



Means of grace or magic, sacrament, or superstition: The curious case of Fr Andres Arango

Peter Langerman
Stellenbosch University, South Africa
plangerman@sun.ac.za

Abstract

In this article I examine the recent case of the Rev Andres Arango, who was fired from his diocese for using the wrong language formula in baptism and use that incident to interrogate the different views of the Catholic and Reformed traditions to the sacraments. The article begins by going back into the history of Christianity to the Donatist controversy, especially as that controversy relates to the administration of the sacraments, of the fourth century CE. I outline the way in which Augustine of Hippo dealt with that crisis and the implications for the administration of the sacraments. Following from that, it tracks the development of the attitudes to the sacraments, especially in the Reformation and the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, and the way in which that shaped the way in which the two traditions came to regard the sacraments. It examines statements in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, especially the WCC's Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry and the Joint Declaration of the Doctrine of Justification to chart some of the progress that has been made in discussions between the two traditions in the ecumenical space. Finally, it examines contemporary attitudes to the sacraments in Roman Catholic and Reformed theology and practice to suggest a way forward.

Keywords

Donatism, Augustan, Reformed, Sacraments, Ecumenism

Introduction

The recent case of the Roman Catholic priest, Rev Andres Arango, who resigned from his diocese after it was decided that he had been using the wrong language formula in conducting baptisms provides a convenient launching point from which to examine the way in which approaches

to the sacraments have developed. The Roman Catholic response to the incident allows space to interrogate the different views of the Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions to the sacraments. In suggesting an alternative, the article reviews the response of Christianity to the Donatist controversy, especially as that controversy related to the administration of the sacraments, in the fourth century CE. It examines the way in which Augustine of Hippo dealt with that crisis and the implications of the outcome for the administration of the sacraments. There were developments in the attitudes to the sacraments, especially in the Reformation and the Council of Trent in the sixteenth century, and that shaped the way the two traditions came to regard the sacraments. More recently, Ecumenical statements in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, especially the attitude of the Second Vatican Council and the WCC's Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry charted some of the progress that has been made in recent discussions between the two traditions in the Ecumenical space.

The curious case of Father Arango

During the course of February and March 2022 there were reports about the Rev Andres Arango, a Roman Catholic priest in Arizona who resigned after he was found to have been using the incorrect formula for the baptism of persons during the course of his twenty-five-year ministry. According to one such report, the Catholic Diocese of Phoenix announced on its website (a post which has subsequently been removed) that "... it determined after careful study that the Rev. Andres Arango had used the wrong wording in baptisms performed up until June 17, 2021. He had been off by a single word." (Treisman 2022). It transpires that Fr Arango, throughout his twenty-five-year ministry had been baptizing children with the words (in both English and Spanish) "We baptize you" where the officially sanctioned liturgy of the Roman Catholic Church prescribes the formula, "I baptize you".

In its official response, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was charged with providing an answer to two questions: First whether the baptism conferred with the formula, "We baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" is valid and whether those persons for whom baptism was celebrated with this formula must

be baptized *in forma absoluta* (strictly according to the liturgy approved by the Church in order to be valid). The response to the two questions was negative to the first and affirmative to the second, meaning that any baptisms performed with the incorrect formula were invalid and that the baptisms were regarded as a nullity (Ladaria and Morandi 2020).

In its doctrinal explanation, the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith offered a number of reasons for this interpretation. They quoted Thomas Aquinas who answered the question, "utrum plures possint simul baptizare unum et eundem (Can several people baptize one person at the same time?)" in the negative and contended that, "... [T]he minister is the visible sign that the Sacrament is not subject to an arbitrary action of individuals or of the community, and that it pertains to the Universal Church" (Ladaria and Morandi 2020). They elaborate that,

When the minister says "I baptize you ..." he does not speak as a functionary who carries out a role entrusted to him, but he enacts ministerially the sign-presence of Christ, who acts in his Body to give his grace and to make the concrete liturgical assembly a manifestation of 'the real nature of the true Church', insofar as 'liturgical services are not private functions, but are celebrations of the Church, which is the "sacrament of unity," namely the holy people united and ordered under their bishops (Ladaria and Morandi 2020).

In their justification, the Congregation relies on the Council of Trent and the Second Vatican Council and I shall return to look at what these two Councils determined with regard to the sacraments further on in this article to determine if this is a true reflection of the rulings of those particular Councils and how those relate to a case like this one.

The Donatist controversy:¹ Validity of the sacrament

What the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith did not consider in deciding this matter was something which troubled the Church earlier on in its history, the debate with the Donatists.

The seeds of the Donatist debate were sown nearly a century before it became a full-blown issue. During the third century, after a period of relative calm, the Church was plunged into bloody persecution under the Emperor Decius. During that persecution, there were those who capitulated in the face of persecution, renounced their faith, apostatized and, in some cases, turned over Christians who were in hiding or handed over copies of the sacred writings (González 2010:172-3).

As soon as the Decian persecution was over, some of those who had apostatized in this way, the “lapsi” (the fallen ones), sought to be readmitted to the church. Cornelius, Bishop of Rome was prepared to allow them to be readmitted provided they performed some act of public penance. Novation, a presbyter in the Roman diocese, objected to this and he gathered around himself a group who supported him. This group elected Novation as Bishop of Rome in opposition to Cornelius. Eventually, this dispute settled, but it continued to smoulder on until it burst into flame again in North Africa (González 2010:174).

The matter seemed to have been settled, but there was a new outbreak in the controversy, the context of which was a disagreement about the nature of martyrdom between Mensurius, the Bishop of Carthage, supported by his archdeacon, Caecilian, and certain of their detractors. When Mensurius died, Caecilian was hastily appointed to succeed him as bishop without consultation with the other North African bishops, as had been the custom prior. Those who were opposed to Mensurius, and now Caecilian, began to spread a rumour that one of the bishops involved in the consecration of Caecilian had earlier, under the threat of persecution, handed over copies of the scriptures to the Roman authorities. Therefore, the detractors and opponents argued, since this bishop has apostatized, Caecilian was not validly installed as bishop. This group appointed a rival, Majorinus,

1 For a detailed history of the debate, see Park (2013:105–107); Walker (1986:130ff); Latourette (1955:137–139) and González (2010:173–181).

as Bishop of and when he died soon after, Donatus was appointed as his successor and the main players in the drama were in place (González 2010:174).

The resulting schism had wide-ranging repercussions, and many were drawn into the dispute, taking one side or the other. Just to make the situation even more complex, it was while this debate was simmering that Constantine declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire, and this led to active (sometimes violent) resistance by the Donatists against the state church (González 2010:178-179). The Donatists' desire for a "pure church" coupled with their high view of martyrdom and valorisation of persecution could not endure the synthesis of state and church that came about under Constantine. In addition, since the Christian faith was now officially embraced, and offered opportunities for career development, many joined the church with questionable motives. This influx of people with these questionable motives into the church affirmed the Donatists' conviction that the Roman Church was irretrievably corrupt, and they wanted nothing to do with it (See González 2010:176-177).

Constantine, to try and settle the debate and bring an end to the dispute, recognized Caecilian as Bishop of Carthage and condemned Donatus and his followers. The Donatists were aggrieved and appealed to the Emperor, who then handed that appeal over to Miltrades, Bishop of Rome, along with three bishops for the province of Gaul to decide on the appeal. They rejected the appeal, but the Donatists appealed again, his time to a Council. Constantine appointed the Synod of Arles in Gaul to hear the dispute in 314CE, and this larger Council also turned down the appeal (See Petry and Manschreck 1981:58-59).

The intervention by Augustine

About a century later, Augustine became involved after he was installed as Bishop of Hippo. Augustine tried to reconcile the parties, and when he failed, he reluctantly agreed to the harsher penalties that had been put in place against the Donatists by the Synod of Arles (See González 2010:248). In response to the Donatist argument that the sacrament was invalid if performed by a person who was unworthy,

Augustine also set forth a different understanding of the sacraments. The Donatists argued that the validity of the sacrament depends on the moral standing of the minister. Augustine said no, the sacrament's validity rests not in the minister but in Christ. The priest's acts are really God's. *All that is required of the priest is his awareness that he administers God's grace for the whole church* (Shelley 2021:164 emphasis added)

Augustine, in his attempts to reason with the Donatists and find a solution to their concerns, argued that grace is given to the Church by God directly and the worthiness of the minister or celebrant of the particular sacrament does not, nor cannot, influence that (Latourette 1955:139). Therefore, Grace does not flow from the minister or celebrant, but from Godself, through the sacrament, to the people. Therefore, Augustine reasoned that the status, spiritual condition, moral quality or any other merit or demerit of the officiant concerned cannot influence or interrupt what only God can do.

Not the minister, but Christ dispenses the *gratia spiritalis* by which man is reborn in baptism. Since it is Christ who actually dispenses grace, especially through the sacraments, a minister could be deeply flawed, be a “Judas”, and yet channel the grace of Christ through a sacrament, specifically baptism and as such be a *dispensator gratiae*. Consequently God also gives the *sacramentum gratiae* through bad ministers (*per malos*) (Dupont and Gaumer 2010:319, emphasis added).

On the basis of the above, I submit that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, when it made its decision in the Father Arango case did not pay adequate attention to Augustine's argument in his dealing with the Donatist issue.

Ex Operare Operato

Over time, Augustine's view was adopted by the Church and became more refined and came to be described by the theological principle, “ex operare operato” when referring to the administration of the sacrament.

Scholastic theology employs *ex opere operato* ... to distinguish what is accomplished *by the minister* of a sacrament from the *activity of*

the minister, the opus operantis ... This distinction was drawn in order to locate the source of the sanctifying effect in the sacramental rite itself, and not in the holiness of the minister (Kilmartin 2003:501 emphasis added).

The later shaping of Augustine's view on the sacraments, beginning in the Middle Ages, into what came to be regarded as the accepted doctrine of the efficacy of the sacrament, *ex operare operato*, was based on a number of sources, beginning with Augustine himself, and then further developed by Aquinas. The work of later Catholic theologians, such as the fifteenth-century Catholic theologian Gabriel Biel is notable. Biel distinguished John's baptism from that of Jesus because of the form of John's baptism: "The weakness of John's baptism was traceable to a defect in its form. John did not baptize in the name of the Trinity, but in the unspecified name of the one to come. Unless the proper form (the name of the Trinity) is joined to the proper matter (water) no sin is remitted *ex operare operato* (upon the basis of the performance of the rite)" (Steinmetz 1995:158).

Biel's contribution is important because it gives context to the Catholic Church's insistence on the proper wording to determine the efficacy of the sacrament as opposed to anything else. It must be emphasised that Biel was arguing for the use of the triune name of God when he referred to proper form. It would be hard to make an argument that a sacrament of baptism that did not invoke the name of Father, Son and Spirit was nevertheless a valid baptism. Notwithstanding, the approach adopted by Catholic scholars such as Biel, who claimed to be following Aquinas and Augustine, shifted the focus of the efficacy of the sacrament. According to Augustine, the sacrament's efficacy is not dependent upon the spiritual condition of the celebrant (Catechism of the Catholic Church. 1994§1128). This, arguably correct and sensible approach taken by Augustine was now supplanted by an argument that the efficacy of the sacrament depended on the celebrant using the correct form and wording in his performance of the sacrament.

Calvin's approach to the sacraments and developments during

the Reformation

John Calvin, along with other Reformers, rejected the doctrine of *ex operato operare*. Calvin did so for reasons that had as much to do with his overarching view of the continuity of the people of God between the Old and New covenants as it did to his rejection of the excesses of Rome.

Calvin's opposition to the Catholic sacrificial understanding of the Mass was based on his view that it violated the second commandment and his opposition to the Catholic view of the sacraments as a whole, and baptism in particular, is that the Catholics drew such a sharp distinction between the old and new covenants. Calvin wanted to create continuity between the old and new covenants because "... he was motivated by a vision of the one people of God in an unbroken history, stretching from Abraham to the present." (Steinmetz 1995:168). In this regard, Milner quotes Calvin in his Commentary on Matthew 5:17, "God had, indeed, promised a new covenant at the coming of Christ, but had, at the same time, showed that it would not be different from the first, but that, on the contrary, its design would give a perpetual sanction to the covenant which he had made, from the beginning, with his own people" (Milner 1970:97-98). Milner goes on to comment: "We ought not to think of two covenants, then, an old and a new, but one covenant that has been 'renewed'. From the beginning to the end, God has made but one covenant with his people, founded, fulfilled and completed in Christ ...One covenant, on faith, one God – these can only have this consequence, 'the church is one, and that which now is has nothing different from that which was before.'"(Milner 1970:98)

It is worthwhile clarifying Calvin's definition of a sacrament:

... an external symbol ... by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us, in order to sustain the feebleness of our faith; and we in turn attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his Angels and before men (Milner 1970:111).

In his response to Catholic scholars such as Biel, Calvin, in his final edition of the Latin version of the Institutes in 1559, dealt with his view of John the Baptist. In opposition to the scholastics and some of the earlier fathers (particularly Chrysostom), Calvin equated John's baptism with that of the

apostles. Calvin also disputed Augustine “who contrasted John’s baptism with Christ’s as a remission of sins in hope ... with a remission in reality ...” (Steinmetz 1995:166)

It is of interest to this article, that Calvin distinguished his approach on the sacraments from those of Augustine. This is notable since in so many places in his theology, Calvin regards his role as that of recovering what he considers theological perspectives of Augustine that appeared to have been lost to Catholic theology. Even though he is generally positive and in agreement with Augustine about the sacrament, Calvin did not support the notion of *ex opere operato* in the way in which it came to be implied in Augustine’s work.

He writes:

We must not suppose that there is some latent virtue inherent in the sacraments by which they, in themselves, confer the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the same way as wine is drunk out of a cup, since the only office assigned them is to attest and ratify the benevolence of the Lord towards us; and they avail no further than accompanied by the Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts and make us capable of receiving this testimony in which various distinctive graces are clearly manifested (Calvin and Beveridge 1949:503).

Calvin distinguished between the sacrament itself, the visible sign (water in baptism, bread and wine in Holy Communion) and the substance of the sacrament. He disputed that the efficacy of the sacrament came about *ex opere operato*, so as not to confuse the sign with the effective operation of the sacrament.

Steinmetz pointed out that Calvin rejected the distinction by the medieval scholastics that the sacraments of the old covenant (circumcision and Passover) operated *ex opere operantis* (on the basis of the recipient of the sacrament) while those of the new covenant operated *ex opere operato* (on the basis of the performance of the rite itself). He pointed out, “No sacrament is effective on the basis of the performance of the rite without the active faith of the recipient ... Sacraments seal the righteousness of faith and so make believers more certain of the grace they have received” (Steinmetz 1995:72-73).

Calvin, in opposition to the Roman Catholic view of the sacraments which held that the sacraments conferred the faith that they pointed to and signified, argued that "...the Eucharist is special, but not different in nature, and not separate from, the substance of the Christian life. It is the divine promise, the Word, made efficacious through faith, through the power of that inward teacher, the Holy Spirit" (Selinger 1984:115).

For Calvin the reality of the presence of God came with the sign and symbol, and this presence was offered to both believer and non-believer alike but there was a distinction between how the believer and non-believer received that sacrament. "The reason, of course, is that all do not have faith, in which case the sacrament is merely the letter, and the symbol is taken without the reality whereas believers receive ... the reality with the sacrament." (Milner 1970:118)

Referring to the Jews, who all experienced liberation from slavery, were "baptized" in the Red Sea and ate of the heavenly food, yet a whole generation perished in the desert and did not get to enter the Promised Land, Calvin traced the principle to the elect – it was in the elect alone in whom the sacrament accomplished that which it represents:

Hence the distinction, if properly understood, repeatedly made by Augustine between the sacrament and the matter of the sacrament. For he does not mean merely that the figure and truth are therein contained, but that they do not so cohere as not to be separable, and that in this connection it is always necessary to distinguish the thing from the sign, so as not to transfer to the one what belongs to the other. Augustine speaks of the separation when he says that in the elect alone the sacraments accomplish what they represent (Augustin. de Bapt. Parvul). Again, when speaking of the Jews, he says, "Though the sacraments were common to all, the grace was not common: yet grace is the virtue of the sacraments. Thus, too, the laver of regeneration is now common to all, but the grace by which the members of Christ are regenerated with their head is not common to all" (August. in Ps. 78) (Calvin and Beveridge 1949:501-502).

Calvin, in his commentary on Augustine's homily on the Gospel of John, again drew a sharp distinction between the visible sign and the virtue, the

grace, conferred by involvement with that sign. He mentioned Judas, who partook of the Last Supper immediately before agreeing to betray Jesus and ultimately committing suicide. He writes, “For even the cup of the Lord was poison to Judas, not because he received what was evil, but being wicked he wickedly received what was good (August. in Joann. Hom. 26) (Calvin and Beveridge 1949:502).

Reacting to those who might accuse him of contending that the sacrament itself was somehow dangerous, defective or destructive, Calvin makes it clear that:

... (t)he sacrament of this thing, that is, of the unity of the body and blood of Christ, is in some places prepared every day, in others at certain intervals at the Lord’s table, which is partaken by some unto life, by others unto destruction. But the thing itself, of which there is a sacrament, is life to all, and destruction to none who partake of it (Calvin and Beveridge 1949:502).

It is accepted that there was significant disagreement between Luther, Calvin and Zwingli on the nature of the sacraments. Bullinger, in his attempts to bridge the disagreements, published his *Consensus Tigurinus* in 1551 in which he maintained that the “sacraments are instruments by which God acts efficaciously when he pleases and not simply signs of God’s invisible and unmediated activity ... that the sacraments are powerless to confer grace apart from the action of God who alone effects what the sacraments figure” (Steinmetz 1995:173)

Calvin separated the efficacy of the sacrament from the celebrant and the sign, but not from God nor the recipient. For Calvin, the emphasis was on the action of the Holy Spirit, the faith of the recipient, the elect, and the nexus of the Word to the sign. When the sacrament follows the Word, the Holy Spirit enables the elect to receive that sacrament by faith, the recipient receives the merit and advantage of that sacrament:

He who may have eaten shall not die, but he must be one who attains to the virtue of the sacrament, not to the visible sacrament; who eats inwardly, not outwardly; who eats with the heart, and not with the teeth. Here you are uniformly told that a sacrament is so separated from the reality by the unworthiness of the partaker, that nothing

remains but an empty and useless figure. Now, in order that you may have not a sign devoid of truth, but the thing with the sign, the Word which is included in it must be apprehended by faith. Thus, as far as by means of the sacraments you will profit in the communion of Christ, will you derive advantage from them (Calvin and Beveridge 1949:502).

For Calvin, the sacraments held the grace which God offered to believers, but they did not confer that grace by their operation alone. Grace was understood to come through the operation of the Holy Spirit, "... whose freedom requires that we distinguish the sign and the reality, and whose faithfulness forbids that they be separated, even though Calvin reckons with the possibility that grace might be conferred apart from the visible sacraments" (Milner 1970:121).

Earlier in this article, the approach of Calvin to John's baptism was mentioned. Now, this section on Calvin is concluded with a comment on Calvin (who in this case agreed with Zwingli) who equated John's baptism with that practiced in the name of Jesus, "partly by raising the baptism of John and partly by lowering the baptism of Christ. They elevated the baptism of John by insisting that John preached the gospel and offered the same baptism as the apostles. They lowered the baptism of Christ by arguing that it conferred no grace *ex opere operato*" (Steinmetz 1995:167-168).

The Catholic approach in the Council of Trent and the Reformed response

The Council of Trent, faced with criticisms of the doctrine of *ex opere operato* from the Reformers and others, could have chosen to abandon the concept. However, it did not do so and in its finding on the Sacraments, Session XII (1547) canon B, said: "If anyone says that grace is not conferred *ex opere operato* through the sacraments of the new law ... let that one be anathema" (Kilmartin 2003:501).

As Kilmartin goes on to write, and it has been argued from Augustine, the original meaning of the doctrine of *ex opere operato* was to take away any concern as to the efficacy of the sacrament based on the moral and spiritual

condition of the celebrant. When Augustine invoked what became the doctrine, he intended to convey the assurance that God was working in and through the sacrament irrespective of the spiritual condition of the person who administers that sacrament. However this aspect was overlooked, and the efficacy of the sacrament gradually became dependent upon a valid administration of the sacrament. The Council of Trent further enhanced this. Therefore the meaning of the doctrine, in Roman Catholic circles, had now fully moved away from stressing the objective efficacy of the sacrament independent of the spiritual condition of the celebrant to an efficacy based on the correct administration of the sacrament, which included the use of the exact formula as prescribed by the Church.

When the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith claimed that it was acting in accordance with the Council of Trent, this is not technically untrue, but it did seem to miss the point of the decision by the Council, which was to uphold the doctrine of *ex opere operato*. For the Council the point was to remove any concern about the efficacy of the sacrament based on the spiritual condition of the officiant, since one of the complaints of the Reformers was that the priests were morally tainted and spiritually suspect because of the violation of the second commandment in the ritual of the mass and in the images in their churches. The Council upheld the principle so that the alleged moral and spiritual transgressions of the priests would not detract from the efficacy of the sacraments and not to create a rule that the sacrament would only be efficacious if performed correctly in every technical aspect, including the use of the correct formulaic words and phrases. This was so that the Church could argue that even if the Reformers were correct and that some priests were morally corrupt, that did not affect the efficacy of the sacrament itself. However, it must be noted that it would seem strange to hold that the sacrament has spiritual efficacy without any reference to the spiritual condition of the celebrant but hold that the sacrament did not have spiritual efficacy because a priest, whose spirituality was not under suspicion, did not use exactly the right words.

Over against the Roman Catholic Church, which prioritized the sacraments, the Reformed Church, regarded both the Word and Sacraments as means of grace. Berkof identifies four characteristics of the Word and Sacraments that designate them as means of grace in the Reformed Tradition. In the first place, the Word and sacraments are the specific and particular instruments

chosen by God to communicate the special grace of God, the grace by which sin is removed and human beings are renewed into the image of God. Second, the Word and Sacraments are themselves the means of grace and do not become that by means of the connection or association with anything else. Their effectiveness in removing sin and bringing renewal and transformation are dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit and nothing else. Third, they are continually and continuously the means of grace, the instruments God chose from the beginning and continues to employ in the life of the church by the Holy Spirit. Fourth, they are the official signs and demonstrations of the existence of the church of Jesus Christ in the world. The church is recognized as such from the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments (Berkhof 1941:605).

The changing approach signalled by Vatican II

In more recent times, the approach taken by the Second Vatican Council must be noted. In a world in which relationships between old enemies were starting to change and there was direct dialogue between Catholic, Reformed, Lutheran and other scholars, Vatican II adopted a more conciliatory approach in many of its findings. A decision for the Council not to use technical terms resulted in Vatican II seldom using phrases such as *ex opere operato* when dealing with the Sacraments, but it does argue for a direct nexus between the Sacrament and faith when considering the efficacy of the Sacrament.

The sacrament is an objective reality bestowed upon the Church by Christ, and its existence essentially depends on the “*fides Ecclesiae*”, forming part of the sacramental sign. In order for the sacrament to be effective (“*ex opere operato*”) – explains Saint Thomas – “*continuatio*” is needed between the principal agent (God) and the instrument (sacrament) because the instrument produces its effect inasmuch as it has continuance with the principal agent. “[In the manner previously mentioned, the instrument (sacrament) receives power only in so far as it is continued to the principal agent (God), so that its power is in a certain way transferred to the instrument. Now the principal and per se agent for justification is God as the efficient cause, and Christ’s passion as meritorious. *And to this*

cause the sacrament is continued by the faith of the Church, which is both an instrument to the main cause and a sign to the signified. And therefore, the efficacy of the instruments or of the sacraments, or virtue, is from three things: it may be known from the divine institution, as from the principal active cause, from the passion of Christ, as from a meritorious cause, from the faith of the Church, as from the continuing instrumentality of the principal agent.](Villar 2015:397, own translation, emphasis added).

This and other pronouncements of Vatican II show a tendency to move away from a seemingly mechanistic understanding of the efficacy of the sacrament to a more organic and dynamic efficacy that is based on God's actions, the sacrament itself, the faith of the Church as a community and the faith of the individual. The sacrament is efficacious because of the actions of God, the sacrifice of Christ interacting and in co-operation with the faith of the Church.

Accordingly, when the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ruled as they did and claimed that they were acting in line with the decisions of Vatican II, it acted in a way that was consistent with the mechanistic understanding of the principle of *ex opere operato*. However, by riling in this way, they have not considered movement of the Roman Catholic Church away from such a mechanistic understanding of the sacrament and to view the efficacy more in terms of God's actions as opposed to the actions and words of the celebrant.

The ecumenical progress by the WCC in “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry”

Following a long process of discussion and debate initiated in the early days of the Faith and Order Movement of the World Council of Churches, in 1982, the Commission issued the well-known statement on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM), asking the churches to prepare an official response to the text “at the highest appropriate level of authority”. The statement itself, therefore, is an important ecumenical event. The Roman Catholic Church was positive about the document, but had some reservations, particularly

towards what it identified as the inadequate ecclesiological dimensions in parts of the document.

Ecclesiology is the background to the Roman Catholic response. More than once the document. In accord with the Second Vatican Council presented as a communion with a sacramental nature and should create no difficulty for the Oriental churches. On the contrary, it will not be so readily accepted by the Protestant churches. It means that all the sacraments, and particularly baptism eucharist and ministry, are rooted in the Church. *This includes the re-evaluation of discipline of sacramentology, which prevailed in the Reformation and the Council of Trent, when Catholics and protestants alike understood the sacraments in a more isolated means of grace, without paying much attention to the ecclesiological foundation* (Vercruyse 1988:686, emphasis added).

Accordingly, when the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith gave their response to the Father Arango matter, they could have chosen to do so in the spirit of the Vatican II, which laid much greater emphasis on the work of the Triune God, the faith of the Church, and the faith of the individual in the case of baptisms where the officiant used the incorrect language. In addition, it failed to consider the broader ecumenical impact of its decision. What does the declaration of validity mean for those baptized by father Arango who present themselves for membership of another Christian denomination? Are they to be regarded as baptized or not baptized by that other church? In this regard, the Roman Catholic Church itself has failed to take into account the broader ecclesiological climate in which this decision was made and the impact such a decision has both for members of the Roman Catholic Church and for other Christian Churches in the ecumenical space. One can only conclude that, while the Roman Catholic Church has given broad assent to the BEM, it has failed to allow that ecumenical project to influence its own view and approach to the sacraments in any meaningful way in circumstances such as this one.

Conclusion

Therefore, in spite of Father Arango using the incorrect formula, the Congregation for the Defence of the Faith could have held that the baptisms were, nevertheless proper because in each case the officiant, the parents, and the community were aware of the actions of the Triune God, since baptisms are always in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and were responding in faith, both personally and corporately. This would have yielded a far more satisfactory outcome than the resignation of Father Arango, a seemingly otherwise faithful and effective parish priest, and the nullification of twenty-five years of faithful pastoral ministry. In finding that Father Arango's baptisms were invalid, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith did not take into account, or erroneously applied the approach of Augustine, the scholastics, the Council of Trent, Vatican II and the ecumenically ground-breaking work of BEM. In addition, had it considered the argument of some of the Reformers, particularly those of John or Jean Calvin, as outlined in this article, it would definitely have come to a different conclusion. Finally critical analysis of the approach taken by the Roman Catholic Church in this matter suggests that the Church has devalued the sacrament to the level of superstition by placing too great an emphasis on the celebrant following a prescribed formula rather than the faithful actions of God that prevail in spite of human fallibilities.

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