

Extract from:

DIRECTORY FOR THE APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES AND NORMS ON ECUMENISM

Issued by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1993

IV

COMMUNION IN LIFE AND SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY AMONG THE BAPTIZED

A. THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM

- 92.** By the sacrament of baptism a person is truly incorporated into Christ and into his Church and is reborn to a sharing of the divine life. Baptism, therefore, constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who through it are reborn. Baptism, of itself, is the beginning, for it is directed towards the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ. It is thus ordered to the profession of faith, to the full integration into the economy of salvation, and to Eucharistic communion. Instituted by the Lord himself, baptism, by which one participates in the mystery of his death and resurrection, involves conversion, faith, the remission of sin, and the gift of grace.
- 93.** Baptism is conferred with water and with a formula which clearly indicates that baptism is done in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is therefore of the utmost importance for all the disciples of Christ that baptism be administered in this manner by all and that the various Churches and ecclesial Communities arrive as closely as possible at an agreement about its significance and valid celebration.
- 94.** It is strongly recommended that the dialogue concerning both the significance and the valid celebration of baptism take place between Catholic authorities and those of other Churches and ecclesial Communities at the diocesan or Episcopal Conference levels. Thus it should be possible to arrive at common statements through which they express mutual recognition of baptisms as well as procedures for considering cases in which a doubt may arise as to the validity of a particular baptism.
- 95.** In arriving at these expressions of common agreement, the following points should be kept in mind:
- a)* Baptism by immersion, or by pouring, together with the Trinitarian formula is, of itself, valid. Therefore, if the rituals, liturgical books or established customs of a Church or ecclesial Community prescribe either of these ways of baptism, the sacrament is to be considered valid unless there are serious reasons for doubting that the minister has observed the regulations of his/her own Community or Church.
 - b)* The minister's insufficient faith concerning baptism never of itself makes baptism invalid. Sufficient intention in a minister who baptizes is to be presumed, unless there is serious ground for doubting that the minister intended to do what the Church does.
 - c)* Wherever doubts arise about whether, or how water was used, respect for the sacrament and deference towards these ecclesial Communities require that serious investigation of the practice of the Community concerned be made before any judgment is passed on the validity of its baptism.
- 96.** According to the local situation and as occasion may arise, Catholics may, in common celebration with other Christians, commemorate the baptism which unites them, by renewing the engagement to undertake a full Christian life which they have assumed in the promises of their baptism, and by pledging to cooperate with the grace of the Holy Spirit in striving to heal the divisions which exist among Christians.

97. While by baptism a person is incorporated into Christ and his Church, this is only done in practice in a given Church or ecclesial Community. Baptism, therefore, may not be conferred jointly by two ministers belonging to different Churches or ecclesial Communities. Moreover, according to Catholic liturgical and theological tradition, baptism is celebrated by just one celebrant. For pastoral reasons, in particular circumstances the local Ordinary may sometimes permit, however, that a minister of another Church or ecclesial Community take part in the celebration by reading a lesson, offering a prayer, etc. Reciprocity is possible only if a baptism celebrated in another Community does not conflict with Catholic principles or discipline.

Comment:

What seems to be excluded here is the joint pouring of water and saying of the baptismal formula by two ministers. (We know of this occurring, but only on very rare occasions.) The rest of the service can be shared by ministers of two communities.

This is so whether the baptism takes place in the Catholic Church or in the church of the other partner. In Britain a large number of churches (including the Roman Catholic Church) have agreed on the mutual recognition of baptism, so it is certainly recognised that baptism celebrated in them "does not conflict with Catholic principles or discipline".

Sometimes there are problems in interchurch families when the first child is baptised in the Catholic Church with the participation of the minister of the other partner, and the couple foresee no difficulty about reversing the process for their second child. There have however been cases where the Catholic priest then refuses to take part in a baptism celebrated in another church. The Directory clearly seems to allow him to do so.

98. It is the Catholic understanding that godparents, in a liturgical and canonical sense, should themselves be members of the Church or ecclesial Community in which the baptism is being celebrated. They do not merely undertake a responsibility for the Christian education of the person being baptized (or confirmed) as a relation or friend; they are also there as representatives of a community of faith, standing as guarantees of the candidate's faith and desire for ecclesial communion.

- a) However, based on the common baptism and because of ties of blood or friendship, a baptized person who belongs to another ecclesial Community may be admitted as a witness to the baptism, but only together with a Catholic godparent. A Catholic may do the same for a person being baptized in another ecclesial Community.

Comment:

Many interchurch parents want their children to have godparents who represent both communities. The distinction made here between a godparent and a witness is a technical one which need not worry them unduly.

- b) Because of the close communion between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches, it is permissible for a just cause for an Eastern faithful to act as godparent; together with a Catholic godparent, at the baptism of a Catholic infant or adult, so long as there is provision for the Catholic education of the person being baptized, and it is clear that the godparent is a suitable one.

A Catholic is not forbidden to stand as godparent in an Eastern Orthodox Church, if he/she is so invited. In this case, the duty of providing for the Christian education binds in the first place the godparent who belongs to the Church in which the child is baptized.

99. Every Christian has the right for conscientious religious reasons, freely to decide to come into full Catholic communion. The work of preparing the reception of an individual who wishes to be received into full communion with the Catholic Church is of its nature distinct from ecumenical activity. The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults provides a formula for receiving such persons into full Catholic communion. However, in such cases, as well as in cases of mixed marriages, the Catholic authority may consider it

necessary to inquire as to whether the baptism already received was validly celebrated. The following recommendations should be observed in carrying out this inquiry.

a) There is no doubt about the validity of baptism as conferred in the various Eastern Churches. It is enough to establish the fact of the baptism. In these Churches the sacrament of confirmation (chrismation) is properly administered by the priest at the same time as baptism. There it often happens that no mention is made of confirmation in the canonical testimony of baptism. This does not give grounds for doubting that this sacrament was also conferred.

b) With regard to Christians from other Churches and ecclesial Communities, before considering the validity of baptism of an individual Christian, one should determine whether an agreement on baptism (as mentioned above, n. 94) has been made by the Churches and ecclesial Communities of the regions or localities involved and whether baptism has in fact been administered according to this agreement. It should be noted, however, that the absence of a formal agreement about baptism should not automatically lead to doubt about the validity of baptism.

c) With regard to these Christians, where an official ecclesiastical attestation has been given, there is no reason for doubting the validity of the baptism conferred in their Churches and ecclesial Communities unless, in a particular case, an examination clearly shows that a serious reason exists for having a doubt about one of the following: the matter and form and words used in the conferral of baptism, the intention of an adult baptized or the minister of the baptism.

d) If, even after careful investigation, a serious doubt persists about the proper administration of the baptism and it is judged necessary to baptize conditionally, the Catholic minister should show proper regard for the doctrine that baptism may be conferred only once by explaining to the person involved, both why in this case he is baptizing conditionally and what is the significance of the rite of conditional baptism. Furthermore, the rite of conditional baptism is to be carried out in private and not in public.

e) It is desirable that Synods of Eastern Catholic Churches and Episcopal Conferences issue guidelines for the reception into full communion of Christians baptized into other Churches and ecclesial Communities. Account is to be taken of the fact that they are not catechumens and of the degree of knowledge and practice of the Christian faith which they may have.

100. According to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, those adhering to Christ for the first time are normally baptized during the Paschal Vigil. Where the celebration of this Rite includes the reception into full communion of those already baptized, a clear distinction must be made between them and those who are not yet baptized.

101. In the present state of our relations with the ecclesial Communities of the Reformation of the 16th century, we have not yet reached agreement about the significance or sacramental nature or even of the administration of the sacrament of Confirmation. Therefore, under present circumstances, persons entering into full communion with the Catholic Church from one of these Communities are to receive the sacrament of Confirmation according to the doctrine and rite of the Catholic Church before being admitted to Eucharistic communion.