Over the past five years, members of the Roman Catholic/United Church Dialogue of Canada have been involved in a careful study of the use of the Trinitarian formula in baptism. With the publication of this Report, *In Whose Name? The Baptismal Formula in Contemporary Culture*, we would like to invite other members of our two churches, ecumenical partners, and theological colleagues to join the dialogue. Some suggestions for study of the Report are outlined in Appendix E. Responses may be sent to either the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' Commission for Ecumenism or the United Church's Committee on Inter-Church and Inter-Faith Relations.

IN WHOSE NAME?
THE BAPTISMAL FORMULA IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE

INTRODUCTION

Roman Catholic/United Church Dialogue

Initiated in 1974 to foster mutual understanding and Christian unity, the Roman Catholic/ United Church Dialogue includes six representatives from each church and an Anglican observer. Meeting twice a year, the members of the dialogue group explore cultural attitudes as well as theological and doctrinal issues. Participants expect to learn from and to be challenged by one another. The group has made a commitment to seek ways of communicating its findings to promote mutual respect and understanding among the members of both churches.

In recent years, the group has engaged in dialogue on such diverse topics as the two churches' positions on abortion, the role and exercise of authority in the church and the meaning of evangelism/evangelization in the two churches. In setting its agenda, the dialogue group is sensitive to topics of concern in the sponsoring churches.

Thus, in the mid-1980's, the United Church began raising the question of alternative Trinitarian formulae for use at baptism, both in its own documents and in ecumenical circles (for example, its response to the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* document of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches). From then until now, the General Council has resisted approving any changes pending consultation with ecumenical partners. At the same time, the Canadian Council of Churches wished to seek clarification of United Church theology and practice on the matter of the baptismal formula. The Committee on Inter-Church and Inter-Faith Relations of the United Church also proposed that Trinitarian language at baptism become a discussion topic for the RC/UC Dialogue. It was thought that this would be a conversation with practical value not only for Canadian churches but for the broader ecumenical community.

Our Churches' Understanding of Baptism

Both of our churches consider water baptism a sacrament. Baptism is an action which the Church carries out as part of its mandate to continue the mission of Jesus Christ in the post-resurrection era. Both of our churches baptize believers and infants, the latter as a sign of the priority of grace in all aspects of human life. Both have come in recent years to recognize more and more the need for pre-baptismal catechesis of candidates or their parents or guardians.

Roman Catholics hold that, through baptism, people "are born again as children of God and, made like to Christ by an indelible character, are incorporated into the Church" (*Code of Canon Law*, §849). In Roman Catholic teaching, those who are ignorant of the Gospel of Christ but seek the truth and do the will of God in accordance with their understanding of it can be saved. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #1260) Yet, the actual reception of baptism is ordinarily necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been preached. When it is correctly carried out by anyone in the form laid down by the Church, baptism is an effective and unrepeatable act. The Roman Catholic Church presumes that a baptism is valid if it is done with water and the Trinitarian formula: "in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Only those baptized in this way may approach the other sacraments.

The United Church's *Basis of Union* says of the sacrament of baptism: "Baptism with water into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is the sacrament by which are signified and sealed our union to Christ and participation in the blessings of the new covenant" (*Basis* 2.16.1).

In 1975 our churches entered into an agreement with Presbyterians, Lutherans and Anglicans in Canada whereby each church would accept as valid the baptisms of the others administered according to established norms (i.e., with water and the use of the traditional Trinitarian formula). Unless there is evidence that a church's established norms are not being followed, its baptisms are presumed to be valid. This agreement was not to be interpreted as restricting the number of churches whose baptisms would be recognized as valid but as identifying the conditions for such agreement.

Baptismal Practice and Liturgical Renewal

The recent liturgical renewal which has taken place in both of our churches since the Second Vatican Council is oriented towards fostering active and intelligent participation by the worshippers in the public celebrations of the church. As a consequence of this renewal, celebrations of baptism in our two churches have become more alike in recent decades. Catholic baptisms are held frequently in the context of the Sunday Eucharist rather than privately, with more emphasis than formerly upon the Word of God in Scripture to which baptism is a response. United Church baptisms are now often performed in the context of celebrations which refer to the rhythms of the liturgical year and they increasingly make use of the variety of symbols and gestures which, in Roman Catholicism, have helped to make the significance of the sacrament apparent.

The contemporary feminist critique of all forms of patriarchy includes a challenge to the church to further revise the way it celebrates liturgies. In both Roman Catholic and United Churches, albeit in different ways, there has been an effort to find more inclusive forms of community and worship. Almost since its inception in 1925, actions of the General Council of the United Church have led the church along lines of greater inclusivity as part of an enduring commitment to follow the early church in its decision to extend to the gentiles God's offer of grace.

In keeping with the way in which language is increasingly being used in secular society, both of our Churches have mandated the liturgical use of inclusive language referring to people where it is clear that such language accurately renders the sense of the underlying Hebrew or Greek texts. The proposal to seek gender balance when addressing or referring to God is more controversial. For the UCC, however, using more inclusive language in this connection is seen as an aspect of the faithful living of the Gospel.

A movement towards greater inclusivity in liturgical language may have the potential to convey the message of the Gospel more effectively in the contemporary context. Certainly it could affect baptismal practice and, in so doing, alter the established norms which form the basis of the 1975 agreement. Over the past four years our dialogue has probed various aspects of the question in an effort to be in a position to spell out with clarity what might be gained and what might be put at risk if the United Church, or any other Christian community, were to give official approval to alternative baptismal formulae. This report offers an overview of how our discussions have progressed, a summary of what we think is at stake and the options available.

Steps in the Dialogue

At the meeting of October 26-28, 1995, we began our discussions with two presentations: a review of the development of the doctrine of the Trinity and a summary of questions raised in feminist discussion of this doctrine. These presentations initiated dialogue about the degree of linguistic flexibility open to Christians as they express their Trinitarian faith at baptism. Acknowledging the relationship between belief and language, we hoped to explore how the words we use both express and form our beliefs. We asked ourselves whether different words really mean that our beliefs are different. Are these beliefs different and divisive? Or, perhaps, different and complementary?

At the spring meeting of April 18-20, 1996, there was a presentation on the Trinitarian doctrine outlined in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and a summary of the teaching expressed in various liturgical and hymn texts of the Reformed and Methodist traditions. These discussions led to a dialogue at the meeting of November 7-9, 1996, on the claim in the *Catechism* that "the doctrine of the Trinity is the central mystery of Christian faith and life" (#234). At the April 21-23, 1997 meeting, a synthesis of statements from the previous meeting led to a decision to develop two papers on the topic, "What's at Stake in Trinitarian Belief?" At this meeting, the group was informed that the UC General Council Executive had

asked that the Committee on Theology and Faith and the Committee on Sexism be kept informed of the progress of the dialogue on this topic.

The meeting of October 30-November 1, 1997, began with a discussion of the two papers on "what's at stake" and a presentation on a "New Testament Survey of Baptismal Practices". The group broke into denominational caucuses to consider: "What, if any, Trinitarian formulae for baptism, other than that of Mt. 28, can we, with justification, offer to our constituencies for their consideration?" At the meeting of April 16-18, 1998, we discussed papers on: "The Baptismal Formula in the Early Church", "The Baptismal Formula in Biblical Witness", "Reflections on the Baptismal Formula", and "Agreed Statements from the International Orthodox/Roman Catholic Dialogue Commission". Some of the content of these papers is included in this report.

From October 29-31, 1998, the members of the dialogue group discussed individual answers to two questions: What's at stake in Father/Son language? What would be lost if we did not use Father/Son language in the baptismal formula? At the meeting of April 8-10, 1999, the dialogue group reflected on "A Feminist Critique of Father/Son Language". At both meetings, we discussed optional formulae that might be proposed and considered criteria that could be used in assessing these formulae. At the November 4-6, 1999, meeting, our usual meeting time was extended to allow for a final editing of the report.

The sections in the following report reflect the development of the dialogue as participants refined the topic to highlight those aspects of Trinitarian belief and language with the greatest relevance for the practice of baptism.

I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRINITY FOR OUR CHURCHES

Early in our discussions of Trinitarian language and the baptismal formula it became clear that a prior conversation was needed, one that would clarify the place of the Trinity within our respective faith traditions. We recognized, however, that this conversation had to begin at the level of our own experience, for we noted the intensity of feeling that surrounded our preliminary attempts to describe our theology of the Trinity to one another.

Thus, we chose a process that would uncover the roots of our theological stances. Taking as a starting point the statement of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* that the Trinity is "the central mystery of Christian faith and life," we asked ourselves, "What do I understand to be the animating centre of the Christian life?" We anticipated (correctly, at it turned out) that our responses to this question would indicate our understandings of the ways in which our "animating centres" connected (or did *not* connect) to the Trinity.

Each member of the dialogue prepared a short statement in response to this question. (See Appendix A) These statements revealed, often in poetic and passionate language, that the faith roots of both our Roman Catholic and our United Church members are deep, distinctive, and entwined. That is, we found both points of commonality and points of difference between our traditions, but *no indifference* to the question of what lies at the heart of Christian faith

and life. In this section, we present first our common ground, then our differences, and then we draw some conclusions about what we see to be at stake when we speak of the significance of the Trinity for Christian faith.

Our Common Ground

1. Revelation is our Starting Point The most obvious common aspect of our statements was also a most basic tenet: for both Roman Catholics and members of the United Church, the "most central mystery of Christian faith and life" is the gratuitous offer of reconciliation God extends to humanity:

> The Christian life is essentially life reconciled to God through Christ's own self-offering for us. (UC)
>
> Belief in Christ impels the believer to adhere to (i.e., seek to be united with) the oneness of God. (RC)
>
> Le Dieu-Trinité veut nous partager sa vie, son amour, sa joie. (RC)
>
> The central mystery of the Christian faith is grace: the unexpected and undeserved experience of God's mercy in Jesus Christ. (UC)

2. "Trinity Talk" is Second Order Theological Reflection Both Roman Catholics and members of the United Church regard what is said about the Trinity as "second order" theological statements, that is, as words which try to articulate Jesus' way of speaking of God and the disciples' experience of the risen Jesus. Both recognize their relationship to Jesus as the fundamental origin of Trinitarian faith. "To think of Jesus is to ponder a God who could, who would, come among us in that way," as one (RC) statement put it.

The extraordinary insight that Jesus himself was Saviour, and that their faith and trust in God was inseparable from their faith in Jesus as the Christ, dawned gradually upon the early Christians. Since in their prayer, life, and mission, they related to Jesus Christ as to God, corresponding theology inevitably followed: the doctrine of the Incarnation of God's eternal Word in Jesus Christ. Just as Trinitarian language helped the early Christians to clarify their faith, so it elucidates our own experience and belief.

In other words, language which seeks to describe the relationships among the persons of the Trinity ("immanent" Trinitarian language) attempts to make sense of the "Trinitarian" form of God's salvific activity among us (the "economic" Trinity). The importance of this language means that United Church people, whose daily faith rituals make them appear to be less tied to the Trinitarian formulations than Catholics are (as will be discussed, below), do still acknowledge the importance of the substance of those formulations.

3. We Emphasize the Generosity of God Both Roman Catholics and United Church people are convinced that viewing God as "three persons" encourages Christians to have confidence that God is "by nature" generous. That generosity establishes a new ethic, a redeemed community, and so directs our human lives toward new community and generous living:

> God's divine life is one of mutual self-giving and communion. . . . The restoration of human beings in Christ to God established for Christians a new ethic . . . one in which absolute control or power are not the dominant feature. (RC)

> My most deeply felt and passionate faith rests in fact upon a God who is a community of persons, persons, who, in their diversity, offer life, liberty and hope for the world. (UC)

> For me, the understanding of God as Trinity is central to prayer and to belief in the possibility of an ongoing encounter with God in daily life. (RC)
> The animating centre of Christian life is the Spirit's gift of participation in the life and mission of the Triune God. (UC)

Our Points of Difference

1. Daily Living: Immanent, or Economic? For Roman Catholics, daily Christian living seems to be more explicitly "Trinitarian" than it is for members of the United Church. The frequent use of the "Sign of the Cross" is an important influence upon the shape of Roman Catholic piety, which has as its goal the sanctification of the individual who, made in God's image and incorporated into Christ, has the potential to receive a share in the divine life through the action of the Holy Spirit. This emphasis upon participation in the Trinitarian relationship tends to draw Roman Catholics toward an immanent expression of the Trinity:

> En traçant le signe de la croix avec les paroles «Au nom du Père, etc.» on indique aussi que c'est par Jésus Christ que cette révélation et ce sceau nous sont donnés. (RC)

> As a child I was taught to maintain a conscious awareness that I was living "in" the Trinitarian relationship. . . . We are called to model our relationships in our family and in the church on the relationships of love and respect which are in the Trinity. (RC)

> The doctrine of the Trinity *does* function as the "animating" centre for me as a Catholic, in the sense of a felt need to live in reference to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. (RC)

Everyday faith in the United Church is focused more upon the grace of God and upon Jesus as reconciler and proclaimer of the Kingdom or Reign of God. The coming of God's Reign involves the triumph of good over evil and the restoration of relationships of love and respect between humanity and God and among all of God's creatures. The individual who, conscious of having received salvation as a gift, helps to make the world more like God's Reign, is a faithful disciple of Jesus. In centring on this active and world-oriented love, United Church people tend to be drawn toward "economic" conceptions of the Trinity; in fact, to speak of the "immanent" Trinity may come only with struggle:

> The animating centre of the Christian life . . . is our participation as individuals and as church, in God's reconciling mission to the world, which is the continuing mission of the risen and living Christ, a mission of love and peace. (UC)

> If you were to ask me about the "animating centre of the Christian life" . . . I imagine that I would speak about the Kingdom of God: inbreaking, indwelling, at hand, come near. (UC)

> Something within me recognizes that there is a connection between the relationship that I see as the animating centre of the Christian life and the intra-relationship of the Trinity, but it seems tenuous and somewhat forced. (UC)

2. Inference or Necessary Condition? Within and behind these differing emphases in daily approaches to faith seems to lie a difference in the location of the doctrine of the Trinity within our theological systems. United Church people tend to view the doctrine of the Trinity as an *inference* based upon the experience of God's self-revelation. In that sense it is important but not necessarily prior to an understanding of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection, and the gift of the Spirit, as witnessed by early Christians:

> The fact is that the apostolic generation of believers lived and witnessed and died in a faith that was implicitly rather than explicitly Trinitarian. . . . How, then, could the doctrine of the Trinity, conceived on an immanent basis, be central to the Christian faith? Perhaps only if *grounding* the authenticity and shape of God's mercy in Jesus Christ is viewed as more important than its *experience*. (UC)

> It seems to me that the words of the Trinity at the time they were first used were developed out of our attempts to explain who Jesus was and how he was still present among his followers. (UC)

> The Scripture provides not doctrines, but testimonies. What we find is a Trinitarian structure in the testimony to Jesus and the Spirit, whether we read Paul or the synoptics, or John. (UC)

Roman Catholics, on the other hand, would see the doctrine not as an inference but as a necessary condition for the truth of what is said about God and/or about Jesus. It is in that sense that they regard the doctrine of the Trinity as most central or fundamental:

> God deals with us in three ways. . . being present to our history as Father, Son, and Spirit. (RC)

> We are through baptism brought into the 'family' which is the Trinity; thus we share in the very life of the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. (RC)

> For me, the "animating centre" of Christian life . . . is relationship with God. . . . There is only one God. There are no divided loyalties. But in this one God, there are three persons. (RC)

What's at Stake?

1. The Nature of God Our exploration of the significance of the Trinity for the Christian faith indicated that both Roman Catholics and United Church members see much at stake in our doctrine of the Trinity. Both agree that the development of the doctrine of the Trinity is not merely a naive phase of Christian theological development, now to be outgrown. It gives us crucial insight into who God was for Jesus, who God is for us, and how we shall live as a result. It tells us that God is open to suffering, not only empathetically with creation, but in God's own self at and on the cross. The God of the immanent Trinity is a God in eternal community, and therefore a God who breaks down patriarchy and undermines tyrants, as feminist and liberation theologians have shown us.

The Triune God is one in open relationship: parental, filial, adopting; such a God cannot be impersonal or indifferent. It is to intimacy of relationship that the traditional

language of Father/Son points. This language reminds us that our whole existence is rooted in One who, despite having been rejected by us, still loves us with familial affection. Where Roman Catholics and United Church members express our faith in *different* ways the divergences tend to be those of emphasis or focus. They do not separate us in our common conviction that in turning to the God who meets us in the Trinity we encounter the One who offers us salvation.

2. Faithful Practice Both Roman Catholics and United Church people are conscious of the great impact which the language of faith practice has upon theological thought (*lex orandi, lex credendi)*. Roman Catholic piety contributes to the readiness with which many Catholics enter into discussions of the immanent Trinity, even though they acknowledge the difficulty of finding adequate language for such discussions. For United Church members, the concern is that the language of faith practice not obscure the liberating message of the Gospel by employing unnecessarily narrow vocabulary. For both groups, the language we use not only speaks of our faith, it helps to create and shape the faith community. It cannot, therefore, be trivialized, either by uncritical repetition, or by jumping on a linguistic band-wagon.

Conclusion

We share a conviction that Trinitarian theology is necessary for the Christian community truly to know God, and we share an affirmation that we are *doing* that theology by the language we speak in worship. Taken together, this conviction and this affirmation challenge us to continue to name the Triune God in baptism in language which is rich and full and inviting. Tesponding to this challenge becomes the task of the next section of our report.

II. SETTING THE BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Affirming that we are committed to naming the Triune God in baptism, we further recognize that both Roman Catholics and United Church members seek to be faithful to the will of Jesus Christ and to the apostolic teaching. Any claim we might make about naming God in baptism needs to be tested against the biblical and historical witness to the meaning, purpose and form of the baptismal rite. That is why we turn now to a review of New Testament, other early Christian, and subsequent historical perspectives.

We acknowledge that there are differences in our emphases when we approach Scripture and Christian history, yet we agree on key issues. Scripture is the indispensable source for our knowledge of faith, yet we do not read it in a fundamentalist way. We realize that the authors of the New Testament books wrote at least two decades after Jesus' death and resurrection. These writings thus give us direct access to the faith of the first Christian generations, and indirect access to the historical Jesus himself, but this recognition does not diminish their significance. The New Testament documents are *both* human documents and God's revelatory word to us. We come to discern the "will of Christ" through our faithful interpretation of these early texts, invoking the aid and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

As well as valuing the work of contemporary biblical scholars who apply various critical techniques to the books of the New Testament, we also value evidence about how past generations of Christians have understood these writings. Yet, the dialogue has shown that our two churches tend to assess the views of past generations differently. Where Roman Catholics look to patristic sources, official teachings, and accepted liturgical practices as authoritative guides to the interpretation of biblical texts, United Church members see both early and more recent interpreters as helpful tools to assist in understanding the meaning of these texts. In both cases, the texts themselves always stand as the norm.

We therefore agree that both the documents of the New Testament and the ongoing Christian witness must be studied carefully and taken seriously as we approach our current context and its questions. Together they represent to us a lived faith, whose contours are suggested by the courageous Christian life and worship of our forebears, as they faced ever-changing circumstances.

The Rite of Baptism in the New Testament

The specific focus of this dialogue was the baptismal formula, and the degree of flexibility permitted to Christians in expressing what baptism symbolizes. We thus approached the New Testament seeking to know what it attributes to Jesus concerning baptism, and what it records about the practice of the early church. We found in the texts references to the baptism of John, the baptizing words and deeds of Jesus and the disciples, the apostles' approach to baptism in Acts and the Letters, and an emphasis on baptism and the gift of the Spirit.

John the Baptist A large proportion of the New Testament passages which mention baptism are connected to John.[1] His baptism involved immersion in the Jordan River of those who sought to confess their sins, in anticipation of one "coming after," who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. It was thus, according to the evangelists, a preparation for something greater: an even more radical purification in God's new age. We do not know exactly what words, if any, John spoke as individuals were immersed. About this the New Testament is silent.

Jesus' baptism by John was exceptional in that, according to the Synoptic accounts, it was a revelatory moment which set Jesus apart as one endowed with a special gift of God's Holy Spirit (Mt 3:16, Mk 1:9, Lk 3:21). A voice from heaven identified Jesus as the Father's beloved Son. In the Gospel of John, Jesus' reception of the Holy Spirit occurs prior to his meeting with John; the evangelist does not actually tell us that Jesus received baptism.

Jesus and the Disciples A small number (eleven) of Gospel passages having to do with baptism refer to those apparently performed by Jesus and/or his disciples in the period of his public ministry. These seem to have been similar in form and meaning to John's

[1]Thirteen out of twenty-three uses of the noun "baptism"; only John receives the title, "the Baptist" (over a dozen times); one-third of the instances in which various forms of the verb "to baptize" appear apply to John the Baptist.

baptisms, but the evangelists supply no details about their form. They also seem uneasy about acknowledging that Jesus engaged in work that seemed to pattern itself on John's ministry, rather than initiating a new era. In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus sometimes uses the word "baptism" figuratively, to describe the suffering that he was about to undergo (Mk 10:38 and parallels).

Matthew's Gospel says that, in his final post-resurrection appearance, Jesus commanded the remaining eleven apostles to go forth and make disciples of all nations, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (28:19). This is, however, the sole place in which the New Testament explicitly mandates what has come to be the usual Trinitarian wording of the baptismal formula.[2] Further, the final few verses of Mark's Gospel (16:15-16) – later additions which summarize the content of the resurrection appearances in the other gospels – lack a parallel to the Matthean passage indicating the precise words to be used in baptism. Biblical scholar Raymond Brown's commentary on Mt 28:19 indicates uncertainty about whether the Trinitarian formula described in the Gospel of Matthew was explicitly mandated by Jesus or whether it grew out of early believers' articulation of faith in Jesus Christ. He believes that the Matthean community's use of this formula (c. 70-100 C.E.) replaced an earlier custom of baptizing in the name of Jesus (e.g., Acts 2:38, 8:16).[3]

Baptism in Acts and the Letters The Acts of the Apostles and some of the New Testament Letters refer to baptisms performed in the decades following Jesus' resurrection. In Hebrews 6:2, instruction about baptism is a foundational "teaching about Christ." Several individuals (Paul, Philip, Peter, John, Annaias) are said to have baptized. Baptism involved water (mentioned explicitly twelve times and implied six times) and was apparently administered "in the name of" the one to whom one's life was being committed. In addition to the Matthean formula, reference is made to baptism in the name of Jesus Christ, or the Lord Jesus.[4]

Baptism and the Gift of the Spirit The first Christians seem to have had a fluid understanding of the connection between water baptism and the gift of the Spirit. In some (six) instances baptism is described as being with or in the Spirit (and twice with fire also), in others the Spirit is received before water baptism, and in yet others those who have been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus later receive the Spirit through the laying on of hands. While, in Acts, the gift or baptism of the Holy Spirit seems to be the distinguishing mark of the committed follower of Jesus, it is not always associated with baptism. The concern in

---

[2]The question arises whether in Acts 1:5 and 8 we have an echo of the baptismal formula of Mt 28:19. If so, the echo is faint, and whether it precedes or follows the other text depends on how we date the manuscripts. Baptism by the Holy Spirit is described as "the promise of the Father." Aside from Mt 28:19 this is the only instance in the New Testament where the words, "the Father" are associated with baptism.

[3]R. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, The Anchor Bible Reference Library (N.Y.: Doubleday, 1996), 203, 217.

[4]In Acts and in the Epistles, baptism in performed "in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38 and 10:48), "in" or "into" "the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 8:16 and 19:5), "into Christ" (Gal 3:27), and "into Christ Jesus" (Rom 6:3). See also 1 Cor 1:10-17.

these texts seems to be not for a uniform baptismal formula, but to assure that both baptism and the receipt of the Spirit have occurred.

Conclusion Taken together, the New Testament documents suggest that a wealth of related meanings was attached to baptism. It was a sign of commitment, like the act of faith made by those who followed Moses into the waters at the Exodus. But in contrast to Moses' followers, Christians were baptized into Jesus as crucified and risen saviour. Other passages describe Christians as having been buried with Christ in/by baptism, or baptized into his death; baptism was thus connected with salvation from sin and its effects, especially death. To be baptized into Christ was also to be made one in Christ with other believers: Paul reminds the contentious Corinthians that "in the one Spirit, we were all baptized into one body." (1 Cor 12:13) And baptism was also powerfully related to resurrection, to the point that there was baptism on behalf of the unbaptized dead: "If the dead are not raised," Paul asks the Corinthians, "why are people baptized on their behalf?" (1 Cor 15:29)

One of our objectives in looking at the New Testament was to see what light Scripture gives on alternative baptismal formulae. Our texts show us that variations in the formula probably existed in the early church. The formula favoured by the Matthean community, however, became the norm, as we discovered in a study of other records of early Christianity.

The Baptismal Formula in the Early Church

The Baptismal Setting Early Christian baptism occurred within the ferment of a new religious movement's struggle to define its identity and to interpret itself to a hostile world. Baptism was both a dangerous political act and a deeply spiritual one. The documents of the time thus depict the rite itself as a liturgical drama of the highest order, while its attendant theology is rich with symbol and imagery. Catechumens trod on goatskin that symbolized their sin, and were anointed from head to foot in the oil of exorcism, before plunging naked into the font. Their teachers urged them, during their weeks of catechesis, to "let the stubbornness of unbelief feel the anvil, let the superfluous scales drop off as of iron, and what is pure remain".[5] In the ancient texts which refer to baptism there is rarely discussion of the "formula" *per se*; it tends to be mentioned either within the rubrics of a fulsome baptismal order, or as a way to summarize the whole baptismal experience. Sometimes it is not clear whether a statement about "baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" is meant to recount the words of a liturgy, or to describe baptism's Trinitarian essence.[6]

As with all Christian doctrine, the rite and theology of baptism developed against a backdrop of conflict and debate. As the Church sought to counter Gnosticism, Arianism, and Donatism, it found itself needing to clarify Trinitarian concepts, and to assess the validity of

---

[5]Cyril of Jerusalem, "Catechetical Oration," in Alan Hayes, ed., *Church and Society in Documents, 100-600 C.E.* (Toronto: Scholar's Press, 1995), 23.

[6]E.C. Whitaker, "The History of the Baptismal Formula," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 16 (1965), 5.

baptisms administered by heretics. These issues all affected the rite itself, as did, of course, the increasing practice of infant baptism, and the sudden membership "boom" that accompanied state legitimation in the early fourth century. It is this complex world which is reflected in early Christianity's baptismal texts.

A survey of early Christian non-biblical writings relating to baptism provides ample evidence of two main forms of an explicitly Trinitarian rite of baptism – a "credal" interrogative form and the "classic" declarative form (in two versions) – and sparse but significant evidence of other, "anomalous" forms of the rite. We considered each of these in turn.

The "Credal" Formula The "credal" formula for baptism involved an interrogative liturgy in which the candidate responded affirmatively to, or recited individually, three Credal statements, one concerning each person of the Trinity, and was immersed three times. The most important early occurrence of this form is the full and elaborate rite described in the *Apostolic Tradition*, a work of uncertain provenance, tentatively dated around 215.[7] It is thought to be the form most commonly practised outside Syria. There is evidence that it was still normative in Rome in the 720's, while the Irish "Stowe Missal" shows the interrogative form still in use in 800.[8] Many other texts offer versions of this interrogative form. Examples may be found in the writings of Tertullian (c. 200), Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 350) Ambrose of Milan (c. 380), and in such documents as the "Baptism of the Procurator" (c. 450), the Canons of Hippolytus (c. 500), and the Gelasian Sacramentary (Paris, 7th century).

In these accounts, the timing of the immersion varies: in some liturgies the candidate is immersed three times, but only after responding to all three questions. More importantly, for our research, the credal questions vary also. The questions Ambrose describes, for example, are simpler than those of the *Apostolic Tradition*. Those who employed the interrogative formulary seem to have been confident that they were following the command of the risen Christ of Mt 28. The Italian *Tractatus de Baptismo* (c. 550 CE) describes an interrogative-style baptism, then states: "This we did in accordance with the command of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave commandment saying, 'Go and baptize all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit'."[9]

The "Classic Formula" Despite the early, ongoing, and widespread use of the "Credal Formulary," it was, however, the other, declarative formula that won the liturgical day in both Eastern and Western parts of the church. It occurs with either active phrasing, such as "I baptize you ...", or in a passive form, such as, "The servant of God, N., is baptized" or "May the servant of God be baptized" (followed by "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.") This "classic" formula is old, appearing in Matthew and the *Didache*, and it also continues to appear over the centuries: in the *Acts of Judas Thomas*, and the *Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena* (both c. 250), and in the works of John Chrysostom (c.

[7] Hayes, 21.
[8] Whitaker, "History," 8-9, 11.
[9] *Ibid*., 4-5.

390), of Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428) and of Dionysius the Aeropagite (c. 500). Theodore does not quote the standard formula, but states that the presider invokes "the threefold substance of the Divine Blessedness at the three immersions".[10] The classic statement is sometimes called the "Syrian formula," since so many of the references (including Matthew 28) seem to have a Syrian origin.[11] But it somehow found its way to Rome, and eventually, by the mid-700's, displaced the old interrogative form.

The classic formula offered certain advantages. It was more suitable for infant baptism, and it also adjusted more easily to conditional baptisms: "If you have not been baptized, I baptize you . . ." . Also, it would have been more expedient, especially for the large number of candidates presenting themselves in the growing post-Constantinian church.

"Anomalous" Formulae Because of our interest in alternatives, it is useful to survey other "anomalous" baptismal rituals described in early church documents. The *Didache* (first century, possibly prior to the Gospel of Matthew, and therefore our earliest non-biblical source), contains three baptismal references. One of these contains a standard Trinitarian formula (*Didache*, 7:1). The second contains an anomalous Trinitarian formula, since it lacks the usual definite articles: "in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (*Didache*, 7:3). The third, however, with its warning that "you must not let anyone eat or drink of your Eucharist except those baptized in the Lord's name" (*Didache*, 9:5), may well preserve a record of the most ancient formula, one by which some who were still alive had been baptized when the *Didache* was compiled.[12]

Justin Martyr, in his *First Apology* (c. 160 CE), gives a fairly full account of the baptismal rite. After describing the preparation of baptismal candidates, he states: "They then are washed in the water in the name of God the Father and Master of all, and of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit." Later in the same passage Justin describes the rite again: "[T]here is named at the water, over him who has chosen to be born again and has repented of his sinful acts, the name of God the Father and Master of all. . . . This washing is called illumination . . . . The illuminand is also washed in the name of Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets foretold everything about Jesus."[13] This passage contains two possible anomalies. First, Justin twice names the persons of the Trinity as Father, Jesus Christ (not "Son"), and Holy Spirit. Second, if these are indeed the words of the baptismal liturgy, they represent the use of an "augmented" baptismal formula.

That baptism did not always require a triple immersion is evidenced in a text from the seventh century. The Fourth Council of Toledo (633) describes a community being given permission to baptize with one immersion, so as not to be confused with a heretical sect in the

---

[10]E.C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (London: S.P.C.K., 1960), 50.

[11]*Ibid*., 5.

[12]Willy Rordorf, "Baptism in the *Didache*," *The Didache in Modern Research*, ed. J. Draper (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 217.

[13]*The First Apology of Justin, the Martyr*, chapter 61.

area which baptizes with three immersions[14]. The act is justified theologically with the assertion that God is "one," so one immersion will suffice.

Summarizing the Evidence The early documents suggest that while some early Christians were baptized "in the name of Jesus," by early in the second century all baptisms were Trinitarian in nature. However, the credal formulary and the classic formula shared status as legitimate and normative methods of entering the baptismal covenant, until well into the middle of the eighth century. Even in liturgies which used the interrogative form, worship leaders used the classic language for anointing and exorcising. Everything happened in threes: they blew away Satan by exhaling three times on the body of the catechumen; they breathed more softly three times after baptism to infuse the new Christian with the Holy Spirit. The church was steeped in its Trinitarianism, and as the Christological battles raged on, the Trinity began to take on a more "immanent" nature.

These documents also show that the words and gestures used in baptismal liturgies are important because of the meanings they convey. They are not magical incantations in which particular words, of themselves, have an effect. The single immersion of Toledo, for example, indicates that variations from established practice were permitted when the use of the usual forms might be open to misinterpretation.

Early Christian Theologians While the liturgies themselves provide the clearest evidence linking baptism to Trinity, a brief look at some of the early theologians' writings *about* the baptismal rite and formula may also be helpful. Irenaeus (c. 180), for example, speaks of the baptismal Trinity in "economic" terms: the first person is "our Maker, our Designer" and the second and third persons become God's "Word and Wisdom."[15] Theophilus of Antioch (c. 180) also used these names for the second and third persons.[16] Irenaeus also spoke of Son and Spirit as the "two hands" of God.[17] Denis of Alexandria referred to the Son as the "wisdom and power of the Father" and to the Spirit as the "sanctity of the Father," while both early and later Greek writers (Basil the Great, Mark of Ephesus, Gregory Palamas) refer to the first person simply as "Source" or "Originator."

Both eastern and western writers of the early centuries used analogy to shed light on the nature of the relationship which exists among the persons of the Trinity. Several eastern theologians, (Gregory of Nazianzen, Cyril of Alexandria, John Damascene) suggested the Father, Son and Spirit are like the sun, its rays, and the resulting light, or like a water course, a spring, and its stream.[18]

Gregory of Nyssa (c. 383) thought that what a person believes about the Trinity affects what occurs at baptism. Those who do *not* believe that the nature of the holy Trinity is

---

[14]Whitaker, *Documents*, 214

[15]Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, in Hayes, 66, 85.

[16]Theophilus of Antioch, *Ad. Auto.* II. 15.

17*Adv. Haer*. IV.xx.1.

[18]Athanasius, *Ad Serap.*, I, xix; Gregory Nazianzen, *Orat.*, xxxi, 31, 32; John Damascene, *Fid. Orth*. I,

"uncreated," should not confess the Son and the Spirit at baptism, because they will then fall "under the yoke" of something created. Only those who assert an uncreated Trinity will truly experience a "birth from above."[19] Gregory also took his baptismal theology in other directions. He and many other post-Nicene theologians saw baptism as primarily an imitation of Christ's death, for Christians must follow in his footsteps as one follows one's guide through a labyrinth. The descent into the water and the triple immersion signify Jesus' death and three-day entombment.[20] The Apostolic Constitutions (c. 375), John the Deacon (c. 500), and Hildephonsus of Toledo (c. 650) all compare baptismal immersion to Jesus' death, and Hildephonsus sees the three steps into the font representing not only Jesus' three days of death, but also three stages of our own confession and repentance.[21] This theology thus moves the baptismal formula away from either economic or immanent conceptions of the Trinity, to focus on Christian discipleship.

The Early Christian Approach to Baptismal Language The early Christian writers describe, in their reflections on baptismal language, a rite which seeks not to limit, but to explore the possibilities inherent in a Trinitarian faith. While they are deeply committed to Trinitarian theology, they do not seem bound by the words of a particular formula. Such richness of imagery does not seem to have extended to the liturgy, however, and there are no examples of female language or images being used of God in connection with baptismal practice. Thus, these early theologians do not provide "proof" of the use of alternative baptismal formulae, but they do invite reflection on the richness of baptismal theology: what it promises and what it demands as it beckons Christians to respond to God's gracious offer of new life in Jesus.

Trinitarian Language and the Baptismal Formula in Medieval and Reformation Periods

Again, in the Medieval period we note that rich imagery for the persons of the Trinity in theological work is to be found alongside a standardization and consequent limitation of imagery in the Church's sacramental forms. None of the "Jesus as Mother" material, dear to the hearts of medieval spiritual writers of both genders finds its way into the forms used at Baptism. Examples of biblical and historical references to God or Jesus as Mother are found in Appendix B.

It would appear that once the classic baptismal rite was established by the eighth century in the West it was held to be obligatory even after the Church had been divided by the Reformation. Some recognized that in the past it had not always been necessary to use the classic formula, but they nevertheless maintained that this formula had soon become, and now continued to be, the only option. This was true of Thomas Aquinas.

---

[19]Gregory of Nyssa. c. 383. *An Address on Religious Instruction*. In *Christology of the Later Fathers*. Edited by E.R. Hardy and C.C. Richardson. London: SCM Press, 1954, 322-23.

[20]*Ibid*., 314-15.

[21]Whitaker, *Documents*, 104.

Thomas Aquinas Aquinas believed that in the early apostolic period baptism had been administered in the name of Jesus. He regarded such a departure from the classic Trinitarian form familiar to him to be the result of a special revelation accorded only to the primitive church (*ST* IIIa. Q. 66. art. 6). Thomas was convinced that Matthew 28 did convey to us verbatim the command of Jesus about the form to be used in baptism, and his unwillingness to admit the validity of contemporary baptisms which intentionally altered that formula was rooted in that conviction. St. Thomas was also of the view that adding words to the baptismal formula would not invalidate the rite (*ST* IIIa. Q. 60. Art. 8) as long as this did not change the meaning of the sacramental sign.

Huldrych Zwingli While the United Church's relationship with its "tradition" is less direct or obvious than that of the Roman Catholics, the United Church Dialogue members see merit in searching the writings of the Reformers for assistance in interpreting Scripture and the present age. Zwingli sees baptism as instituted by Christ, the "chief and special token" of the new covenant.[22] He speaks of the formula only incidentally. Once, in challenging Luther on his statement that "the Holy Spirit is in baptism," he speaks approvingly of the "papists'" understanding of baptism as consisting of a "material thing and a form," the form being the formula.[23] In a separate discussion of apostleship he quotes Matthew 28:19-20 as Christ's proclamation of the vocation of all Christians.[24]

John Calvin In the *Institutes*, Calvin does not discuss the formula as though it were an issue of controversy, or as if there were any option about it. He does make the point that Christians are not baptized into the name of any person, but "into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." Again, in the same chapter, he gives explicit instructions about the conduct of baptism. He argues that it is of no consequence whether baptism is done by immersion, once, or thrice, or by sprinkling. However, Christians are to "baptize in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit."[25] In a discussion of infant baptism, in opposition to the Anabaptists, Calvin refers to and quotes Acts 2:37-38, which speaks of baptism "in the name of Jesus Christ," but does not comment on the formula as such.[26] As respects the doctrine of Trinity, Calvin makes a vigorous defence (especially against Servetus) of orthodox teaching (e.g., *Institutes* I.xiii). Interestingly, he comments on the appropriateness of using "God" to refer singularly to the Father without taking anything away from the deity of the Son or Spirit.[27] "God" is "sometimes applied to the Father par excellence because he is the fountainhead and beginning of deity – and this is done to denote the simple unity of essence."[28] While maintaining the importance of the historic formulations

---

[22] Huldrych Zwingli, *Subsidiary Essay or Crown of the Work on the Eucharist*, 1525 (Z IV: 458-504), 500.

[23] Huldrych Zwingli, *Friendly Exegesis, that is, Exposition of the Matter of the Eucharist to Martin Luther*, 1527 (Z V: 562-758), 711.

[24] Huldrych Zwingli, *The Preaching Office*, 1525 (Z IV: 382-433), 393.

[25] Calvin, *Institutes*, IV. xv. 16.

[26] *Inst.*, IV. xvi. 23.

[27] *Inst.*, I.xiii.20, 26, 29

[28] *Inst.*, I.xiii.23

of Nicaea and of the Cappadocian fathers, Calvin is wary of over-emphasizing the significance of the internal relations of the Trinity. In commenting on John 15.9, "Even as the Father has loved me . . . ", Calvin says that those who refer the verse to "the secret love of God the Father which he always had for the Son philosophize beside the point. Rather it was Christ's design to place, so to say, in our bosom a sure pledge of the divine love toward us."[29] As those in need of reconciliation with God, it is more efficacious for us to know the redemptive mission of the triune God than the nature of the immanent relations.

The Council of Trent The Council of Trent (1645-63), insisted that baptisms performed by "heretics" were valid provided that those baptizing used the classic formula "with the intention of doing what the Church does."[30]

Trinitarian Language and the Baptismal Formula in the Modern Period

John Wesley Wesley also does not discuss the Trinitarian formula as though there is any question about it, or any option. In a document on baptism, Wesley argues entirely from Mt 28:19, and prescribes that three things are essential to Christian baptism: an episcopal administrator, the application of water, and "administration in the name of the Trinity." Shortly thereafter he declares that the question of "washing, dipping, or sprinkling" is irrelevant, but it must be "in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost."[31]

Catholic Theology and Statements of the Magesterium Statements of the Magisterium stress the efficacy of baptism for salvation, and presume that the "undivided Trinity" will be referred to in the classic language. There are occasional attempts to clarify the pre-eminent importance of both form and "intent" in the baptismal act. The *Code of Canon Law* (1983) affirms the validity of the baptism of persons who have been baptized in a "non-catholic ecclesial community" provided that there is no doubt about the "matter or the form of the words used" or of "the intention of the adult being baptized or of that of the baptizing minister."[32] (See Appendix C for examples of texts from the Magisterium.)

In recent decades, however, a substantial body of theological work has sought to uncover the variety and richness of the images through which Scripture speaks of God. Several key biblical texts in which feminine imagery is applied to God have been highlighted (See Appendix B). The legitimacy of the attempt to make people aware of the Bible's feminine imagery is implied when the Pope himself makes use of such imagery (See Appendix B).

United Church Statements The doctrinal section of the *Basis of Union*, prepared for the 1925 formation of the United Church of Canada, states: "Baptism with water into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit is the sacrament by which are

---

[29] *Comm. Jn.* 15.9. See also, *Comm. Jn.* 17.21.

[30] Council of Trent, Canons on Baptism, #4 (Tanner II.685).

[31] John Wesley, "On Baptism," in *A Preserve Against Unsettled Notions in Religion* (1758), Section 6.

[32] *Code of Canon Law* (Latin Rite), 1983: Canon 869.2.

signified and sealed our union to Christ and participation in the blessings of the new covenant." (Article 16)

In 1983, the United Church's Inter-Church/Interfaith Committee presented a resolution to the Executive of the General Council which sought both to encourage the use of inclusive language and to retain without change the accepted baptismal formula, pending ecumenical agreement on any proposed changes. The Executive voted to "postpone indefinitely." This was, in effect, to take no action. (*Record of Proceedings, 30th General Council, Committee on Inter-Church and Inter-Faith Relations Report*, p. 423) In 1984, the General Council rejected a recommendation from the *Report on Christian Initiation (1984),* that "the candidate be baptized into the name of the Holy Trinity," and retained the words "into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (*Record of Proceedings, 30th General Council*, p. 335)

In responding to *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (response published in 1986), the United Church noted that the "use of the Trinitarian formula in baptism would seem to be fundamental to any ecumenical consensus." It went on to state that the question of "sexist" language is a complex one, and urged "further work by the Faith and Order Commission that would show sensitivity to the fact that the Trinitarian formula, while central to ecumenical consensus, is experienced by many Christians as a source of alienation."

Feminist Critique of Father/Son Language

In our previous dialogue on evangelization, we discussed how our two churches share the Good News. We concluded that the words we use to speak of God and the actions through which we bear witness to the Gospel must help prospective believers to grasp that God's loving offer of mercy and friendship extends to every human person. God's offer does not depend upon a person's social status, ethnic background, gender or sanctity. This Good News needs to be heard by people today as in every age. However, for some people today, the "Father, Son" language used by Scripture and church tradition to refer to Jesus and the One who is revealed in him, suggests that God is more like a man than like a woman and, conversely, that men are more God-like – more in the image of God – than women are.[33] Traditional language is scandalous to these persons, many of whom have suffered discrimination and even abuse on the part of men. They are outraged at the use of terminology which privileges men in church, and encourages the oppression of women in society. Proposals to use Trinitarian formulae other than "Father, Son and Holy Spirit" stem from a genuine pastoral concern for such people who are among those who most need to hear that God's love extends to them.

The United Church's tentative consideration of alternative baptismal formulae is a response to the misuse of religious language as a support for oppressive social structures and a

[33]See, Ruth Duck, *Gender and the Name of God* (New York: Pilgrim Press 1991) p. 37: "The masculine - but not the feminine - is generally associated with God in the English language.... Thus a man, by association, is god-like: a woman is not."

way of acknowledging the pain of those who have suffered from its misuse and been scandalized by it. However, discomfort with the use of masculine imagery and pronouns with respect to God is not limited to the United Church. Although we have little or no evidence of requests being made by Catholics for alternate baptismal formulae, we can attest to having experienced other indications of this unrest. It is not unusual to hear, for example, at least in English-speaking parishes, the spontaneous replacement of masculine pronouns "he" and "his" referring to God with "God" or "God's" in the people's responses of the Mass (e.g., the prayer concluding the Offertory and the Preface Dialogue). The wording of the French liturgical texts of these parts of the Mass is, in fact, more gender-neutral.

Classical Christian teaching affirms that God is beyond sex differentiation. However, the use of masculine imagery and pronouns in relation to God has misled some people to think of God as a male. Furthermore, when this occurs in the context of a society with many patriarchal features and in which men are encouraged to be strong, unsentimental and assertive, the exclusive use of such language tends to evoke among the faithful a faulty image of God – as mighty in the sense of domineering. As an alternate to predominantly masculine imagery, feminist theologians have searched the Bible and Christian history to recover a wide variety of female and especially, maternal images for God. While this has been a positive development which has enriched contemporary theological reflection, a simple substitution of maternal for paternal terms does not sufficiently address the complexity of issues raised by feminist concerns.[34]

Christian feminists fear that an image of God as fundamentally masculine lends divine approval to the idea that society is meant to be patriarchal. Yet, they are convinced that the message of the Gospel is different from this and seek to make it clear that such ills as family violence or the attitudes which are associated with it do not have the support of Christian revelation. The Good News of Jesus liberated people in unexpected ways from many of the social restrictions of his own time. He made it clear that God's gracious offer of mercy and reconciliation was being extended to all – and that all were equally unworthy of it. Those who regarded themselves as more deserving than others were sharply criticized by Jesus for their false view of matters (e.g., the pharisee and the publican in Matthew's gospel). What strikes feminists about Jesus is the surprising way he seems to have simply disregarded the social divisions of his time which distinguished the worthy from the unworthy – distinctions based upon religion, ethnic background, sanctity, social standing, wealth and gender. Jesus, to the surprise of many "worthy" people, associated with gentiles, tax-collectors, sinners, the poor, women, lepers, the handicapped, slaves. His followers left their jobs and their families, stepping out of the social niches in which they had lived and entered a fellowship of people united as one, encouraged to share their goods and their good will in a way which subverted accepted social structures.

---

[34]Ruth Duck, *Gender and the Name of God*, pp. 55-57, notes the ambiguities which arise from the use of Mother language: women as well as men may abuse children, and the use of Mother language to imply compassion and understanding may simply reinforce patriarchal stereotypes. See also, Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroads, 1992), pp. 42-57, 131-133.

Jesus' actions show what sort of life God wants people to live here and now as an anticipation of the more complete transformation to come at the end of time. Christians seek to transform society so that human relationships will be more like those which Jesus established with others. By so doing, they hope to make it easier for others to see the credibility of the Gospel. When Christian feminists attack patriarchal structures, they understand themselves to be doing likewise.

In every time and place, Christians must ensure that the Gospel is preached in language which, as clearly as possible, presents what they believe about the love and mercy of God revealed in Jesus Christ, "God with us." The baptismal liturgy, in which God's gracious offer of mercy is formally accepted by believers, needs to speak of God in language which fosters the faith commitment which new initiates are making. If some prospective believers have personal histories which render customary terminology problematic, Christians need to address this problem in order to remain faithful to the church's mission to preach the Gospel to all.

Lessons from the Biblical/Historical Context

1. Summarizing the Data

From our study of the biblical and historical material, we can make the following points:

- There was fluidity in the use of baptismal formulae in the earliest Christian communities.

- The possibility that in the earliest Christian decades, baptism "in the name of Jesus" or something similar was accepted cannot be ruled out.

- It is not certain that the baptismal formula found in Matthew 28 is derived from Jesus' own words, although it is clearly a formula in use by the end of the first century.

- An interrogative, credal formula for baptism was used for many centuries.

- By the fifth century, almost all Christians were baptizing using the "classic" formula of Mt 28:19, in an active or passive form.

- Theologians of the early church employed a variety of metaphors in their discussion of Trinity, mainly to explicate the immanent Trinity. There is no evidence, however, that they transferred these metaphors into baptismal practice.

- There is evidence in some patristic texts that the Trinitarian persons, named in baptism, were sometimes characterized in an expanded formula. Thomas Aquinas thought that words could be added to the baptismal formula as long as this did not change the meaning of the sacramental sign.

- The Mt 28:19 formula has remained the *only* acceptable formula in both our traditions since those early centuries. There is no evidence in either Roman Catholic or Reformation documents of serious consideration of any other formula.

- In our present time and context, the liberative presence of Jesus Christ has special significance for the full inclusion of women in the community and language of faith.

- In biblical and historical writings, there is a variety of both male and female images for God. Theological reflection and spiritual life will be enriched by greater familiarity with many different ways of imaging God.

2. Observations

- The baptismal formula has always been valued for the meaning it conveys in its liturgical context. It is clear that baptismal formulae and gestures are not like magical incantations or rituals in which particular words or actions, of themselves, have an effect. The words and gestures used in baptismal liturgies are important because of the meanings they convey. The particular words and gestures involved in baptism are not, in themselves, sufficient for the validity of the rite – both recipient and celebrant must intend the meaning which the church gives to the words and gestures.

- It is also important that sacramental signs and gestures are meaningful to those who administer and receive the sacraments, including those who feel alienated by exclusive use of male imagery for God.

- There is a close connection between the baptismal liturgy and the basic beliefs of the Christian faith. The history of the tradition shows that it has always been thought important that the words used in the sacraments of initiation convey an orthodox understanding of who God is.

- Our two traditions do place differing emphases on the transmission of "tradition": Roman Catholics tend to give priority to traditional phrases, actions, and norms, seeing them as safeguarding our fidelity to the Gospel and protecting us from individual misuse and misunderstanding. United Church members tend to give priority to the faith community's freedom to interpret the Gospel in light of new contexts and understandings. Safeguards against misuse arise from the mutual accountability of the community's members.

- Even though evidence of rituals both interrogative and declarative in form may be found in liturgical history, and despite some variation in the number of immersions required, the Trinitarian language used in baptism seems almost invariably to have been that of "Father, Son, Spirit." Greater variety in Trinitarian imagery is to be found in works of theology, but this diversity does not make its way into liturgical texts

associated with baptism. We have, however, found more diversity in Trinitarian blessing formulae.

III. CRITERIA FOR PROPOSING/RECOGNIZING ALTERNATIVE FORMULAE

The classic formula will continue to be used and will provide a criterion for assessing other formulae. Any alternative formula would have to:

- convey the inclusiveness of the Gospel and not obscure Christian witness to the love and grace of God.

- name the God of Jesus Christ; express an understanding of God substantantially the same as that of the classic formula; identify God as personal and name the persons of the Trinity in a way that conveys their mutual relationships; honour the Church's experience of God in Christ over the centuries, avoiding unitarianism on the one hand and tritheism on the other.

- evoke the biblical narrative and respect the revelatory character of the Word of God in Scripture. The complete rejection of traditional, biblical language for God might suggest that biblical revelation is not receiving sufficient reverence.

- be concise, so as to be easily memorized for use in a liturgical context.

- be officially approved by the denomination in which it is used.

- be introduced with care for ecumenical partners.

- be serviceable in both English and French as a minimum.

IV. SOME OPTIONS

In the previous sections of this report some account was given of a complex of factors informing our discussion, including the biblical witness, the historical practices of the church, and the theological dynamics of the two traditions. Now all of our investigation and discussion must focus on a practical outcome. What recommendations do we have for our two churches as to whether acceptable alternative language can be found to name the triune God in services of baptism?

Two options seem possible: 1) retain the classic formula with or without additional phrasing; 2) provide options to the classic formula.

1. Retain the use of the classic formula of Matthew 28

a) Maintain the sole use of the classic formula:

There is a multiplicity of opportunities in the worship life of the church to use alternative Trinitarian language. Well-conceived baptismal services could supply enough other analogies/images for the divine to ensure that "Father, Son, Holy Spirit" language is not understood as conveying the idea that God is closer to men than to women. The goal of inclusive language is not to proscribe all male images of God but to provide a variety of images in worship.

Supportive Arguments

- While the practice of baptism is evident in the life of the early church throughout the New Testament, at Matthew 28 we have the sole instance of a baptismal formula presented as a dominical command. According to Matthew's account, it is the risen Jesus who directs the church to baptize "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

- This formula is clearly "catholic": its use has been continuous in the practice of the church since apostolic times. The use of a universally received formula avoids the tyranny of idiosyncratic interpretations of the faith. These words guarantee that the persons of the Trinity are named in a personal way and that their relationship to each other is adequately expressed.

- Re-affirmation of the obligatory use of the classic formula would alleviate concerns that baptisms performed without the Matthew 28 formula may not be recognized as valid. Baptism is not merely a denominational matter; it brings one into communion with the one Church of Christ. For example, the United Church baptismal certificate says that "Nn was this day received into the Holy Catholic Church."

Possible Objections

- As the act of initiation into Christ and Christ's body, baptism is too foundational not to underscore the inclusive nature of the gospel in its practice. To insist that the church can use only these words obscures the graciousness of the Gospel for some.

- To identify the efficacy of baptism with one particular set of vocables may concede too much ground to "formulaism".

b) Precede or accompany the classic formula by defined credal questions in inclusive language:

Possible Examples

1. (i) Do you believe in God, who has created and is creating? YES
   (ii) Do you believe in Jesus, the Word made flesh? YES
   (iii) Do you believe that God works in us and others by the Spirit? YES
   I baptize you, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

2. (i) Do you believe in God, the Source of Love? YES
   I baptize you in the name of the Father.
   (ii) Do you believe in Jesus Christ, Love Incarnate? YES
   I baptize you in the name of the Son.
   (iii) Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, Love's Power? YES
   I baptize you in the name of the Holy Spirit.

3. (i) Do you believe in God, who loves us tenderly as a Mother? YES
   I baptize you in the name of the Father.
   (ii) Do you believe in Jesus Christ, our brother, born of Mary? YES
   I baptize you in the name of the Son.
   (iii) Do you believe in the Spirit, who gives us new birth? YES
   I baptize you in the name of the Holy Spirit.

Supportive Arguments

- Maintains the use of the classic formula, but accompanies it with a variety of gender inclusive images.
- The ancient church shows us some precedents for an interrogative credal formulary in baptism.
- Ecumenical recognition is less likely to be jeopardized.
- Does not encumber the formula itself with extra words.
- Allows for liturgical variety.

Possible Objections

- Danger of encouraging inappropriate or unauthorized images.
- Credal formularies will be contextually conditional and may become outdated.

c) Augment the classic formula with a number of defined expansions:

Possible Examples

"I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; one God, Mother of us all".[35]

"I baptize you in the name of the Father, loving source of all that is; in the name of the Son, who came into our midst in Jesus, born of Mary; and of the Holy Spirit, who breathes renewal and strength in the journey of faith."

"I baptize you, in the name of the Father, who loves us tenderly as a Mother; and of the Son, Jesus Christ our Brother; and of the Holy Spirit, who nurtures and sustains us."

"I baptize you, in the name of the Father, loving Source of all; and of the Son, Jesus Christ, Wisdom enfleshed; and of the Holy Spirit, who gives us new birth."

Supportive Arguments

- Maintains the use of the classic formula but incorporates a desirable variety of images within the very act of baptism.
- There is some precedent in the ancient church for expanding the formula.
- Ecumenical recognition is less likely to be jeopardized.
- Expansion allows for elucidation of the inclusive intent of the traditional formula.

Possible Objections

- Expansion runs the risk of cumbersome and distracting phraseology.
- Our expansions will be contextually conditional and therefore may become outdated.

2. Provide optional formulae with alternative Trinitarian language

a) drawn from Scripture:

At several places, but most notably at 2Co 13:13, Paul uses a God/Christ/Spirit pattern to name God. An example is offered based on the insight of 1John 4:8 that "God is love".

I baptize you in the name
of God, the Source of love,
of Jesus Christ, the love incarnate,

[35]This formula is being used at New York City's Riverside Church. For examples of references to God as Mother, see Appendix B.

and of the Holy Spirit, love's power.

Supportive Arguments

- Christian faith is evidently declared and the persons of the Trinity are named, while dependence on male-specific language is avoided.

- This pattern refers more directly than the classic formula to the concrete shape of the Biblical story and to the reach of redemptive love.

- This pattern does not deny the importance of the eternal relationships internal to the Trinity but points to them. When the Gospels show us Jesus praying to his Father in Gethsemane or allow us to hear the Father saying,"You are my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased", we are glimpsing what the internal relations of the Godhead are surely like.

- It is serviceable in French and English.

Possible Objections

- While the use of "God" to denote the Father is biblically warranted, it may convey a sense of the subordination of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and thus may even raise questions about the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

b) drawn from the theological tradition, as in the following example:

I baptize you in the name of the most Holy Trinity,
the Source of Life, the Living Word and the Bond of Love.

Supportive Arguments

- This formula attempts to translate the meaning of the internal Trinitarian relations intended by the classic formula into language that is inclusive and also derived from the theological tradition.

- It is serviceable in French and English.

Possible Objections

- The formula would strike many as unfamiliar and abstract. It does not convey an understanding of God as personal and the relationships between the persons of the Trinity are not sufficiently expressed. To understand this formula, knowledge of specialized theological debate seems to be required.

- Ecumenical recognition might be a problem.

c) drawn from the functions of the persons of the Trinity in the history of salvation, as in the following example:

I baptize you in the name of the Creator, and of the Redeemer, and of the Sanctifier.

Supportive Arguments

- The functions/actions named come from the tradition; e.g., in the Apostles' Creed, the Father is named "Maker of heaven and earth".

- The formula is concise and can easily be used in a liturgical context.

Possible Objections

- This formula avoids the use of male-exclusive language only in English. In French, one has to choose between *Créateur* and *Créatrice*, *Rédempteur* and *Rédemptrice*, *Sanctificateur* and *Sanctificatrice*.

- It could be perceived that this formula is neither *evidently* Christian nor *evidently* Trinitarian. The formula refers to functions/actions of God and not the divine persons of the Godhead. People in many religions could affirm that God creates, redeems and sanctifies.

- It could appear that there is an arbitrary quality to emphasizing these three particular actions of God. One could choose any three activities of God, or more than three (e.g., Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, Sanctifier, Fulfiller).

- There is the danger that God's work as Creator, Redeemer, and Sancitifier would be seen only as changing aspects of the divine presence, and, therefore, as not necessarily related to the existence of a community of persons within the being of God.

- Traditionally, Christian theology has understood that all three persons of the Trinity are involved in all of the work of the triune God. Thus, according to John 1.1-5, Col.1.15-20, and Heb. 1.1-4, the work of creation takes place through the agency of the eternal Word.

- Ecumenical recognition might be a problem.

V. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Of Roman Catholic Participants

We are grateful for willingness of United Church dialogue partners to undertake a careful investigation of baptismal precedents including not only an analysis of the relevant biblical texts but also an examination of pertinent liturgical and theological sources from the tradition of the Christian Church – East and West, Catholic and Reformed. We have appreciated their sensitivity to our concerns about the authority of tradition and our joint discussions have made us all better informed about what the tradition can tell us.

With respect to the possibility of optional baptismal formulae, we note the following considerations which seem to offer a theological rationale for providing a limited number of these:

1. Common Meaning Expressed in Different Ways

A brief look at Roman Catholic documents acknowledging the validity of sacramental practices and/or theological formulations found among the Eastern Churches indicates that there is some precedent for the recognition by the Roman Catholic Church of liturgical or theological formulae different from its own as long as they convey the same theological meaning. For example, the Council of Florence (Session 6, Definition of the Holy Ecumenical Synod of Florence) accepted that both Greeks and Latins meant the same thing whether or not they added the *filioque* to or omitted it from liturgical recitation of the Creed. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "We do not believe in formulas, but in those realities they express, which faith allows us to touch." (#170)

With regard to the sacrament of matrimony, the Western Church understands the partners' explicit exchange of consent as the efficacious sign of the sacrament. In the East, however, consent is assumed rather than expressed and the sacramental sign is the priestly blessing or crowning. Yet the West recognizes the validity of such marriages.

As for the Eucharist, in the West, the moment of the sacramental change in the substance of the elements of bread and wine is understood to be the consecration, when the presider says "This is my body. . . . This is my blood." The location of the consecratory epiclesis *after* the repetition of these words of institution in the Eastern Orthodox Liturgies of St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil indicates that the transformation of the elements is not pinpointed in the same way in the East. Yet, the validity of the Orthodox Eucharist is not denied by the Catholic Church. Furthermore, the prayers of the Eucharist are not always directed to the same "person" of the Trinity in the various liturgies recognized as valid by the Roman Catholic Church. In the West, for example, prayers are directed to the Father, through the Son, in union with the Holy Spirit, but in the Eastern liturgies prayers are sometimes directed to the Son and often in the same terms as prayers are offered to the Father. The Trisagion seems directed to God in general in the Eastern Orthodox Liturgies of St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil, but in the Coptic Liturgy, the additional prayers indicate it is directed primarily to the Son ("Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal Who was born of the Virgin. . . Who was crucified. . . Who rose. . .have mercy on us)." The Christological agreements between the Roman Catholic Church and the Assyrian Church of the East and the

Oriental Orthodox offer further examples of a willingness to accept that the same Christian faith can be expressed in different words.

It seems clear that the recognition of alternative theological and liturgical formulations of basic Christian beliefs is made possible because the orthodoxy of the overall faith context within which such formulations are used seems unquestionable. Our dialogue discussions have made it clear to Roman Catholic participants that United Church members of the dialogue are firmly Trinitarian in their Christian faith. Despite the fact that their tradition is not one which emphasizes a Trinitarian piety as explicitly as does Roman Catholicism, it is clear to us that the members of this dialogue are firmly committed to the doctrine of the Incarnation and regard the doctrine of the Trinity as expressing the "conditions of the possibility" of that central Christian doctrine. Yet, Roman Catholic members of the dialogue suspect, on the basis of past discussions concerning the uniqueness of Jesus, that there are differences between our two traditions on Christological questions. We would not want such differences to be heightened by the adoption of a non-traditional baptismal formula which might mislead some, even as it enlightened others.

2. Substantially the Same Meaning

We agree that any alternate baptismal formula would have to express an understanding of God and the meaning of baptism which is substantially the same as that conveyed by the classic formula. However, in as much as the classic Trinitarian baptismal formula is open to being misunderstood by some today, some might say that it can be "improved". It would not be unthinkable to weigh the deficiencies of another proposed formula against the deficiencies which some of our contemporaries find in the traditional one. No human language can speak with complete adequacy of God. If we are bound to fall short in one way or another, perhaps it is worth considering whether particular ways of falling short ought to be matched to particular contexts so that the least harm will result from such short-comings.

3. Augmented Formulae

In Roman Catholic understanding of sacraments, the words, elements and gestures which constitute the outward sacramental signs are meaningful symbols. They speak to those present, and especially to the recipient, of the particular focus of the encounter with Christ which the sacramental rites facilitate. We believe that Christ is encountered through the sacraments because he has promised to be and is faithful. We are convinced, however, that a person who enters wholeheartedly into a rite having understood its significance, will benefit more from the sacramental encounter with Christ than one who is less consciously or less completely disposed. The importance placed upon the natural effectiveness of the sacramental signs in Roman Catholic theology argues for ensuring that the meaning of sacramental signs be made clear if there is a danger of their being misunderstood. Augmenting the classic baptismal formula by brief additions to clarify its meaning might be a way of making evident the identity and character of the God in whom Christians profess their faith. Thomas Aquinas's view that the baptismal formula can, under certain circumstances, be augmented by brief additions which clarify its meaning, offers support to this way of making the baptismal liturgy more inclusive. A proposal to clarify the language of the Bible and the church's liturgical tradition by augmenting the classic formula with phrases which speak of God in feminine imagery, or show that "Father" language as applied to God is

intended to convey loving care rather than dominance, could be seen as consistent with the position of St. Thomas. Article 239 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and section III.8 of the encyclical *Mulieris dignitatem* are examples of this sort of approach.

Much as we see this openness to possibilities, we must still express some reservations:

1. Even if the "Father, Son, Holy Spirit" baptismal formula of Matthew 28 cannot be proven to be based on actual words of Jesus, the fact remains that "Father" and "Son" language permeates the New Testament. Furthermore, masculine imagery for God, while not the only sort of divine imagery found in the Hebrew Scriptures, is the most prominent. This is not insignificant. Those who believe that God has inspired the Scriptures cannot lightly dismiss the language employed in them. To replace the traditional Trinitarian baptismal formula with another, more gender-inclusive one, would not necessarily help people to understand the masculine imagery for God which the Scriptures employ. In fact, by its tacit acceptance of the view that Scripture's language really does, with divine approval, discriminate against women, such a strategy might make it more difficult for women believers to approach the Scriptures as revealed.

2. The obligation to preserve the Christian unity which already exists is a serious one. The risk of provoking further schism within the Christian community ought to be weighed very heavily against the advantages sought by changing the baptismal formula. It would have to be readily apparent to other Christians (including the non-specialists in the pews) that an alteration in the formula was not in any sense the result of a falling away from the apostolic faith. Nor should it exhibit a lack of concern for the conscientious objections of other Christians. Faced with the serious possibility of scandalizing other Christians by adopting an alternative formula for baptism, one ought to consider Paul's advice to those who understood themselves to be free from certain obligations enjoined by the Jewish Law, and weigh the good to be achieved by change against the potential harmful consequences, curtailing one's liberty if that seems to effect the greater good.

Of United Church Participants

We are grateful for the willingness of our Roman Catholic partners to enter into this intensive discussion of our common Trinitarian faith and the baptismal formula. They have taken seriously our concerns about the equality of women and its implications for inclusive language, which gave initial impetus to the dialogue. We feel that the Roman Catholic dialogue participants all have sympathy with this concern. They have led us to a keener awareness of the spiritual and theological significance of the doctrine of the Trinity, and this we will offer back to our own communities as a fruit of the Dialogue.

1. Tradition

Though the United Church is of very recent birth, it is a union within Canada of older Protestant traditions, all of which baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the formula is as much a part of the Protestant tradition as of the Catholic. Moreover, as Protestants we have come to recognize more deeply that the pre-Reformation history of the church, both ancient and medieval, is also our own history. That our forebears used the classic formula (in credal or declarative form) since apostolic times cannot be lightly dismissed.

The dialogue also served to remind us that, in accordance with our own Basis of Union and our older Reformation traditions, we do not baptize people into one congregation only, or one denomination only. *Baptism is not merely a congregational or denominational matter; it is an ecumenical matter. We baptize into the one holy catholic church.* We wish to maintain the ecumenical consensus that now exists and to avoid further schism of the church.

Nevertheless, we have become more aware through the dialogue that 'tradition' has always carried less weight in the churches of the Reformation than in the Roman Catholic Church. The reformers of the sixteenth century believed that accumulated traditions had fallen into grave error, both practically and doctrinally, and had to be brought under the critical authority of the Word of God, which comes to us uniquely in the Scriptures. In our own time, theological criticism of Christian tradition has seriously questioned the dominance of male leadership and of male language in church and theology down through the centuries. We feel strongly that, where our traditions reflect patriarchy, they must be reformed for the sake of the gospel. To be 'ever reforming' is itself a venerable Protestant tradition.

2. Scripture

The Scriptures allow us the closest possible access to decisive revelatory events, especially the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus the Scriptures are 'constitutive' for our continuing existence and identity as church. For this reason, the Scriptural command to baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit rightly carries great weight for many United Church people.

Yet it has always been recognized that the words of Scripture cannot be simply identified with the Word of God. Modern scholarship has heightened our awareness of the humanity and fallibility of the Scriptures. Particularly in the last three decades, feminist biblical criticism has made us more sharply aware that the Scriptures often reflect the culture of the time and place in which they were written, and specifically that they are marked by the patriarchy of biblical authors. Our United Church already limited the authority both of tradition and of scriptural texts when, in 1936, it undertook to ordain a woman, a step which at that time shocked many of our ecumenical partners.

We recognized in the course of this dialogue that The United Church of Canada, existing within a single nation, runs the risk of being isolated from the world wide catholic church. Yet its relative smallness and independence gives it freedom to move and to be innovative, and perhaps to function as a kind of ecclesial 'gadfly' within the world church. This is why we must listen for the dynamic and living Word that God speaks to every new

situation. The contemporary concept of 'hermeneutical circle' means that we allow the Scriptures to interpret the circumstances of our lives and the world, and that we in turn interpret Scripture in light of new experience, knowledge and understanding. In our time the recognition of the full equality of women is a new circumstance that must be placed into dynamic relation with the Scriptural texts. Such 'circular' interpretation is always risky, and requires discernment through prayer for the guidance of the Spirit.

3. Jesus Christ

We found our dialogue partners to be as concerned as we are to recognize that Jesus was remarkably liberative toward women, befriending them, teaching them, defending them, including them as disciples. It is in obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ that the equality of women must be affirmed. It is this conviction which compels us to ensure that *nothing in our language of worship or theology be allowed to obscure the liberation, dignity and equality which Jesus Christ has given to all women.* Thus the unique status of the Matthean formula is in some degree relativized. We are suspicious of 'formulaism' – any suggestion that particular words or gestures are in themselves efficacious. The power of baptism resides in the whole event as a visible proclamation of the Word of grace, in the power of the Spirit; it cannot be located exclusively in a particular formula of words.

Still, the words used in baptism are not a matter of indifference. To baptize "in the name of . . ." is to identify clearly the One who is believed and trusted, and to invoke the power of that One. Jesus, as he is represented to us in the Scriptures, clearly named God as Abba, Father. The Father/Son language is so basic to Scripture that it cannot be ignored.

However, traditional theology has always known that "Father" is analogical, and that the One who sent Jesus is not literally male. Merely to insist that "God the Father" is not male, yet to go on using it exclusively, is to evade the point of the feminist criticism; i.e., the impression is given that God is indeed male, and that maleness is more divine that femaleness. We do not see the need to eradicate Father/Son language, but to balance it with other expressions.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Of Roman Catholic Participants

We would find it most helpful to respond to contemporary concerns about "Father, Son, Spirit" language by offering explanations of these terms which express the richness of biblical imagery for God and which prevent this traditional language from being used in support of patriarchy.

1. With reference to baptisms celebrated in the Roman Catholic Church, we recommend:
   i) The meaning of the classic formula should be carefully explained in catechesis and, where feasible, within liturgical contexts.

ii) The diversity of liturgical practice already present in the Catholic tradition could be studied as means of exploring the range of possibilities that might be available in the Roman Catholic Church.

iii) In view of Thomas Aquinas's position on the possibility of augmenting the baptismal formula, an argument could be made for modifying the traditional formula by the addition of phrases which would discourage people from interpreting the traditional language as suggesting that God is masculine.

2. With reference to baptisms celebrated in other churches, we recommend:

i) The emphasis in Catholic teaching on the unrepeatability of the sacrament of baptism encourages a careful assessment of the baptismal practices of other churches which intend to do what the Church does, to initiate believers into the fullness of the Christian faith.

ii) When it is clear that another church's profession of faith is authentically Trinitarian, its proposal of an alternate formula (e.g., an augmented formula) which is rooted in scripture and expresses the personal nature of God as well as the mutual relations among the persons of the Trinity should be given serious consideration.

iii) In assessing another formula, the Roman Catholic Church should respond only after consultation with the wider ecumenical community.

Of United Church Participants

Believing that gender inclusivity is important for the baptismal liturgy in our time, and mindful that we baptize not into one denomination but into the universal Church of Jesus Christ (the "Holy Catholic Church"), we recommend:

1. That, in order to respect Scripture and the historic tradition of the world-wide ecumenical community, we maintain the words, "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." We believe this is essential if we are to avoid further schism in the Church of Jesus Christ, who prayed that "they all may be one."

2. That gender balance be sought in the whole service of worship in which a baptism occurs.

3. That at this time the one responsible proposal for change is the augmentation of the classic formula with inclusive language, as exemplified in Options 1(b) and 1 (c) of this report (pp. 22-24). We strongly commend this way of responding to concerns for inclusivity.

This augmentation can occur in two ways:

i) by adding a number of defined expansions to the classic formula in inclusive language;

ii) by preceding or accompanying the classic formula by a number of defined credal questions in inclusive language.

4. That we continue to seek an inclusive alternative formula that meets the criteria set out in Section IV, in intentional conversation with our ecumenical partners.

5. That the General Council Executive send a letter to all pastoral charges and ministry personnel, clarifying authorized baptismal practice in the United Church of Canada; that this report be made available upon request, for study and response, to United Church congregations, theological schools, and ecumenical partners.

APPENDIX A: SOUNDINGS

Each member of the Dialogue prepared a short statement about whether s/he considered the doctrine of the Trinity to be, in the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "the central mystery of Christian faith and life," that is, "the animating centre of Christian life." Here are excerpts from those statements. They illustrate both the similarities and differences between the lived faith of Roman Catholic and United Church members.

> "The Christian life is essentially life reconciled to God through Christ's self-offering for us in the suffering and Cross of Jesus Christ. The animating centre of the Christian's life, then, is our participation as individuals and as church, in God's reconciling mission to the world, which is the continuing mission of the risen and living Christ. It is a mission of participating in the growth of God's Reign in the world, a mission of love and peace, which will ultimately overcome all evil and suffering. It engages us here and now in the sharing of good news and the search for justice and healing, empowered by the Holy Spirit. Stated still more briefly, the animating centre of the Christian life is the Spirit's gift of participation in the life and mission of the triune God." (UC)

> "God deals with us in three ways ... being present to our history as Father, Son and Spirit... Belief in Christ impels the believer to adhere to the oneness of God. Yet our conviction that Jesus is the Incarnate Christ dictates that we expand this oneness in a Trinitarian way... Jesus Christ revealed that in God's eternal glory, God's divine life is one of mutual self-giving and communion. "God is love" (1 Jn 4.8) ... The restoration of human beings in Christ to God established for Christians a new ethic ... one in which absolute control or power is not the distinctive feature." (RC)

> "What is the animating centre of the Christian life? It is the relationship of intimacy between God, humanity and all of creation, a relationship of love and respect. Jesus Christ is the ultimate expression of this... It seems to me that the words of the Trinity at the time they were first used were developed out of our attempts to explain who Jesus was and how he was still present among his followers... Something within me recognizes that there is a connection between the relationship that I see as the animating centre of the Christian life and the intra-relationship of the Trinity, but it seems tenuous and somewhat forced." (UC)

"We are through baptism brought into the 'family' which is the Trinity; thus we share in the very life of the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. We are adopted children, with all the 'rights and privileges' that Jesus has as Son. The church (in the teaching of Pius XII, during whose reign I was in elementary school) is truly, literally the 'mystical body of Christ' ... and as a child I was taught to maintain a conscious awareness that I was living 'in' the Trinitarian relationship... We are called to model our relationship in our family and in the church on the relationships of love and respect which are in the Trinity." (RC)

"If you were to ask me, apart from any discussion of the 'Trinity,' about the 'animating centre of the Christian life,' I imagine that I would speak about the Kingdom of God: in-breaking, indwelling, at hand, come near... The Kingdom for which I long is a *community*, a community of inclusion and over-turned power, the mirror of the divine community. In that sense, whenever I ponder the mystery of the Kingdom of God, I, in fact, invoke the immanent Trinity... My most deeply and passionately felt faith rests in fact upon a God who is a community of persons, persons who, in their diversity, offer life, liberty and hope for the world." (UC)

"Il est dit que «le mystère de la Très Sainte Trinité est le mystère central de la foi et de la vie chrétienne». Il en est ainsi pour ma propre expérience de foi. L'une des toutes premières choses que j'ai apprises sur les genoux de ma mère a été de faire le signe de la croix «au nom du Père, du Fils et du Saint-Esprit». On m'a enseigné à poser ce même geste au moment de me lever et de me mettre au lit. A peu près toutes mes prières, incluant la célébration de l'eucharistie, commencent ainsi.... En traçant le signe de la croix avec les paroles «au nom du Père, etc.» on indique aussi que c'est par Jésus Christ que la révélation de ce salut nous est donnée... Jésus vient nous révéler le plan de Dieu. Or, ce qui me paraît également central dans ce plan, c'est que ce Dieu-Trinité veut partager avec nous sa vie, son amour, sa joie. Car en Dieu, la vie est déjà partagée."(RC)

"The central mystery of the Christian's life, then, is our participation as individuals and as church, in God's reconciling mission to the world, which is the continuing mission of the risen and living Christ, a mission of love and peace... The animating centre of Christian life is the Spirit's gift of participation in the life and mission of the Triune God... The internal relationships of the Persons of the eternal Trinity is, at a secondary level of theological reflection, essential to and presupposed by this understanding of the Christian life." (UC)

"For me, to be a Christian is to believe what Jesus of Nazareth revealed to us through his life, death and resurrection about how the One in Whom human life is grounded is disposed towards us... In him we really do have 'God-with-us.'... So to think of Jesus is to immediately launch oneself into a pondering of the mystery of a God who could, who would, come among us in that way.... Jesus and the Father are very much a part of the 'animating centre' of Christian life in so far as 'self-animation' or 'self-

motivation' is connected to a sense of meaning and purpose.... However, real life Christians don't just 'think' about God; they have a sense that they are intimately connected to God who continues to be present to them through a 'gift of the Spirit.'... So the doctrine of the Trinity *does* function as the 'animating centre' for me as a Catholic, in the sense of a felt need to live in reference to Father, Son and Holy Spirit." (RC)

"The central mystery of the Christian faith is grace, the unexpected and undeserved experience of God's mercy in Jesus Christ.... The mystery of God's work through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit does lead to reflection on the ultimate relationship of the three thus named; and the loving relationship among the persons of the Godhead is seen as the ground of the possibility of the whole work of redemptive grace. But the immanent Trinity is an *inference* from the Biblical witness. The fact is that the apostolic generation of believers lived and witnessed and died in a faith that was implicitly rather than explicitly Trinitarian... How, then, could the doctrine of the Trinity, conceived on an immanent basis, be central to the Christian faith? Perhaps only if *grounding* the authenticity and shape of God's mercy in Jesus Christ is viewed as more important than its *experience*." (UC)

"For me, the 'animating centre' of Christian life, or of any human life for that matter, is relationship with God... There is only one God. There are no divided loyalties. But, in this one God, there are three Persons. Relationship, community, is integral to who God is. Further, this relationship is one of complete harmony and equality.... Because of the centrality of relationship in who God is, freedom is central in humanity's being created in God's own 'image and likeness.' When human beings freely choose to break the very relationship which renders them free, God chooses to become human so that the relationship can be restored and freedom again becomes possible. Further, in order to sustain this freedom, the Holy Spirit is given to us as an indwelling presence, praying within us, molding the soul like a seal shapes hot wax... for me, the understanding of God as Trinity is central to prayer and to belief in the possibility of an ongoing encounter with God in daily life." (RC)

APPENDIX B: DESCRIPTIONS OF GOD OR JESUS AS MOTHER

Biblical References

"You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you; you forgot the God who gave you birth." (Deut 32:18)

"The Lord ... shouts aloud.... For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labour, I will gasp and pant." (Is 42:13-14)

"As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you;" (Is 66:13)

"Thus says the Lord: ... Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you." (Is 49:8,15)

"Listen to me, O house of Jacob, all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been borne by me from your birth, carried from the womb; even to your old age I am he, even when you turn gray I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save." (Is 46: 3-4)

"Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with bands of love. I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them." (Hos 11:3-4)

"I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs" (Hos 13:8)

"The the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind: ... From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven?" (Job 38:1, 29)

"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God."(Jn 1:12-13)

Historical and Contemporary References

Anselm of Canterbury:
"But you too, good Jesus, are you not also a mother? Are you not a mother who like a hen gathers her chicks beneath her wings? ... Christ, my mother, you gather your chickens under your wings; This dead chicken of yours puts himself under those wings.... Warm your chicken, give life to your dead one, justify your sinner." (*The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm*, Penguin, 1973, p. 153)

Julian of Norwich:
"The mother can give her child to suck of her milk, but our precious Mother Jesus can feed us with himself, and does, most courteously and most tenderly, with the blessed sacrament, which is the precious food of true life." (*Showings*, Paulist Press, 1978, p. 298)
"I understand three ways of contempating motherhood in God. The first is the foundation of our nature's creation; the second is his taking of our nature, where the motherhood of grace begins; the third is the motherhood at work. And in that, by the same grace, everything is penetrated, in length and in breadth, in height and in depth without end; and it is all one love." (*Showings*, p. 297)

Pope John Paul I:

"Also we who are here have the same sentiments; we are the objects of undying love on the part of God. We know he always has his eyes open on us, even when it seems to be dark. God is our father; even more God is our mother. God does not want to hurt us, but only to do good for us, all of us. If children are ill, they have additional claim to be loved by their mother. And we too, if by chance we are sick with badness and are on the wrong track, have yet another claim to be loved by the Lord." (*L'Osservatore Romano*, September 21, 1978, p. 2)

Pope John Paul II:
"The merciful Father who embraces the prodigal son is the definitive icon of God revealed by Christ. First and foremost he is Father. It is God the Father who extends his arms in blessing and forgiveness, always waiting, never forcing any of his children. His hands support, clasp, give strength and, at the same time, comfort, console and caress. They are the hands of both a father and a mother. The merciful Father in the parable transcends all the traits of fatherhood and motherhood. In throwing himself on his son's neck, he resembles a mother who caresses her son and surrounds him with her warmth." (*L'Osservatore Romano*, September 15, 1999, p. 11)

APPENDIX C: TEXTS FROM THE MAGISTERIUM

1. Fourth Lateran Council (1215), Constitutions, 1:

> "But the sacrament of baptism is consecrated in water at the invocation of the undivided Trinity – namely Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and brings salvation to both children and adults when it is correctly carried out by anyone in the form laid down by the church." (Tanner ed. I.230)

2. Council of Vienne (1311-12), Decree 1:

> "We believe that when baptism is administered in water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, it is a perfect means of salvation for both adults and children." (Tanner I.360)

3. Basel-Ferrara-Florence, Decree for the Armenians (1439):

> Gives the Latin rite form as usual, but acknowledges the validity of two other forms: "May this servant of Christ be baptized in the name of the Father etc." and "This person is baptized by my hands in the name of the Father etc." (Tanner I. 542-43)

4. Council of Trent (1645-63), Canons on Baptism, #4:

> "If anyone says that the baptism which is given by heretics in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, with the intention of doing what the Church does, is not a true baptism, let him be anathema." (Tanner II.685)

5. *Code of Canon Law* (Latin rite) (1983):

> Canon 849: "Baptism, the gateway to the sacraments, is necessary for salvation, either by actual reception or at least by desire. By it people are freed from sins, are born again as children of God and, made like to Christ by an indelible character, are incorporated into the Church. It is validly conferred only by a washing in real water [Canon 854: "by immersion or by pouring"] with the proper form of words."
>
> Canon 867.2: "Those baptized in a non-catholic ecclesial community are not to be baptized conditionally unless there is serious reason for doubting the validity of their baptism, on the ground of the matter or the form of words used in the baptism, or of the intention of the adult being baptized or of that of the baptizing minister."

6. *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (1990):

> Canon 675.1: "In baptism a person through washing with natural water with the invocation of the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is freed from sin, reborn to new life, puts on Christ and is incorporated in the Church which is His Body."

7. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994):

> 1239: "[Baptism] signifies and actually brings about death to sin and entry into the life of the Most Holy Trinity through configuration to the Paschal mystery of Christ. Baptism is performed in the most expressive way by triple immersion in the baptismal water. However from ancient times it has also been able to be conferred by pouring water three times over the candidate's head." (Summarized also in #1278.)
>
> 1240: "In the Latin Church this triple infusion is accompanied by the minister's words: 'N., I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' In the Eastern liturgies the catechumen turns toward the East and the priest says: 'The servant of God, N., is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.' At the invocation of each person of the Most Holy Trinity, the priest immerses the candidate in the water and raises him up again."

8. Canons on Baptism of non-Catholic Children by a Catholic Minister

> *Code of Canon Law* (Latin Rite):
> Canon 868.2: "For an infant to be baptized lawfully it is required that there be a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the catholic religion." (Otherwise a deferral of baptism is recommended, except in case of imminent death.)
>
> *Code of Canon Law of the Eastern Churches*

> Canon 681.5: "The infant of non-Catholic Christians is licitly baptized, if the parents, or one of them or the one who legitimately takes their place, request it and if it is physically or morally impossible to approach their own minister."

APPENDIX D: BAPTISMAL AGREEMENT OF PLURA CHURCHES (1975)

In 1969, the Joint Working Group (JWG) of the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) received a request for an ecumenical study of baptism. The request was forwarded to the CCC's Faith and Order Commission which reported to the JWG on the results of its study in May 1972.

In its discussion of the topic on September 12, 1972, the JWG decided not to ask the churches to endorse the Report but to receive it "as documentation for a recommendation of mutual acceptance of baptisms." The JWG formulated two recommendations which were forwarded to the churches on October 31, 1972:

> 1) that in the absence of evidence to the contrary they accept the validity of baptisms conferred with water, by pouring, sprinkling or immersion, accompanied by the Trinitarian formula; 2) that the churches adopt in addition to whatever certificate or certificates they now use, a common certificate to be agreed upon.

A press release issued by the CCCB on September 11, 1975 states: "Five major Christian churches have reached an understanding through which one Church will recognize as valid, baptisms conferred according to the established norms of other Churches. In addition a consensus has been reached which will facilitate the use of a common Baptismal certificate in addition to those already in use." "The responses of the churches [Anglican, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian and United] to the report was that baptisms would be recognized when conferred according to the norms of the churches, with flowing water, by pouring, sprinkling or immersion, accompanied by the Trinitarian formula."

Although the proposal was approved in 1975, the churches subsequently were unable to agree on a common baptismal certificate and in 1980 the Joint Working Group recommended that this second aspect of the proposal be dropped.

APPENDIX E: SUGGESTIONS FOR GROUP STUDY

While this Report uses specialized language and assumes broad knowledge of the Roman Catholic and United Churches, it may be more accessible than it first appears. One approach for group study would begin with Section IV ("Some Options"). Other parts of the Report then could be addressed on a need-to-know basis as discussion develops.

1. Section I: What is the animating centre of the Christian faith for you?

2. Section II (pp. 8-21 generally): Did you make any new discoveries as you read this section? The paragraph at the bottom of p. 20 contrasts the value of "safeguarding our fidelity to the Gospel and protecting us from individual misuse" and that of "the faith community's freedom to interpret the Gospel in light of new contexts". How do you assess and relate these two values?
3. Section II (pp. 18-20 specifically): Before reading the feminist critique of Father/Son language, how aware were you of this issue? What degree of importance do you assign to the critique and to the need of the churches to respond?

4. Section III (pp. 21-22): How do the criteria relate to the significance of baptism in your experience? Is there anything that should be added to, or changed in, the list?

5. Section IV (pp. 22-26): Which of the options presented seem authentic expressions of Trinitarian faith to you? Why do you include (or exclude) the ones you do?

6. Section V (pp. 27-31): Which aspects of the concluding reflections strike you as the most worthy of note? Would you add any observations?

7. Section VI (pp. 31-33): Would you endorse the recommendations of the Roman Catholic participants? Of the United Church participants?

Your responses to these questions would be welcomed by:

Commission for Ecumenism
Relations
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
90 Parent Avenue
Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7B1

Committee on Inter-Church and Inter-Faith

United Church of Canada
3250 Bloor Street West, Suite 300
Etobicoke, Ontario M8X 2Y4

If your responses are that of a group, please indicate how many participated in the discussion.