

CTSA 2025 CONVENTION THEME

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ONE BAPTISM: EVOLVING VISIONS OF CATHOLICITY FROM NICAEA TO VATICAN II AND BEYOND

“I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins” (Nicene Creed)

While an ordinary jubilee year, 2025 is yet extraordinary, marking both the 1700th anniversary of the Council of Nicaea and the 60th anniversary of Vatican II. Following the powerful Synod on Synodality, Pope Francis has declared that the motto for Jubilee Year 2025 is “Pilgrims of Hope,” enjoining the baptized faithful, from east and west—and from diverse cultural and social global locations—to become pilgrims of hope.

The Nicene Creed declares that the sacrament of baptism is unambiguous in linking new life in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to the forgiveness of sins. Further, Vatican II understood baptism as the foundation and sign of ecumenical unity (in a lovely coincidence, Easter for both western and eastern Christians falls on the same day, on April 20, 2025). The authentic catholicity initiated for each of us in baptism thus proclaims that the very breath of God is lavished on each of us for a purpose beyond personal salvation, i.e. to become sacraments of global reconciliation and artisans of hope and peace for a world desperately in need of both.

In his 2025 Jubilee letter Pope Francis exhorts us to “fan the flame of hope that has been given us and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision.”¹ This only comes about by listening to the voices of the poor and all those who struggle to live lives of dignity. It also happens as we meet the profound challenge of forgiving the perpetrators of abuse, racism, sexism, and many other forms of wounding, by enacting the very forgiveness extended to all in baptism. How may a synodal church, suffused with the grace and power of the Holy Spirit become the “sign and sacrament of the union with God and the unity of the whole human race” as *Lumen Gentium* declares (LG 1)? How will the Holy Spirit animate the conversations and reflections of CTSA as we address the nature of Catholicity accorded by one baptism?

In the spirit of the global church’s jubilee year, the seventy-ninth annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America will gather in Portland, Oregon from June 12 to June 14, 2025. Nancy Pineda-Madrid will deliver the presidential plenary. The other plenary speakers will be Nicholas Denysenko, with a response offered by Steven Battin, and Bishop Laurie Larson Caesar, of the Oregon

¹ Francis, “Letter to the President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization for the Jubilee 2025” (February 11, 2022), <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2022/02/11/220211c.html>.

Province of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of American, with a response offered by Ish Ruiz. Jakob Karl Rinderknecht will facilitate a plenary synodal conversation.

Our convening will take seriously the legacy of Nicaea's proclamation of one baptism for the forgiveness of sins and will be animated by Pope Francis' jubilee letter. More specifically, this conjunction of Nicaean anniversaries and a year of jubilee invites consideration from the diverse perspectives offered by the many theological subdisciplines of the CTSA. What are the theological, practical, and spiritual implications of One Baptism that might nurture an authentic global catholicity, for now and the future, in the face of global woundedness.

Additionally, we may address the following questions:

- What does it mean for the baptized to become “pilgrims of hope,” refracted through the lens of the 2024 theme of *Social Salvation*?
- How may a revitalized theology of “One Baptism” animate new global discussions of pneumatology, Christology, theologies of ministry, peace studies, ecclesiology, and care for all creation?
- Given the rapid growth of technology (especially AI), and the challenges and/or opportunities it poses to theological notions of personhood and relationality, how may a renewed focus on baptism re-pristiniate theological anthropology?
- Can a renewed scholarly focus on the sacrament of baptism or initiation bring into greater focus Vatican II's emphasis on the church in the world?
- If the sacrament of baptism is a call to communal and corporate responsibility for the wellbeing of the newly baptized, is there an eschatological and future oriented meaning to the sacramental action of baptizing?
- How may the theological and spiritual idea of “One Baptism” create ecumenical common ground and a new understanding of catholicity in our struggle for Christian unity?
- How do we engage Eastern Rite Churches respectfully in Latin Rite majority contexts?
- How may a theology of “One Baptism” bring to fruition Pope Francis' vision of the church as a “merciful community” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 47)?
- Does the idea of “One Baptism” unify or polarize in the context of religious, theological, and cultural pluralism?
- What does it mean to “listen to all,” especially the wounded, such as victims of sexual and gender abuse, *and* its perpetrators, in a church that confesses one baptism?
- How may the theological framework of “One Baptism” inspire theological and pastoral strategies for centering the poor, migrants, refugees, and victims of war in our academy's work?
- What does the profession of one baptism contribute to fostering a commitment to the common good?
- How may recalibrating our understanding of the common baptism for the “forgiveness of sin” compel the combating of racism and xenophobia especially in church and secular institutions?

- Since the Nicene declaration does not recognize ordination or hierarchical orders, how does the pivotal ecclesial creed and confession of one baptism encourage the flowering of lay vocations for the new Catholicity (e.g., educators, theologians, preachers, formators, catechists, and lay leaders among others)?
- To what extent is the Nicene Creed’s only sacramental affirmation—of baptism—serve as an antidote to authoritarianism and clericalism with their chauvinist overtones so prevalent in the global institutional church? Conversely, how does “One Baptism” challenge secular culture’s propensity to a “cancel culture?”

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