Sacraments and Justice

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Edited by Doris Donnelly

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Introduction

There was a concern among theologians, liturgists, and church historians at the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) that sacramental symbolism was not measuring up to its potential. In *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy),[1] the council urged that sacramental symbols be more transparent to their sacred reality and, implicitly, that whatever camouflaged transparency be either refreshed or eliminated so that mystery, and not confusion, could flourish.

It took a while for the revitalization process to take hold. Catholics, accustomed to an approach to sacraments that required little, if any, participation, were comfortable with passivity, and sometimes, sad to say, a "magical" understanding of sacraments. The liturgical renewal proposed at the Second Vatican Council, on the other hand, invited active participation, personal involvement, and commitment. The council understood sacramental symbols as actions, not objects.[2] That orientation encouraged beholding not bread, oil, and water, but participating in the powerful symbolism of *breaking bread* so that all might be fed, of *drowning* by immersion in baptismal waters as more closely revealing a death and rebirth in Christ than did drops of water on a person's forehead, of *burnishing* confirmands, the newly ordained, and the sick with oil for strength in what lay ahead, and of *hearing* and *trusting* words of mutual commitment spoken in marriage and of forgiveness spoken in penance as effecting what they signify.

[1] All quotations from the Second Vatican Council used in this volume are taken from *Vatican Council II: The Basic Sixteen Documents; Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014).

[2] Nathan Mitchell, " 'Symbols are Actions, Not Objects'—New Directions for an Old Problem," in *Living Worship*, a publication of the Liturgical Conference, February 1977, 13:2.

Sacraments go beyond "representing" another reality. In a class of their own, sacramental symbols are intimately connected with the reality they express. Baffling to nonbelievers unable to decipher them, misrepresented by those who misread and often reduce symbols to mere signs, sacramental symbols are sources of joy, solace, confrontation, peace, healing, strength, and life-giving sustenance to the initiated.

As symbols were resuscitated and sacraments were renewed, each of the seven—baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, penance, marriage, orders, and the anointing of the sick—uncovered a link to social justice, understood in these pages as a call for harmony and well-being of all in society where there exists equality of chances in education and employment, appropriate living conditions, and access to health care.

Few understand that link better than the authors represented in these pages.

Each writer is a theologian with pastoral sensitivities. Some are married, some are parents, some are pastors, and some are priests. All are educators aware of the social implications of worship, able to communicate not only the history of each sacrament but also the active presence of Christ who lives in expectation that each of us will participate in the urgent renewal of unjust policies and systems that affect the most vulnerable in our global family.

The privilege of working with my colleagues on *Sacraments and Justice* was made possible by a Grauel Fellowship with the unfailing support of the former dean and now provost at JCU, Jeanne Colleran, and from Reverend Robert L. Niehoff, SJ, who, in addition to his responsibilities as president of John Carroll University, happens also to be a naturally gifted liturgist and homilist.

Editing this volume has been a labor of love.

Doris Donnelly
May 11, 2014

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Baptism and Justice

John F. Baldovin, SJ

Near the end of Francis Ford Coppola's first *Godfather* film, Michael, the youngest Corleone son, has been forced by circumstances to take charge of the "family business"—organized crime. His father has died a natural death, but his older brother, Sonny, has been murdered by a rival crime family. Michael plots revenge, and in a frighteningly vivid scene we witness the baptism of his sister's child interspersed with scenes of the murder of Michael's enemies, murders committed on Michael's orders. Michael, as the new godfather, even plans to have his brother-in-law, the father of the baptized child, murdered immediately after the baptism for his betrayal of the family and the part he played in Sonny's death. Michael's facial expression as he answers the baptismal questions about renunciation of evil and profession of faith is telling. One senses his recognition of the utter hypocrisy of his actions.

Sometimes it takes a counterexample to heighten our own awareness of the meaning of a sacramental act. The contradiction here is quite clear—one cannot at one and the same time affirm the life that is given to the children of God and commit murder.

Baptism Today

> Baptism is participation in Christ's death and resurrection (Rom 6:3-5; Col 2:12); a washing away of sin (1 Cor 6:11); a new birth (John 3:5); an enlightenment by Christ (Eph 5:14); a re-clothing in Christ (Gal 3:27); a renewal by the Spirit (Tit 3:5); the experience of salvation from the flood (1 Pet 3:20-21); an exodus from bondage (1 Cor 10:1-2) and a liberation into a new humanity in which barriers of division whether of sex or race or social status are transcended. (Gal 3:27-28; 1 Cor 12:13).[1]

The landmark ecumenical convergence document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (BEM) contains a number of essential affirmations about the Christian life. It is a fine starting point for understanding baptism today. Baptism is the formal beginning of the Christian life and (at least in adults and children of catechetical age) the culmination of a process of conversion to Christ. (I was tempted to write "conclusion to the process," but of course the Christian life is one of constant and deeper conversion.)

In the New Testament Jesus is himself baptized by John the Baptist (Mark 1:9-11; Matt 3:13-17; Luke 3:21-22).[2] Jesus associates baptism with his death in Mark 10:38-40. Baptism is clearly indicated as the means of formal entry into Christian living in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:5-6, 2:37-42, 8:26-30, 10:44-48). John's gospel spells out the necessity of baptism as being "born from above" in the dialogue with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21). Finally, in exhorting his correspondents to live a truly Christian life, Paul reminds them that their baptism was a participation in Christ's death and burial (Rom 6:3-11). There are, then, a variety of metaphors used for baptism in the New Testament: new birth, enlightenment, and cleansing, as well as death and resurrection.

In the early church, for the most part, adults were initiated in the sequence: baptism, chrismation (or imposition of hands), and first

[1] Faith and Order Commission (World Council of Churches), "Baptism," in *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry, Faith and Order Paper 111* (Geneva: 1982), 1, para. 2.

[2] On this and many other issues treated in this essay, see Maxwell Johnson, *The Rites of Christian Initiation*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007). See also E. C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*, 3rd ed. (London: SPCK, 2003).

Eucharist.[3] In the course of the rites they exchanged the kiss of peace for the first time and joined in the prayers of the faithful. Their preparation included a period of instruction, training, and exorcisms that could last up to three years.[4] A final period of the catechumenate, as it was known, began with the enrollment of names at the beginning of Lent, the reception of the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, and a final series of exorcisms, called the scrutinies.[5] The catechumens, at this point called "the Elect," were baptized, were chrismated, and received the Eucharist during the course of the great vigil of Easter on Holy Saturday night. As newborn Christians (neophytes) they were then instructed on the rites in which they had participated, the so-called period of mystagogy. The mass conversion to Christianity encouraged the widespread practice of infant baptism, which itself inspired St. Augustine of Hippo to argue for the universality of original sin.[6]

In the course of the Middle Ages, Eastern and Western Christianity divided in their approach to baptismal practice. The Christian East retained the integrity of initiation as well as the traditional sequence of baptism-chrismation-Eucharist. The principle of ecclesial unity, always important for initiation, was signified by the fact that only a bishop was able to consecrate chrism, the oil used in the postbaptismal anointing.[7] In the West, however, unity was signified by the person of the bishop himself. Eventually, when infants were baptized by presbyters, their baptism was confirmed (completed) by the imposition of hands and anointing by the bishop. In this way, confirmation was sundered from the original integrity of the initiatory scheme. Many churches retained the original sequence (baptism-chrismation-Eucharist), but in the course of time, first Eucharist began to precede

[3] "For the most part," since there were regions like Syria where the sequence seems to have been Anointing-Baptism-Eucharist. See Johnson, *Rites of Christian Initiation*, 55–63.

[4] At least according to *The Apostolic Tradition*, see Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy*.

[5] Once again, I am painting with a broad brush and homogenizing practices from a number of geographical areas and across centuries. We only know of the official enrollment of names, for example, from the late fourth century on.

[6] See Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 804ff.

[7] See Johnson, *Rites*, 275–307.

confirmation, especially when confirmation began to be given in adolescence.

One of the major achievements of the Second Vatican Council's document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy) was the restoration of the catechumenate for adults and the creation of an explicit rite geared to the baptism of children.[8] Here is what the Constitution has to say:

> 64. The catechumenate for adults, divided into several distinct steps, is to be restored and brought into use at the discretion of the local Ordinary. By this means, the time of the catechumenate, which is destined for the requisite formation, may be sanctified by sacred rites to be celebrated at successive stages.
>
> 65. In mission countries, in addition to what is found in the christian tradition, those elements of initiation may be admitted which are already in use among every people, insofar as they can be adapted to the Christian ritual in accordance with articles 37-40 of this constitution.
>
> 66. Both rites for the Baptism of adults are to be revised, not only the simpler rite but also, taking into consideration the restored catechumenate, the more solemn rite. A special Mass "For the conferring of Baptism" is to be inserted into the Roman Missal.
>
> 67. The rite for the Baptism of infants is to be revised. The revision should take into account the fact that those to be baptized are babies. The roles of parents and godparents, and also their duties, should be brought out more clearly in the rite itself.
>
> 68. The baptismal rite should contain variants, to be used at the discretion of the local Ordinary, when a large number is to be baptized. Likewise a shorter rite is to be drawn up, especially for mission countries, which may be used by catechists when neither priest nor deacon is available and, when there is danger of death, by the faithful in general.
>
> 69. In place of what is known as the "Rite for making up for what was omitted in the Baptism of an infant" a new rite is to be drawn up. This rite should indicate more fittingly and clearly that the infant baptized by the short rite has already been received into the church.

[8] For centuries the rite of baptism for infants was simply an abbreviated form of the rite for adults suitable for emergencies, hence "clinical" baptism; see Mark Searle, *Christening: The Making of Christians* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1980).

Thus the council was responsible for the Rite of Baptism of Infants, issued in 1968, and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, issued in 1972. Although many thought that a restored catechumenate would be employed mainly in "mission lands," it quickly became clear that it was to provide a model for what it means to belong to the church—everywhere.[9]

Two further comments are appropriate with regard to what *Sacrosanctum Concilium* tried to achieve with initiation. First, note that the constitution's section on cultural adaptation in 37–40 is specifically mentioned. It was later understood that cultural adaptation (or inculturation, as it came to be called) was necessary everywhere. In addition, there is a new concern for the adaptation of the rites to particular circumstances, e.g., those of the infant. The rites for adults and for infants that were produced subsequent to Vatican II took these guidelines into consideration. There are a number of places in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, for example, where a good deal of latitude in ritual action and wording is allowed. In infant baptism, the godparents no longer act as "liturgical ventriloquists" mouthing the renunciations and faith of the child. Now the faith of the church is explicitly professed by the parents and godparents as their own faith.

Finally, we should note the widespread practice of baptizing infants at parish eucharistic celebrations on Sundays. The connection between baptism and the church is made much more explicit by this practice.

At this point, it should be obvious that baptism is much more than cleansing from sin—original in the case of infants, and of all sin in the case of adults. Baptism, as the BEM document points out, is also participation in Christ's death and resurrection, entrance into the body of Christ, the church, liberation from bondage, and renewal in the Spirit.

Among the motifs spelled out in BEM is a concern for the ethical character of the Christian life: "a liberation into a new humanity in

[9] See the excellent commentary by Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991).

which barriers of division whether of sex or race or social status are transcended (Gal 3:27-28; 1 Cor 12:13)."[10]

Ethical concerns appear with some frequency in the document's section on the Eucharist, in particular with regard to the communion of the faithful and the meal of the kingdom, both of which demand that the Eucharist itself mirror a just society. They appear as well in the passage cited above that includes the vision of a new humanity in which the usual boundaries that bring about injustice are dissolved. Liberation from these barriers is listed among the meanings of baptism.

The remainder of this chapter is an attempt to unfold the meaning of baptism (Christian initiation in general) as an effective sign of social justice. Clearly one of the essential tasks for Christian theology today is to explain the profound connections between the celebration of the sacraments and Christian life in general. My thesis here is the same as Robert Taft's, when he says "the liturgy is Christian life in a nutshell."[11] Somehow, fifty years after Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, this connection between liturgy and life has become lost on the majority of Christians. Perhaps this essay as well as others in this collection may be a small step in ameliorating that misunderstanding.

Baptism and Justice in the New Testament

The writings of the New Testament provide a number of clear indications of the human dignity that comes with Christian baptism. The first letter of Peter is considered by a number of commentators as a baptismal homily. The nobility of the Christian calling and the fundamental equality of the baptized is suggested by 1 Peter 2:9-10:

> But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.
> Once you were not a people,
> but now you are God's people;

[10] Faith and Order Commission, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*.

[11] Robert Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1993), 340–46.

> once you had not received mercy,
> but now you have received mercy.

If it really is the case that baptized Christians constitute a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation, then any form of injustice within the Christian family is unthinkable.

Similarly, in reminding his correspondents that all are baptized in the Spirit into one body (1 Cor 12:4-13), Paul makes it quite clear that all are dependent on one another. All the baptized are intimately interrelated, just as a body only works if all its parts are coordinated:

> Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.
>
> For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Finally, in making his case to the Galatians with regard to the new relationship that Christians have to the Mosaic Law, Paul delivers a memorable and powerful message about the radical equality of the baptized:

> As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:27-28)

Given modern sensitivities about social justice, many today have pointed to Galatians 3:27-28 as a charter statement against all forms of discrimination within the church.

The Early Church

Augustine and the Fundamental Equality of the Baptized

Some have argued that the primary sacrament in the early church was baptism. Perhaps more accurately, one can say that the initiatory sequence—baptism, chrismation, Eucharist—constituted the central sacramental imagination and practice of Christians. A number of early Christian writers testify to the importance and dignity of the baptismal state, among them Cyril of Jerusalem, Ambrose of Milan, and John Chrysostom.[12] But perhaps no one preaches so elegantly on the topic as St. Augustine of Hippo.[13] The following is an excerpt from his (justly) famous Easter sermon to the newly baptized in Hippo, given on the last day of Pentecost and dated to the second decade of the fifth century:

> If you desire to understand the Body of Christ, listen to the apostle who tells the faithful, "Now you are the Body of Christ and its members" [1 Cor 12:27]. If, therefore, you are the Body and the members of Christ, your mystery is placed on the Lord's table; you receive your own mystery. Respond "Amen" to what you are, and by responding you give your assent. You hear "The Body of Christ" and you respond "Amen." Be a member of Christ's Body so that your Amen may be true. Why in bread? So that we may bring nothing of our own here, let us listen to the same apostle who says about this sacrament, "We though many are one bread, one body" [1 Cor 10:17]. Understand and rejoice: unity, truth, godliness, love. "One bread." Who is this one bread? "Many are one body." Further reflect on the fact that the bread is made from many grains, not from one grain. When you were exorcised, you were, so to speak, ground in a mill. When you were baptized, you were, so to speak, mixed together like dough. When you received the fire of the Holy Spirit, you were, so to speak, baked. Be what you can see, and receive what you are.[14]

[12] See Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994).

[13] For a comprehensive study of initiation in early Christianity, specifically with regard to Augustine, see Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, 776–816.

[14] See Lawrence Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, vol. 3 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 77. See also the recent study by Garry Wills, *Font of Life: Ambrose, Augustine, and the Mystery of Baptism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Augustine here underlines the corporate unity of Christians who receive the Eucharist by means of a description of the process of initiation. Just as bread is produced by a process that involves grinding, moistening, and baking, so Christians are formed into one body in Christ. This is a fine example of how our fundamental unity, equality, and interdependence is mirrored in our sacramental life.

Chrysostom on the Dignity of Baptism

John Chrysostom, presbyter at Antioch and later archbishop of Constantinople, delivered a number of baptismal catecheses. The following passage helps us to understand his justified reputation for eloquence:

> 5. "Blessed be God," we repeat it, "for he has done wonderful things," he who makes and renews all things. Those who yesterday were captives are today free, being citizens of the Church. Those who recently were in the shame of sin are now assured of justice. They are not only free, but also holy; not only holy, but just; not only just, but children; not only children, but inheritors; not only inheritors, but brothers [and sisters] of Christ; not only brothers [and sisters] of Christ, but also his joint heirs; not only his joint heirs, but his members; not only his members, but also the temple; not only the temple, but also instruments of the Spirit.
>
> 6. "Blessed be God who alone does wonderful things." You have seen how numerous are the benefits of baptism. Although many believe that its only benefit is the remission of sins, we have counted ten honors that are conferred by it. This is why we baptize small infants even though they are sinless. We do so that they may be given justice, filial adoption, inheritance, that they may become brothers [and sisters] and members of Christ and may become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit.[15]

In addition to being rhetorically impressive, this passage illuminates the dignity of Christian baptism—well beyond the forgiveness

[15] See Lawrence Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, vol. 2 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 201–2.

of sin.[16] Baptism demands a treatment of others that recognizes them as heirs of Christ and temples of the Holy Spirit.

BEM and the Ethical Implications of Baptism

As we saw earlier in this chapter, the BEM document devotes considerable attention to the ethical implications of baptism, Eucharist, and ministry. The ethical dimensions of baptism are suggested in the document's attempt to emphasize its ecumenical dimension:

> D. Incorporation into the Body of Christ
>
> 6. Administered in obedience to our Lord, baptism is a sign and seal of our common discipleship. Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other and with the Church of every time and place. Our common baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity. We are one people and are called to confess and serve one Lord in each place and in all the world. The union with Christ which we share through baptism has important implications for Christian unity. "There is . . . one baptism, one God and Father of all . . ." (Eph 4:4-6). When baptismal unity is realized in one holy, catholic, apostolic Church, a genuine Christian witness can be made to the healing and reconciling love of God. Therefore, our one baptism into Christ constitutes a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship.[17]

The ecumenical movement has helped to foster the conviction that what unites us in baptism is deeper than what may divide us in terms of the churches to which we belong. I would add that this kind of respect is essential to an attitude of doing social justice that is even wider than the worldwide fellowship of Christians. The document's section on the Eucharist goes even further in spelling out the justice implications of Christian baptism:

> Since the earliest days, baptism has been understood as the sacrament by which believers are incorporated into the body of Christ and are endowed with the Holy Spirit. As long as the right of the

[16] Note that original sin does not seem to be an issue for Chrysostom, since he mentions that infants are baptized regardless of being sinless.

[17] Faith and Order Commission, "Eucharist as Communion of the Faithful," in *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, 12, para. 19.

> baptized believers and their ministers to participate in and preside over Eucharistic celebration in one church is called into question by those who preside over and are members of other Eucharistic congregations, the catholicity of the Eucharist is less manifest. There is discussion in many churches today about the inclusion of baptized children as communicants at the Lord's Supper.[18]

On the basis of what one could call a baptismal ecclesiology, the BEM document challenges churches to examine themselves with regard to their own practice of justice.

Baptism and Its Implications

In their book, *The Liturgy That Does Justice*, James Empereur and Christopher Kiesling approach the subject of Christian initiation from the angle of the liberation of Israel from bondage in Egypt. They adopt the Vatican II (and of course, the biblical) image of the people of God as their lens. This enables them to link the liberation won by Jesus with a liberation from unjust social structures.[19] One can find a similar implication in the sacrifice of the first fruits in Deuteronomy 26. After the harvest, the people are instructed to bring their first fruits to the priests who will offer them to God. At the same time, the people recite God's marvelous deeds in rescuing them ("us") from Egypt. The passage does not end with the ritual sacrifice, however. It ends with the following:

> When you have finished paying all the tithe of your produce in the third year (which is the year of the tithe), giving it to the Levites, the aliens, the orphans, and the widows, so that they may eat their fill within your towns, then you shall say before the Lord your God: "I have removed the sacred portion from the house, and I have given it to the Levites, the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows, in accordance with your entire commandment that you commanded me." (Deut 26:12-13)

In other words, having become a people liberated from slavery, the Israelites are now to recognize their justice obligations to the

[18] Ibid.

[19] See James Empereur and Christopher Kiesling, *The Liturgy That Does Justice* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 41–48.

oppressed. Sacramental theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet calls this the process of symbolic exchange, whereby our liturgical actions are verified by how we live out what we have been given with our lives.[20]

Empereur and Kiesling also find a call to justice quite explicitly formulated in the American Episcopal *Book of Common Prayer* with its baptismal covenant:[21]

> Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?[22]

Here it is quite clear that receiving one's own baptismal dignity implies recognizing the dignity and human rights of all people. Similarly, William Reiser has suggested a reformulation of baptismal promises adapted to our contemporary circumstances, among them:

> Do you dedicate yourself to seeking the kingdom of God and God's justice, to praying daily, to meditating on the gospels and to celebrating the Eucharist faithfully and devoutly?
>
> Do you commit yourself to that simplicity of living which Jesus enjoined on his disciples? Do you commit yourself to resisting the spirit of materialism and consumerism which is so strong in our culture?
>
> Do you accept responsibility for building community, for being people of compassion and reconciliation, for being mindful of those who are poor and oppressed, and for truly forgiving those who have offended you?[23]

Reiser's contention is that we need a fresh look at our baptismal promises and the kind of evil that we are renouncing with such formulaic phrases as: "Do you renounce evil and refuse to be mastered by sin?" Often enough the antiquity of our formulas make it difficult to appreciate their modern applications.

[20] Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, ed. and trans. P. Madigan and M. Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1995), 231–39, 266ff.

[21] Empereur and Kiesling, *The Liturgy That Does Justice*, 49–50.

[22] *Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Publishing, 1979), 304–5.

[23] William Reiser, *Renewing the Baptismal Promises: Their Meaning for the Christian Life* (New York: Pueblo, 1988), 12–13.

Before the conversion of the emperor Constantine to Christianity in the fourth century, Christians had little difficulty appreciating the seriousness of their faith. They ran the risk of at least periodic persecutions for their baptismal commitment! The practical meaning of baptism then was a commitment to a way of life significantly transformed by the triumph of infant baptism and an overwhelming concern with original sin. It may be that the imbalance which that concern fostered has been mitigated today by the recovery of the adult catechumenate and the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. The challenge for the future is to help parents and families of those who are baptized in infancy to appreciate how momentous Christian baptism really is.

Returning to *The Godfather*

The violence of the concluding scenes of *The Godfather* reviewed at the opening of this chapter, with Michael Corleone flaunting un-Christian values in the murder of his enemies during the baptism of his nephew, offers a vivid example of how easily we can dissociate our liturgical and sacramental acts from the way we live our lives.

The film biography of Archbishop Oscar Romeo of San Salvador, *Romero*, serves as a countercultural response to the *Godfather*. It opens with a cleric, Romero, who has recently become archbishop and is friendly with the rich and important families that make up El Salvador's ruling oligarchy. But he is transformed by the assassination of a friend, the Jesuit Rutilio Grande, who has been preaching social justice. He experiences a conversion to Gospel justice for the poor and oppressed of his country. Shortly afterward, one of his rich friends comes and asks him to baptize her baby. He is delighted. She suggests a Sunday in December and he says, "Wonderful, that's a very popular time; there will be a lot of people coming to be baptized." She tells him they were hoping for a private baptism. "We don't do that," he responds. "You mean you want me to baptize my baby with a bunch of Indians?" He nods his head and she says, "You have deserted us." The incident sets the scene for the increasing opposition to Romero by the ruling oligarchy, but it also says something significant about baptism. In committing himself to social justice, the archbishop has realized that the sacramental sphere must mirror

economic and social realities. To allow a private baptism simply because his friend cannot imagine mixing with "those Indians" would be a betrayal of a far different sort. It would be an outright contradiction to the meaning of Christian baptism itself.

The blindness of Archbishop Romero's rich friend to the fundamental equality and dignity of human beings is a chilling reminder of our need to recover a truly baptismal ecclesiology. That recovery can be part of a renewed appreciation of the rich life offered us in union with Christ—the life offered in Christian baptism.