

G. Worship, Prayer & Ritual | Sample Answer

Outline the similarities and the differences in the meaning of ‘sacrament’ for members of two different Christian denominations today (2014 Section G [b])

Christians celebrate sacraments as a way of receiving God’s grace. Different denominations celebrate different sacrament in different ways. The two Christian denominations that I have studied are the Catholic Church and the United Methodist Church. Both share some core beliefs; however, they also have significant differences in the way in which they celebrate sacraments.

Eucharist is the sacrament in which bread and wine are given to commemorate the last meal Jesus ate with his disciples before he was crucified. In the Roman Catholic church, Eucharist is the most important sacrament. “The Eucharist is the source and summit of Christian life” according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Catholics believe in transubstantiation, the doctrine that teaches when the priest consecrates the bread and wine, they become the true body and blood of Jesus. Communion brings believers closer to God and provides spiritual nourishment. Only Catholics in good standing are to receive communion in the Catholic Church.

In the Methodist Church, communion is believed to symbolize the body and blood of Jesus, helping believers to “be Christ’s body in the world today, redeemed by Christ’s blood”. Methodists commonly refer to communion as the “Lord’s Supper”. They teach that communion is “a holy meal of bread and wine that symbolises the body and blood of Christ”. For Methodists, communion is the time to remember the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; to experience gratitude for Christ and unity with other believers. Methodists have “open Communion”, given to all who come to the altar. Communion is viewed as a symbolic union with Christ.

Similar to Eucharist, beliefs about Baptism vary greatly from one denomination to the next. In the Catholic Church, Baptism is “the Church’s way of celebrating and enacting the embrace of God”. During the sacrament, the minister of the sacrament (usually the priest) says “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” while pouring water three times on the

infant's forehead. These words and the pouring of water makes the “washing away” of original sin of the infant happen, which is to say the infant is no longer separated from God. The infant is in a state of grace. Methodists baptize people of any age with water by sprinkling, pouring or immersing them.

The sacraments of the Christian churches are believed to be the visible or physical instruments of the delivery of God's grace, which is divine favour and divine love aided by the active participation in the traditions of ritual. Although the Catholic and Methodist Church share core beliefs it is obvious that clear differences exist in their sacramental celebrations.