

THESE LIVING WATERS: COMMON AGREEMENT ON MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF BAPTISM
A REPORT OF THE CATHOLIC REFORMED DIALOGUE IN UNITED STATES
2003 – 2007

THEOLOGICAL AFFIRMATIONS

A significant part of the Reformed-Catholic agreement on baptism includes common affirmations around these questions.

What Is Baptism?

Baptism is a sacrament of the church in which a person is effused with or immersed in water, accompanied by the Trinitarian formula that the person is baptized “in(to) the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19-20). Baptism is the first of the sacraments that a person receives. It is a means of grace through which God works in a person and that marks the reception of a person into the life and mission of Christ’s Church.

Why Does the Church Baptize?

The Church baptizes in obedience to the command of Christ (Matt. 28:19, Mk. 16:16) in order to initiate persons into the life of the Church.

What Does Baptism Effect or Signify?

Baptism is the divinely-appointed means of grace by which Christ acts through a visible sacramental act of the Church to signify the forgiveness of sins, regeneration, and being united to and engrafted into the Church, the Body of Christ.

How Is Christian Baptism Related to the Biblical Economy of Salvation?

Christian baptism is rooted in the biblical economy of salvation. The water of baptism echoes the water of creation, of the Flood, of the Red Sea during the Exodus, and of Jesus’ own baptism. Baptism is the sign of God’s covenant with the church, a covenant that not only stretches back to God’s covenant with Abraham and his descendants but also binds those who are members of this covenant to God as God’s children.

What is the relationship between baptism, faith, and discipleship?

Baptism is an important source for a life of Christian faith and discipleship. For those baptized as infants, faith and discipleship are the expected fruit of baptism. For those baptized as adolescents or adults, typically faith and discipleship precede baptism. Nevertheless, both infant and adult baptism are intended to nurture Christian faith and discipleship. Working with the Word of God, the sacraments – including baptism – nourish the faith of God’s people and motivate them to follow God’s will as Christ’s disciples.

What implications does baptism have for the church?

Baptism is the sacramental bond that effects membership in the visible Church. As an ecclesial sacrament it is also the basis for the real communion that Christians enjoy in their churches and among the various ecclesial communities as they strive to overcome separation and division in a more full and perfect communion.

Who May Baptize, and with What Means and Formula?

In order for a baptism to be valid, it must be administered by someone authorized to do so, using water and the Trinitarian formula. Typically, baptism is administered by an ordained

minister or priest, within a worship service, using water (either dipping the baptizand into the water or pouring or sprinkling the water on the baptizand), and following the command of Jesus to baptize people of all nations “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). The Roman Catholic Church allows non-ordained people to administer baptism and permits baptism to occur outside a worship service; Reformed churches do not allow such exceptions. Some Reformed churches allow – at least in practice – the use of alternate formulations of the Trinitarian formula (e.g., “in the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sanctifier”); other Reformed churches as well as the Roman Catholic Church do not. With one exception, the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed churches in this dialogue accept any baptism of a member of one of the other ecclesiastical bodies in this dialogue as long as the baptism was recognized as valid by the ecclesiastical communion in which the person was a member. The exception is that the Roman Catholic Church does not recognize as valid a baptism in which any of the following is lacking: intent to do what the Church does when she baptizes, use of water, and use of the Triune name as given in Matt. 28:19.

Why Do People Need to Be Baptized?

Although God created the human race righteous and holy, bearing God’s image, the fall of humanity into sin has so infected the race that all human beings are born sinful, alienated from God, and subject to death and misery. Sin has ruined our connection with God, other human beings, and other creatures, leaving us slaves to sin as well as guilty of it, and helpless to save ourselves from our plight. We therefore need the forgiveness and new life from God that are effected (according to the Roman Catholic Church) or signified (according to Reformed churches) by baptism.

Who Can Receive Baptism?

Anyone who, having been outside the household of faith, accepts the Christian faith and participates in catechetical instruction not only may, but should, be baptized. In addition, infants of believing parents should be baptized.

Why do we baptize children?

Since God’s promises and covenant extend to the children of those who believe in Jesus Christ, we administer baptism, the sign of the covenant, not only to those who come to faith as adults, but also to the infant children of those who believe in Jesus Christ and have established membership in a local parish or congregation. Such baptism recognizes the need of new birth on the part of all people, even infants. It also connects Christian baptism to circumcision, the sign of the covenant in ancient Israel. And it shows that infants, along with their believing parents, are included in the hope of the gospel and belong to the people of God.

Why should someone be baptized only once?

As Jesus Christ died once for all and was raised from the dead (Rom 6:10, Heb 9:28, 1 Pet 3:18), so too, the Christian is baptized only once, signifying union with Christ in his death and resurrection through the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit (Tit 3:5-7).

What is the relationship between baptism and confirmation and/or profession of faith?

Those who are baptized as adults are confirmed or profess their faith at the time of their baptism. Those baptized as children should, at an appropriate age, be confirmed or make an ecclesial profession of their faith. While we agree that baptism signifies new birth in water and the Holy Spirit and that no Christian is without the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9), we do not agree that

there is a distinct sacramental act to signify and impart the gift of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, all the baptized are heirs of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit given at Pentecost.

What is the relationship between baptism and election?

Those who are baptized are part of God's elect people, the Christian church. A person's being baptized is not a guarantee that the person is predestined or elected to salvation.

What is the relationship between baptism and grace?

Baptism is a sacrament of grace. Baptism signifies both the unmerited favor of God and the impartation of divine life that is God's self-communication to us.

What is the relationship between baptism and sanctification?

Baptism signifies the beginning of sanctification, the universal call to holiness for all those joined to Christ. The communication and reception of grace is always a transformative event for one's relation to God and consequently in one's own person.

What is the relationship between baptism and the assurance of salvation?

Baptism is a sacrament intended to provide assurance to God's people. For Roman Catholics, baptism is always the assurance of grace imparted and therefore of one's entry into God's salvific purposes. Therefore, all the baptized may take comfort and hope in the salvation yet to be consummated that God through his Word and Spirit initiates in baptism. For Reformed Christians, baptism is a means God uses to assure believers of God's forgiveness and of God's gracious presence.