i. Who Can Receive Baptism?**

2489  
2490 Common Statement

2491  
2492 Anyone who, having been outside the household of faith, accepts the Christian faith and  
2493 participates in catechetical instruction not only may, but should, be baptized. In addition, infants  
2494 of believing parents should be baptized.

2495  
2496 Roman Catholic Statement

2497  
2498 Quoting from the Code of Canon Law of the Latin Church (*Codex Iuris Canonici*—  
2499 *CIC*, can. 864) the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: “Every person not yet baptized and  
2500 only such a person is able to be baptized” (*CCC*, 1246). The same applies for the Eastern  
2501 Catholic Churches (*Corpus Canonum Ecclesiarum Orientalium*—*CCEO*, can. 679). There are  
2502 two implications that one can draw from these canons. First, it highlights the missional  
2503 dimension of the Church, called to proclaim the gospel to all nations. All peoples are called to  
2504 faith and baptism. Second, any person validly baptized in another Church or ecclesial  
2505 community is already a Christian and cannot be baptized again. It underscores the common faith  
2506 that Catholics share with other Christians.

2507  
2508 Reformed Statement

2509  
2510 Churches baptize those who, having come from other religions or from unbelief, “accept  
2511 the Christian faith and participate in catechetical instruction” (BEM, Baptism IV.11). So those  
2512 who “profess faith in and obedience unto Christ” should be baptized (Westminster Conf., 6.157).  
2513 But those who are not part of the visible church and therefore are “strangers from the covenant of  
2514 promise,” should not be baptized “till they profess their faith in Christ, and obedience to him,”  
2515 although infants with one or both parents who profess faith in, and obedience to, Christ “are, in  
2516 that respect, within the covenant, and are to be baptized” (Westminster Larger Catechism, Q.&A.  
2517 166).

2518  
2519 **5. j. Why do we baptize children?**

2520  
2521 Common Statement

2522  
2523 Since God’s promises and covenant extend to the children of those who believe in Jesus  
2524 Christ, we administer baptism, the sign of the covenant, not only to those who come to faith as



2525 adults, but also to the infant children of those who believe in Jesus Christ and have established  
2526 membership in a local parish or congregation. Such baptism recognizes the need of new birth on  
2527 the part of all people, even infants. It also connects Christian baptism to circumcision, the sign of  
2528 the covenant in ancient Israel. And it shows that infants, along with their believing parents, are  
2529 included in the hope of the gospel and belong to the people of God.

2530  
2531  
2532

2533 Roman Catholic Statement

2534

2535 The Catholic Church baptizes infants in recognition that children are in need of new birth  
2536 and that infant baptism particularly manifests the “sheer gratuitousness of the grace of salvation”  
2537 (CCC, 1250). Since baptism is the sacrament of faith there is a clear recognition that faith is  
2538 present for infant baptism as well as for adult baptism. Within the faith of the Church including  
2539 the faith of the assembly, the faith of the parents and godparents (a true ecclesial function—  
2540 *officium*) is active on behalf of the child. Christian nurture provided by family and community is  
2541 important for the faith that must grow after baptism as the child goes on to receive the  
2542 sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation at the appropriate ages. First  
2543 Communion in particular is an important event for the child to develop a personal relationship  
2544 with Christ. In this respect baptism is a beginning but one which the Church cannot refuse.

2545

2546 The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of  
2547 God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth (CCC, 1250).

2548

2549 Reformed Statement

2550

2551 Just as infants in ancient Israel received circumcision, the sign of the covenant, so too  
2552 infants in the church should be baptized: “We believe our children ought to be baptized and  
2553 sealed with the sign of the covenant, as little children were circumcised in Israel on the basis of  
2554 the same promises made to our children” (Belgic Confession, art. 34). Since infants as well as  
2555 adults are in God’s covenant, they should be “received into the Christian church” by this “mark  
2556 of the covenant” and “distinguished from the children of unbelievers. This was done in the Old  
2557 Testament by circumcision, which was replaced in the New Testament by baptism” (Heidelberg  
2558 Catechism, Q. & A. 74). In short, “baptism does for our children what circumcision did for the  
2559 Jewish people. This is why Paul calls baptism the ‘circumcision of Christ’” (Belgic Conf., art.  
2560 34, quoting Col. 2:11).

2561

2562 In sum, infants, “[a]long with their believing parents, are included in the great hope of the  
2563 gospel and belong to the people of God. Forgiveness and faith are both promised to them as gifts  
2564 through Christ’s covenant with his people. These children are therefore to be received into the  
2565 community by baptism, nurtured in the Word of God, and confirmed at an appropriate time by  
2566 their own profession of faith” (Study Catechism of 1998 of the PCUSA, Q. & A. 73).

2567

2568 When parents have their children baptized, the parents must “help their children grow in  
2569 godly life by Christian teaching and training, by prayer and example” (Evangelical Catechism,

2570 Q.&A. 121). The church and its minister need evidence of such a commitment before baptizing  
2571 an infant: “It would be irresponsible to baptize an infant without at least one Christian parent or  
2572 guardian who promises to nurture the infant in the life of the community and to instruct it in the  
2573 Christian faith” (Study Catechism 1998 of the PCUSA, Q.&A. 74).

2574  
2575  
2576  
2577

## 2578 **5. k. Why should someone be baptized only once?**

2579

### 2580 Common Statement

2581

2582 As Jesus Christ died once for all and was raised from the dead (Rom 6:10, Heb 9:28, 1  
2583 Pet 3:18), so too, the Christian is baptized only once, signifying union with Christ in his death  
2584 and resurrection through the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit (Tit 3:5-7).

2585

### 2586 Roman Catholic Statement

2587

2588 Baptism, along with Confirmation and Holy Orders, is a sacrament that cannot be  
2589 repeated. This has been associated with the reception of a spiritual mark or sacramental  
2590 character. In the case of the first sacrament to be administered, “[b]aptism imprints on the soul  
2591 an indelible spiritual sign, the character, which consecrates the baptized person for Christian  
2592 worship” (CCC, 1280). Therefore the baptized person by virtue of this “*seal of the Lord*” is  
2593 enabled to exercise the baptismal priesthood or the common priesthood of the faithful (CCC,  
2594 1274). It is also a sign of the fullness of redemption to be accomplished in the consummation of  
2595 faith at the parousia, the resurrection of the dead, and in the beatific vision. A sign of hope that  
2596 marks the person as belonging to Christ, it also cannot be erased even “if sin prevents Baptism  
2597 from bearing the fruits of salvation” (CCC, 1272).

2598

### 2599 Reformed Statement

2600

2601 As the sign of rebirth in Christ, baptism should be administered only once to a person:  
2602 “anyone who aspires to reach eternal life ought to be baptized only once without ever repeating it  
2603 — for we cannot be born twice” (Belgic Confession, art. 34). “Any practice which might be  
2604 interpreted as ‘re-baptism’ must be avoided” (BEM, Baptism IV.13).

2605

## 2606 **5. l. What is the relationship between baptism and confirmation and/or profession of faith?**

2607

### 2608 Common Statement

2609

2610 Those who are baptized as adults are confirmed or profess their faith at the time of their  
2611 baptism. Those baptized as children should, at an appropriate age, be confirmed or make an  
2612 ecclesial profession of their faith. While we agree that baptism signifies new birth in water and  
2613 the Holy Spirit and that no Christian is without the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9), we do not agree that

2614 there is a distinct sacramental act to signify and impart the gift of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless,  
2615 all the baptized are heirs of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost.

2616  
2617 Roman Catholic Statement

2618  
2619 The overarching framework for baptism is the context of Christian Initiation. Along with  
2620 the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist baptism is necessary for the full initiation of the  
2621 new Christian into Christ and his Church. The new life in Christ is received in baptism,  
2622 strengthened in confirmation and nurtured by the Eucharist. Although all three sacraments are  
2623 administered together in the case of adult conversion and for infants in the Eastern Catholic  
2624 Churches, they are separated for the initiation of those baptized as infants in the Latin Church.  
2625 The sacraments of Eucharist and Confirmation are administered at an appropriate age along with  
2626 the proper catechesis and sacramental preparation. Nevertheless, this distinction between  
2627 baptism and confirmation does not eliminate their essential complementarity for Christian  
2628 initiation.

2629  
2630 As baptism is clearly associated with the paschal mystery of the Easter Vigil and the  
2631 reception of the fruits of Christ's saving death and resurrection, so "the effect of the sacrament of  
2632 Confirmation is the special outpouring of the Holy Spirit as once granted to the apostles on the  
2633 day of Pentecost" (CCC, 1302). During the Easter Vigil adult catechumens are baptized,  
2634 confirmed and receive the Eucharist for the first time, thus completing their Christian Initiation.  
2635 The Christian faithful also renew their baptismal promises by renouncing sin and Satan, and  
2636 professing the Apostles' Creed. The joint mission of the Son and Holy Spirit is present in both  
2637 sacraments with the latter sacrament understood as the "an increase and deepening of baptismal  
2638 grace" (CCC, 1303). A deeper sense of divine filiation, union with Christ, and increase of the  
2639 gifts of the Spirit in Confirmation render a more perfect bond with the Church and a special  
2640 strength to confess Christ in the world. Therefore, the grace of Confirmation is a further giving  
2641 of the Spirit already received in baptism with an eye towards maturity, perfection and mission.

2642  
2643 Reformed Statement

2644  
2645 Those who come to the Christian faith, not having been baptized as infants, make a  
2646 profession of their faith and are confirmed at the same time that they are baptized. Those who  
2647 have been baptized as infants, having been received into the community of the church and  
2648 "nurtured in the Word of God," are to be "confirmed at an appropriate time by their own  
2649 profession of faith" (Study Catechism 1998 of the PCUSA, Q.&A. 73).

2650  
2651 Although one should be baptized only once, that "baptism is profitable not only when the  
2652 water is on us and when we receive it but throughout our entire lives" (Belgic Confession, art.  
2653 34). Thus, in the case of those baptized as infants, God's promises to be a God to that child lead  
2654 to the church's expectation that God will work in that child through the Holy Spirit and that the  
2655 child will respond to the Spirit's work in faith. The church then expects that, once they reach an  
2656 age of maturity, baptized children who have responded to the Spirit's work in faith will profess  
2657 that faith publicly in the context of the church.

2658

2659 Since confirmation was not instituted by Jesus, the Protestant reformers did not accept  
2660 confirmation as a sacrament. Still, many reformers desired some ritual by which children who  
2661 had been baptized would publicly appropriate the baptismal promises that were spoken on their  
2662 behalf. Thus the Reformed tradition adapted the earlier rite of confirmation into a catechetical  
2663 practice for children that included the laying on of hands. Upon completion of this rite, children  
2664 were typically admitted to the Lord’s Supper, thus connecting two fragmented pieces of patristic  
2665 initiation, “confirmation” and first communion. Within the Reformed tradition, infant baptism,  
2666 young adult confirmation, and then first communion became a standard pattern for many  
2667 churches. In recent years, several Reformed churches have begun allowing or advocating the  
2668 pattern of infant baptism, communion at a young age, and then confirmation during adolescence.  
2669

## 2670 BAPTISM AND OTHER DOCTRINES

2671

### 2672 **5. m. What is the relationship between baptism and election?**

2673

#### 2674 Common Statement

2675

2676 Those who are baptized are part of God’s elect people, the Christian church. A person’s  
2677 being baptized is not a guarantee that the person is predestined or elected to salvation.

2678

#### 2679 Roman Catholic Statement

2680

2681 The Catechumenate for those preparing for Baptism ends with the Rite of Election at the  
2682 beginning of Lent. The candidates are thus called the elect.

2683

2684 For a person to be enrolled among the elect, he must have enlightened faith and the  
2685 deliberate intention of receiving the sacraments of the Church. After the election, he is  
2686 encouraged to advance toward Christ with even greater generosity (*RCIA*, 134).

2687

2688 However, this differs from the theological discussion over the doctrine of election  
2689 understood as predestination. The Catholic Church has not precisely defined the doctrines of  
2690 election and predestination although the doctrine exists and has led to considerable theological  
2691 debate. There are certain negative parameters to be observed. The Council of Trent states:

2692

2693 “No one, moreover, so long as he is in this mortal life, ought so far to presume as regards  
2694 the secret mystery of divine predestination, as to determine for certain that he is assuredly  
2695 in the number of the predestinate; as if it were true, that he that is justified, either cannot  
2696 sin any more, or, if he do sin, that he ought to promise himself an assured repentance; for  
2697 except by special revelation, it cannot be known whom God hath chosen unto Himself’  
2698 (*Decree on Justification*, Chapter XII).

2699

2700 This is confirmed by the canons of the same *Decree*:

2701

2702 “If any one saith, that he will for certain, of an absolute and infallible certainty, have that  
2703 great gift of perseverance unto the end, unless he have learned this by special revelation;  
2704 let him be anathema” (Canon 16).

2705  
2706 “If any one saith, that the grace of Justification is only attained to by those who are predestined  
2707 unto life; but that all others who are called, are called indeed, but receive not grace, as being, by  
2708 the divine power, predestined unto evil; let him be anathema” (Canon 17).

2709  
2710 The *Decree on Justification* along with other Decrees, e.g., the Condemnation of  
2711 Cornelius Jansen, thus excludes positive reprobation based upon the unconditional predestination  
2712 of the unjust, and any denial of the universality of the divine will for salvation, the scope of the  
2713 atonement, and extent of the offer of grace. Consistent with these the Catholic doctrine of grace  
2714 denies its irresistibility and affirms the freedom of the will both prior to grace (although  
2715 wounded by sin) and under the influence of grace. *Positive assessments of predestination*  
2716 *include the following propositions articulated by Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P.:* “(1)  
2717 *Predestination to the first grace is not because God foresaw our naturally good works, nor is the*  
2718 *beginning of salutary acts due to natural causes; (2) predestination to glory is not because God*  
2719 *foresaw we would continue in the performance of supernaturally meritorious acts apart from the*  
2720 *special gift of final perseverance; (3) complete predestination, in so far as it comprises the whole*  
2721 *series of graces from the first up to glorification, is gratuitous or previous to foreseen merits.”<sup>2</sup>*

2722  
2723 The knotty issue of how grace and freedom are related and the nature of efficacious  
2724 grace—a heated dispute between Dominicans and Jesuits, the *Congregatio de Auxiliis*  
2725 controversy—was put to rest by Pope Paul V in 1607 when he forbade both sides from  
2726 censuring the other. It therefore remains an open theological question. The Council of Quierzy  
2727 in 853 best sums up what the Church can say in the most general terms:

2728 “that certain ones are saved, is the gift of the one who saves; that certain ones perish,  
2729 however, is the deserved punishment of those who perish” (Chapter 3).

2730  
2731 Practically, many Catholics have taken the advice of St. Ignatius Loyola in his *Spiritual*  
2732 *Exercises (SE)*:

2733  
2734 “Granted that it be very true that no one can be saved without being predestined and  
2735 without having faith and grace, still we must be very cautious about the way in which we  
2736 speak of all these things and discuss them with others” (“Rules for Thinking with the  
2737 Church,” *SE*, 14).

2738  
2739 Reformed Statement

2740  
2741 Some in the Reformed tradition, including Calvin, speak of two types of election: God’s  
2742 election of a people, such as ancient Israel or the Christian church, and God’s election of  
2743 individuals to salvation. Membership in the former leads to the hope or expectation, but not the

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

2744 guarantee, that one is elect in the latter sense. Baptism is the sign of membership in God's elect  
2745 people, the church, but not a guarantee that one is elect to salvation. So baptism is a sign of  
2746 election, but not a guarantee of election to salvation.

2747

2748 Election to salvation is an eternal divine decision to choose some people to be the  
2749 recipients of special saving grace. In some contexts the term predestination is synonymous with  
2750 election, and in others it encompasses both election and reprobation (an eternal divine decision  
2751 that results in everlasting death and punishment for some persons). The doctrine of election is  
2752 closely tied to the teaching that salvation is a free gift of God (Eph. 2:8; Phil. 1:29).

2753

2754 Although some have held that divine election to salvation is based on God's  
2755 foreknowledge of a person's faith or life, traditional Reformed confessions hold that, in election,  
2756 God has chosen people for salvation "freely, and of his mere grace," "without any consideration  
2757 of their works" (Second Helvetic Conf., 5.052; Belgic Conf., art. 16; Canons of Dort, I,9).

2758

2759 From before the foundation of the world, God has elected people to salvation in Christ  
2760 and on the basis of Christ's work: "Therefore, although not on account of any merit of ours, God  
2761 has elected us, not directly, but in Christ, and on account of Christ, in order that those who are  
2762 now ingrafted into Christ by faith might also be elected" (Second Helvetic Conf., 5.053; see also  
2763 Scots Conf., 3.08; Belgic Conf., art. 16, Canons of Dort, I,7). God not only elected us in Christ,  
2764 but "appointed him to be our head, our brother, our pastor, and the great bishop of our souls"  
2765 (Scots Confession, 3.08).

2766

2767 This divine election to salvation in Christ was for the purpose that we should be "holy  
2768 and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus  
2769 Christ ... to the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph. 1:4-6; quoted by Second Helvetic Conf.,  
2770 5.054). Furthermore, election shows both God's mercy and God's justice. God's having  
2771 graciously saved people from perdition shows that God is merciful, while God's "leaving others  
2772 in their ruin and fall into which they plunged themselves" shows God's justice (Belgic Conf., art.  
2773 16).

2774

2775 Since Christ did not say how few or many would be saved (Luke 13:23-24), and since we  
2776 do not know who is elect, we should have a good hope for all: "Although God knows who are  
2777 his, and here and there mention is made of the small number of elect, yet we must hope well of  
2778 all, and not rashly judge any man to be a reprobate" (Second Helvetic Conf., 5.055-56).  
2779 Regarding election, then, we should speak with care and with awareness of our limited  
2780 knowledge. These affirmations have a solid foundation: "No one will be lost who can be saved.  
2781 The limits to salvation, whatever they may be, are known only to God. Three truths above all are  
2782 certain. God is a holy God who is not to be trifled with. No one will be saved except by grace  
2783 alone. And no judge could possibly be more gracious than our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ"  
2784 (Study Catechism 1998 of the PCUSA, Q. & A. 49).

2785

2786 **5. n. What is the relationship between baptism and grace?**

2787

2788 Common Statement

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

Roman Catholic Statement

With other Christians, Catholics believe that baptism is a sign of new life in Christ. It is also 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 Christ-like through the increase and maturation of the moral virtues, e.g., prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude (cf 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 grace – 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” (CCC, 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 is also 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 are also 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

2834 operating grace) preceding the act of the will (including grace which prepares and disposes one  
2835 for justification) and subsequent grace (or cooperating grace) that accompanies and supports the  
2836 volitional act, sufficient grace enabling a person to accomplish a salutary act and efficacious  
2837 grace that secures such an accomplishment. There are also sacramental graces (proper to each  
2838 sacrament), graces of state accompanying “the responsibilities of the Christian life and of the  
2839 ministries within the Church” (CCC, 2004), and special or charismatic graces, that is, charisms  
2840 or gifts which build up the Church in the service of charity and are therefore “oriented toward  
2841 sanctifying grace and are intended for the common good” (CCC, 2003).

2842  
2843 The Catholic doctrine of grace builds on the notion of God’s action and our participation  
2844 with God in our own sanctification based on *Phil 2: 12b-13*; “...work out your salvation with  
2845 fear and trembling. For God is the one who, for his good purpose, works in you both to desire  
2846 and to work.” It should also be stated that without grace one is capable by the light of reason and  
2847 free will (although wounded by sin) to know religious and moral truths and perform morally  
2848 good actions. One cannot, however, attain salvation in the absence of grace.

2849  
2850 The fruit of grace in baptism entails regeneration, the “birth into the new life of  
2851 Christ...by which man becomes an adoptive son of the Father, a member of Christ and a temple  
2852 of the Holy Spirit.” It is also the beginning of the “whole organism of the Christian’s  
2853 supernatural life”...namely, “the renewal of the inner man” (CCC, 1266, 1279, 2019) and is  
2854 therefore accompanied by justification and sanctification.

2855  
2856 The Catholic doctrine of justification has been the subject of much ecumenical work as  
2857 reflected in the 1999 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* promulgated by the  
2858 Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation. In its specifically Catholic articulation  
2859 justification may be defined as including “not only the remission of sins, but also the  
2860 sanctification and renewal of the interior man.” Following upon God’s merciful initiative of  
2861 offering forgiveness, justification is also “*the acceptance of God’s righteousness* through faith in  
2862 Jesus Christ. Righteousness (or ‘justice’) here means the rectitude of divine love” (CCC, 1991).

2863  
2864 Justification may be parsed according to its causes and was dogmatically established at  
2865 the Council of Trent (1545-1563):

2866  
2867 “The causes of this justification are: the final cause is the glory of God and of Christ and  
2868 life everlasting; the efficient cause is the merciful God who *washes and sanctifies*  
2869 gratuitously, signing and anointing *with the holy Spirit of promise, who is the pledge of*  
2870 *our inheritance*, the meritorious cause is His most beloved only begotten, our Lord Jesus  
2871 Christ, who, *when we were enemies, for the exceeding charity wherewith he loved us,*  
2872 merited for us justification by His most holy Passion on the wood of the cross and made  
2873 satisfaction for us to God the Father, the instrumental cause is the sacrament of baptism,  
2874 which is the sacrament of faith, without which no man was ever justified, finally, the  
2875 single formal cause is the justice of God, not that by which He Himself is just, but that by  
2876 which He makes us just, that, namely, with which we being endowed by Him, are  
2877 *renewed in the spirit of our mind*, and not only are we reputed but we are truly called and  
2878 are just, receiving justice within us, each one according to his own measure, which the



2879 Holy Ghost distributes to every one as He wills, and according to each one's disposition  
2880 and cooperation” (Chapter VII of the *Decree on Justification* of the Council of Trent).

2881  
2882 Although justification by faith alone is rejected——Canon IX of the *Decree on*  
2883 *Justification* of the Council of Trent (since all the theological virtues of faith, hope and love are  
2884 infused with sanctifying grace)——one may broadly speak of “justification through faith” and  
2885 sanctification through charity,” (CCC, 2001). These virtues have to do with our collaboration  
2886 with the grace of God and in that respect “faith is the beginning of human salvation, the  
2887 foundation and root of all justification” (Chapter VIII of the *Decree on Justification* of the  
2888 Council of Trent).

2889  
2890 Reformed Statement

2891  
2892 Baptism signifies God’s gracious love. Grace is an unmerited gift of God by which fallen  
2893 humans are adopted as God’s children and granted the righteousness of Christ (Rom. 3:24;  
2894 Second Helvetic Confession 5.107; Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 33, 56). God grants  
2895 forgiveness of sins to fallen people and grants to them “the perfect satisfaction, righteousness,  
2896 and holiness of Christ” as an act of grace (Heidelberg Catechism Q. & A. 60, 70).

2897  
2898 Although the grace of forgiveness and regeneration are signified by baptism, forgiveness  
2899 and regeneration do not necessarily occur at the time of baptism. God’s grace and salvation are  
2900 not so tied to baptism that one cannot be “regenerated or saved without it, or that all that are  
2901 baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.” Nevertheless, “by the right use of this ordinance the  
2902 grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such  
2903 (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God’s own  
2904 will, in his appointed time” (Westminster Confession, 6.158-59).

2905  
2906 Reformed Christians consider the efficacy of baptism, like the Lord’s Supper, to depend  
2907 on God’s grace, working through the Spirit and the words of institution. Sacraments, even when  
2908 rightly used, do not themselves have the power to confer grace. Moreover, the efficacy of a  
2909 sacrament does not “depend on the piety or intention of him that doth administer it, but upon the  
2910 work of the Spirit, and the word of institution, which contains, together with a precept  
2911 authorizing the use thereof, a promise of benefit to worthy receivers” (Westminster Confession,  
2912 6.151; see also Westminster Shorter Catechism, 7.091). Since baptism “signifies the beginning of  
2913 life in Christ, not its completion, “[t]he efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time  
2914 wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance the grace  
2915 promised is not only offered, but really exhibited and conferred by the Holy Ghost, to such  
2916 (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God’s own  
2917 will, in his appointed time” (Westminster Confession, 6.159).

2918  
2919 **5. o. What is the relationship between baptism and sanctification?**

2920  
2921 Common Statement

2922

2923           Baptism signifies the beginning of sanctification, the universal call to holiness for all  
2924 those joined to Christ. The communication and reception of grace is always a transformative  
2925 event for one’s relation to God and consequently in one’s own person.  
2926

2927 Roman Catholic Statement  
2928

2929           Sanctification is the increase of sanctifying grace (or an increase of justification  
2930 received——Chapter X of the *Decree on Justification* of the Council of Trent). Infused by the  
2931 Holy Spirit, sanctifying grace heals the soul of sin and makes it holy (the sanative [or medicinal]  
2932 and elevating dimensions of grace), uniting the soul to God in Christ. In this respect a person is  
2933 made pleasing to God and can grow in grace through the increase of the theological and moral  
2934 virtues in one’s life, also known as the increase of justification through cooperation in good  
2935 works enabled by grace. Moved by the Holy Spirit who is the master of the interior life one can  
2936 genuinely merit eternal life by responding to the call to Christian perfection, the fullness of  
2937 divine charity. One also prays for the grace of final perseverance even as one makes spiritual  
2938 progress that bears fruit in a more intimate union with Christ.  
2939

2940           Merit is an important dimension of the Catholic understanding of sanctification. It is a  
2941 consequence of the divine initiative to associate human beings in process of their own salvation.  
2942

2943           “The fatherly action of God is first on his own initiative, and then follows man's free  
2944 acting through his collaboration, so that the merit of good works is to be attributed in the  
2945 first place to the grace of God, then to the faithful. Man's merit, moreover, itself is due to  
2946 God, for his good actions proceed in Christ, from the predispositions and assistance given  
2947 by the Holy Spirit” (CCC, 2008).  
2948

2949           Although “*no one can merit the initial grace* of forgiveness and justification, at the  
2950 beginning of conversion...[m]oved by the Holy Spirit and by charity, *we can then merit* for  
2951 ourselves and for others the graces needed for our sanctification, for the increase of grace and  
2952 charity, and for the attainment of eternal life” (CCC, 2010). In this respect all the baptized are  
2953 called to holiness and to that spiritual progress that “tends toward ever more intimate union with  
2954 Christ” (CCC, 2014). Catholics therefore even speak of Christian perfection but one that  
2955 eschews false notions of triumphalism. “The way of perfection passes by way of the  
2956 Cross...[and t]here is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle” (CCC, 2015).  
2957

2958 Reformed Statement  
2959

2960           Baptism calls God’s people to live in ways that reflect the new life they have received in  
2961 Christ. Sanctification is the newness of life and progress in doing good that appears in those who  
2962 have been buried with Christ and renewed by the Holy Spirit (Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A.  
2963 70). Those who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been “buried with him by baptism into  
2964 death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so [they] too  
2965 might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:3-4). Thus faith, produced in God’s people by hearing  
2966 God’s Word and by the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerates them and makes them new creatures  
2967 in Christ, freeing them from slavery to sin (2 Cor. 5:17; Belgic Confession, art. 24). It is,

2968 moreover, “impossible for this holy faith to be unfruitful in a human being, seeing that we do not  
2969 speak of an empty faith but of what Scripture calls ‘faith working through love,’ which leads a  
2970 man to do by himself the works that God has commanded in his Word” (Belgic Confession, art.  
2971 24, quoting Gal. 5:6).

2972  
2973 So when faith bears fruit, leading believers to do what God has commanded in his Word,  
2974 “These works, proceeding from the good root of faith, are good and acceptable to God, since  
2975 they are all sanctified by his grace. Yet they do not count toward our justification — for by faith  
2976 in Christ we are justified, even before we do good works” (Belgic Confession, art. 24).

2977 “Moreover, although we do good works, we do not base our salvation on them; for we cannot do  
2978 any work that is not defiled by our flesh and also worthy of punishment. And even if we could  
2979 point to one, memory of a single sin is enough for God to reject that work” (Belgic Confession,  
2980 art. 24). Basing our salvation on “the merit of the suffering and death of our Savior” has the  
2981 benefit of avoiding the doubt, uncertainty, and torment of conscience that would come from  
2982 basing our salvation on our good works (Belgic Confession, art. 24).

2983  
2984 The growth of baptized believers in the Christian life of faith both bears witness to the  
2985 liberating Gospel of Christ and “has ethical implications which not only call for personal  
2986 sanctification, but also motivate Christians to strive for the realization of the will of God in all  
2987 realms of life” (BEM, Baptism, III.10).

2988

## 2989 **5. p. What is the relationship between baptism and the assurance of salvation?**

2990

### 2991 Common Statement

2992

2993 Baptism is a sacrament intended to provide assurance to God’s people. For Roman  
2994 Catholics, baptism is always the assurance of grace imparted and therefore of one’s entry into  
2995 God’s salvific purposes. Therefore, all the baptized may take comfort and hope in the salvation  
2996 yet to be consummated that God through his Word and Spirit initiates in baptism. For Reformed  
2997 Christians, baptism is a means God uses to assure believers of God’s forgiveness and of God’s  
2998 gracious presence.

2999

### 3000 Roman Catholic Statement

3001

3002 Finally, while Catholics believe that grace is always offered and even infused in baptism  
3003 they may differ with Reformed Christians on the assurance of grace. The assurance of grace  
3004 cannot be considered in the Catholic perspective as the assurance or certainty of salvation. The  
3005 Council of Trent anathematized such assurance as articulated in the language it understood to be  
3006 used by Protestant Reformers. Hence, the following canons from its *Decree on Justification*:

3007

3008 If anyone says that in order to obtain the remission of sins it is necessary for every man to  
3009 believe with certainty and without any hesitation arising from his own weakness and  
3010 indisposition that his sins are forgiven him, let him be anathema (Canon 13).

3011

3012 If anyone says that man is absolved from his sins and justified because he firmly believes  
3013 that he is absolved and justified, or that no one is truly justified except him who believes  
3014 himself justified, and that by this faith alone absolution and justification are effected, let  
3015 him be anathema (Canon 14).

3016  
3017 Eternal salvation is a matter of perseverance in grace and the object of the virtue of hope.  
3018 Therefore, experiences of grace, for example, spiritual consolations, would not be interpreted as  
3019 the witness of the Spirit assuring one of salvation. If the assurance of grace is intended to pose  
3020 the question as to whether one is certain that he or she is in a state of grace, again the answer  
3021 would be in the negative. That is, it could not be matter of absolute certitude. The same  
3022 Tridentine decree states:

3023  
3024 “For as no pious person ought to doubt the mercy of God, the merit of Christ and the  
3025 virtue and efficacy of the sacraments, so each one, when he considers himself and his  
3026 own weakness and indisposition, may have fear and apprehension concerning his own  
3027 grace, since no one can know with the certainty of faith, which cannot be subject to error,  
3028 that he has obtained the grace of God” (Chapter IX).

3029  
3030 The only exception would be by a special privilege of revelation. However, one may on  
3031 the basis of conjecture (not certainty) be assured of receiving divine grace and abiding in it.  
3032 Thomas Aquinas states: “things are known conjecturally by signs; and thus any one may know  
3033 he has grace, when he is conscious of delighting in God, and of despising worldly things, and  
3034 inasmuch as a man is not conscious of any mortal sin.” This can even entail “certain sweetness”  
3035 in spiritual experience although “this knowledge is imperfect” (*Summa Theologiae* IIae. 112.5).

3036  
3037 The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in answering this question implicates the  
3038 difference (although not a necessary separation) between the ontological state of grace and  
3039 psychological awareness of grace:

3040  
3041 “Since it belongs to the supernatural order, grace *escapes our experience* and cannot be  
3042 known except by faith. We cannot therefore rely on our feelings or our works to conclude  
3043 that we are justified and saved. However, according to the Lord's words——“Thus you  
3044 will know them by their fruits”——reflection on God's blessings in our life and in the  
3045 lives of the saints offers us a guarantee that grace is at work in us and spurs us on to an  
3046 ever greater faith and an attitude of trustful poverty” (CCC, 2005).

3047  
3048 A pleasing illustration of this attitude is found in the reply of St. Joan of Arc to a question  
3049 posed as a trap by her ecclesiastical judges:

3050  
3051 “Asked if she knew that she was in God's grace, she replied: 'If I am not, may it please  
3052 God to put me in it; if I am, may it please God to keep me there'" (CCC, 2005).

3053  
3054 Faith it must be emphasized is a theological virtue supernaturally infused and abiding in the soul  
3055 amid the consolations and desolations of the spiritual life.

3056

3057 Reformed Statement

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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. Since 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).

3102 God provides assurance to believers to the end that they will not only know forgiveness,  
3103 but also have courage, comfort, and hope in serving God: “God promises to all who trust in the  
3104 gospel forgiveness of sins and fullness of grace, courage in the struggle for justice and peace, the  
3105 presence of the Holy Spirit in trial and rejoicing, and eternal life in that kingdom which has no  
3106 end” (Statement of Faith of the United Church of Christ, adapted by Robert Moss).  
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3108  
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3110

3111 **6. Pastoral Recommendations: Tangible Expressions of Mutual Recognition of Baptism**  
3112 Reformed-Roman Catholic Dialogue  
3113

- 3114 1. In our Agreement, we have given the grounds for formal mutual recognition of the  
3115 validity of our baptisms. The following are recommended to the consideration of our  
3116 communions on the basis of the ecumenical commitments that bring us to the dialogue  
3117 table. *It is understood that these recommendations should be implemented in accordance*  
3118 *with existing regulations.*  
3119
- 3120 2. We recommend that our local communities maintain the custom of keeping baptismal  
3121 records and providing baptismal certificates when requested at various times in the  
3122 Christian life of our members. Compatibility in the form and content of these documents  
3123 would be sign of ecumenical cooperation and a safeguard of the validity of what we  
3124 celebrate together as Christians.  
3125
- 3126 3. We recommend that prominence be given to the placement of the baptismal font and  
3127 water near the worshipping assembly as a sign of continuity in faith.  
3128
- 3129 4. We recommend the practice of inviting members of our respective communions to  
3130 reaffirm their Baptism together at times of prayer for Christian unity.  
3131
- 3132 5. We recommend, where the custom of baptismal sponsors, witnesses, or godparents has  
3133 been maintained, that these be selected from our respective communities of faith as a sign  
3134 that Christians belonging to our communions are truly members of the Body of Christ.  
3135 This is particularly important when welcoming interchurch families and their  
3136 congregations to a celebration of Baptism.  
3137
- 3138 6. We recommend the active participation of the families of those to be baptized in the  
3139 selection of readings, intercessory prayers, and music as a way of giving tangible  
3140 evidence of the unity that we share in Christ.  
3141
- 3142 7. Mindful that the active participation of clergy and laity of the respective communions of  
3143 the spouses is at present allowed in interchurch weddings, we also recommend the  
3144 practice of inviting clergy or lay guests to offer prayers, proclaim a Scripture reading,  
3145 preach, and/or confer a blessing in the rite of Baptism, maintaining respect for the rites of  
3146 each communion.

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8. We recommend the participation of clergy in local ministerial associations in order to facilitate the pastoral dialogues that need to take place to foster ecumenical cooperation at Baptism and at other important times in the faith journeys of Christians. Ministerial associations can be a means for fostering life-long spiritual accompaniment in faith both for clergy and for the laity whom they serve. In addition, such associations may find other creative symbolic ways to foster ecumenical sharing in a town, neighborhood, or village.
9. At the funeral rites of members of our communions, including other Christians with whom we are in ecumenical dialogue, we recommend the use of a prayer or rite (e.g. sprinkling of the casket, the white pall, etc.) as a final commendation that calls to mind the enduring gift of grace received in Baptism.
10. We recommend the use of those liturgical options already available in our official ritual books for the celebration of Baptism that enhance ecumenical awareness on the local level.
11. Mindful that in many instances local congregations may not be able to implement all these recommendations at the present time, we recommend a patient and prudent process of discernment among laity and clergy. We recognize that the journey towards 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 the 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.

## 7. Endnotes:

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<sup>i</sup> For more detailed description of the history that follows, see Maxwell Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville: 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: Liturgical Press, 1994).

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

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

<sup>iv</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.

<sup>v</sup> The resulting simple three part structure was:

cleansing--signation--flood prayer  
exorcism--reading of Mark 10:13-16--Lord's Prayer  
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>vi</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)

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Reading of Mark 10:13-16  
Naming (again) and baptism in the triune name  
Clothing in white robe  
Benediction [Fisher, 129-131.]

vii 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.]

viii 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.]

ix 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 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  
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. This prayer concludes with the Lord's Prayer.<sup>ix</sup>  
Baptism in the triune name  
Post-baptismal 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" s/he may "so prevayle against Satan, that in the end, obteyning the victorie, he may be exalted into the libertie of thy kingdome."

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

x 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)



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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>xi</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 eternall.” The instruction goes on to explain the reasons for infant baptism (as did the 16<sup>th</sup> C 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 20<sup>th</sup> C. An exception is Charles Shields’ 1864 publication of the 1661 BCP, which apparently did enjoy usage in some American Presbyterian churches in the 19<sup>th</sup> C.

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 post-baptismal 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>xii</sup> Hall, 74.

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

<sup>xiv</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>xv</sup> The UPNA was a smaller 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>xvi</sup> Hall, 218 n. 109, and 220.

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

<sup>xviii</sup> On this other hand, this was not a universal movement; the 1868 UPNA Directory, e.g., significantly abbreviated the texts of their earlier Directory, removing all prayer instructions and condensing the exhortations.

<sup>xix</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

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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>xx</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.

<sup>xxi</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  
Baptism in the triune name  
Prayer of thanksgiving and intercessions for child, parents, and all children of the Church, concluding with Lord's Prayer

<sup>xxii</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>xxiii</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>xxiv</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>xxv</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>xxvi</sup> See "Changes in CRC Baptismal Rites", unpublished paper by Lyle D. Bierma and Ronald J. Feenstra, April 1, 2005.

<sup>xxvii</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

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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  
Welcome, including congregational promise

<sup>xxviii</sup> 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 may 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]

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

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<sup>xxx</sup> The CRCNA alone has "into" rather than "in": "I baptize you *into* the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

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