



## Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

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Volume 13 | Number 2

Article 15

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2001

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Alonzo Gaskill

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**Title** *Maximus Nothus Decretum: A Look at the Recent Catholic Declaration regarding Latter-day Saint Baptisms*

**Author(s)** Alonzo Gaskill

**Reference** *FARMS Review of Books* 13/2 (2001): 175-96.

**ISSN** 1099-9450 (print), 2168-3123 (online)

**Abstract** Review of “The Question of the Validity of Baptism Conferred in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” (unpublished), by Luis Ladaria.

# MAXIMUS NOTHUS DECRETUM:<sup>1</sup> A LOOK AT THE RECENT CATHOLIC DECLARATION REGARDING LATTER-DAY SAINT BAPTISMS

Alonzo Gaskill

On 5 June 2001, the Roman Catholic Church's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a ruling that baptisms performed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are to be considered invalid by the magisterium of the Rome-based faith.<sup>2</sup>

A spokesman for the Congregation, Father Luis Ladaria, indicated that the ruling came in response to questions posed by American Catholic bishops regarding the validity of Mormon baptisms.<sup>3</sup> On 24 July 2001, the *New York Times* reported rationales for the decision to rebaptize a baptized member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints if he or she converted to Catholicism.<sup>4</sup>

The reasoning for the decision appears to be twofold, both issues related to the Latter-day Saint doctrine on the nature of God. Although

1. "The Great Illegitimate Decree."

2. "Why Mormon Baptism Is Invalid," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 17 July 2001; see Gustav Niebuhr, "Vatican Decides to Rebaptize Mormons Who Are Converting," *New York Times*, 24 July 2001; Bob Mims, "Catholics Demote LDS Baptism," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 19 July 2001.

3. "Why Mormon Baptism Is Invalid."

4. "Vatican Decides to Rebaptize Mormons." The author of this article notes that "Members of Protestant and Orthodox churches may convert to Catholicism without being rebaptized."

Review of Luis Ladaria. "The Question of the Validity of Baptism Conferred in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints." Unpublished.

the Vatican has not produced an official document regarding Rome's position on the matter, it appears that the two related areas of concern are (1) the Latter-day Saint rejection of traditional trinitarian definitions of the Godhead and (2) a stated difference in the understood purpose of baptism.<sup>5</sup> According to the official Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, Mormons have a "misconception of the Trinity" and, consequently, a mistaken understanding as to "the identity of Christ."<sup>6</sup>

### The Issue of the Trinity

On 17 July 2001, *L'Osservatore Romano* reported that, according to the directive, Mormon baptisms did not involve a true invocation of the Trinity because Latter-day Saints perceive the Godhead as consisting of three separate divine beings rather than as one God existing within three persons of one substance.<sup>7</sup> Ladaria indicated that, since members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints reject the Trinity (in its traditional orthodox definition), they are therefore baptizing in the name of another divinity.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Bill Ryan, a spokesman for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, claimed that "The directive . . . was based on important differences in how the two faiths understand the concept of God as the Trinity—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—in whose name both churches conduct baptisms."<sup>9</sup>

5. An "unofficial" document explaining the position of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith does exist under the title of "The Question of the Validity of Baptism Conferred in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," by Father Luis Ladaria. The manuscript is unpublished and narrowly circulated. A copy of the document is in my possession.

6. "Why Mormon Baptism Is Invalid."

7. Ibid.

8. See "Why Mormon Baptism Is Invalid," and Ladaria, "The Question of the Validity of Baptism," 4–7.

9. "Vatican Decides to Rebaptize Mormons." This implied supposed misunderstanding on the part of the Saints brings to mind a thought penned by the contemporary philosopher R. J. Joynt, who writes, "Consciousness is like the Trinity; if it is explained so that you understand it, it hasn't been explained correctly." R. J. Joynt, "Are Two Heads Better Than One?" *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 4:108–9, quoted in Kathleen V. Wilkes, "Is



Of course, lay members of the Catholic Church generally believe that the Trinity, defined as “one God existing within three persons of one substance,” is a scriptural concept. However, I have yet to meet a Catholic scholar who believes this understanding of the Trinity is a dogma present in or founded upon the Bible.<sup>10</sup> Thus, while acknowledging this distinction between the LDS construct of the Godhead and the traditional Christian interpretation of the dogma of the Trinity, from a scholarly Catholic position this dichotomy is somewhat misrepresentative and arguably moot.

Many contemporary Catholic theologians have acknowledged the dogma of the Trinity as nothing more than a response to early Christian dissensions, such as the fourth-century Arian controversy. In her award-winning book *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*,<sup>11</sup> theologian Catherine Mowry LaCugna acknowledges that, from New Testament times down to the present, the Christian understanding of the nature of God has evolved greatly and that Augustine’s “preference for thinking and speaking of God as Trinity . . . ‘defunctionalizes’ the biblical and creedal ways of speaking of God.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the traditional Christian view of God is so distorted when compared to early Christian ideas (as contained in the New Testament and patristic writings) that scholars like the influential German theologian Karl Rahner indicate that if the entire doctrine of the Trinity were dismissed as false, the major part of religious literature would remain virtually unchanged.<sup>13</sup> Biblical exegete Philip B. Harner notes that in “the first two centuries A.D. . . . the specific doctrine of the Trinity

Consciousness Important?” *British Journal of the Philosophy of Science* 35 (1984): 223. In light of Joynt’s reflection one might ask whether it is better to profess understanding or misunderstanding of the issue at hand.

10. Incidentally, I hold a graduate degree in theology from the Catholic University of Notre Dame.

11. The Catholic Press Association designated this book the Theology Book of the Year for 1992.

12. Catherine M. LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991), 102.

13. See Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 11, as cited in LaCugna, *God for Us*, 6 and 8; see William Rusch, ed. and trans., *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 1–80; J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 83–137.

was not yet formulated” and the “early Christians . . . apparently believed in ‘two powers’ in heaven, i.e., Jesus and God.”<sup>14</sup> Even the current pontiff, John Paul II, acknowledges that the formulation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed was a response to the hellenization of the church and its perceived need for “ways of presenting her doctrine which would be adequate and convincing in that cultural context.”<sup>15</sup>

As to the existence of the Trinity in the Bible, one Catholic scholar writes:

It was common in neo-Scholastic manuals of dogmatic theology to cite texts such as Gen. 1:26, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness” (see also Gen. 3:22; 11:7; Isaiah 6:2–3), as proof of a plurality in God. Today, however, scholars generally agree that there is no doctrine of the Trinity as such in either the OT or the NT. . . . [1]t would go far beyond the intention and thought-forms of the OT to suppose that a late-fourth-century or thirteenth-century Christian doctrine can be found there. . . .

Likewise, the NT does not contain an explicit doctrine of the Trinity. . . .

It would be anachronistic to say that the NT necessarily implies what will later be expressed with metaphysical refinement as a Trinity of three coequal divine Persons who share the same substance. . . . The vocabulary of metaphysics cannot be found in Scripture. Because of this, there are theologians who regard all postbiblical doctrinal developments as arbitrary or even aberrant. For them, one cannot go beyond the language and concepts of the Bible.<sup>16</sup>

Thus even Catholic scholars acknowledge that rejection of a person or group of people based on their acceptance or denial of the Trinity

14. Philip B. Harner, *The “I Am” of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Johannine Usage and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 24.

15. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 46.

16. Catherine M. LaCugna, “God,” in *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, ed. Richard P. McBrien (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995), 565–66.

would be to apply a false standard.<sup>17</sup> First- and second-century Christians didn't accept the Trinity (as it is understood today). The fathers of the church, on whom the Catholics and Eastern Orthodox place heavy emphasis, frequently wrote in an effort to combat the heretical teaching that the Father and Son shared an equality and metaphysical oneness. Irenaeus,<sup>18</sup> Justin Martyr,<sup>19</sup> and others<sup>20</sup> were all very clear that the Father and Son were separate beings, the latter subordinate to the former, and that to confuse or combine them was an act of heresy.

Roman Catholic scholars (including the church's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) are not ignorant of the history behind the development of trinitarian theology or the patristic proclamations acknowledging the distinct individuality of the Father and Son.<sup>21</sup> Rather, they traditionally view the evolution of the church's doctrine of God as a positive move toward a more philosophical and sophisticated model. In the subordinationist spirit of John 14:28 (see Matthew 19:16–17; 24:36; Mark 13:32; and John 17:21), the Catholic saint Justin Martyr indicates that Jesus simply carries “into execution” the

17. John W. Welch, in a correspondence on 26 September 2001, posed an interesting question: “Must the person being baptized have a correct understanding of God? If so, how can infant baptism be recognized as a valid sacrament? Infants obviously have no concept of God whatever.”

18. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 7.4, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (hereafter ANF), ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 1:470; *Fragments from the Lost Writings of Irenaeus* 53 (ANF 1:577).

19. Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin* 63 (ANF 1:184); *Dialogue with Trypho* 113, 75, and 38 (ANF 1:255, 236, and 213).

20. See Hippolytus, *Fragments from Commentaries: Scholia on Daniel* 7.13 (ANF 5:189).

21. Although Father Ladaria, who holds a doctorate in systematic theology, cannot be ignorant of the development of the dogma of the Trinity, his article makes no mention of it. Indeed, in reading his article one is left with the impression that the Christian Church has always accepted a trinitarian interpretation of the doctrine of God. Ladaria goes so far as to state that the Catholics, by accepting the Trinity and baptizing in the name of the Trinity, are doing what Christ intended to do when he baptized. But Mormons, he argues, reject traditional trinitarian Christology and thus are not intending what Christ intended. Ladaria appears to suggest that Jesus believed in and preached trinitarian formulas that Catholic scholars (other than himself) universally deny have any tie to the Bible or Christ's teachings. Ladaria, “The Question of the Validity of Baptism,” 6–7.

Father's "counsel," publishing "to men the commands of the Father and Maker of all things."<sup>22</sup> Justin argues further:

I shall attempt to persuade you . . . that there is . . . another God and Lord subject to the Maker of all things; who is also called an Angel, because He announces to men whatsoever the Maker of all things—above whom there is no other God—wishes to announce to them. . . . He who is said to have appeared to Abraham, and to Jacob, and to Moses, and who is called God, is distinct from Him who made all things,—numerically, I mean, not (distinct) in will. For I affirm that He has never at any time done anything which He who made the world—above whom there is no other God—has not wished Him both to do and to engage Himself with. . . . He who is called God and appeared to the patriarchs is called both Angel and Lord, in order that from this you may understand Him to be minister to the Father of all things.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, Irenaeus, who is considered by Catholics to be at the "orthodox center" in his teachings,<sup>24</sup> also indicates that the Father is superior to the Son.<sup>25</sup> One contemporary scholar declares that until about the year A.D. 300 "every single theologian, East and West, had postulated some form of Subordinationism."<sup>26</sup> Indeed, one scholar notes that "subordinationism was pre-Nicene orthodoxy."<sup>27</sup>

22. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 60 (ANF 1:227).

23. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 56 and 58 (ANF 1:223–24 and 225). See Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin* 13 (ANF 1:166–67).

24. Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 489.

25. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.28.8 (ANF 1:402). In their note 2, the editors indicate that this passage is clearly an example of "the subordination of the Son" to the Father.

26. Richard Hanson, "The Achievement of Orthodoxy in the Fourth Century A.D.," in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, ed. Rowan Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 153. I am indebted to Barry R. Bickmore for bringing this source to my attention.

27. Henry S. Bettenson, *The Early Christian Fathers*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 330.

While Catholics accept fathers such as Justin, Irenaeus, and others who explicitly tended toward a subordinationist view of the Godhead, they also accept the baptisms of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which is also clearly subordinationistic in its pneumatology.<sup>28</sup> How, therefore, the Catholic magisterium can deny the validity of Latter-day Saint baptisms because of subordinationistic issues is mind-boggling.

Evidently, the earliest extrabiblical Christian writings do not support a trinitarian interpretation of the nature of the Godhead. Indeed, they emphatically deny the validity of such an interpretation. In addition, as we have seen above, contemporary Catholic theologians deny both the biblical roots of the dogma and its functionality.

### The Purpose of Baptism

According to Ladaria, although non-Catholics can perform valid baptisms, such must be done in the name of the Trinity and “with the intention of doing what the [Catholic] Church does.”<sup>29</sup> Similarly, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ spokesman Bill Ryan states that “The

28. For the Catholics the Holy Ghost has been defined as the “ineffable communion of Father and Son,” the “mutual and reciprocal love between” them, and the “sweet blessedness of the Begetter and the Begotten.” For the Western branch of the church the Holy Spirit proceeds from the “reciprocal love between Father and Son.” Thus its origin, according to Catholicism, is both the Father and the Son. Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (New York: Crossroad, 1984), 215–16. For Catholics a distinction must be made between how the Son proceeded forth from the Father and how the Spirit proceeds from the Father. Concern has been expressed that if the Son proceeds forth in the same manner as the Holy Spirit, there would be two Sons—which Catholics reject. The Eastern Church, however, holds that the Spirit is not the relationship or love that God and Christ share. Rather, it has been compared to God’s breath. When I speak, it is my breath that makes my words accessible to my audience. Jesus is God’s Word, but the Holy Spirit is that which makes the Word accessible to the world. It “proceeds from the Father, is communicated through the Son, and is received by every creature” (*ibid.*, 217). In the case of the Eastern Church, then, the Spirit has its origin solely in the Father. See George Mastrantonis, *The Nicene Creed: Introduction and Interpretation* (St. Louis, Mo.: OLOGOS, 1960), 13. This disagreement has remained unresolved for centuries. And yet such a significant disparity of belief regarding the nature of God is allowed to exist between the two faiths without disqualifying Orthodox baptisms, while the differences between the Catholic and LDS views have been deemed unacceptable by those in Rome.

29. “Why Mormon Baptism Is Invalid”; Ladaria, “The Question of the Validity of Baptism,” 1–3.

Mormon understanding of baptism is not the same as the [Catholic] church's understanding of baptism."<sup>30</sup>

Both men suggest a major distinction between the purpose of a Catholic baptism and that of an LDS baptism. This prompts the question—What is the function of a Catholic baptism? Apparently, Catholic baptisms have a purpose or goal that is different from that of baptisms in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

According to the *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, the sacrament of baptism has three primary purposes. First, “baptism is the sacrament by which one becomes a member of the Christian community.”<sup>31</sup> This should sound both familiar and acceptable to Latter-day Saints. Carl Hawkins, in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, indicates that for Latter-day Saint Christians baptism represents entrance “into the fold of God.”<sup>32</sup> Latter-day Saint scholar John Gee recently wrote, “With baptism the individual witnesses that he has repented of his sins, takes on the name of Christ, and becomes *a member of the Christian community*, all at the same time.”<sup>33</sup>

Second, the *Encyclopedia of Catholicism* indicates that the baptismal ordinance pardons sin and rescues recipients from the power of darkness.<sup>34</sup> Numerous scriptural passages in the standard works attest to the Latter-day Saint belief that baptism brings a “remission of sins” (see Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3; 2 Nephi 31:17; Moroni 8:11, 25; D&C 13:1; 19:31; 55:2; 84:27; 107:20; 138:33; Joseph Smith—History 1:68–69; Article of Faith 4). Also, many of the presiding Brethren have spoken of the power that repentance, baptism, and the receipt of the Holy Ghost have to dispel the powers of darkness.<sup>35</sup>

30. “Vatican Decides to Rebaptize Mormons.”

31. Anthony Sherman, “Baptism,” in *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 133.

32. Carl S. Hawkins, “Baptism,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:92.

33. John Gee, “La Trahison des Clercs: On the Language and Translation of the Book of Mormon,” review of *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, by Brent Lee Metcalfe, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 76, emphasis added.

34. Sherman, “Baptism,” 137.

35. See, for example, Joseph F. Wirthlin, “Christians in Belief and Action,” *Ensign* (November 1996): 72; James E. Faust, “The Great Imitator,” *Ensign* (November 1987): 36; Dallin H. Oaks, “The Aaronic Priesthood and the Sacrament,” *Ensign* (November 1998): 39; Boyd K. Packer, “Washed Clean,” *Ensign* (May 1997): 10.

Finally, we are informed that for Catholics baptism allows them to become “new creations” and to be called the “sons and daughters of God.”<sup>36</sup> These concepts are not foreign to the Church of Jesus Christ either. Both the scriptures we hold in common with the Catholics and the scriptures unique to our faith speak of the converted and baptized as becoming “new creations” (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15; Mosiah 27:26) in Christ and his “sons and daughters” (2 Corinthians 6:18; Mosiah 27:25; D&C 25:1, and 76:24).

Thus the contention that somehow members of the Church of Jesus Christ understand baptism as having some purpose foreign to Catholicism seems inaccurate. A false dichotomy has been drawn by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Further, although Catholic scholars acknowledge that the New Testament “does not provide us with the exact rite of baptism or the exact formula,”<sup>37</sup> nevertheless spokesmen for the Congregation have expressed concern that the formula used in the Church of Jesus Christ is unacceptable.<sup>38</sup> Yet again, Sherman, in his article on baptism in the *Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, explains that the proper formula for a valid baptism consists of the person performing the baptism repeating the “Trinitarian invocation: ‘I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.’”<sup>39</sup> This authoritative formula is nearly word for word the latter portion of Doctrine and Covenants 20:73, which reads: “The person who is called of God and has authority from Jesus Christ to baptize, shall go down into the water with the person who has presented himself or herself for baptism, and shall say, calling him or her by name: Having been commissioned of Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of

36. Sherman, “Baptism,” 137.

37. *Ibid.*, 135; see Lars Hartman, “Baptism,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:583–94.

38. In “Why Mormon Baptism Is Invalid,” Father Ladaria quotes the Latter-day Saint baptismal prayer as “Having received Christ’s mandate, I baptize you in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” However, in “The Question of the Validity of Baptism,” 5, he gets closer to the actual prayer: “Being commissioned by Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

39. Sherman, “Baptism,” 137.

the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.” No notable difference exists between the two formulas. Indeed, baptismal formulas employed by Christian denominations whose baptisms are considered valid by the Catholic Church are sometimes at greater variance from this aforementioned authorized formula than is the Latter-day Saint mode.<sup>40</sup>

In fact, if variance is reason to denounce the validity of a baptism, then perhaps Catholics should acknowledge that their current mode of baptism varies from that found in the New Testament text. Spencer admits that “It does seem that baptism in the early Church was by immersion. Paul’s reference in Rom 6:4 to being ‘buried’ with Christ implies immersion. The account of the Ethiopian eunuch also speaks of a going down into the water and a coming up out of the water (Acts 8:36–38). . . . After the immersion . . . there followed the imposition of hands during which the gift of the Spirit was given.”<sup>41</sup> This pattern is in absolute agreement with Latter-day Saint practice yet goes contrary to popular practice in contemporary Catholicism.

Since scholars and some of the magisterium of the Catholic Church acknowledge the Trinity to be nonscriptural and of late ori-

40. As an example, some use the formula “I baptize you in the name of Jesus” or “I baptize you in the name of Christ.” The U.S. Presbyterians add “child of the covenant” to their baptismal formula so as to indicate what the convert is becoming. Riverside Church in the city of New York has added at the end of its baptismal formula “one God, Mother of us all” so as to avoid naming God in solely masculine terms. See Ruth C. Duck, “Baptismal Formulae in East and West,” in *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, ed. Peter E. Fink (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1990), 124. The Eastern Orthodox rite of baptism employs the formula: “The servant of God, [the name of the Catechumen is stated], is baptized in the name of the Father—Amen [the person is then immersed in the water]—and of the Son—Amen [the person is again immersed in the water]—and of the Holy Spirit—Amen [the person is immersed a third time in the water].” Compare Mastrantonis, *The Nicene Creed*, 13. Ladaria argues that since members of the Church of Jesus Christ think differently about the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit than do Catholics, they are not intending the same thing when they baptize. However, as has been established already, infants don’t have a “Catholic understanding” of the nature of God when they are baptized, and the Eastern Orthodox openly acknowledge that their understanding of the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and Son differs drastically from the Catholic understanding. Yet the baptisms of both groups are deemed valid. See Ladaria, “The Question of the Validity of Baptism,” 5–6.

41. Sherman, “Baptism,” 135.



gin, it seems that the concern of the Congregation regarding the LDS understanding of the correct nature of God is moot. A condemnation of Latter-day Saint baptisms based on this reasoning becomes self-defeating for Catholics.<sup>42</sup>

We turn our attention now to the Catholic stance on the issue of soteriology. Three items are significant in this study: the Vatican II decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, the dogma of the baptism of desire, and the concept of anonymous Christianity. We will examine each of these.

### *Unitatis Redintegratio*

This document, also known as the Decree on Ecumenism, has been called “the most authoritative charter of the Catholic Church’s active participation in the one ecumenical movement.”<sup>43</sup> The document, which holds a position of highest authority in the church, marked a shift in the Catholic position from a former declaration of no “salvation outside the church”<sup>44</sup> to one of acknowledging the

42. Welch, correspondence, 26 September 2001: “It is significant that the issue of belief rather than authority has completely dominated the [Catholic position]. Perhaps this result logically follows once Catholics agree to accept any Protestant baptisms because the only issue for Protestants in terms of authority is establishing a priesthood of true believers. By acquiescing to the Protestant point-of-view, the Catholic Church has conceded one of the most important planks of the Protestant Reformation, namely that authority is based solely on belief. One must only wonder how far-reaching this development may be allowed to extend. If Protestant ministers can perform acceptable Catholic baptisms, can they also perform the mass? The last rites? Or Catholic marriages? Does this then imply that a Catholic couple can go to a Protestant minister and be granted a divorce which the Catholic Church will then recognize ecclesiastically? . . . Whether or not the implications of the new decision for Catholics or the underlying reasons behind the Mormon position were clearly understood by those who issued this new Catholic statement, it seems clear that the new Catholic proclamation may represent a greater step in Catholic theological history than many people have realized or intended. It may shift the ground of conversation between Catholics and Protestants but will only sharpen attention on the Mormon claim of authority. The Protestants may have won an ecumenical ally with this maneuver, but in so doing they may have only opened the door for Latter-day Saints to call greater attention to what they believe to be the fundamental and crucial issue.”

43. Thomas F. Stransky, “Decree on Ecumenism,” in *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 401. This decree was proclaimed by Pope Paul VI on 21 November 1964.

44. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, part 3, Q. 73, A. 3.

“incompleteness” of the Catholic Church and the “need for one another.”<sup>45</sup> The document makes several points worth noting here.

- Christ’s true church subsists in Catholicism, but is not coextensive with it. Indeed, outside of the “visible boundaries” of the true church are other Christians and their communions, in which exist divine “endowments” that “give life to” the true church.
- In the history of man “large communities” of faithful children of God have become “separated from full communion” with Catholicism. “The children who are born into these communities and who grow up believing in Christ cannot be accused of the sin involved in the separation, and the Catholic Church embraces upon them as brothers, with respect and affection.”
- Those outside of Catholicism can have “gifts of the Holy Spirit,” which “come from Christ and lead back to Christ.”
- “All who have been justified by faith in Baptism are members of Christ’s body, and have a right to be called Christian, and so are correctly accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church.”
- “Separated Churches and Communities . . . have been by no means deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Church.”<sup>46</sup>

The significance of *Unitatis Redintegratio* for our discussion is to be found in the fact that this official and binding declaration acknowledges that salvation can be found outside of the Catholic Church, as can gifts of the Spirit, valid ordinances, and so forth. As many Latter-day Saints were born outside of Catholicism, they must be accepted as Christians simply by virtue of their profession of Christ as Savior. The decree acknowledges a true church that is much bigger than Ca-

45. Stransky, “Decree on Ecumenism,” 401.

46. Decree on Ecumenism 1.3, in Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, new rev. ed. (Northport, N.Y.: Costello, 1992), 455–56.

tholicism—although its boundaries are not and cannot be defined by man. In theory the Church of Jesus Christ can fall into that greater church, which is in possession of the gifts of the Spirit, salvation, and requisite acceptance as brothers and sisters in Christ (by Catholics).<sup>47</sup>

*Ad Totam Ecclesiam*, or the Directory concerning Ecumenical Matters,<sup>48</sup> makes several significant points:

- The Catholic Church acknowledges that many of those Christians who are found outside of the visible walls of the Catholic Church but nevertheless are part of the true body of Christ “do not profess the faith in its entirety.”<sup>49</sup>
- “Baptism by immersion, pouring or sprinkling, together with the trinitarian formula, is of itself valid.”<sup>50</sup>
- “The minister’s insufficient faith never of itself makes baptism invalid. Sufficient intention in a baptizing minister is to be presumed unless there is serious ground for doubting that he intends to do what Christians do.”<sup>51</sup>

As we have already shown, by Rome’s own official definition, the Church of Jesus Christ qualifies as part of the “body of Christ” existing outside of the Catholic Church. We have established that it does use a “trinitarian” formula nearly identical to that prescribed by the Catholic Church. The *New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship* provides the following correct formula to be used when performing a baptism: “Name, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” Indeed, it actually calls this formula the “trinitarian baptismal” formula.<sup>52</sup> Thus, contra Ladaria, Latter-day Saints are employing

47. Ladaria himself acknowledges that “errors of a doctrinal nature have never been considered sufficient to question the validity of the sacrament of Baptism. . . . The validity of the sacrament depends neither on the personal sanctity of the minister nor on his belonging to the [Catholic] Church.” Ladaria, “The Question of the Validity of Baptism,” 1.

48. A subsection of *Unitatis Redintegratio*, in Flannery, *Vatican Council II*, 483–501.

49. Section 10, in *ibid.*, 487.

50. Section 13a, in *ibid.*, 488.

51. Section 13b, in *ibid.*

52. Duck, “Baptismal Formulae,” 123. Additionally, contra Ladaria, it states nothing about necessary intent when baptizing.

the correct formula. And it must be assumed, according to the Directory concerning Ecumenical Matters, that those performing baptisms in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints intend to do what Christians do. After all, Latter-day Saints emphatically attest their belief in Christ as the Son of God and Savior of the world.<sup>53</sup> *Ad Totam Ecclesiam* explains that the lack of faith of the minister is not sufficient to negate the validity of a baptism. Thus, if doctrinal misconceptions exist or if the person performing the ordinance lacks faith in God, according to *Ad Totam Ecclesiam* the baptism can still be valid and should be deemed salvific for the ordinance's recipient.

### Baptism of Desire

Related to *Unitatis Redintegratio* is the dogma of baptism of desire, which is a response to the dilemma posed by the fact that although baptism is necessary for salvation most will die never having received that ordinance. From the Council of Trent (A.D. 1524) onward, the Catholic Church has taught that "those who do not actually receive the sacrament [of baptism] can be saved by the 'desire' (*votum*) of baptism."<sup>54</sup> As one scholar has written: "Baptism of desire (that of one preparing for baptism, or that of a person of goodwill who simply is unaware that God is calling the person to the Church) . . . may substitute in the case of water baptism."<sup>55</sup> Thus theoretically, from the construct of Catholic soteriology, if a Latter-day Saint desires a valid baptism but never receives one (but perhaps thinks that he or she has), in God's eyes it will be as though he or she has been baptized properly and authoritatively, and the individual would be allowed entrance into the kingdom of heaven.

53. See, for example, "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," *Ensign* (April 2000): 2–3; Heidi S. Swinton, *I Know That My Redeemer Lives: Latter-day Prophets Testify of the Savior* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990); Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 2, 4, 7, 33, 71–72, 111–14.

54. Edward J. Yarnold, "Baptism, Theology of," in *New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, 119.

55. Sherman, "Baptism," 138.

## Anonymous Christianity

Connected to baptism of desire is the offshoot dogma of anonymous Christianity. Although not solely responsible for the teaching, Rahner did more to make it popular than any other Catholic theologian of the twentieth century. According to this teaching, anonymous Christians are those who are saved via “implicit faith in Christ which is unrecognized to themselves.”<sup>56</sup> In other words, one could be a non-Catholic Christian (like a Latter-day Saint, Protestant, or Jehovah’s Witness), or even an atheist, and still go to heaven because of this unrecognized faith in God, which the Second Vatican Council described as “a sort of secret presence of God” dwelling in the heart and soul of the nonbeliever.<sup>57</sup> Rahner put it this way: “Even according to the teaching of the [Catholic] Church itself, a man may already possess the sanctifying grace, and may therefore be justified and sanctified, a child of God, heir of heaven, and mercifully and positively on his way towards his supernatural and eternal salvation even before he has accepted an explicitly Christian confession of faith and has been baptized.”<sup>58</sup> Regardless of the Congregation’s rejection of Latter-day Saint baptisms, the dogma of anonymous Christianity would suggest that Mormons still qualify for salvation based on their evidential “implicit faith in Christ.”<sup>59</sup>

## By What Authority?

Regardless of all the evidence presented thus far, indicating that this recent announcement on Latter-day Saint baptisms contradicts

56. Yarnold, “Baptism, Theology of,” 119.

57. *Ad Gentes* 1.9; see also *Lumen Gentium* 2.17; Geoffrey B. Kelly, “‘Unconscious Christianity’ and the ‘Anonymous Christian’ in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Rahner,” *Philosophy and Theology* 9 (autumn–winter 1995): 117–49; Karl Rahner, “Anonymous Christianity and the Missionary Task of the Church,” *IDOC Internazionale* 1 (4 April 1970): 70–96; Maurice Boutin, “Anonymous Christianity: A Paradigm for Interreligious Encounter?” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 20/4 (1983): 602–29.

58. Rahner, “Anonymous Christianity,” 75–76.

59. This particular doctrine is the death knell for Ladaria’s argument that beyond using the proper formula, Latter-day Saints must have the “same intent” as Catholics and the

the Catholic Church's current stance on soteriology and ecumenism, the Catholic Church has defined its "new position," and many Catholics will think differently about Latter-day Saints because of it.

So what is the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (which issued this ruling)? What is its purpose? What authority does it have, and how binding are its proclamations upon Catholics who have been told in so many words that their LDS friends are not Christians?

The Congregation, established in 1542, serves to safeguard the faith, denounce false doctrines, and defend the church from heresy. It is charged with the responsibilities of fostering scholarship with a view to a deepened understanding of the faith and an ability to respond to new initiatives in science and culture, investigating and reproofing writings that seem contrary or dangerous to the faith, handling ecclesiastical offences against the faith and violations of the sacraments, providing canonical sanctions (or censures), and granting "privilege-of-the-faith" dispensations (such as dissolving marriages between baptized and unbaptized persons).<sup>60</sup>

In the Church of Jesus Christ, the only bodies of men that hold this wide-ranging authority would be the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve. However, for Latter-day Saints the dictates and definitions of the Brethren are traditionally perceived as binding and authoritative—particularly when offered in the format of this directive. Yet whereas the range of authority of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith seems almost unlimited, the force of its "definitions" or "directives" is relatively insignificant.

In the Catholic Church, teachings, policies, and dogmas are released or announced at different authoritative levels. In other words, not every policy or statement that comes from the Vatican, a congregation, or a diocese is of equal force, authority, or obligatory response. This multitiered system, as it pertains to our discussion, consists of several types of documents at various levels of authority.

same understanding of the nature of God. On the contrary, official Catholic teaching insists the exact opposite.

60. Elizabeth McDonough, "Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith," in *Harper-Collins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 354–55.

The most solemn and formal type of document is a conciliar constitution, which can only be issued by an ecumenical council.<sup>61</sup> A conciliar constitution is sometimes also called a decree.<sup>62</sup> The resolutions of a council require unanimity and “spiritual consensus” on the part of the magisterium participating in the council. When such is arrived at they may claim a special binding authority for their decrees.<sup>63</sup>

The second most binding statement would be a conciliar declaration. These carry less weight than conciliar constitutions and are designed to indicate the church’s “current position” on topics of contemporary interest. Conciliar declarations may be developed and revised with the passage of time.<sup>64</sup>

The end result of conciliar constitutions or declarations is the formation of canon law, or a codification of laws of the Roman Catholic Church. “The code is universal law, binding on all Latin-rite Catholics who are at least seven years old and who are mentally competent.”<sup>65</sup>

The third most authoritative and binding dictum that can be offered is an encyclical. Papal encyclicals possess less authority than dogmatic pronouncements made by the pope or by an ecumenical council. Encyclicals do not contain definitive or infallible teachings. The publication of an encyclical does not imply that theological issues examined in the encyclical are “closed.” Although Catholics are normally obliged to give assent to the moral and doctrinal content of papal encyclicals, some forms of dissent are permitted.<sup>66</sup>

It may be helpful at this juncture to interject a few points from canon law that are not only binding on all Catholics, but potentially have bearing on the directive currently under discussion.

61. See Canons 337–41, in *Code of Canon Law: Latin-English Edition* (Washington, D.C.: Canon Law Society of America, 1998), 107–9, and Richard P. McBrien, “Conciliar Constitution,” in *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 362.

62. Richard P. McBrien, “Decree,” in *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 401.

63. Hans Küng, “Ecumenical Council,” in *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 456.

64. Richard P. McBrien, “Conciliar Declaration,” in *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 399.

65. John M. Huels, “Code of Canon Law,” in *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 326.

66. Michael O’Keeffe, “Encyclical,” in *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 465.

- “The Supreme Pontiff possesses infallibility in teaching when . . . he proclaims by definitive act that a doctrine of faith or morals is to be held. The college of bishops also possesses infallibility in teaching when the bishops gathered together in an ecumenical council exercise the magisterium. . . . No doctrine is understood as defined infallibly unless this is manifestly evident.”<sup>67</sup>
- “Religious submission of the intellect and will” is only required with respect to doctrines that the pope or an ecumenical council called by the pope declare “concerning faith or morals when they exercise the authentic magisterium.”<sup>68</sup>
- The obligation to observe and accept constitutions and decrees is only present if the document or pronouncement is offered by the pontiff or college of bishops.<sup>69</sup>

According to all three of these canon laws, the decision of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is not binding and is potentially fallible. This very fact should “delegitimize” the Congregation’s document in the minds of Catholic scholars, the magisterium, and the laity.

Aside from conciliar constitutions, declarations, and encyclicals, other edicts can be issued by the church and its representatives (at various levels) but are not binding on the church as a whole and typically serve as counsel on matters not deemed soteriologically significant enough to warrant a conciliar constitution or declaration. The recent pronouncement on baptism would be an example of such a document. It falls under the category of a directive, which is simply guidance from the magisterium that does not have the authority or power to override or overturn conciliar constitutions, declarations, or canon law.

Of this recent proclamation, Bishop George Niederauer of Salt Lake City’s Catholic community responds: “This is an internal church decision to guide our sacramental practice and that’s really all it is.”<sup>70</sup>

67. Canon 749:1–3, in *Code of Canon Law*, 245–46.

68. Canon 752, in *Code of Canon Law*, 247.

69. Canon 754, in *Code of Canon Law*, 248.

70. Mims, “Catholics Demote LDS Baptism.” I find it interesting that, although from this time forward the Catholic Magisterium will rebaptize any former Latter-day Saints



Similarly, Cecil White of St. Patrick's Catholic Seminary in Menlo Park, California, claims: "This is merely a definition. Important, but of lesser weight. It's a directive. A response to a question from someone (like a bishop). They respond with 'This is how you should act in this situation.'" <sup>71</sup> Reverend Kevin McMorrow, editor of the theological journal *Ecumenical Trends*, clarifies that "the decision . . . does not deny holiness of life among Mormons nor does it in any way exclude them from salvation." <sup>72</sup> Interestingly, Ladaria admitted that the ruling is "a change from the past practice." <sup>73</sup> By past practice, he means canon law and the binding conciliar documents. Whereas "Canon Law does not require rebaptism of converts from other Christian denominations," <sup>74</sup> this document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith does, but has no authority to do so.

## Conclusion

I agree entirely with the *New York Times* assessment of the situation, reported on 24 July 2001: "The Vatican directive . . . means the Roman Catholic church will treat Mormon converts the same way Mormons deal with Catholics, and others, who embrace Mormonism." <sup>75</sup> Indeed, Michael Otterson, a spokesman for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints concurred: "We rebaptize Catholics, we rebaptize Protestants and we rebaptize everyone else." The Church of Jesus Christ is "neither concerned nor offended" by the directive. <sup>76</sup>

Catholic bishop George Niederauer observes that in baptizing all converts to the church, the Latter-day Saints are acknowledging their own baptism as "accomplishing something which is substantially

who convert to Catholicism, they are not going back and baptizing Latter-day Saints who converted to Catholicism before this document was circulated. Are there not soteriological implications in this?

71. Cecil White, interview with author, 25 July 2001.

72. Kevin McMorrow, letter to author, 2 September 2001.

73. Mims, "Catholics Demote LDS Baptism"; see Ladaria, "The Question of the Validity of Baptism," 4.

74. Mims, "Catholics Demote LDS Baptism."

75. "Vatican Decides to Rebaptize Mormons."

76. *Ibid.*

different from that of all other baptismal rites.<sup>77</sup> At a cursory glance Niederauer's claim seems correct. However, he is employing this argument to say that in baptizing converts, members of the Church of Jesus Christ are doing essentially what the Catholics are doing by re-baptizing Latter-day Saints.<sup>78</sup> In this it appears that Niederauer has committed a fallacy of weak analogy. According to my understanding, the primary reason the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints baptizes all converts—even those who were previously baptized in another faith—is an issue of authority and not because of the convert's flawed understanding of the nature of God at the time of his or her previous baptism. Whereas the Church of Jesus Christ is concerned that the baptism be performed by the proper priesthood authority, the Catholic position acknowledges no such requisite authority—even within its own ranks.<sup>79</sup> For them this is a matter of orthodoxy rather than orthopraxy. For the Saints, the lack of authority necessitated a restoration.

So what? Does any of this make any difference? Those who firmly believe in the restoration of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ know that it does not. It should be understood, then, that this article was not written under the auspice of protesting the Vatican's directive. Nor was it written in the hopes of changing the minds of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The former would not matter and the latter is not possible.

In part, these thoughts are an expression of ecclesiological, theological, and soteriological shock at what I deem a contradictory and

77. Mims, "Catholics Demote LDS Baptism."

78. In all fairness, the Catholics would not approve of my use of the term *rebaptizing* as they only accept *one* baptism. Thus one can only be baptized once in his or her entire life. All other experiences called "baptism" are fraudulent experiences masquerading under the sacramental term of baptism. To this end, when one has been excommunicated from the Catholic Church and then returns, he or she is not "rebaptized."

79. *Lumen Gentium* 2.10; See Richard P. McBrien, "Priesthood of All Believers," in *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 1051; Frederick J. Cwiekowski, "Priesthood," in *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, 1049–50. Ladaria, "The Question of the Validity of Baptism," 2, explains, "even non-Catholics can validly administer Baptism. . . . Anyone can baptize, provided intention is correct."

illegitimate act on the part of the magisterium of the Catholic Church, an act that some suspect is grounded more in recent conversion rates than in trinitarian formulas.<sup>80</sup>

Rahner notes that the introduction of the binding dogmas of baptism of desire and anonymous Christianity, coupled with the Decree on Ecumenism, requires that the church “reinterpret” its “missionary task.” He observes that formerly the church’s “mission was regarded as necessary because the men who are not reached by the mission become lost” or in other words, damned.<sup>81</sup> Today the Catholic Church’s official soteriological position makes conversion to Catholicism, a correct understanding of the doctrine of God, and baptism by proper authority and mode non-issues.

As understandable as the issuance of this dictum is from an administrative standpoint, theologically it is mind-boggling. It seeks to overturn a much larger doctrine of soteriology that has stood for centuries and has only become more defined and firmly entrenched as time has passed. In a church that, since Vatican II, has made great strides toward ecumenism and has denounced cries of “no salvation outside of the church,” this decree is a step in the opposite direction. Beyond that, technically the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith had no authority to take this step.

Finally, perhaps something eschatological is behind all this. Certainly the world in which we live is becoming more saturated in sin and wickedness. The days of opposition and persecution are but a faint memory for most Latter-day Saints. Indeed, many seem rather elated that the world has become so accepting of us as a church and people. Yet such will not always be the case (see D&C 45:31–35 and 66–71).<sup>82</sup> Just as the early Christians were hated and persecuted by those who also professed membership in the house of Israel, Latter-day Saints will

80. “The church’s missionaries are active in many nations with high Catholic populations, particularly in Latin America. Last year, for example, Mormon missionaries recorded 32,000 conversions in Brazil.” “Vatican Rules on Baptism Issue: Mormon Converts Must Be Baptized Again, Catholic Church Says,” *San Jose Mercury News*, 28 July 2001.

81. Rahner, “Anonymous Christianity,” 87.

82. Richard D. Draper, *Opening the Seven Seals: The Visions of John the Revelator* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 80.

surely see a manifest increase in persecution and hatred by those who likewise profess a belief in Christ. Such can be expected because of the ever-increasing ideological divide between the worldly and the saintly. This recent decree by Catholicism's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith may simply be a sign of the times and an indication of that which is to come.

For faithful Latter-day Saints who have enjoyed decades of relatively persecution-free acceptance, this may also serve as one more reminder of their need to be the "peculiar people" God has called them to be (see Deuteronomy 14:2; 26:18; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9). As Elder Neal A. Maxwell has written: "The prophecy given by the angel Moroni was that Joseph's name 'should be had for good and evil among all nations.' The adversary will be doing his relentless part with regard to the negative portion of that prophecy. By word and deed, faithful Church members must see to it that the positive portion is fulfilled."<sup>83</sup> Bruce R. McConkie reminded us: "In every age the Lord sends forth clearly discernible signs and warnings so that those who are spiritually inclined can know of his hand-dealings with men. . . . Where the gospel is, there will be opposition and persecution, for Lucifer will not stand idly by while the work of God rolls forward."<sup>84</sup> Critical "decrees" and "directives" by our non-LDS contemporaries should not offend us but, rather, should serve as gentle reminders of what we have covenanted to be, and whose errand we are on.

83. Neal A. Maxwell, *But for a Small Moment* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), 133.

84. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 715, 723.