

Baptism Policy (Adopted by Church Council 1/10/17)

The Policy of St. John's (Burry's) United Evangelical Protestant Church concerning Baptism.

Summary of Principles that Undergird our Understanding of Baptism:

1. Baptism replaces Old Testament circumcision as the sign of covenant membership as well as our identification with the priesthood of believers.
2. When joined with saving faith, baptism also becomes a seal of one's union with Christ in his death and resurrection and that we will join in a resurrection like his.
3. Baptism should be administered only once in the life of a person, either as a child or as a believing adult.
4. Baptism with water is properly administered by the sprinkling or pouring of water, not by immersion.
5. If a person who comes to faith has never been baptized, he should be baptized before he enters church membership.
6. Infants of active members of the church should be baptized without undue delay.
7. Baptism belongs to the church and thus, no private baptisms will ordinarily be done.

Principles on Baptism

1. Baptism is a sign and a seal of Christian covenant membership in the church.¹
 - In the New Testament era, the bloodless sign² of baptism is designed to replace the bloody sign of circumcision³, thus making physical circumcision useless.⁴
 - In the Old Testament, circumcision was the mark that identified you as separate from the world and able to participate in the festivals and worship of the church.⁵
 - While only performed on males in the Old Testament economy, in Christ's greater economy, there is neither male nor female⁶, thus both genders are presented for baptism.

1. H.C. 69-70; Constitution IV.2.a; 1 Corinthians 12:13.

2. Bloodless because Christ's sacrifice is not like the bloody sacrifices of the Old Testament priesthood that had to be repeated daily, but Christ's sacrifice is once and for all time — Hebrews 10:10-14.

3. Colossians 2:11-12.

4. Galatians 6:15. Note that the Covenant Sign of circumcision was given to Abraham as an everlasting covenant (Genesis 17:13). Thus it is improper to speak of circumcision being abrogated (or done away with), but instead it is fulfilled. And as it has fulfilled, its form has changed yet its purpose remains unchanged and all of the meaning contained within circumcision has been absorbed by baptism, baptism symbolizing the "better promises" of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6) which are fulfilled in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20-22).

5. Exodus 12:48.

6. Galatians 3:28.

- Baptism points symbolically to the circumcision of the heart⁷ spoken of in the Old Testament⁸, for a Jew⁹ is one inwardly, not outwardly in the flesh.¹⁰ And it points to justification by faith, as in the case of Abraham.¹¹
- As a sign it sets the individual apart from the world as a part of Christ's covenant community¹², it places them under the spiritual oversight of the Elders and Pastor¹³, and it entitles the baptized member to the benefits of regular Christian instruction¹⁴ and discipline.¹⁵
- When the sign is joined with saving faith¹⁶ it becomes an eternal seal, anointing us as a member of the priesthood of all believers¹⁷ and binding us permanently as members in Christ's body.¹⁸ As such, it opens access to the Lord's Table.¹⁹
- As a sign, it symbolizes the washing away of sins by the sacrifice of Christ's blood²⁰; when the sign becomes a seal, the outward symbolic washing becomes an inward reality in the life of the believer.²¹
- As a sign it is also an outward mark of obedience²², making baptism a requirement for someone entering membership in Christ's local church and proper for those babies born to believers who are a part of Christ's covenant church.

7. A metaphor for regeneration.

8. Deuteronomy 10:16; 30:6. Our sinful condition is called "uncircumcision" (Colossians 2:13) and the baptism anticipates the heart circumcision (Jeremiah 4:4).

9. While it is not common to think of Christians as Jews, in this context, scripture unites the two as one people, for not all who descend from Jacob are true Israel, but only those who descend according to the promise (Romans 9:6-8). And all who are in Christ are Abraham's offspring and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:29).

10. Romans 2:29.

11. Romans 4:11.

12. H.C. 71; Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 10:2; 12:13.

13. Acts 20:28.

14. Ecclesiastes 12:11; Malachi 2:7; Romans 10:14-17; 1 Timothy 5:17; 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

15. Proverbs 6:23; 1 Corinthians 9:27; 11:32; Hebrews 12:5-6; Revelation 3:19.

16. Mark 16:16; Acts 1:5; 2:38; Titus 3:4-7.

17. 1 Peter 2:9.

18. 1 Corinthians 12:27; Ephesians 4:12.

19. 1 Corinthians 11:29.

20. H.C. 69,72-73; Acts 2:38.

21. Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21 (noting that without faith, the symbol remains just that, a symbol or a sign).

22. Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 10:48.

- As a sign it reminds us of entering into Jesus' death (judgment) with the good conscience²³ that as we died with him we will be sealed in faith to him and will rise (in life).²⁴

2. There is no supernatural grace imparted in the act of baptism, nor is there any meritorious work on the part of the pastor or person being baptized. Thus:

- Baptism is only to be conducted once. As it is about what God is doing, man cannot add to that through repetition.²⁵
- Baptism is not required to enter heaven, as in the case of the criminal on the cross to whom Jesus said, "this day you will be with me in paradise."²⁶ Thus those who profess faith but are unable to be baptized due to circumstances outside of their control should have a clean conscience regarding the matter.²⁷ Yet, where circumstances do not prevent baptism, it is a mark of the obedience of the believer to receive baptism or to baptize their covenant children according with Christ's command.²⁸
- So long as the Baptism is Trinitarian in nature²⁹, we will recognize baptisms carried out even by Christian churches or denominations which have fallen into error in their beliefs. Yet, if one's 'baptism' was not with water and made in the Triune name of God, then we do not recognize that ritual as water baptism and baptism is thus necessary.
- It is only God who can transform the sign into a seal.³⁰ No amount of good works on the part of the person nor ordinances of the church can regenerate a person. Thus, while baptism is the first step of entrance into the visible church; it is not a first step into heaven.
- Thus a child's baptism does not guarantee their election, it simply identifies them as part of the local covenant body.

23. 1 Peter 3:21.

24. Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12.

25. As baptism signifies a salvation that is and can only ever be worked by God (Ephesians 2:8-9), the emphasis is on God's covenantal work and purposes; further, as salvation cannot be lost or forfeited (John 10:28-30), so too, the sign is only to be applied once and no amount of sin or rebellion can undo one's baptism and no amount of good works can add to its value.

26. Luke 23:43.

27. Extreme cases would be that of a person coming to faith in a prison camp. More common cases would be a death-bed profession or of a believer whose child is stillborn.

28. Matthew 28:19-20. Jesus' command to the church is to "make disciples" ... the first step of which is baptism, the sign by which a person is identified as part of the covenant community.

29. It must be in the Trinitarian name: "The name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Matthew 28:19. Note that in Acts 2:38 and 10:48, Peter speaks of being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Since the Trinitarian name is singular and not plural, reflecting the unity of the Godhead, Peter's reference to Baptism is considered a reference to Christian baptism and thus the Trinitarian name is to be inferred.

30. John 3:3,5-6.

3. If Baptism is not for everyone, to whom should it be administered?
- Those adults who come to faith and who were never baptized as children should present themselves to the Pastor and Elders for baptism.
 - Infants where *at least one parent* is an active member of St. John's (Burry's) Church should be baptized without delay.
 - Adopted children of an active member of St. John's (Burry's) Church (up until adulthood) should be baptized without delay.
 - Children who come to live under the oversight of an active member of St. John's (Burry's) Church (whether the member is an extended relative or is a foster parent) should be baptized without delay.
 - An unbelieving wife of a believing husband, who is not hostile to the Gospel and is willing to submit to her husband's leadership, though she is not yet a believer, should be baptized along with the rest of the household, under the spiritual authority of her believing husband.

4. Baptism of Children is a recognition that God has providentially placed the child in a Christian home where there is a commitment to raise him or her in the Christian faith and in a way that is consistent with the teachings of the church, which is meant to reflect the covenantal nature of the sacrament.³¹

- Baptism is a covenant act where the sign is to be placed upon a believer and all those under his covenant headship. Thus:
 - Abraham circumcised Ishmael (though Ishmael would not be a part of the covenant) and he circumcised all of his male servants.³²
 - Similarly, when Peter preaches of the promise of the Gospel, in the character of the Old Testament covenants, he clearly states that the promise was for those who would believe and for their children as well as those who are far off.³³
 - In turn, when people came to faith in the book of Acts, entire households were baptized.³⁴
- Thus, it is not normally the practice of St. John's (Burry's) Church to baptize children unless at least one parent³⁵ is an Active Member³⁶ of the church, for those who are not members will ordinarily not commit to being an active part in the life of the church. The Elders may make an exception to this rule in extraordinary circumstances.

31. H.C. 70,74. While it should be noted that Jesus' reception of the little children (Luke 18:15-17) is not the basis for the covenant baptism of children, it certainly goes to support the idea that Jesus considered the raising of children in the faith a high calling and honored those who would, in faith, present their children to him for blessing, distinguishing covenant children from the children of pagans.

32. Genesis 17:11-13.

33. Acts 2:39 echoing Genesis 17:7-8.

34. Acts 16:33.

35. 1 Corinthians 7:14.

36. Active Members are defined in the church Constitution IV.2.c as those members who 1) commune at least once per year, 2) conscientiously attend public worship, 3) contribute financially to the work of the church, and 4) sincerely endeavor to live the Christian life.

5. Baptism is an ordinance of the church, under the oversight of the Elders, and is meant to be practiced as a part of the worship of the gathered congregation.³⁷

- Thus, Baptism will be practiced as a part of a regularly scheduled worship service.
- Therefore, no private baptisms will ordinarily be practiced.³⁸
- As a part of worship, Baptism becomes a time for congregation members to renew their commitment to Christ as they vow to assist parents in raising their children in faith and it also serves as a reminder of God's promise to be God not only of the believer but of his or her children.

6. As to delaying baptism.

- Ordinarily, baptism should not be delayed any longer than necessary.³⁹ Parents of new children should meet with the pastor as soon as possible to discuss Baptism and schedule a time for the baptism to take place. Similarly, foster or adoptive parents and those who take in new members of their families as well as new converts should meet with the pastor to discuss the baptism and schedule a time for the sacrament.
- While baptism is not to be delayed any longer than necessary, it does mark a significant time in the life of the covenant family and as such, accommodation can be made in scheduling for those who will be traveling a distance to be able to witness the baptism.
- As baptism is also a visible sign of the Gospel and is part of the worship of God's people where the Word of God will be preached, as well as being an important event in the life of the covenant family, families are encouraged to invite friends and extended family members to witness the baptism in the hopes of encouraging the faithful and evangelizing the lost.

7. Baptism is properly administered through the sprinkling of water.

- We believe that the mode of baptism is significant as it reflects the ordination practices of the Levitical priesthood⁴⁰ as well as the Jewish practice of ritual washing⁴¹ from defilement. The same holds true for references to the spiritual cleansing in the New Covenant.⁴² These practices were done through sprinkling with water, not through immersion.
- Further, when it comes to the Old Testament symbolism behind baptism (The Flood⁴³ and the Red Sea Crossing⁴⁴), God's people remained dry and only those under God's judgment were immersed.

37. Constitution VI.4.a & VII.4.

38. At times there may be extraordinary circumstances where a private baptism might be permissible, see Acts 8:36-38 & Acts 16:33.

39. Bylaws VII.1; Acts 8:37; 10:47.

40. Numbers 8:7.

41. Mark 7:4.

42. Ezekiel 36:24-26.

43. 1 Peter 3:20-21.

44. 1 Corinthians 10:2

- Baptism is meant to be symbolic of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ Thus the symbolic practice of pouring or sprinkling reflects that which is being symbolized.
- Baptisms in the book of Acts were applied to the multitudes⁴⁶ and in one instance, it took place at midnight⁴⁷ — a time when immersion baptism would be highly unlikely.
- Thus, both children and adults alike, being presented for baptism will be baptized with the sprinkling of water and not by immersion, even if immersion is requested.

8. As to the word, "Baptism."

- While the Greek word can be used to refer to something "plunged under the water," in the vast majority of its uses, both in the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) and in the Greek New Testament, it refers to a kind of initiation rite where one enters into a new state or position with respect to the covenant.
 - In the Greek translation of the Old Testament sacrificial law, the root word behind baptism was used to speak of the hyssop or the finger of the priest being dipped in blood so that the blood may be sprinkled upon the doorposts and the people⁴⁸ — further, in Christ, we have been sprinkled by a better blood⁴⁹, that sprinkling again symbolized in the bloodless sacrament of Baptism.
 - In the Greek translation of the Old Testament Historical books, the root word behind baptism is often used to describe simply touching an item to the water or lightly dipping it in, not to submersion under water.⁵⁰
 - In the Septuagint, Isaiah's language of being overcome or overwhelmed by lawlessness is described as a baptism.⁵¹
 - Also in the Septuagint, the language of long, flowing turbans wrapped around one's head is translated as having "tiara's 'baptizing' their heads."⁵²
 - Jesus referred to his impending crucifixion as a kind of baptism.⁵³
 - Jesus speaks of Pentecost as a baptism.⁵⁴
 - Paul refers to the Red Sea Crossing as a Baptism into Moses.⁵⁵
 - Paul uses baptism as an analogy to putting on faith in Christ.⁵⁶

45. Isaiah 44:3; Ezekiel 39:29; Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17,33; 10:45.

46. Acts 2:41.

47. Acts 16:25,33.

48. Exodus 12:22; Leviticus 4:6, 17; 9:9; 14:16,51; Numbers 19:18.

49. Hebrews 12:24.

50. Joshua 3:15; Ruth 2:14; 1 Samuel 14:27.

51. Isaiah 21:4.

52. Ezekiel 23:15.

53. Mark 10:38-39.

54. Acts 1:5.

55. 1 Corinthians 10:2.

56. Galatians 3:27.

- Paul parallels baptism to circumcision.⁵⁷
- The author of the book to the Hebrews speaks of "various" baptisms, implying that such was a common practice in the covenant community.⁵⁸
- Peter refers to Noah's flood as a kind of baptism.⁵⁹
- While it is possible to read the Gospel reference to going into and out of the water to imply an immersion, the text never demands immersion as an interpretation. Since "living water"⁶⁰ was required for Jewish cleansing rituals, it need only be asserted that John the Baptist, Jesus' disciples, and Philip simply went to those places of water for access to the running water. Similarly, when the Didache⁶¹ speaks of going "to" the water, no immersion need be inferred by the statement, in fact, given the writings of the ancient church fathers, it would be hard to defend the typical Baptist reading.⁶²
- Thus it is the position of St. John's (Burry's) Church that baptism refers to a change in one's status towards the covenant of God and makes a person a part of the visible covenant church. No salvation, washing away of original sin, nor regeneration is imparted, but it is a symbol of the hope for regeneration to come through faith and of a life that is committed to living in newness of life.⁶³

9. Other resources: It is believed that the view articulated above is not only consistent with Scripture and the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), but is also consistent with historic Reformed positions as follows:

- Calvin's Geneva Catechism (1538): Article 28
- Scots Confession (1560: Articles XXI-XXIII
- Belgic Confession (1561): Article 34
- Second Helvetic Confession (1566): Article XX
- Irish Articles of Religion (1615): Articles 89-91.
- Westminster Confession of Faith (1647): Chapter XXVIII
- Westminster Shorter & Longer Catechism (1647): S.C. 94-95; L.C. 165-167.
- The Savoy Declaration (1658): Chapter 29

57. Colossians 2:11-12.

58. Hebrews 6:2.

59. 1 Peter 3:21.

60. A reference to running water in contrast to stagnant water.

61. The Didache (meaning 'teaching') is the oldest surviving manual of the Christian faith, dating to the very early part of the 2nd century AD.

62. Early church fathers such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Cyprian all make reference to the baptism of infants as the practice in the church. Origin spoke of the practice of Infant Baptism being handed down to the people by the Apostles and Justin Martyr taught on the different conditions of those infants who died baptized and who died unbaptized. These theologians all lived in the first central centuries and several were taught by those who had sat at the feet of the Apostle John personally. It is not until the Anabaptist reformation of the 1500's that one finds a concerted theological effort to defend adult-only immersion baptism.

63. Romans 6:1-4.

Historical Addendum....

Heidelberg Catechism (1563)

Question 69: How is it symbolized and sealed to you in Holy Baptism, that you have participated in the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross?

Answer: In this way: that Christ has appointed this outward washing with water and has joined it with a promise — that I am washed with His blood and Spirit of the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins. This is as definite as common dirt is taken away from the body with the outward washing of water.

Question 70: What does it mean to be washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ?

Answer: It is having the forgiveness of sins from God, through grace, done for the sake of Christ's blood which He shed for me in His sacrifice on the cross. It is also to be renewed by the Holy Spirit, and to be sanctified as a member of Christ, so that I may more and more die to sin and lead a holy and blameless life.

Question 71: Where has Christ promised that Baptism with water is a symbol of our being washed with His blood and Spirit?

Answer: In the institution of Baptism which is worded in this way: 'Go, therefore, and teach all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He that believes and is baptized will be saved; but he that does not believe, will be damned.' This promise is also repeated where the Scripture calls Baptism the washing of regeneration and the washing away of sins.

Question 72: Is then the outward washing with water itself the washing away of sins?

Answer: No; for only the blood of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit cleanse us from all sin.

Question 73: Why then, does the Holy Spirit call Baptism the washing of regeneration and the washing away of sins?

Answer: God speaks this way for a very important reason: that is he wants to teach us that like the filthiness of the body is taken away by water, so too our sins are taken away by the blood and Spirit of Christ. But there is another reason, for by this divine pledge and token, He assures us that we really are washed from our sins spiritually, just as our bodies are washed with water.

Question 74: Should we also baptize infants?

Answer: Yes. Since they, along with their parents, belong to the covenant and people of God and since both the redemption from sins and the Holy Spirit, who works faith, are promised to them no less than to their parents. Further, as Baptism is a sign of the covenant, they are ingrafted into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers as was done in the Old Testament through circumcision — baptism replacing the sign of circumcision in the New Testament.

Calvin's Geneva Catechism (1538)

Q324 M. First, what is the meaning of Baptism?

S. It consists of two parts. For, first, Forgiveness of sins; and, secondly, Spiritual regeneration, is figured by it. (Ephesians 5:26; Romans 6:4)

Q325 M. What resemblance has water with these things, so as to represent them?

S. Forgiveness of sins is a kind of washing, by which our souls are cleansed from their defilements, just as bodily stains are washed away by water.

Q326 M. What do you say of Regeneration?

S. Since the mortification of our nature is its beginning, and our becoming? new creatures its end, a figure of death is set before us when the water is poured upon the head, and the figure of a new life when instead of remaining immersed under water, we only enter it for a moment as a kind of grave, out of which we instantly emerge.

Q327 M. Do you think that the water is a washing? of the soul?

S. By no means; for it were impious to snatch away this honour from the blood of Christ, which was shed in order to wipe away all our stains; and render us pure and unpolluted in the sight of God. (1 Peter 1:19; 1 John 1:7.) And we receive the fruit of this cleansing when the Holy Spirit sprinkles our consciences with that sacred blood. Of this we have a seal in the Sacrament.

Q328 M. But do you attribute nothing more to the water than that it is a figure of ablution?

S. I understand it to be a figure, but still so that the reality is annexed to it; for God does not disappoint us when he promises us his gifts. Accordingly, it is certain that both pardon of sins and newness of life are offered to us in baptism, and received by us.

Q329 M. Is this grace bestowed on all indiscriminately?

S. Many precluding its entrance by their depravity, make it void to themselves. Hence the benefit extends to believers only, and yet the Sacrament loses nothing of its nature.

Q330 M. Whence is Regeneration derived?

S. From the Death and Resurrection of Christ taken together. His death hath this efficacy, that by means of it our old man is crucified, and the virtuosity of our nature in a manner buried, so as no more to be in rigor in us. Our reformation to a new life, so as to obey the righteousness of God, is the result of the resurrection.

Q331 M. How are these blessings bestowed upon us by Baptism?

S. If we do not render the promises there offered unfruitful by rejecting them, we are clothed with Christ, and presented with his Spirit.

Q332 M. What must we do in order to use Baptism duly?

S. The right use of Baptism consists in faith and repentance; that is, we must first hold with a firm heartfelt reliance that, being purified from all stains by the blood of Christ, we are pleasing to God: secondly, we must feel his Spirit dwelling in us, and declare this to others by our actions, and we must constantly exercise ourselves in aiming at the mortification of our flesh, and obedience to the righteousness of God.

Q333 M. If these things are requisite to the legitimate use of Baptism, how comes it that we baptize Infants?

S. It is not necessary that faith and repentance should always precede baptism. They are only required from those whose age makes them capable of both. It will be sufficient, then, if, after infants have grown up, they exhibit the power of their baptism.

Q334 M. Can you demonstrate by reason that there is nothing absurd in this?

S. Yes; if it be conceded to me that our Lord instituted nothing at variance with reason. For while Moses and all the Prophets teach that circumcision was a sign of repentance, and was even as Paul declares the sacrament of faith, we see that infants were not excluded from it. (Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 4:4; Romans 4:11.)

Q335 M. But are they now admitted to Baptism for the same reason that was valid in circumcision?

S. The very same, seeing that the promises which God anciently gave to the people of Israel are now published through the whole world.

Q336 M. But do you infer from thence that the sign also is to be used?

S. He who will duly ponder all things in both ordinances, will perceive this to follow. Christ in making us partakers of his grace, which had been formerly bestowed on Israel, did not condition, that it should either be more obscure or in some respect less abundant. Nay, rather he shed it upon as both more clearly and more abundantly.

Q337 M. Do you think that if infants are denied baptism, something is thereby deducted from the grace of God, and it must be said to have been diminished by the coming of Christ?

S. That indeed is evident; for the sign being taken away, which tends very much to testify the mercy of God and confirm the promises, we should want an admirable consolation which those of ancient times enjoyed.

Q338 M. Your view then is, that since God, under the Old Testament, in order to show himself the Father of infants, was pleased that the promise, of salvation should be engraved on their bodies by a visible sign, it were unbecoming to suppose that, since the advent of Christ, believers have less to confirm them, God having intended to give us in the present day the same promise which was anciently given to the Fathers, and exhibited in Christ a clearer specimen of his goodness.

S. That is my view. Besides, while it is sufficiently clear that the force, and so to speak, the substance of Baptism are common to children, to deny them the sign, which is inferior to the substance, were manifest injustice.

Q339 M. On what terms then are children to be baptized?

S. To attest that they are heirs of the blessing promised to the seed of believers, and enable them to receive and produce the fruit of their Baptism, on acknowledging its reality after they have grown up.

Scots Confession (1560)

Article 21: Of the Sacraments

As the fathers under the law, besides the verity of the sacrifices, had two chief Sacraments, to wit, Circumcision, and the Passover; (the despisers and contemners whereof were not reputed for God's people [Gen 17:9-14; Exod 12:1-28†; Num 9:13†; 1 Cor 10:2-4†]); so we acknowledge and confess, that we, now in the time of the Gospel, have two chief Sacraments only, instituted by the Lord Jesus, and commanded to be used of all those that will be reputed members of his body; to wit, Baptism, and the Supper, or Table, of the Lord Jesus, called the Communion of his body and his blood (Matt 26:26-28; 28:19; Mark 14:22-24†; 16:15-16† [TR]; Luke 22:19-20†; 1 Cor 11:23-26†). And these Sacraments, as well of the Old, as of the New Testament, now instituted of God, not only do make a visible difference betwixt his people and those that were without his league, but also do exercise the faith of his children (1 Cor 10:16-17†), and, by participation of the same Sacraments, do seal in their hearts the assurance of his promise (Rom 4:11), and of that most blessed conjunction, union, and society, which the elect have with their head Christ Jesus. And thus we utterly condemn the vanity of those, that affirm Sacraments to be nothing else but naked and bare signs. No; we assuredly believe, that by Baptism we are ingrafted into Christ Jesus, to be made partakers of his justice, by which our sins are covered, and remitted (Rom 6:3-5; Gal 3:27†; Tit 3:5-7†): and also that in the Supper, rightly used, Christ Jesus is so joined with us (1 Cor 10:16), that he becometh the very nourishment and food of our souls (John 6:55; 1 Cor 11:23-26†). Not that we imagine any transubstantiation of bread into Christ's natural body, and of wine into his natural blood, as the Papists have perniciously taught, and damnably believed: but this union and conjunction, which we have with the body and blood of Christ Jesus in the right use of the Sacrament, is wrought by the operation of the Holy Ghost, who, by true faith, carrieth us above all things that are visible, carnal, and earthly, and maketh us to feed upon the body and blood of Christ Jesus, which was once broken and shed for us, which now is in heaven, and appeareth in the presence of his Father for us (Mark 16:19† [TR]; Luke 24:51†; Acts 1:11†; 3:21†; Heb 6:20; 10:12). And notwithstanding the far distance of place, which is betwixt his body now glorified in heaven, and us now mortal on this earth; yet we must assuredly believe, that the bread which we break is the communion of Christ's body, and the cup which we bless is the communion of his blood (1 Cor 10:16). So that we confess, and undoubtedly believe, that the faithful, in the right use of the Lord's Table, do so eat the body and drink the blood of the Lord Jesus, that he remaineth in them, and they in him (John 6:56). Yea, they are so made flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bones (Eph 5:30), that, as the Eternal Godhead giveth to the flesh of Christ Jesus (which of its own condition and nature was mortal and corruptible [Matt 27:50†; Mark 15:37†; Luke 23:46†; John 19:30†]) life and immortality; so doth Christ Jesus his flesh and blood, eaten and drunken by us, give unto us the same prerogatives (John 6:51). Which albeit we confess are neither given unto us at this time only, neither yet by the proper power and virtue of the Sacrament only; yet we affirm, that the faithful, in the right use of the Lord's Table, have such conjunction with Christ Jesus, as the natural man cannot apprehend: yea, and further we affirm, that albeit the faithful, oppressed by negligence and manly infirmity, do not profit so much as they would, in the very instant action of the Supper; yet shall it after bring fruit forth, as lively seed sown in good ground: for the Holy Spirit, which can never be divided from the right institution of the Lord Jesus, will not frustrate the faithful of the fruit of that mystical action. But all this we say cometh of true faith, which apprehendeth Christ Jesus, who only maketh his Sacraments effectual unto us. And therefore whosoever slandereth us, as that we affirm or believe Sacraments to be only naked and bare signs, doth injury unto us, and speaketh against the manifest truth. But this liberally and frankly we confess, that we make distinction betwixt Christ Jesus in his eternal substance, and betwixt the elements in the sacramental signs. So that we will neither worship the sign, in place of that which is signified by them, neither yet do we despise, and interpret them as unprofitable and vain; but do use them with all reverence, examining ourselves diligently before that so we do: because we are assured by the mouth of the Apostle, that "such

as eat of the bread, and drink of that cup unworthily, are guilty of the body and blood of Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 11:28-29).

Article 22: Of the Right Administration of the Sacraments

That Sacraments be rightly ministered, we judge two things requisite: the one, that they be ministered by lawful Ministers, whom we affirm to be only they, that are appointed to the preaching of the word, into whose mouths God hath put some Sermon of exhortation, they being men lawfully chosen thereto by some Church: the other, that they be ministered in such elements, and in such sort, as God hath appointed: else we affirm that they cease to be right Sacraments of Christ Jesus. And therefore it is that we fly the society of the Papistical Church, in the participation of their Sacraments; first, because their Ministers are no Ministers of Christ Jesus (1 Tim 6:3-5), (yea, this is more horrible, they suffer women, whom the Holy Ghost will not suffer to teach in the Congregation [1 Tim 2:12†], to baptize); and secondly, because they have so adulterated both the one Sacrament and the other with their own inventions, that no part of Christ’s action abideth in the original purity. For oil, salt, and spittle, and such like in Baptism, are but men’s inventions; adoration, veneration, bearing through streets and towns, and keeping of bread in boxes or boists, are profanation of Christ’s Sacraments, and no use of the same. For Christ Jesus said, “Take eat, &c. Do ye this in remembrance of me” (Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22†; Luke 22:19†; 1 Cor 11:24†). By which words and charge, he sanctified bread and wine to be the Sacrament of his holy body and blood, to the end that the one should be eaten, and that all should drink of the other, and not that they should be kept, to be worshipped and honoured as God, as the Papists have done heretofore: who also have committed sacrilege, stealing from the people the one part of the Sacrament, to wit, the blessed cup.

Moreover, that the Sacraments be rightly used, it is required that the end and cause for which Sacraments were instituted, be understood and observed, as well of the Minister, as by the receivers. For if the opinion be changed in the receiver, the right use ceaseth; which is most evident, by the rejection of the sacrifices (Isa 1:11-13; Ps 50:7-8†): as also, if the teacher plainly teach false doctrine, which were odious and abominable before God, (albeit they were his own ordinances), because that wicked men use them to another end than God hath ordained (Jer 7:21-26; Isa 66:1-4). The same we affirm of the Sacraments in the Papistical Church; in which we affirm the whole action of the Lord Jesus to be adulterated, as well in the external form, as in the end and opinion. What Christ Jesus did, and commanded to be done, is evident, by the Evangelists and by St. Paul (Matt 26:26-28; 1 Cor 11:23-26): what the Priest doth at his altar, we need not to rehearse. The end and cause of Christ’s institution, and why the self-same should be used, is expressed in these words: “Do ye this in remembrance of me; as oft as ye shall eat of this bread, and drink of this cup, ye shall shew forth,” that is extol, preach, magnify, and praise, “the Lord’s death, till he come.” But to what end, and in what opinion, the Priests say their Mass, let the words of the same, their own doctors and writings, witness: to wit, that they, as Mediators betwixt Christ and his Church, do offer unto God the Father a sacrifice propitiatory for the sins of the quick and the dead: which doctrines, blasphemous to Christ Jesus, and making derogation of all those that shall be sanctified (Heb 9:27-28†; 10:14†), we utterly abhor, detest, and renounce.

Article 23: To Whom Sacraments Appertain

We confess and acknowledge, that Baptism appertaineth as well to the infants of the faithful, as unto them that be of age and discretion. And so we condemn the error of the Anabaptists, who deny Baptism to appertain to children before they have faith and understanding (Col 2:11-12†; Rom 4:11†; Gen 17:10†; Matt 28:19†). But the Supper of the Lord we confess to appertain to such only, as be of the household of faith, and can try and examine themselves as well in their faith, as in their duty towards their neighbours. Such as eat and drink at the holy Table without faith, or being at dissension with their brethren, do eat unworthily (1 Cor 11:28-29†): and therefore it is, that, in our Church, our Ministers take public and particular examination of the knowledge and conversation of such as are to be admitted to the Table of the Lord Jesus.

Belgic Confession (1561)

Article 34: The Sacrament of Baptism

We believe and confess that Jesus Christ, in whom the law is fulfilled, has by his shed blood put an end to every other shedding of blood, which anyone might do or wish to do in order to atone or satisfy for sins.

Having abolished circumcision, which was done with blood, he established in its place the sacrament of baptism. By it we are received into God's church and set apart from all other people and alien religions, that we may be dedicated entirely to him, bearing his mark and sign. It also witnesses to us that he will be our God forever, since he is our gracious Father.

Therefore he has commanded that all those who belong to him be baptized with pure water in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Matthew 28:19

In this way he signifies to us that just as water washes away the dirt of the body when it is poured on us and also is seen on the body of the baptized when it is sprinkled on him, so too the blood of Christ does the same thing internally, in the soul, by the Holy Spirit. It washes and cleanses it from its sins and transforms us from being the children of wrath into the children of God.

This does not happen by the physical water but by the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Son of God, who is our Red Sea, through which we must pass to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh, who is the devil, and to enter the spiritual land of Canaan.

So ministers, as far as their work is concerned, give us the sacrament and what is visible, but our Lord gives what the sacrament signifies-- namely the invisible gifts and graces; washing, purifying, and cleansing our souls of all filth and unrighteousness; renewing our hearts and filling them with all comfort; giving us true assurance of his fatherly goodness; clothing us with the "new man" and stripping off the "old," with all its works.

For this reason we believe that anyone who aspires to reach eternal life ought to be baptized only once without ever repeating it-- for we cannot be born twice. Yet this baptism is profitable not only when the water is on us and when we receive it but throughout our entire lives.

For that reason we detest the error of the Anabaptists who are not content with a single baptism once received and also condemn the baptism of the children of believers. We believe our children ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as little children were circumcised in Israel on the basis of the same promises made to our children.

And truly, Christ has shed his blood no less for washing the little children of believers than he did for adults.

Therefore they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of what Christ has done for them, just as the Lord commanded in the law that by offering a lamb for them the sacrament of the suffering and death of Christ would be granted them shortly after their birth. This was the sacrament of Jesus Christ.

Furthermore, baptism does for our children what circumcision did for the Jewish people. That is why Paul calls baptism the "circumcision of Christ." Colossians 2:11

Second Helvetic Confession (1566)

CHAPTER XX: Of Holy Baptism

THE INSTITUTION OF BAPTISM. Baptism was instituted and consecrated by God. First John baptized, who dipped Christ in the water in Jordan. From him it came to the apostles, who also baptized with water. The Lord expressly commanded them 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). And in The Acts, Peter said to the Jews who inquired what they ought to do: "Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:37 f.). Hence by some baptism is called a sign of initiation for God's people, since by it the elect of God are consecrated to God.

ONE BAPTISM. There is but one baptism in the Church of God; and it is sufficient to be once baptized or consecrated unto God. For baptism once received continues for all of life, and is a perpetual sealing of our adoption.

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE BAPTIZED. Now to be baptized in the name of Christ is to be enrolled, entered, and received into the covenant and family, and so into the inheritance of the sons of God; yes, and in this life to be called after the name of God; that is to say, to be called a son of God; to be cleansed also from the filthiness of sins, and to be granted the manifold grace of God, in order to lead a new and innocent life. Baptism, therefore, calls to mind and renews the great favor God has shown to the race of mortal men. For we are all born in the pollution of sin and are the children of wrath. But God, who is rich in mercy, freely cleanses us from our sins by the blood of his Son, and in him adopts us to be his sons, and by a holy covenant joins us to himself, and enriches us with various gifts, that we might live a new life. All these things are assured by baptism. For inwardly we are regenerated, purified, and renewed by God through the Holy Spirit and outwardly we receive the assurance of the greatest gifts in the water, by which also those great benefits are represented, and, as it were, set before our eyes to be beheld.

WE ARE BAPTIZED WITH WATER. And therefore we are baptized, that is, washed or sprinkled with visible water. For the water washes dirt away, and cools and refreshes hot and tired bodies. And the grace of God performs these things for souls, and does so invisibly or spiritually.

THE OBLIGATION OF BAPTISM. Moreover, God also separates us from all strange religions and peoples by the symbol of baptism, and consecrates us to himself as his property. We, therefore, confess our faith when we are baptized, and obligate ourselves to God for obedience, mortification of the flesh, and newness of life. Hence, we are enlisted in the holy military service of Christ that all our life long we should fight against the world, Satan, and our own flesh. Moreover, we are baptized into one body of the Church, that with all members of the Church we might beautifully concur in the one religion and in mutual services.

THE FORM OF BAPTISM. We believe that the most perfect form of baptism is that by which Christ was baptized, and by which the apostles baptized. Those things, therefore, which by man's device were added afterwards and used in the Church we do not consider necessary to the perfection of baptism. Of this kind is exorcism, the use of burning lights, oil, salt, spittle, and such other things as that baptism is to be celebrated twice every year with a multitude of ceremonies. For we believe that one baptism of the Church has been sanctified in God's first institution, and that it is consecrated by the Word and is also effectual today in virtue of God's first blessing.

THE MINISTER OF BAPTISM. We teach that baptism should not be administered in the Church by women or midwives. For Paul deprived women of ecclesiastical duties, and baptism has to do with these.

ANABAPTISTS. We condemn the Anabaptists, who deny that newborn infants of the faithful are to be baptized. For according to evangelical teaching, of such is the Kingdom of God, and they are in the covenant of God. Why, then, should the sign of God's covenant not be

given to them? Why should those who belong to God and are in his Church not be initiated by holy baptism? We condemn also the Anabaptists in the rest of their peculiar doctrines which they hold contrary to the Word of God. We therefore are not Anabaptists and have nothing in common with them.

Irish Articles of Religion (1615)

Of Baptism.

89. Baptism is not only an outward sign of our profession, and a note of difference whereby Christians are discerned from such as are no Christians; but much more a Sacrament of our admission into the Church, sealing unto us our new birth (and consequently our Justification, Adoption, and Sanctification) by the communion which we have with Jesus Christ.

90. The Baptism of Infants is to be retained in the Church as agreeable to the word of God.

91. In the administration of Baptism, Exorcism, Oil, Salt, Spittle, and superstitious hallowing of the water are for just causes abolished: and without them the Sacrament is fully and perfectly administered to all intents and purposes agreeable to the institution of our Savior Christ.

Westminster Confession of Faith (1647)

Chapter XXVIII

Of Baptism

I. Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life. Which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in His Church until the end of the world.

II. The outward element to be used in this sacrament is water, wherewith the party is to be baptized, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, by a minister of the Gospel, lawfully called thereunto.

III. Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; but Baptism is rightly administered by pouring, or sprinkling water upon the person.

IV. Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized.

V. Although it is a great sin to contemn or neglect this ordinance, yet grace and salvation are not so inseparably annexed unto it, as that no person can be regenerated, or saved, without it:⁵³⁴ or, that all that are baptized are undoubtedly regenerated.

VI. The efficacy of Baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongs unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His appointed time.

VII. The sacrament of Baptism is but once to be administered unto any person.