

A Comparison of the *Ordo Salutis* between Calvinism and Romanism

Introduction

The comprehension of the *Ordo Salutis* is not simply an exercise in theological study. It contributes significantly to the spiritual assurance of salvation for the saint, particularly for traditional Calvinists. Fundamentally, the *Ordo Salutis* (Latin for *Order of Salvation*) is the soteriological understanding of the sequence a believer is saved. There are many differing thoughts as to the arrangement of iterations and the agency responsible for them, however they mostly demonstrate a pattern from God's initial work (before creation) to the eschatological conclusion of the believer's place in the new heaven and new earth. The *Ordo Salutis* also impacts other doctrines of God (especially His attributes of sovereignty, omnipotence and omniscience).

Two differing presentations of the *ordo salutis* examined in this review will be *Traditional Reformed* (as summarised in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*¹ [WCF]) and *Modern Roman Catholic* (as summarised in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*² [CCC]).

Traditional Reformed *Ordo Salutis*

The Reformers' *Ordo Salutis* is a prominent feature in the works of virtually all the Reformers and Puritans. John Bunyan (notably *The Pilgrim's Progress*,

¹ Rowland S Ward, *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English: A Modernised Text Commemorating the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly, 1643-49* (Wantirna, Vic.: New Melbourne Press, 2000)..

² John Paul II, ed., *Catechism of the Catholic Church, Complete and Updated*. (New York: Doubleday, 1995).

Image 1: John Bunyan's *Mapp*³ (1664)

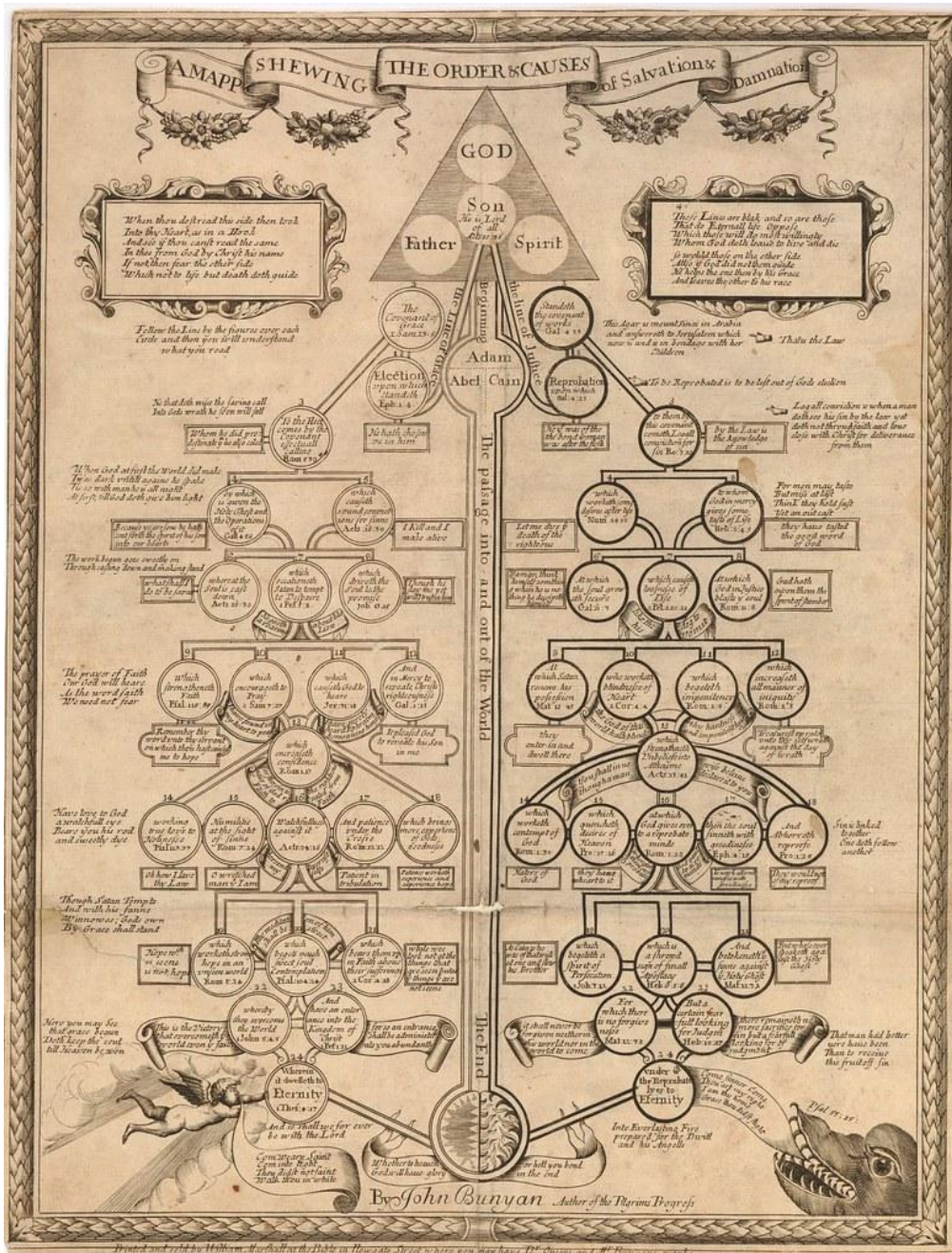
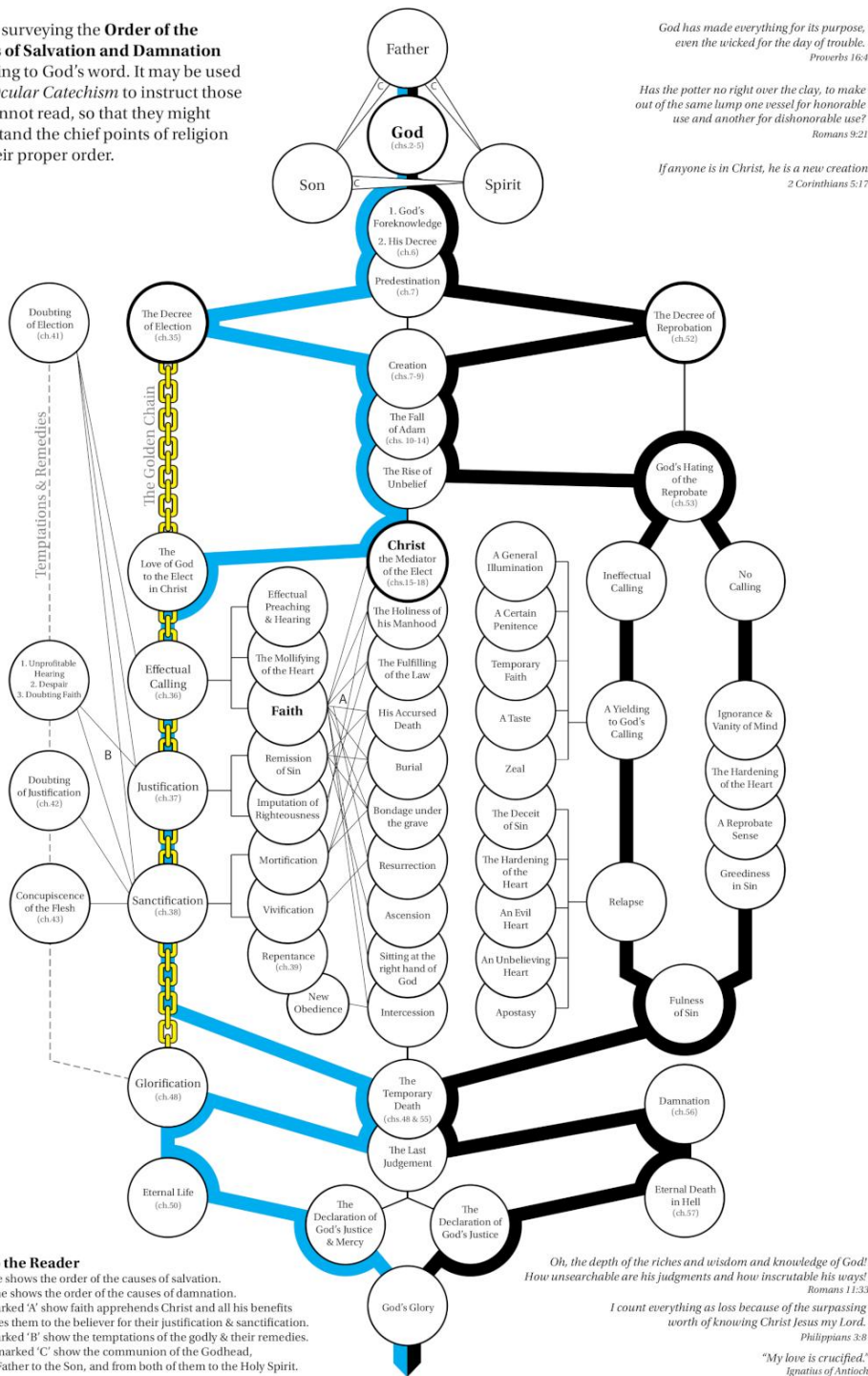


Figure 1) and William Perkin's earlier "A Golden Chain" (including an ocular catechism for illiterates [modernised], Image 2) demonstrate the general consensus.

³ John Bunyan, *A Mapp Shewing the Order & Causes of Salvation & Damnation*, Paper Inscription, 1664, British Museum, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1864-0813-291.

Image 2: William Perkins' Ocular Catechism from *A Golden Chain* (1590)⁴

A table surveying the **Order of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation** according to God's word. It may be used as an *Ocular Catechism* to instruct those who cannot read, so that they might understand the chief points of religion and their proper order.



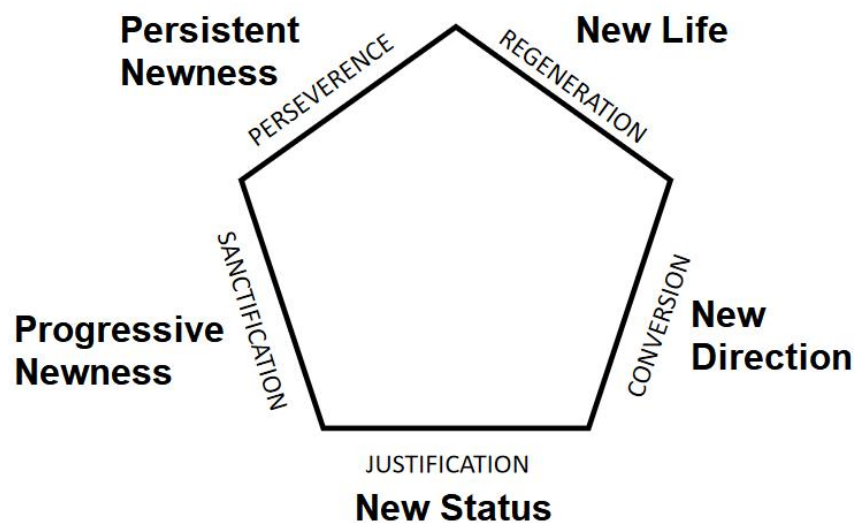
William Perkins, *A Golden Chain* (1590).
www.silipublishing.com.au/book/a-golden-chain/

Matthew Payne, 2021
www.stretchtheology.com

⁴ Matthew Payne, *Order of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation*, online image, "A Golden Chain" by William Perkins (1590), 2021, <http://stretchtheology.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/GoldenChainChartCs.png>.

Hoekema represents the *Process of Salvation* as a pentagonal unity which may better reflect the nature of God's operation (Figure 3)⁵. It needs to be mentioned that features between the two representations are identical but express the holistic operation differently.

Figure 3: Hoekema's Reformed Salvific Process



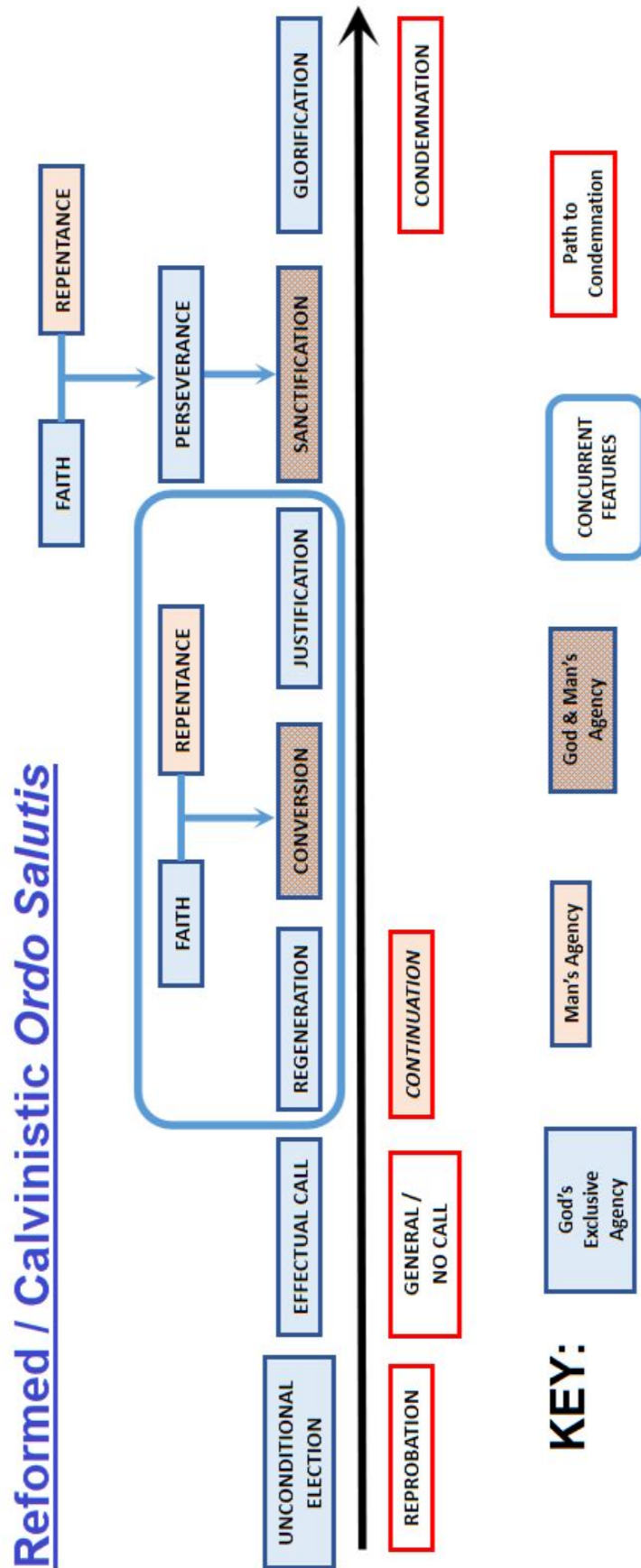
Referring to this author's graph (Figure 4), we can follow an introductory outline of Traditional Reformed *Order of Salvation*. Observing the blue box (in Figure 4) surrounding *Regeneration*, *Conversion* and *Justification*, implies these features occur concurrently (if examined chronologically). They are sequenced linearly to simplify discussion.

Election

The Doctrine of *Election* (ἐκλογή; based on God's Foreknowledge and His eternal Decree) is traditionally considered the first link in the *Golden Chain*.

⁵ Anthony A Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids, Mich. ; Cambridge, U.K.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994). 16.

Figure 4: Traditional Reformed (Calvinistic) *Ordo Salutis*



It is the gracious act of God whereby He chose in Christ (before creation) those whom He would regenerate, save and sanctify (Rom. 8:28-30; Eph. 1:4-11; 2 Thes. 2:13; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 Pet. 1:1-2; WCF 3:5-6).

God's *Foreknowledge* (Rom 8:29; προγινώσκω; WCF 3:2) is more than an awareness of the future. It is His assured *Predetermination* from eternity to bring certain people into a special relationship with Himself (Acts 2:23; 26: 25; Rom. 11:2, 1 Pet. 1:2, 20; 2 Pet. 3:17; WCF 3:1). They are *Predestinated* or *Foreordained* (Rom. 8:29; Eph. 1:5; WCF 3:4; προορίζω) *beforehand*.

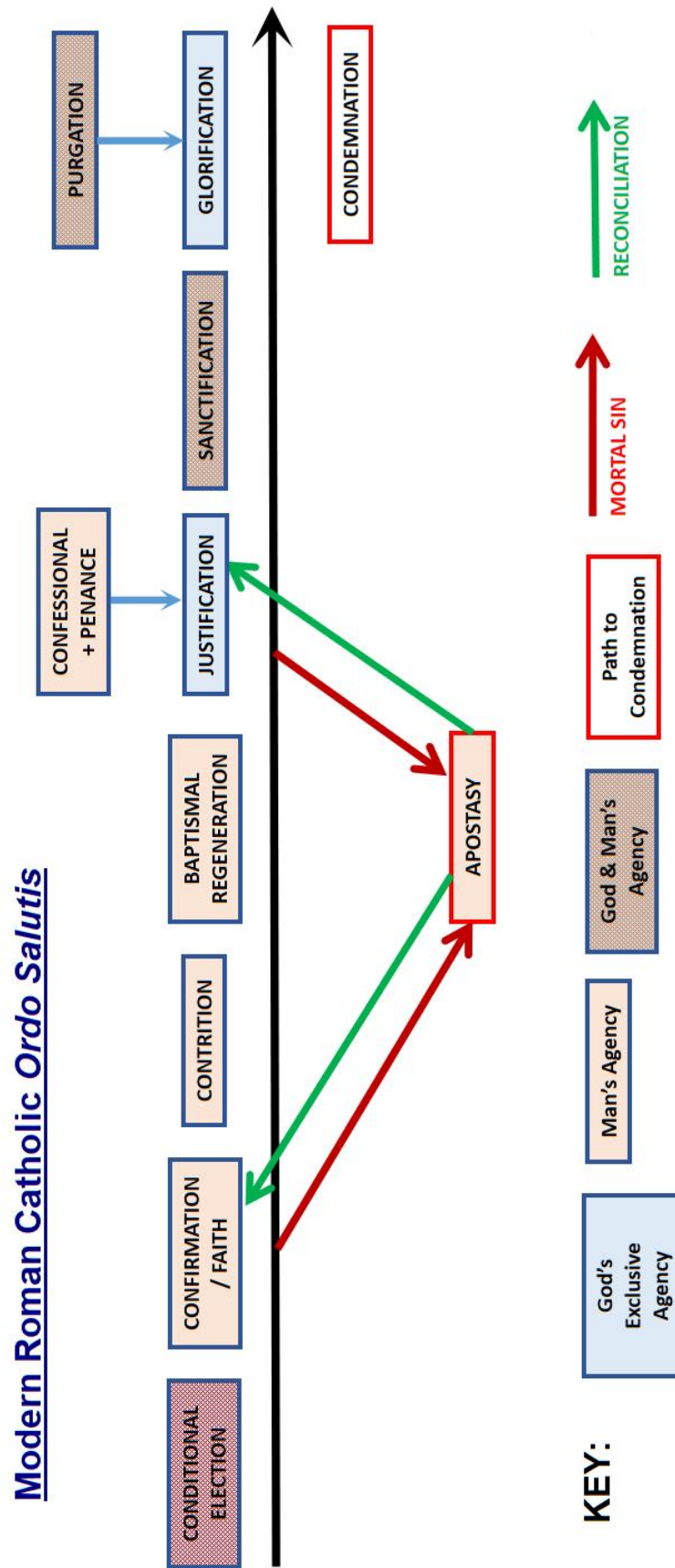
Calvinism teaches that the favour of God is granted to totally depraved sinners unrelated to any initiative in themselves (being spiritually dead) nor God's "anticipation" of their soteriological reaction, but by His sovereign grace and mercy alone (Eph. 1:4; Tit. 3:4-7; 1 Pet. 1:2; WCF 3:5)!

It is important in *Reformed election*, that His sovereignty is exercised in conjunction with His other attributes, particularly His omniscience, justice, holiness, wisdom, grace and love (Rom. 9: 11-16)⁶. Sovereign election does not contradict or excuse man's responsibility to repent and trust Christ as Saviour and LORD (Ezek. 18:23, 32; 33:11; John 3:18, 19, 36; 5:40; 2 Thes. 2:10-12; Rev. 22:17; WCF 3:1).

Roman Catholicism considers the Calvinistic doctrine of election as God arbitrarily selecting some for salvation, and others predestined to hell,

⁶ Arthur Walkington Pink, *The Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996). 32-36.

Figure 5: Modern Roman Catholic *Ordo Salutis*



abhorrent⁷. Their concept of predestination is equivalent to *Arminianism*, in that there is a *Conditional Election* (referring to Figure 5) where God established His “eternal plan based on each person’s response to His grace”, because of His transcendency over time (Acts 4:27-28; Ps. 2:1-2; CCC 600).

Effectual Calling

Election will result in what God determines, so that all who the Father calls to Himself, will indeed come in faith to Him and be received (John 6:37-40, 44; Acts 13:48; Jas. 4:8; WCF 9:4). This leads to the next *Gold Link*, God’s *Effective Call*. Those who are elect are *Effectually Called* (Rom. 8:30, καλέω ~called; Rom. 8:28, κλητός ~ invited) by means of God’s Word (WCF 1:6) and the Holy Spirit (WCF 1:9) in the fullness of His time (Rom. 8:28; WCF 10:1). God has extended the elect a general, external invitation to believe the gospel (Is. 45:22; 55:6; Ezek. 33:11; Matt. 11:38; John 7:37; Rev. 22:17). By His Spirit, He then effectively calls His chosen to salvation (Rom. 8:28, 30). Certain non-elect may also be exposed to the gospel without salvation (Matt. 13:3-23; Luk. 8:5-15; WCF 10:4).

The WCF in the American editions (1903/1942) provides an extra chapter pertaining to *The Gospel Call*⁸.

As discussed regarding Election, Romanists believe in an Effective Call based only on God’s prescience of the reaction of the believer in a

⁷ George Patrick Dwyer, *The Catholic Faith*, Australian. (1959; repr., Sydney: Catholic Enquiry Centre, 1963). 175.

⁸ Rowland S Ward, *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English*. 64.

Universalism “environment”. Everyone is *potentially* externally called (Matt. 8:11; 10:5-7; 28:19; *Lumen Gentium* 5:39⁹; CCC 543), but man must act (of his own volition/merit, not truly by grace) to accept Jesus (*Lumen Gentium* 1:3¹⁰; CCC 545-546).

Regeneration

Regeneration (Tit. 3:5 παλιγγενεσία; John 3:3 *born again/from above*, γεννηθῆν ἄνωθεν) is the supernatural work of the Spirit when the divine nature and life are imparted to the elect (2 Cor. 5:17; Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:3, 23; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5: 1, 4, 18). It is an instantaneous spiritual washing (purification of the soul) and achieved through the Word of God (John 5:24, Eph. 5:26, Tit. 3:5). The term regeneration (in this context) demonstrates the need for a spiritual transformation (due to man’s depravity whereby he is spiritually dead until enacted upon by the Spirit)¹¹. In John’s gospel (chapter 3) it warns of the Jewish dependence of being Abraham’s sons (8:39). It is a divine providence, and reiterates the importance of a changed (new) life.

Comparing Roman theology, regeneration is not achieved until the *Sacrament of Baptism* (Figure 5), which is also called the *washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit* (CCC 1215). Concurrent to *Baptismal Regeneration*, which “actually brings about the birth of water and Spirit”, there are *Confirmation* and *Contrition (Conversion)* which is represented in figure 5

⁹ Vatican, “Lumen Gentium: Chapter 5 - the Universal Call to Holiness in the Church,” www.intratext.com, 21 November 1964, http://www.intratext.com/ixt/ENG0037/_PC.HTM.

¹⁰ Vatican, “Lumen Gentium: Chapter 5 - the Universal Call to Holiness in the Church,” www.intratext.com, 21 November 1964, http://www.intratext.com/ixt/ENG0037/_P8.HTM.

¹¹ Rowland S Ward, *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English*. 63.

encapsulated in the purple box. Roman *Contrition* will be discussed further under Reformed *Conversion*, but it is important to remember that in Roman theology it comprises a component of their concept of regeneration.

Confirmation

Confirmation is a Roman *sacrament* “where the initiate is more perfectly bound to the church and enriched to the Holy Spirit” and more strictly obliged to evangelise and defend the faith in word and actions (CCC 1285). The effects of Confirmation is meant to be a special outpouring of the Spirit, comparable to the apostles at Pentecost (CCC 1302). This is characterised by Adoption, Union with Christ, increased gifts from the Spirit, and enabling Spiritual strength for evangelism and professing Christ. (CCC 1302).

It may be remotely considered comparable to the Reformed concept of *Progressive Sanctification*, without the mysticism or elevation by Catholicism as a sacrament. It is especially considered a willed assent to Roman church doctrine, not a fiducial faith as represented in Reformed dogma.

Conversion

Continuing from the Reformed concept of New Birth, is *Conversion* (שוב ~ *to turn back, return*; Ps. 51:13; ἐπιστρέφω ~ *to turn towards, to turn around, to bring back, convert*) resulting from repentance and the sinner responding in faith (as enabled by the Holy Spirit). Genuine regeneration is observed by fruits worthy of repentance as manifested in righteous attitudes and conduct.

Good Works will be the proper evidence (1 Cor. 6:19-20; Eph. 5:17-21; Phil. 2:12b; Col. 3:12-17; 1 Pet. 1:4-11).

Conversion refers to true turning to God that incorporates humility, a genuine change of heart, and a real seeking after the Lord (Dt. 4:29; 30:2, 10; Is. 6:9; Jer. 24:7). This is accompanied by a renewed clarity of knowledge about God and His will (Jer. 24:7; 2 Kings 5:15; 2 Chron. 33:13).

Repentance

Repentance (μετάνοια ~ *a change of mode of thought and feeling*, as in Matt 3:8; Acts 20:21; 2 Tim. 2:25; μετανοέω ~ *to have a change of mindset and feeling*, Luke 17:3-4; *to reform*, Matt. 3:2) demonstrates a change of mind and heart towards God. Psychologically, this is an act of man whereby being aware of his sin and dangerous condition before God (Is. 6:5; Ezek. 1:28), out of remorse, grief and hatred, turns from them towards God (based on His grace and mercy) (WCF 15:2). It requires *Confession* of one's general sins initially, and particular sins throughout life (WCF 15:5).

Penance

Romanism requires a *Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation* as an expression of repentance to God, per se (CCC 1440). It focuses on *Interior Penance*, which is a comparative to Biblical repentance (CCC 1431). They also believe God's forgiveness is not contingent on His grace and mercy alone, but dependent on man's works! These works are an expression of conversion to enable *Reconciliation*, namely as fasting, prayer and almsgiving.

It is claimed that *conversion* is *accomplished* by daily gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, exercise and defence of justice and right, admitting faults to brothers in faith, fraternal correction, revised life, examining one's conscience, following spiritual advice, suffering, persecution for righteousness' sake (CCC 1435). Although Reformed theology considers good works to be evidence (from the the operation of faith, WCF 16:2), Roman theology emphasises that works including penitence and contrition (as an anthropocentric love to God) contribute to salvation (CCC 1452).

Contrition / Confession

Contrition is a Roman doctrine flowing from penitence, which is comparative to Reformed Repentance: "sorrow of the soul and detestation for the sin committed, together with the resolution to not sin again" (CCC 1451). The *Confession* of sin must be presented to a priest to examine one's sins, embrace responsibility, open oneself to God and the communion of the (Roman) church for potential Reconciliation (CCC 1455).

There are two types of contrition, being *Perfect* or *Contrition of Charity*, and *Imperfect* or *Contrition of Fear*. *Contrition of Charity* is a gift of God, where He bestows a a supreme love for Himself upon the believer. This Perfect Contrition results in remitting *Venial* sins¹²; and *Mortal* sins¹³ if it incorporates a resolve to respond in a *Sacramental Confession* urgently (CCC 1452)! An *Imperfect Contrition* will not absolve "grave" sins, however, it is claimed to

¹² A ***Venial*** sin is a lesser sin against the standard of the moral law, or grave sin committed in ignorance or without full consent.

¹³ A ***Mortal*** sin requires three conditions: a grave sin against the Decalogue, committed in full knowledge, and with deliberate intent.

absolve or predispose forgiveness if followed through with the *Sacrament of Baptism*.

Faith

Faith is a complex term and represents several facets regarding salvation. This one lexical word form (πίστις) incorporates *faith, belief, firm persuasion, conviction, guaranteed assurance*. It relates to the background of Christ's atoning work according to God's will. *Sola Fide* is the cry from the Reformation reminding that it is a gift from God, which not only allows man to trust God (at His Word, *Sola Scriptura*), but salvifically obey (enact) what He requires of us, *Sola Gratia* (WCF 14)!

Justification

Justification (δικαιόω) before God is a Divine act (Rom. 8:30,33) where He declares people righteous who (by faith in Christ) repent of their sins (Luk. 13:3, Acts 2:38; 3:19; 11:18; Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 7:10; Is. 55:6-7; WCF 10). This righteousness is apart from any virtue or merit in man (Rom. 3:20; 4:6) and incorporates imputing our sins upon Christ (Col. 2:14; 1 Pet. 2:24) and imputing Christ's righteousness to us (1 Cor. 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2 Cor. 5:21). God is declared to *be just and the justifier of the one who is of the faith of Jesus* (Rom. 3:26).

Sanctification

Every believer is sanctified (set apart) to God, based on justification and as a Divine act declared holy. This is the result of *creating a saint* (ἅγιος; a most holy thing). This is technically *Positional Sanctification* which is instantaneous with justification (contrasted with the *Progressive Sanctification* which is the spiritual maturing of the believer throughout life.) Thus, *Positional Sanctification* refers to the believer's standing, not the walk or spiritual condition (Acts 20:32; 1 Cor 1:2, 30; 6:11; 2 Thes. 2:13; Heb. 2:11; 3:1; 10:10, 14; 13:12; 1 Pet. 1:2; WCF 13:1).

Progressive Sanctification, as mentioned, entails every saved person being involved in a daily conflict (as new creations at war with the flesh) provided victory by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This struggle continues throughout the believer's life, however they spiritually mature conforming more to God's will - the image of Christ (John 17:17, 19; Rom. 6:1-22; 2 Cor. 3:18; 1 Thes. 4:3-4; 5:23; WCF 13:3). It is unbiblical to consider that there is an eradication of sin in a believer this side of death, however the Spirit provides for victory over sin (Gal. 5:16-25; Phil. 3:12; Col. 3:9; 1 Pet. 1:14-16; 1 John 3:5-9; WCF 13:2).

Perseverance

Although *Perseverance* or *Preservation* of the saints is not a direct article of the *Ordo Salutis*, like *Conversion* (which also depends on faith and repentance), it is a component (or blessing) of *Sanctification*. It is the doctrine that the redeemed once saved are kept by God's power and therefore secure

in Christ forever (John 5:24; 6:37-40; 10:27-30; Rom. 5:9-10; 8:1, 31-39; 1 Cor. 1:4-9; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 7:25; 13:5; 1 Pet. 1:4-5; Jude 24; WCF 17).

Assurance

Romanism (like Arminianism) does not offer any comparable doctrine of assurance. It is an honour for believers to rejoice in the *Assurance* of their salvation through the veracity of the Scriptures. This doesn't provide an excuse for Christian liberty to allow sinful living or carnality (Rom. 6:15-22; 13:13-14; Gal. 5:13, 16-17, 25-26; Tit. 2:11-14; WCF 18).

Glorification

The conclusion to the *Ordo Salutis* is *Glorification* (δοξάζω ~Rom. 8:30). For the sake of brevity, the saved will enter an eternal state of glory and fellowship with God and one another in the *New Heaven* and the *New Earth* (John 17:3; Rev. 21, 22; WCF 32, 33).

Purgatory

Although this could be included under *Ultimate Sanctification*, Romanism embraces a deuterocanonical¹⁴ church tradition¹⁵ known as *Purgatory*. This is a place where the dead elect are purified (achieve holiness) which is necessary to enter the joy of heaven (CCC 1030). The Romanists promotes almsgiving, indulgences, and penitential works from the living on behalf of the dead (CCC 1032).

¹⁴ 2 Macc. 12:46

¹⁵ Council of Florence (1439) and Council of Trent (1563), ratifying *Benedictus Deus* (1336) (CCC 1031)

Conclusion

This review has briefly contrasted the *Order of Salvation* between *Traditional Reformed* and *Roman Catholic* theology. Romans 8:30 encapsulates the *Ordo Salutis* perfectly. We see the elect are predestinated and foreknown - acts from God's eternity. Thus, they are called to reception of the communicated gospel to be justified (and therefore sanctified), which is enacted in history. Glorification however is yet to be realised consummately, but most assuredly, as all of God's previous works.

Soli Deo Gloria

References

- Bunyan, John. *A Mapp Shewing the Order & Causes of Salvation & Damnation*. Paper Inscription, 1664. British Museum.
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1864-0813-291.
- Dwyer, George Patrick. *The Catholic Faith*. Australian. 1959. Repr., Sydney: Catholic Enquiry Centre, 1963.
- Hoekema, Anthony A. *Saved by Grace*. Grand Rapids, Mich. ; Cambridge, U.K.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994.
- Paul II, John, ed. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Complete and Updated. New York: Doubleday, 1995.
- Payne, Matthew. *Order of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation*. Online image [modernised]. "A Golden Chain" by William Perkins (1597), 2021.
<http://stretchtheology.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/GoldenChainChartCs.png>.
- Pink, Arthur Walkington. *The Attributes of God*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996.
- Vatican. "Lumen Gentium: Chapter 1 - the Mystery of the Church." *Www.intratext.com*, 21 November 1964.
http://www.intratext.com/ixt/ENG0037/_P8.HTM.
- . "Lumen Gentium: Chapter 5 - the Universal Call to Holiness in the Church." *www.intratext.com*, 21 November 1964.
http://www.intratext.com/ixt/ENG0037/_PC.HTM.
- Ward, Rowland S. *The Westminster Confession and Catechisms in Modern English: A Modernised Text Commemorating the 350th Anniversary of the Westminster Assembly, 1643-49*. Wantirna, Vic.: New Melbourne Press, 2000.