

# The Roman Rite and Child Communion Preserved in the Tridentine Era

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## 1. The Latin Speaking Church and Child Communion Prior to the Roman Rite

The Roman rite can be said to have developed after the city of Rome had developed outstanding rites and ceremonies that originated or uniquely were celebrated there. Prior to the clear establishment of any rite, the saintly Fathers of the Church witness the practice of child communion as forerunners of the requirements to give babies communion (not to mention confirmation) in the Roman rite.

Infants also, in the arms of their parents, either carried or conducted, [...] say, “We have done nothing; nor have we forsaken the Lord's bread and cup to hasten freely to a profane contact.” (Cyprian, [\*On the Lapsed\*](#), chapter 9)

The context of this rhetorical irony of infants (speechless ones) speaking about their regular taking of Holy Communion was used by St. Cyprian of Carthage for correction of faithlessness of adult members of the church. The central point, however, is that child communion was used as a rhetorical example known to all in Latin-speaking North Africa. St. Cyprian is quite explicit about this in longer and better example:

25. [...] Parents [...] left a little daughter under the care of a wet-nurse. The nurse gave up the forsaken child to the magistrates. They gave it [...] bread mingled with wine, which however itself was the remainder of what had been used in the immolation [...]. [...] When, however, the solemnities were finished, and the deacon began to offer the cup to those present, and when, as the rest received it, its turn approached, the little child, by the instinct of the divine majesty, turned away its face, compressed its mouth with resisting lips, and refused the cup. Still the deacon persisted, and, although against her efforts, forced on her some of the sacrament of the cup. Then there followed a sobbing and vomiting. In a profane body and mouth the Eucharist could not remain; the draught sanctified in the blood of the Lord burst forth from the polluted stomach. [...]

26. This much about an infant, which was not yet of an age to speak [...] And another woman, when she tried with unworthy hands to open her box, in which was the holy (body) of the Lord, was deterred by fire rising from it from daring to touch it. (Cyprian, [\*On the Lapsed\*](#), chapter 25-26)

Here, St. Cyprian relates that a young girl child who had been unwittingly exposed to a sacrilege was unable to keep receiving child communion, despite her age, due to not having the words to expose the sacrilege and therefore to spiritually get past the evil to which she had been exposed.

It is in this context, too, that we can understand why St. Augustine talks about a what a baby would say if he were able to speak about his senses encountering the Eucharist at Mass in North Africa around AD 410. St. Augustine, however, easily betrays what he also saw and heard in Milan, when he himself was baptized en masse by the catechumens of St. Ambrose, bishop of the city since AD 374. There, Ambrose explicitly confessed that for baptism, save a ceremony of the washing of the feet within the rite of baptism, they strictly followed the Roman rite (*typus*)

for all their ceremonies in the imperial city. So, St. Augustine, when talking about children's experience at mass, says the following (around AD 400):

Original sin is examined: Christ is even with infants, as Jesus is baptism and the communion (*est Jesus parvulorum baptismus et communio*). Somebody asserts that the age of infancy has nothing since Jesus saves, then he should deny that Jesus is with all infants as with members of the faithful [...] Jesus is savior. Those whom he saves is not by not having which in them saves, Jesus is not with them [...] infants are made his members, they are infants, but they receive his sacraments, they are infants but they are made partakers of his table, in order to have eternal life (*Infantes sunt, sed Sacramenta ejus accipiunt. Infantes sunt, sed mensae ejus participes fiunt, ut habeant in se vitam*)! ([Sermon 174](#); translation mine)

St. Augustine see babies receiving communion as fulfilling John 6:53-54, that they have eternal life. Elsewhere the doctor of grace continues on infant communion:

And what else do they say who call the sacrament of the Lord's Supper life, than that which is written: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:51) and "The bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world" (John 6:51) and "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, you shall have no life in you?" (John 6:53). If, therefore, as so many and such divine witnesses agree, neither salvation nor eternal life can be hoped for by any man without baptism and the Lord's body and blood, it is vain to promise these blessings to infants without them. Moreover, if it be only sins that separate man from salvation and eternal life, there is nothing else in infants which these sacraments can be the means of removing, but the guilt of sin — respecting which guilty nature it is written, that no one is clean, not even if his life be only that of a day (Augustine, [On Merit and the Forgiveness of Sins, and the Baptism of Infants](#), book I, chapter 34)

Altogether, there are numerous instances in Augustine where infant communion is referred to in passing, such that the doctor of the church, whose influence on subsequent popes is assured, naturally will lead to papal endorsement of this North African tradition as it reflective of Rome's own tradition.

This tradition among Latin-speaking Christians is poetically referred to by the Southern Italian Christian St. Paulinus of Nola in the early 400s [Epistle 32](#): "From here, a parent leads their infants to the sacred font and then a priest from the font leads the white-clothes infants to (the Lord's) body" (*Inde parens sacro ducit de fonte sacerdos, infantes niveos corpore*).

This patristic doctrine of the Latin Fathers in their teachings began to be formalized shortly afterwards as witnessed in the discipline recounted by Gennadius of Marseille, around AD 492 (and the subsequent local Frankish synod of Mâcon):

However, if little children (*parvuli*) are sick, but they can't understand doctrinal teaching, the [godparents] should respond on their behalf who have brought them forward according to the custom of baptizing. In this way, too, there is a laying on of hands, they are admitted then, after they are fortified by chrism, to the mysteries of the Eucharist (*chrismate communiti, eucharistiae mysteriis admittantur*). ([On ecclesiastical dogmas](#), chapter 52)

## 2. Child Communion in the Early Roman Rite

Child communion was effectively required by papal decretals in the first millennium (e.g., Pope St. Innocent I, [Epistula 30](#)). It is interesting to ask in comparison to the Eastern Catholic Churches, whether authentic forms of the historical Roman rite equally preserve the ritual of child communion as a *locus liturgicus* par excellence, as one celebrated scholar recently designated the liturgy. Pope St. Innocent wrote at the beginning of the fifth century:

[By the proposal of Pelagians on baptism] There are infants forced to have the grace of God removed, which grace we seek as necessary for us, even after our freedom has been restored of our original state; Indeed we are able to avoid by that very same aid other machinations of the devil (Augustine, *Letter to Pope St. Boniface I*, book II, chapter 4, number 7). Yet, that which your brotherliness argues to preach, namely, that infants can be given the rewards of eternal life without the grace of baptism is completely idiotic. For unless “they eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood they have no life within themselves” [John 6:54; Pope Innocent connects infant baptism to infant communion here] (*asserit praedicare, parvulos aeternae vitae praemiis etiam sine baptismatis gratia posse donari, perfatum est. Nisi enim manducaverint carnem filii hominis, et biberint sanguinem ejus, non habebunt vitam in semetipsis*). But they who defend infants without regeneration here, they seem to want to void baptism itself, when they preach infants to possess in themselves what is believed to be conferred only by baptism. (Translation adapted from Robert Taft, SJ).

In the same vein, Pope St. Leo the Great (around AD 450) acknowledged the fact that Roman children were baptized and given Holy Communion in the following lines:

In what density of ignorance, in what utter sloth must they hitherto have lain, not to have learned from hearing, nor understood from reading, that which in God's Church is so constantly in men's mouths, that even the tongues of infants do not keep silence upon the truth of Christ's Body and Blood at the rite of Holy Communion ? For in that mystic distribution of spiritual nourishment, that which is given and taken is of such a kind that receiving the virtue of the celestial food we pass into the flesh of Him, Who became our flesh. ([Epistle 59](#))

But we do not refuse the assistance of our ministry for the instruction of our little ones ([parvulorum](#)), who after being fed with milk desire (*desiderant*) to be satisfied (*satiari*) with more solid food ([Epistle 162](#))

Now we discover that some former prisoners returning home who were namely taken into captivity at an age when the weren't able to recall anything firmly in their minds [...] whether they went through the mystery of that aforementioned baptism and its sacraments, being unable to remember anything of their infancy [...] ([Epistle 167](#); my translation).

Pope St. Leo in *Epistle 59* is writing the Byzantine Church in Constantinople where he appeals to a common practice of infant communion and writes to St. Augustine lays the thematic basis for the future Roman sacramentary, where we will see the *Old Gelasian Sacramentary* describing the newly baptized and communed infants in its Post-Communion prayer, below, as “*satiati*” or

satisfied with the desired food linked to their baptism, after they are symbolically instructed or catechized, just as Pope St. Leo states, above. His last letter, above, deals with a pastoral problem of returning captives who can't remember whether they were baptized as infants, which always included the other sacraments of confirmation and communion. Later in the development of the Roman rite, a key prayer and ceremony for understanding Tridentine references to infant communion first showed up in history around AD 498–AD 514. Those familiar with the Tridentine *Roman Ritual* know at the beginning of the rite of baptism there is an exorcism of salt followed by feeding the exorcized salt to the baby or catechumen who is about to be baptized during the middle of the ceremony. Our first historical witness to this feeding of salt is John the Deacon's [\*Letter to Senarius\*](#):

The catechumen shall already receive blessed salt, in which he is marked, for just as all flesh is preserved by salt seasoning (*condita*), likewise is a weak and wandering mind made firm/seasoned (*conditur*) to arrive, after sweetness – a moisture of utter corruption – is dispersed at the firmness of stalwartness of a divine salt. (translation mine)

This is an indirect reference to Mark 9:48-49:

English	Vulgate Latin
Every one shall be salted with fire: and every victim shall be salted with salt. Salt is good. But if the salt became unsavory; wherewith will you season it? Have salt in you, and have peace among you.	Omnis enim igne salietur, et omnis victima sale salietur. Bonum est sal: quod si sal insulsum fuerit, in quo illud <i>condietis</i> ? Habete in vobis sal, et pacem habete inter vos.

John the Deacon is making a wordplay that works only in Latin (not the Greek of the New Testament). The Roman rite unique from this period for using exorcized salt as part of Christian initiation or baptism-confirmation-Eucharist, but the Latin wordplay even confirms the western-Latin. This wordplay is central to the rite, since the weak and changeable mind is stabilized (*condita*) by something providing it fundament (*conditum*) but this same root word in Latin also means a spice (*condimentum*)! Even though Deacon John does not cite the words of the salt-prayer that is used in the Roman Ritual of AD 1614, the wordplays nonetheless strongly suggest that the salt-prayer below already existed, which was written out in full as early as AD 650 and a copy of this exists from about AD 750. The ceremony takes place in Lent for babies who are being prepared for baptism on Easter Vigil:

O God of our Fathers, God the founder-seasoner of all truth, (*Deus patrum nostrorum, deus universae conditor veritatis*) we beggars pray to you, that you deign to look down kindly on your slave, that you allow him who is tasting his first solid food of salt not to hunger for much time so as not to be filled with heavenly food [...] Lead him to the washing of a new rebirth to merit to obtain with your faithful the eternal rewards of your promises. (*Old Gelasian Sacramentary*, number 290)

The Roman mass book, representing papal practices is found under the title here:

RERUM ECCLESIASTICARUM DOCUMENTA

CURA PONTIFICII ATHENAEI SANCTI ANSELMI DE URBE EDITA

MODERANTE L. C. MOHLBERG

SERIES MAIOR

FONTES

IV

LIBER SACRAMENTORUM  
ROMANAE AECLESIAE  
ORDINIS ANNI CIRCULI

(Cod. Vat. Reg. lat. 316/Paris Bibl. Nat. 7193, 41/56)

(SACRAMENTARIUM GELASIANUM)

The prayer in this book, above, plays on God as both a seasoner and founder of truth at the dispensing of salt seasoning that preserves human flesh (by virtue of a sacramental) from corrupting any further until the elixir of healing is dispensed at Easter. The Salty-prayer begs God for infants in Rome to receive Easter Eucharist after passing through Lent and the baptismal vigil of Easter. In the same Lenten rubrics of the *Old Gelasian Sacramentary*, we find first an explicit mention that the entire rite of initiation (since the conversion of pagan Rome into Christians) is for infants explicitly, *not* for adults:

284      *Ut autem uenerint ad ecclesiam, scribuntur nomina infantum  
ab ac<sup>r</sup>c<sup>l</sup>olyto, et uocantur in ecclesia per nomina, sicut scripti sunt. Et  
statuuntur masculi in dexteram partem, faeminae in sinistram, Et dat    27  
orationem praesbiter super eos.*

*The names of infants are written by the acolyte but in order to come to the church and be called out by their names in the church in accordance with how they were written down. And the boys are set up on the right of the church and the girls on the left and the priest performs prayer over them. (My translation of the Old Gelasian Sacramentary, number 284).*

All the rubrics for Lent and Easter are focused on infants alone, just like this. These rubrics are followed up by the salt-prayer that will be used over 900 years later in the Tridentine *Roman Ritual*:

## BENEDICTIO POST DATAM SALE

290        Deus patrum nostrorum, deus uniuersae conditor ueritatis,    3  
te supplices exoramus, ut hunc famulum tuum respicere digneris  
propicius, ut hoc primum pabulum salis gustantem non deucius  
esurire permittas, quo minus gybo expleatur caeleste, quatenus    6  
sit semper, domine, spiritu feruens, spe gaudens, tuo semper nomine  
seruiens. Perduc eum ad nouae regenerationi lauacrum, ut cum fide-  
libus tuis promissionum tuarum aeterna praemia consequi merea-    9  
tur: per dominum.

O God of our Fathers, God the founder-seasoner of all truth, we beggars pray to you, that you deign to look down kindly on your slave, that you allow him who is tasting his first solid food of salt not to hunger for much time so as not to be filled with heavenly food [...] that he may always be, o Lord, fervent in spirit, joyful in truth, and serviceable to your holy name. Lead him to the washing of a new rebirth to merit to obtain with your faithful the eternal rewards of your promises. (*Old Gelasian Sacramentary*, number 290)

The future Roman rite in the AD 1614 Roman Ritual will show hardly any editorial changes to this prayer that might go back to about AD 500, save some spelling changes *diutius* = *deucius* and *cibo* = *gybo*. The few changes in the prayer are by and large accounted for by the fact that native Latin speakers often spell according to their local accent and pronunciation, not bothering to spell like pagan classical Latin of centuries prior.

Next, like the Roman Ritual of infant baptism issued after Trent, a recital of a Creed is symbolically a moment of catechesis for the prerational infant:

313        Fili karissimi: audistis symbulum graecae, audi et latinae.  
*Et dicis:* Qua lingua confitentur dominum nostrum Iesum Christum?  
*Respondet:* Latinae. Adnuntia fidem ipsorum qualiter credunt.    3  
314        *Ponens manum acolytus super caput infantis, et dicit symbulum*  
*decantando his uerbis:*

O most precious children, you have heard the Creed in Greek, listen in Latin too. *And you say:* “By what language do people confess Jesus Christ is our Lord?” *Response:* Latin. Announce the faith of those same child in whatever language they believe it. *The acolyte puts his hand on the head of the infant and says the Creed by singing the words of it that follow...* (My translation of *Old Gelasian Sacramentary*, numbers 313-314)

The major transition from AD 500 to AD 650 is that all adults in Rome look to have been baptized so that, by AD 650, only babies need baptism in the city and it is for this reason that only infants are mentioned in the instructions or rubrics as the very catechumens to be blessed, instructed, and baptized at Easter Vigil.



The acolyte who recites the Nicene Creed (without *filioque* [!]) in both Latin and Greek (whereas the *Roman Ritual* will opt for the Apostle's Creed) lays hands on the head of the infant to be baptized, confirmed, and communed. Next, at Easter Vigil, these same infants are explicitly led to be reborn in baptism and the rubric anticipates that as soon as the prerational little devils are baptized, the irrational angels are sacramentally anointed with chrism oil by the bishop, that is, they receive confirmation:

442 / Omnipotens sempiterne deus, respice propitius ad [*f. 71v*]  
 deuoci<sup>o</sup> nem populi renascentis, qui sicut ceruus aquarum expectat  
 fontem, et concede propitius, ut fidei ipsius sitis baptismatis my- 6  
 sterio animam corpusque sanctificet: <per>  
 443 *Inde procedunt ad fontes cum laetania ad baptizandum. Bap-*  
*tismum expletum consignantur ipsi infantes ab episcopo, dum accipiunt 9*  
*septem dona gratia spiritus sancti, et mittit chrisma in frontibus eorum.*  
*Postea uero ipse sacerdos reuertit cum omnibus ordinibus in sacrario.*  
*Et post paulolum incipiunt tercia laetaniam, et ingrediuntur ad 12*  
*missas in uigilia, ut stella in caelo apparuerit. Et sic temperent, ut in*  
*trinitate numero ipsae laetaniae fiant.*

Almighty eternal God, look down kindly on the devotion of your people who are being reborn. They are like a deer yearning for a spring of water. Grant them in your kindness, too, that the thirst for the same faith sanctifies their soul and body by the mystery of baptism. Through (Jesus Christ our Lord). *From this point they go forward to the founts for baptism while a litany is recited. When the baptism has been completed these very infants are anointed by the bishop*, whereupon they receive the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, and he puts chrism oil on their foreheads. Now later, the very priest himself turns around with all ranks of clergy in the sacred space. And a little later, they begin a litany a third time, and the go into the eucharistic services in the midst of its vigil, as by now the stars are out, and such should it be calculated the very same litanies should get done in a trinitarian number. (My translation of an *Old Gelasian Sacramentary*, numbers 442-443)

The rubrics or explanations of these rituals even note that infants explicitly receive confirmation in the Roman rite and then a little later Mass will begin for their first holy communion, which is accomplished according to the Mass text for the feast below:

460 ITEM INFRA ACTIONEM. / Hanc igitur oblationem seruitutis [*f. 76v*]  
 nostrae, sed et cunctae familiae tuae, quam tibi offerimus pro his  
 quoque, quos regenerare dignatus es ex aqua et spiritu sancto, tri- 9  
 buens eis remissionem omnium peccatorum, ut inuenires eos in  
 Christo Iesu domino nostro, quaesumus, domine, placatus accipias.  
 Pro quibus maiestati tuae supplices fundimus praeces, ut nomina 12  
 eorum ascribi iubeas in libro uiuentium: diesque nostros.  
 461 POST COMMUNIONEM. Praesta, quaesumus, omnipotens deus,  
 ut diuino munere satiati et sacris mysteriis innouemur et moribus: 15  
 <per>.

LIKEWISE WITHIN THE EUCHARISTIC ACTION: Therefore, we ask, o Lord that you be pleased to receive this our offering of our slavery, but even that of your entire household, which we offer to you for them as well, whom you have deigned to regenerate from water and the Holy Spirit, as you grant them remission of all their sins as you find them in Jesus Christ our Lord.

POST COMMUNION [Prayer]: Grant, we ask, almighty God as we have just been filled with a divine gift, we may be renewed both by the divine mysteries and by good habits of life. (*Old Gelasian Sacramentary*, numbers 460-461; translation mine)

Within the Eucharistic prayer of Roman Canon, the insert in the eucharistic prayer mentions those babies who have just been baptized – infants only according to the rubrics of Lent and Easter Vigil – and their names as inscribed in the initial rubrics, as catechumens, in Lent. Now, those names are sealed by baptism and Eucharist in the book of eternal life: “He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath everlasting life: and I will raise him up in the last day” (John 6:55; Douay-Rheims). This is the same citation that Pope St. Innocent I (*Decretal 30*) first provides for requiring infant communion within his decretals.

Finally, at the end of the Mass on Easter morning, the post communion prayer above brings the Salt-blessing prayer to completion. The infants who hungered for the solid food of eternal life, who were temporarily sated with exorcized salt, are now declared “full” or “sated” (*satiati*) by the Eucharist they have received as babies. This *Old Gelasian* sacramentary merely agrees with a rules set down a little earlier by Pope St. Gregory the Great to give babies baptism and confirmation (even if here he does not address communion):

Let not bishops presume to sign baptized infants a second time on the forehead with chrism; but let the presbyters anoint those who are to be baptized on the breast, that the bishops may afterwards anoint them on the forehead. (Pope St. Gregory I, [\*Epistle IX\*](#)).

In Pope St. Gregory’s and the *Old Gelasian* book’s same century, the Roman liturgical tradition required the regular communing of infants in Roman books quite explicitly, as in the following papal ceremonial books meant for Roman clergy (around AD 615–AD 633):

Concerning infants, care should be taken lest they receive food or be nursed (except in case of urgent need) before receiving the sacrament of Christ’s Body. And afterwards, during the whole of Easter week, let them come to mass, offer, and receive communion every day. ([\*Ordo Romanus XI\*](#))<sup>1</sup>

After especially AD 794, the liturgical books of the Roman rite spread throughout the Holy Roman empire. The liturgical books for a bishop celebrating sacraments imitated Rome in compilations published in the Holy Roman Empire:

A presbyter ought to always have the eucharist ready to go so that whenever someone has fallen sick, or when a child has fallen ill (*parvulus infirmus fuerit*) he may at once give

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<sup>1</sup> See page 220 for the translation.



communion so that such a one not die without communion. (Charlemagne's *Capitularia de presbyteris*)

These rules were often reproduced verbatim in legal collections, as for example Abbot Regino Prumiensis's, *On ecclesiastical instructions* around AD 915. These laws on infant confirmation and communion were also mirrored in the Germano-Roman Pontifical, that is, the bishops' book for celebration of the sacraments compiled (AD 950-AD 962) partly from texts of the Roman rite.

379. Et<sup>1</sup> sunt parati qui eos  
suscepturi sunt cum linteis in  
manibus eorum et accipiunt 20  
ipsos a pontifice et presbite-  
ris vel diaconibus qui eos bap-  
tizant. Pontifex vero egredi-  
tur a fonte in sacrarium habens  
ibi compositam sedem, vel in 25  
ecclesia ubi voluerit, et sedet  
in ea, ut cum vestiti fuerint in-  
fantes, confirmet eos.

[...] However, the Pontiff goes out of the font into the sacred space have his seat set up there, or wherever he wants it in the church, and he on it in order to confirm the infants at the time when they have been clothed [after baptized nude] ([Germano-Roman Pontifical](#), 379; my translation).

As expected, the bishop confirmed at the baptismal ceremony of infants, then the babies that were before him (*parvuli*). Elsewhere, the salt prayer was absorbed from Rome into the rite of initiation in the Holy Roman empire:

25 10. Et<sup>1</sup> mittat in ora infantium<sup>2</sup> de ipso sale, per singulos ita  
dicendo:  
Accipe salem<sup>3</sup> sapientiae propitius in vitam aeternam. Pax  
tibi. Resp.<sup>4</sup>: Et cum<sup>5</sup> spiritu tuo.  
11. Oratio<sup>1</sup> post datum salem<sup>2</sup>.  
30 Deus patrum nostrorum, Deus universae conditor veritatis<sup>3</sup>, te

And the [priest] puts some of the same salt into the babies' mouths, saying individually: *Kindly accept the salt of wisdom unto endless live. Peace be with you.* Response: *And with your spirit.* The prayer after the salt is dispensed: *O God of our Father, God the founder-seasonor of all truth...* (*Germano-Roman Pontifical*, translation mine)

Finally, this medieval pontifical or bishop's book for the sacraments, gave very precise directions, just as in Rome, about making sure to have a short fast from milk and any food before a baby is individually communed right after baptism:

*Accipe vestem sanctam, candidam et immaculatam, ut habeas vitam aeternam. Pax tecum*<sup>1</sup>. Resp.: *Et cum spiritu tuo*.

37. Hoc facto, cum vestiti fuerint **infantes**, ingrediantur ad missas et communicent singuli. Et si pontifex adest, confirmet eos. <sup>30</sup> Qui etiam non prohibentur lactari ante sanctam communionem, si necesse fuerit.

*Accept this holy, white, and spotless clothing for you to possess endless life. Peace be with you. Response: And with your spirit. After this is done, when the infants have been clothed, they enter into the ongoing divine services and take communion individually. And if the bishop is present, he should confirm them. They should not even be forbidden to nurse before holy communion, if necessity warrants. (Germano-Roman Pontifical; my translation)*

The *Germano-Roman Pontifical*, marking the celebration of the sacraments in the Holy Roman Empire, outlined a practice still being commended as late as AD 1150, as witnessed by celebrated theologians of the period:

[a newly baptized child] should receive the sacraments of unity, that is, the body and blood of Christ. The same sacrament time is administered by the finger of the priest dipped into the form of the blood for recently born babes, since such one naturally are able to suck Augustine writes to Pope (St.) Boniface (I) against the heresy of the Pelagians: [...] “In baptism [...] And that you shouldn’t think that can have eternal who are unacquainted with the body *and* the blood of Christ, as the Lord himself says: “Unless you eat the flesh ... and drink his blood, etc. (John 6). [...] The sacrament of the Eucharist *is* handed over in the form of blood [...] ” (Robert Paululus, *De caeremoniis*, chapter 20)

We have omitted other minor witnesses of this period that add no new information but merely show that the Roman rite, as absorbed into the Holy Roman lands, continuously practiced what its own liturgical books preached.

### 3. The Roman Rite Prior to the Printing Press

The Roman rite had bishops take special care to give confirmation and communion to all baptized infants. The situation in the next centuries in the *Roman Pontifical* is much the same, at least with the pope confirming infants, as in the earlier pontificals:

26. Deinde <sup>1</sup> habentes illos quos baptizati exint. Pontifex sibi <sup>2</sup> representatos. sacro crismate in fronte confirmat dicens. *Dominus vobiscum.* Resp. *Et cum spiritu tuo.* Oratio. *Omnipotens sempiterne Deus qui te regeneravit dignatus es. hos famulos et famulas ex aqua. Oratione completa faciat crucem in fronte singulorum et pollice de crismate ita dicendo. Iohannes. vel quovis alio nomine. signo te signo crucis. Pax tecum.* Resp. *Et cum spiritu tuo.* Confirmatus vero dicit hos versus. *Ecce sic*

26. Deinde illos tres quos baptizaverat pontifex sibi representatos sacro crismate in fronte confirmat, dicens: *Dominus vobiscum.* Resp.: *Et cum spiritu tuo.* Oremus <sup>1</sup>. *Omnipotens sempiterne Deus qui regenerare... propitiatus eternam.* Per. *In unitate eiusdem.* Oratione completa, faciat crucem in frontibus singulorum cum pollice de crismate ita dicendo: *Iohannes, vel quovis alio nomine invocans <sup>2</sup> eum, signo te signo crucis et confirmo te crismate salutis in nomine patris et filii et spiri-*

Above, the important instructions and prayers, for our purposes reads:

“Then the bishop confirms those three (infants) whom he had baptized with sacred chrism on their forehead, saying [the following prayer}” (Translation mine)

Further papal decretals after AD 1100 and the papal liturgy itself defended the right of infant communion. For example, Pope Paschal II, in his [Epistle 535](#) to the abbot of Cluny decreed:

[On prohibiting intinction of bread and wine in communion:] Now we know that bread by itself and real wine by itself were handed over [for communion] by the very Lord himself. We teach and decree this custom always be preserved in the holy church, except among infants and those who are deathly ill, as they are not able to swallow bread [by itself] (*praeter in parvulis ac omnino infirmis, qui panem absorbere non possunt*). (*Patrologia Latina* volume 163, column 442D)

And, of course, the Roman pontifical, preserved the exhortations to give newly baptized babies communion until about AD 1100:

However, it should be provided for babies that after they are baptized they shouldn't take any food nor be nursed, unless there is extreme need, before the babies receive communion of the sacrament of Christ's body. And later they should go up for mass all days of the entire octave of Easter, they should make their offering, and they should take communion (*Illud autem de parvulis providendum est, ne postquam baptizati fuerint, ullum cibum accipiant nec ablacentur, sine summa necessitate, antequam communicent sacramento corporis Christi. Et postea per totam hebdomadam paschae omnibus diebus ad missam procedant, offerant, et communicant*). ([Roman Pontifical](#), see page 220)

Of course, this pontifical also witnessed infant confirmation, as extracted [here](#) below:

31. Ordo ad consignandos infantes hic est:

Infantes <sup>a</sup> quidem in brachiis dextris tenentur. Maiores vero pedem ponunt <sup>5</sup> super pedem patrini sui. Quibus per ordinem dispositis ante pontificem, ipse pontifex <sup>b</sup>, imposita manu super capita singulorum, dat orationem super eos cum invocatione septiformis gratiae spiritus sancti, sic dicens:

The order for infants to be confirmed is here: Indeed, the infants are held in godparents' right hand. However, older kids stand their feet on top of the feet of their godparents. When they've been so organized before the bishop, the very same bishop, after he has layed his hand on each individual infant, recites a prayer over them with a calling down of the sevenfold grace of the Holy Spirit. (*Roman Pontifical*; Translation mine)

Rubrics or instructions in pontifical books of the period, where the bishop or pope are giving communion to babies, are seemingly numberless in the Roman rite and its allied rites prior to the printing press. Even after the development of Scholasticism, in AD 1295, the [\*Roman Pontifical\*](#) published by William Durandus still retains infant confirmation as the norm:

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18. Benedictione fontium completa<sup>1</sup>, secedit<sup>2</sup> pontifex paululum in secretario iuxta fontes et, exuta planeta, paratus prout<sup>3</sup> moris est, regreditur<sup>4</sup> ad fontes et, representatis sibi **infantibus**, scilicet Iohanne<sup>5</sup>, Petro et<sup>6</sup> Maria, et eis prius<sup>7</sup> catecizatis per<sup>8</sup> sacerdotem, pontifex baptizet<sup>9</sup> illos<sup>10</sup> hoc modo. Primo enim<sup>11</sup> interrogat offerentem<sup>12</sup>: *Quis*<sup>13</sup> *vocaris?* Et pro-<sup>5</sup> sequitur<sup>14</sup> formam solitam baptizandi.

19. Hos quoque<sup>1</sup> baptizatos<sup>2</sup> pontifex sacro crismate in fronte confirmat<sup>3</sup>. Require<sup>4</sup> formam<sup>5</sup> confirmationis supra<sup>a</sup>.

The key lines I here translate:

[...] 19. The bishop confirms with sacred chrism too the recently baptized on their forehead

Well after St. Thomas Aquinas had died (AD 1274) and his memory and theology were being defended by the Dominican until his AD 1323 canonization, the entire Catholic Church preserved the distribution of sacraments of initiation for non-rational babes, as the universal tradition had dictated in the first millennium.

Following the onset of the Protestant Reformation, this longstanding practice of infant confirmation and communion naturally led to papal support and respect for the maintenance of this practice among Byzantine churches newly erected in Italy after the destruction of the Byzantine state, especially after AD 1453. On this matter, Pope Leo X wrote the following (AD 18 May 1521):

Among other things that have been established and by us decided, the aforementioned nationality (of Byzantines) in their same rites and observances, which were not imputed as heresy, are to persist and among others, namely, [...] and that the venerable Sacrament may be administered under each of the two forms to all, even to children (*pueris*), as provided by what was set down at the Council [of Florence] [...] However Latin ordinaries of places are accustomed daily to harass this same nationality (Byzantine), to cause them trouble, and take away their peace of mind, forcing their child and another among them [...] to be rebaptized by the custom of the Roman Church, and that the aforesaid Sacrament ought not be administered to all (Byzantine) persons under each of both forms, least of all to infants [...] (Leo X, [\*Nuper Accepimus\*](#); my translation)

Pope Leo X went on to chide, forbid, and correct such injustice in the Latin Church. As we will see, in the Tridentine period, Pope Paul III will renew protection of these legitimate customs, first recognized by pope Eugene IV in the bull of union at the Council of Florence, according to Pope Leo X.

#### 4. Post-Tridentine Catholicism

Indeed, the first Pope of the Tridentine Period, Paul Paul III (died AD 1549) – who opened the Council of Trent – defended the practice of infant communion in Southern Italy in a like manner in AD 1534 by reissuing the same defense of child communion and the same prohibitions on opposing in in his papal bull Dudum, which simply followed the publishing of Leo X's privileges by Clement VII (AD 1517-AD 1534). These privileges were extended to other parts of Europe in the same terms by a decree of Pope Julius III in 1553. Pope Pius VI, Romanus Pontifex, in AD 1564 only remanded supervision of the Byzantine rite back to local ordinaries due to accusations of local Byzantines denying other dogmas of the faith, which were never substantiated. In this, local ordinaries were permitted to continue to allow infant communion, but no longer penalized for agitating against it.

It is for all these reasons that the Council of Trent naturally respected the ancient practice and local Latin and Greek practices of infant communion that had survived and were discussed by the Fathers of the Council who voted to honor it, if not to restore it to its pristine usage as found in their local and in Roman liturgical books. In July of 1562, the Council of Trent considered the matter of children and their receiving communion and issued a statement, which reads as follows:

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### **That little Children are not bound to sacramental Communion.**

Finally, this same holy Synod teaches, that little children, who have not attained to the use of reason, are not by any necessity obliged to the sacramental communion of the Eucharist: forasmuch as, having been regenerated by the by the laver of baptism, and being incorporated with Christ, they cannot, at that age, lose the grace which they have already acquired of being the sons of God. Not therefore, however, is antiquity to be condemned, if, in some places, it, at one time, observed that custom; for as those most holy Fathers had a probable cause for what they did in respect of their times, so, assuredly, is it to be believed without controversy, that they did this without any necessity thereof unto salvation. (The Council of Trent, 21<sup>st</sup> Session; **bold** and underline are mine).

Embarrassingly for our day, olden Fathers who had very limited access and only with difficulty consulted ancient documents, Fathers, and even papal documents, were entirely aware of the patristic and Eastern tradition, which was honored at Trent (as above), but today, with such ease of access to all this documentation and authorities, unscrupulous persons grossly ignorant of the universal tradition attack what Trent itself revered, placing themselves among those execrated by the bull of Pope Leo X.

What Trent outlines is the pith of the matter, the Fathers we have surveyed often connected the rites of infant baptism with salvation. For example, both Pope St. Innocent I and St. Augustine cite John 6:52-54 on eating the flesh of Christ to have eternal life to justify infant communion. Trent is making a further precision, that there are – as theologians were noting –



two kinds of necessity, one that is absolute for salvation (a *conditio sine qua non* in the Church's sacramental system is baptism, in place of which no other means can save in the least). Secondly, there is a necessity of precept, whereby those who are perceptively bound by Jesus or the Apostles to receive something must – in possible conditions – exercise their potential to accomplish the precept. So, Trent recognizes that without a child being able to sin and to sin mortally at that, the child is only bound by the precept of Jesus to receive (confirmation and) Eucharist when they would be in circumstances to possibly sin so that they need assistance by sacramental grace. Generally, as we will see in the Roman liturgical books published after Trent below, this is designated as the period at which the child gains the use of his reason. This has been estimated on average to be at seven years of age. So, the liturgical laws will eventually reflect the precept obliging reasonable people to receive the sacrament to guard them from venial and mortal sin. Instead of Trent prohibiting the underaged to commune, it is setting up the age at which the obligation of precept binds a persons conscience, that is, only after they are capable of sinning. So, Trent is not setting a floor beneath which nobody can receive communion but rather a door through which a child passes that, afterwards, requires them to seek the sacrament out of moral necessity and divine precept. In short, the Father of Trent interpret Pope St. Innocent I and other to mean that a child must eat and drink the flesh as a command *conditionally* (at the very least by the time they can morally sin) but that they are to be baptized without this condition for salvation.

Unsurprisingly, in light of sixteenth century popes, the post-Tridentine liturgical books (the Conciliar period being AD 1545-AD 1563) retained the order for Christian initiation of catechumens (which include babies for confirmation), without scruple (as for example the [\*Rituale sacramentorum romanum\*](#) under Pope Gregory XIII, AD 1583), this priest's ritual adapted to parishes in Rome (see page 31) prescribed the Salty-prayer and child confirmation after the scrutinies. Then the newly baptized were immediately given communion as below. The order of Christian initiation in stages for the catechumen is printed in the same order as the *Old Gelasian Sacramentary* as follows:

<a href="#"><u><i>Rituale sacramentorum romanum</i></u></a>	<b>Christian Initiation Rite Described in the Book:</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> Scrutiny after Ash Wednesday (page 29-31):	Exorcism of Salt + “Accept the Salt of wisdom + Salty-prayer: “O God of our Fathers, founder-seasoner of all truth...”
3 <sup>rd</sup> Scrutiny of Lent (pages 45-46):	The Latin apostles Creed is recited instead of the Nicene Creed + a Greek Nicene Creed with the <i>Filioque</i> added in Greek + the maintenance of an old rubric admitting that the catechumen for the rite might be “infants.”
Easter Vigil (pages 67-68):	The vigil foresees that infants are called by name to baptism as in the <i>Old Gelasian</i>
Easter Vigil (page 68, 73):	Infants are explicitly confirmed by the bishop
Easter Mass (page 76):	A new rubric is added: “The ministers give communion [...] Neophyte adults, who have been judged read on account of their age or by use of reason go to the altar two by two”



Conclusion:	The Salty-prayer was always connected, even in post-Tridentine Roman books, with the actual reception of communion after baptism.
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The Roman Ritual in AD 1614 and its subsequent revisions preserve integrally this first-millennial prayer for child communion (the Salty-prayer). Let's look at the *Collectio Rituum* 1954 (prior to the universal imposition of the New Holy Week, controverted by some attached to the previous discipline):

8 Baptism	
11 Deinde immittit modicum salis benedicti in os infantis, dicens:	
N., accipe sal sapientiae: propitiatio sit tibi in vitam aeternam.	N., receive the salt of wisdom. May it win for you mercy and forgiveness, and life everlasting.
R. Amen.	R. Amen.
Sacerdos:	
Pax tecum.	Peace be with you.
R. Et cum spiritu tuo.	R. And with your spirit.
Sacerdos:	
Oratio	
Orémus.	Let us pray.
Deus patrum nostrorum, Deus universae conditor veritatis, te supplices exoramus, ut hunc famulam tuam, N./hanc famulum tuam, N., respicere digneris propitius, et hoc primum <sup>1</sup> pabulum salis gustantem non diutius esurire permittas, quo minus cibo expleatur caelesti, quatenus sit semper	God of our fathers, God the Author of all truth, we humbly implore Thee to look with favor on this Thy servant, N., and grant that he/she who is now tasting this salt as his/her first <sup>1</sup> nourishment may not hunger much longer before he/she is given his/her fill of heavenly food, so that he/she may
<sup>1</sup> In supplendis caeremoniis omittitur: primum.	first.
sanctification this salt which Thou hast created and to bless it with Thy blessing, so that it may become a perfect medicine for all who receive it and may remain always in every fiber of their being. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who will come to judge the living and the dead and the world by fire.	

The priest, presumably baptizing an infant in its first six months (prior to tasting and eating solid food), prays the *Old Gelasian* Salty-prayer for the infant to receive Holy Communion at the ceremony of child baptism in the AD 1954 *Roman Ritual*: “Grant that he who is now tasting this salt as his first nourishment may not hunger much longer before he is given his fill of heavenly food...” This prayer is extracted from the Salty-prayer of the *Old Gelasian Sacramentary* (AD 650), attributed in its essence to Pope St. Gelasius (before AD 492-AD 496). This attribution is at least propitious for the composition of the Salty-prayer for child communion, since we saw a possible oblique reference to this prayer around AD 500 in the *Epistle to Senarius*. In the *Old Gelasian Sacramentary*, the context is absolutely clear: This blessing is given in Lent during the so-called Scrutiny periods before Easter Vigil. The baby will have his hunger satiated after baptism and confirmation by its bishop at the vigil mass in Rome, just weeks later at the end of the liturgical season. Immediately after infant confirmation, the vigil mass of Easter had taken place where the infants – according to the rubrics – received communion. So, child communion marks the moment where the Salty-prayer comes to its fruition: The infants – who were once milk eaters until their consumption of blessed salt (and who are not supposed to eat any more milk until they eat “meat” or Jesus’s flesh – received but a temporary snack, to temporally sate

them for what they really hungered for, solid food (an oblique reference to the controversy over who initiated whom in baptism from 1 Corinthians 3:2):

1 Corinthians 3:2 (Douay-Rheims)	1 Corinthians 3:2 (Vulgate)
I gave you milk to drink, not meat; for you were not able as yet. But neither indeed are you now able; for you are yet carnal.	lac vobis potum dedi, non escam: nondum enim poteratis: sed nec nunc quidem potestis: adhuc enim carnales estis.

As it stood, the canonical discipline of post-Tridentine Catholicism restricted infant communion to the Eastern rites. Still, it maintained a clear memory and implicit approval of the concept of infant communion by virtue of the baptismal ceremony in the AD 1614 ritual.

Knowing full well that the baptismal texts printed under Pope Gregory XIII used the Salty-prayer for child communion, the Tridentine commission of cardinals nonetheless chose to keep the prayer in the *Roman Ritual* of AD 1614. Despite its petition for the child to shortly after this ritual to be allowed as an infant to receive communion, there was felt to be no theological problem to be overcome in the liturgical books of the Roman rite. The practice was, until then, simply in abeyance. Despite the post-Tridentine rites no longer providing for child confirmation and child communion in the ordinary rubrics and instruction of the *Roman Ritual*, Roman popes continued after the publication of the *Roman Ritual* to defend the practice of infant communion, although the region of Southern Italy, constituted a strange case where some rites were discouraged. There was an issue explicitly with child confirmation – not a problem in the very Roman ritual published after Trent – due to confusion by Latin bishops who did not know if they should confirm Byzantine children in their dioceses who were under their care, as mentioned in Pope Clement VIII's [\*Instructio super ritibus Italo-graecorum\*](#) (AD 1595). However, there is no mention of prohibiting children from receiving communion. The restrictive policy of Pope Clement VIII was limited to the Italo-Greeks in Southern Italy but was continued with some improvements by Pope Benedict XIV in *Etsi pastoralis* (AD 1742). The peculiarities of Greek parishes under Latin bishops remained a source of tension and misunderstanding during this period, since there was no proper seminary education on the history, existence, or customs of the Eastern Churches in any Latin programs and resistance by Latin bishops. Pope Clement XII and others started institutes of higher learning in Southern Italy dedicated to promoting knowledge of the Byzantine tradition. As we can learn, papal magisterium was most resisted by Latin bishops of Italian regions who were obnoxious to rites native to their regions that had predated the introduction of the Roman rite by the invasion of the Normans centuries after Byzantine Christianity had been the norm.

## 5. Conclusion

A thorough-going look at the most authentic Roman liturgical books leads to the preservation of the liturgical tradition of child confirmation and communion. Even in the AD 1614 ritual, in a sort of commemorative way, a prayer for child communion was still preserved, as Trent put, in reverence for antiquity and with confidence that the Holy Fathers knew what they were doing. This part of the ritual for children from the Gelasian Sacramentary was continuously reproduced in the period after the printing press (around AD 1450) by the Roman see for its own Latin rite priests dispensing the sacraments of the Roman diocese and then extended to all

dioceses throughout the world. In AD 1614 the Roman Ritual (a truncated version of earlier papal books for Roman priests) began to be the model for sacraments that gradually led to the abandon of child communion in most Latin regions still using it as it gradually spread in virtue of its prestige and commendation by popes. After AD 1200, Roman liturgical rubrics gradually started to deemphasize confirmation and communion should be given to “infants” as infant communion slowly disappeared in Latin parishes in Europe. The edited liturgical books reflected this gradual disappearance of child communion that coincided with the disappearance of adult communion, requiring obligation to receive it under pain of mortal sin by AD 1215, since people went their entire lives without having been communed. Nevertheless, the Roman Ritual of 1614, so to speak, never forgot that children at baptism were expected to receive communion, at least according to the salt prayer the liturgical rite anticipated explicit child reception of food by the time that baptismal ceremony had reached its culmination with the celebration of Mass and communion to the newly baptized baby. As confirmation was gradually separated from baptism in the Roman rite and as communion too fell by the wayside, the 1,000 year tradition of infant communion simply fell into abeyance. As Robert Taft, SJ, has pointed out (hyperlinked within this article), Pope St. Pius X’s *Quam singulari* “mentions the age of reason not as required before communion *can* be received, but as the age when *the obligation* of satisfying the precept of annual confession and communion begins.” Communion of seven-year old children is an attempt not to thwart Jesus’s order for children to receive, at least when they become moral persons, it in no way has ever been taken as a rule in the magisterium that seven years old or the age of reason are somehow intrinsic or per se requirements for the capacity to receive the sacrament and its grace properly. The question, naturally, is how and under what circumstances the tradition of the first 1,000 years of Latin Christianity should be restored. The discussion of the Consilium Fathers at Vatican II in their reform of the rites of the Latin rite of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist, were entirely aware of this tradition in their minutes and publication, but the force of custom and psychological habit was admitted a pastoral impediment to restoring the first millennium of initiation. Essentially, the Fathers and experts of the Consilium rightly judged that feelings and psychological comfort with the familiar was simply too strong to want a jolting change back to the universal tradition and there we remain. Perhaps, in light of the *loci theologici*, including the supreme magisterium of the church, we do well to remember that the *locus musicus* par excellence to summarize today’s Latin opposition to child communion is best described by the greatest hit of Morris Albert:

Feelings, Nothing more than feelings

Trying to forget my Feelings of love, of love [for the AD 1614 Ritual]

Teardrops, Rolling down on my face

Trying to forget my Feelings of love

Feelings For all my life, I’ll feel it

I wish I’ve never met you, [*Sacramentarium Gelasianum and Rituale sacramentorum Romanum*], You’ll never come this way