

## **VALIDITY OF BAPTISM LIST (2023)**

### **OFFICE OF DIVINE WORSHIP**

#### **Christian Baptism**

It is important to read a baptismal certificate thoroughly. On occasion, a certificate may read that the person has been baptized in the “holy catholic church”. This does not mean that they have been baptized Roman Catholic. The Roman Catholic norm for valid baptism must follow the proper matter and form. The “matter” is water baptism by immersion or pouring. The “form” is the Trinitarian formula (in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit) (canons 849, 850).

Always ensure that the exact ritual has been followed. If the rituals or established customs of a church or community prescribe baptism by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling together with the Trinitarian formula, doubt can only arise if it happens that the minister did not observe the regulations of his or her own church or community or if there is explicit renunciation of intention to do what the Catholic Church does at baptism.

Careful discernment must be exercised in each case when evaluating the validity of the supposed baptism of an individual seeking to be Catholic. OCIA directors and teachers should take counsel with their parish priests. If there are doubts or questions about validity, they may be referred to the Office of Divine Worship.

If an individual is from a church with a valid baptism and wishes to enter into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church, he/she will need to make a profession of faith and receive the sacrament of Confirmation after a suitable period of catechesis.

#### **Valid Confirmations**

If an individual is from a church with a valid baptism and confirmation (e.g., one of the Orthodox churches) and wishes to enter into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church, he/she will need to make a profession of faith only after a suitable period of catechesis.

#### **Individuals from a Church with an Invalid Baptism**

If an individual is from a church with an invalid or no baptism and wishes to enter into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church, he/she is to be regarded as a catechumen and will need to enter into the steps and periods of the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults. He/she is fully initiated at the Easter Vigil.

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### **Children**

If a child is not baptized and is under the age of reason (7 years old), he/she may be baptized and enrolled into parish formation with children his/her age and consequently receive Confirmation and Holy Eucharist with them.

If a child is older than 7 years of age, he/she is to enter the catechumenate. He/She is fully initiated at the Easter Vigil.

If a child's parents are from an Eastern rite, he/she remains a member of the rite of his/her parents.

Children (under the age of 7) of adults received into the Church and validly baptized in another church in communion with the Church are to be enrolled in the parish religious education program and undergo sacramental preparation with others in their age group. When they receive their first Holy Communion, they will make a profession of faith with the other children. It is not necessary for them to add the statement found in the RCIA rite 491. Please note in the first Communion registry that they have made their profession of faith. All pertinent Office for Divine Worship information about their baptism should be noted in the baptismal registry with a note that they made their profession of faith at their first Communion. Make sure to include the date.

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The following list of ecclesial communions and Churches, as well as non-Christian groups, is not exhaustive considering the many sects that sometimes form in short periods of time.

|    | <b>Group</b>  | <b>Valid</b> | <b>Invalid</b> | <b>Discretion<br/>Strongly<br/>Advised</b> | <b>Notes</b>   |
|----|---|--------------|----------------|--|--|
| 1. | All Eastern Churches in Communion with Rome                               | √            |                |  | See the list below this chart.   |
| 2. | All Eastern non-Catholic (Orthodox) Churches: Not in Communion with Rome  | √            |                |  | Sacrament of Confirmation recognized.<br>See the list below this chart.  |
| 3. | All non-Christian “Baptisms” and All non-Christian groups and communities |              | √              |  | Jewish, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Baha’i, Vedanta Society, and others.  |
| 4. | Adventists  | √            |                | !!   | Generally considered valid in the USA. Groups in other countries may not administer valid baptism. Also, there are some groups in the USA that have administered valid baptism only at certain times in their history. Water baptism is by immersion with the Trinitarian formula. Baptism is given at the age of reason. A dedication ceremony is given to infants. The two ceremonies are separate. (Many Protestant religions have the dedication ceremony or other ceremony, which is not a baptism. If the church has the dedication ceremony, baptism is generally not conferred until the age of reason or until the approximate age of 13). Inquiry must be made on an individual basis. |

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| 5.  | African Methodist Episcopal and African Methodist Episcopal Zion | √ |   |    | Baptism with water by sprinkling, pouring, or dunking. Trinitarian form is used. There is, sometimes, an open-door ceremony, which is not baptism.   |
| 6.  | Amana Church Society   |   | √ |    |  |
| 7.  | American Ethical Union   |   | √ |    |  |
| 8.  | American (United American) Catholic                              | √ | √ | !! | Sacrament of Confirmation is doubtful.   |
| 9.  | Amish  | √ |   | !! | This is coupled with Mennonites. No infant baptism. The rite of baptism <i>seems valid</i> . Inquiry required.   |
| 10. | Anglican/Church of England                                       | √ |   |    |  |
| 11. | Apostolic Church (Apostolic Overcoming Holy Church of God)       |   | √ |    |  |
| 12. | Apostolic Faith Mission  |   | √ |    |  |
| 13. | Armenian Apostolic   |   | √ |    |  |
| 14. | Assembly of God  | √ |   |    | A dedication ceremony is possible. Infants are not customarily baptized. Baptism through water takes place when a person is mature enough to understand its implications. The method of baptism is not outlined but appears valid. Inquiry required. |
| 15. | Baha'i Faith   |   | √ |    | Non-Christian sect.  |
| 16. | Baptists   | √ | √ | !! | No infant baptism. There is a ceremony of dedication. Valid baptism may take place at the approximate age of 13. (Some Southern Baptist churches do not believe in baptism. Inquiry must be made on an individual basis.)                            |

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| 17. | Bohemian Free Thinkers                             |   | √ |    | There is no Trinitarian belief. No baptism of any kind is practiced.  |
| 18. | Brethren   |   | √ |    |   |
| 19. | Children of God (“The Family”)                     |   | √ |    |   |
| 20. | Chinese Catholic Baptism                           | √ |   |    | Sacrament of Confirmation recognized.   |
| 21. | Chinese Christian                                  | √ |   |    |   |
| 22. | Christadelphians                                   |   | √ |    | Non-Christian sect.<br>Belief is in spiritual rebirth by immersion. There is no belief in the Trinity, but in one God, Jesus, who was the son of God, but not God the Son. There is no Trinitarian formula, since there is no belief in the Trinity.  |
| 23. | Christian and Missionary Alliance                  | √ | √ | !! | No belief in infant baptism, but only to those who give evidence of repentance and new birth.<br>Baptism is seldom conferred before the age of 12. It is conferred by immersion. It is given upon the personal confession of Christ as the Savior of this person. In the past, C&MA baptism has been listed as both valid and invalid. Based on correspondence with the denomination (Canada, 1991; US, 2009), it seems that the norm is now to baptize using the Trinitarian formula with water. Baptisms in this denomination are valid, but inquiry should be made on an individual basis. |
| 24. | Christian Church                                   | √ |   |    |   |
| 25. | Christian Church, Disciples of Christ              | √ |   |    |   |
| 26. | Christian Community (Disciples of Rudolph Steiner) |   | √ |    |   |
| 27. | Christian Fellowship                               | √ |   |    |   |

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| 28. | Christian Reformed Church in North America             | √ |   |    | Valid per USCCB agreement, November 2010.   |
| 29. | Christian Scientists (aka Church of Christ, Scientist) |   | √ |    | Non-Christian sect.<br>The mother “church” of all Christian Science Churches states: “Baptism is an individual spiritual experience. It is not a religious rite or ceremony performed by an ordained minister or priest.”<br>Their textbook states that it is a purification by spirit. A letter from the board of directors states that there is no baptismal ritual in the Christian science movement. In other words, they have no true baptism. |
| 30. | Christians of the Universalist Brotherhood             |   | √ |    |   |
| 31. | Church of the Brethren (formerly called Dunkers)       | √ |   |    |   |
| 32. | Church of Christ                                       | √ |   |    |   |
| 33. | Church of Christ, Scientist (aka Christian Scientists) |   | √ |    | See note above for “Christian Scientists”   |
| 34. | Church of Daniel’s Band                                |   | √ |    |   |
| 35. | Church of David’s Band                                 |   | √ |    |   |
| 36. | Church of Divine Science                               |   | √ |    | The ceremony is a christening ceremony, but not one of baptism. There is no change brought about in the person who is blessed. This church does not believe in original sin, so that the child is only “blessed” when received into the church.   |
| 37. | Church of God -Of Prophecy                             | √ |   | !! | There is a public baby dedication with no sacramental significance. Baptism is conferred later  |

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|     | -Of Anderson, Indiana<br>-Of Cleveland,<br>Tennessee<br>-And of Various<br>Others |   |   |    | by immersion and with the Trinitarian formula. Baptism is conferred when the individual asks for it.   |
| 38. | Church of Illumination  |   | √ |    |  |
| 39. | Church of Jesus<br>Christ of Latter Day<br>Saints (aka Mormons)                   |   | √ | !! | This “church” used to appear on the list of valid baptisms. See below for explanation, per the Dicastery (formerly the Congregation) for the Doctrine of the Faith.                |
| 40. | Church of the<br>Nazarene   | √ |   |    |  |
| 41. | Church of Revelation  |   | √ |    |  |
| 42. | Church of the New<br>Jerusalem  |   | √ |    |  |
| 43. | Church of the<br>Scientology  |   | √ |    | Non-Christian sect.  |
| 44. | Classic Pentecostals<br>(not to be confused<br>with Pentecostal<br>churches)      | √ |   | !! | See “Pentecostal Churches” below.  |
| 45. | Community of Pope<br>Pius X (Lefebvre)  | √ |   |    | Sacrament of Confirmation recognized.  |
| 46. | Congregational<br>Church  | √ |   |    |  |
| 47. | Disciples of Christ   | √ |   |    |  |
| 48. | Disciples and<br>Christians   | √ |   | !! | There is a dedication service; no infant baptism; Trinitarian formula used in baptism by immersion at an older age. These churches are sometimes known as the Disciples of Christ. |
| 49. | Dutch Reformed  | √ |   |    |  |
| 50. | Eastern Non-Catholics<br>(Orthodox)   | √ |   |    | Sacrament of Confirmation recognized.<br>See list below.   |

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|     |   |   |   |  |   |
| 51. | Episcopalian                                | √ |   |  |   |
| 52. | Erieside Church                             |   | √ |  |   |
| 53. | Evangelical Churches                        | √ |   |  |   |
| 54. | Evangelical Church of Covenant              | √ |   |  |   |
| 55. | Evangelical United Brethren                 | √ |   |  | Members are not received into this “church” unless they have been baptized. Assurance of baptism is required before membership is extended. There is a dedication ceremony. Baptism by water appears to be valid and is generally done by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling. The Trinitarian form is used.  |
| 56. | General Assembly of Spiritualists           |   | √ |  | Non-Christian sect.   |
| 57. | Hephzibah Faith Missionary Association      |   | √ |  |   |
| 58. | House of David Church                       |   | √ |  |   |
| 59. | Iglesia ni Kristo (Philippines)             |   | √ |  |   |
| 60. | Independent Church of Filipino Christians   |   | √ |  |   |
| 61. | International Council of Community Churches | √ |   |  |   |
| 62. | Jehovah’s Witnesses                         |   | √ |  | Non-Christian sect. It appears that the Jehovah’s Witnesses are fundamentalists, and Unitarians. The Divinity of Christ is explicitly denied, as is the existence of the Holy Spirit as a person. In the ceremony of “baptism,” there is a discourse. It is really a symbol of dedication rather than baptism. The person enters the water, but his name is not called out. No words or formulae are pronounced while the person is submerged |



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|     |   |   |   |    | or immersed in the water. If matter and form are valid, the intention of the minister is to baptize the person into the Jehovah's Witness sect, thereby not intending that the person be baptized in the name of the triune God. This is evident since the Divinity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit are denied. These latter refer simply to a power exerted by Jehovah, who alone is God. |
| 63. | Liberal Catholic Church   | √ |   |    |   |
| 64. | Lutheran<br>-Missouri Synod<br>-Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (ELCA)<br>-Wisconsin Synod | √ |   |    |   |
| 65. | Masons/Freemasonry  |   | √ |    | Non-Christian sect. No baptism administered.  |
| 66. | Mennonites (some)   | √ | √ | !! | Doubtful. No infant baptism. The rite of baptism <i>seems valid</i> . Inquiry required.   |
| 67. | Methodist   | √ |   |    |   |
| 68. | Metropolitan Church Association   |   | √ |    |   |
| 69. | Missionary Hill   | √ |   |    |   |
| 70. | Moravians   | √ | √ | !! | Doubtful. Inquiry required.   |
| 71. | Mormons (aka Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints)   |   | √ | !! | This "church" used to appear on the list of valid baptisms. See below for explanation, and #39 above.   |
| 72. | National David Spiritual Temple of Christ Union   |   | √ |    |   |
| 73. | National Spiritualist Association   |   | √ |    |   |
| 74. | New Apostolic Church  | √ |   |    |   |

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| 75. | New Church of Mr. Emmanuel Swedenborg                                   |   | √ |    |  |
| 76. | New Jerusalem Church (Swedenborg or “New Age” Church or The New Church) |   | √ |    |  |
| 77. | Old Catholic  | √ |   |    |  |
| 78. | Old Roman Catholic  | √ |   |    |  |
| 79. | Orthodox Churches   | √ |   |    | Sacrament of Confirmation recognized. See list below this chart.   |
| 80. | Pentecostal Churches (“Jesus Only” or “Oneness”                         |   | √ | !! | Invalid baptism because of Unitarian formula. “Oneness” Pentecostals deny the Trinity. This is found in the official book of the Pentecostal Assembly. Yet baptism is considered necessary for salvation and is done by immersion. Individual investigation required in each case, as some may have been validly baptized. |
| 81. | Peoples Church of Chicago   |   | √ |    |  |
| 82. | Plymouth Brethren (Some communities)                                    |   | √ |    |  |
| 83. | Polish National Church  | √ |   |    |  |
| 84. | Presbyterian Church (USA)   | √ |   |    | Valid per USCCB agreement, November 2010.  |
| 85. | Quakers (Society of Friends)  |   | √ |    | No baptism.  |
| 86. | Reformed Churches   | √ |   |    |  |
| 87. | Reformed Church in America  | √ |   |    | Valid per USCCB agreement, November 2010.  |
| 88. | Reunification Church (Moonies)  |   | √ |    |  |

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| 89.  | Salvation Army                        |   | √ |    | The Salvation Army Headquarters state that they do not have a baptismal service, but a religious ceremony called a dedication service of children, and also a cradle role. A certificate is issued for the dedication service but is not to be confused with water baptism. |
| 90.  | Seventh Day Adventist                 | √ | √ | !! | Doubtful because of baptismal practices which are not uniform. Careful investigation is required for each case. Some communities have valid baptisms, while others do not.  |
| 91.  | Shakers (United Society of Believers) |   | √ |    | No baptism.   |
| 92.  | Spiritualist Church                   |   | √ |    |   |
| 93.  | Swedenborg (New Age) (The New Church) |   | √ |    |   |
| 94.  | Unitarians                            |   | √ |    | This sect denies the Trinity.   |
| 95.  | Unification Church                    |   | √ |    |   |
| 96.  | United Church                         | √ |   |    |   |
| 97.  | United Church of Australia            | √ |   |    |   |
| 98.  | United Church of Canada               | √ |   |    |   |
| 99.  | United Church of Christ               | √ |   |    | Valid per USCCB agreement, November 2010.   |
| 100. | United Reformed                       | √ |   |    |   |
| 101. | United Society of Believers (Shakers) |   | √ |    | No baptism.   |
| 102. | Universal Emancipation Church         |   | √ |    |   |
| 103. | Universalists                         |   | √ |    | Universalists and Unitarians voted to merge in May of 1960, with the union taking effect in 1961. Even before that time, Universalists favored ultimate salvation and rejected original sin. With time, they denied the Trinity   |

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|      |             |   |   |  | and the Divinity of Jesus. No valid baptism in either church. |
| 104. | Waldensians | √ |   |  |   |
| 105. | Word Harves |   | √ |  |   |
| 106. | Zion        | √ |   |  |   |

### **Eastern Churches**

The following has been compiled to assist in determining the canonical status of someone baptized or confirmed in an Eastern Church, some of which are in communion with the Roman Catholic Church and some of which are not. This list is not exhaustive. If you have questions, please contact the Office of Divine Worship. \*Please see the Special Note below.

#### **1. Eastern Churches in Communion with the Roman Catholic Church**

Baptism and Confirmation conferred in these Eastern Churches are always valid. It is sufficient to establish the fact that Baptism was administered. Valid Confirmation is always administered at the same time as Baptism. Usually, the child has also received First Communion at the time of Baptism.

The Eastern Churches in Communion with the Roman Catholic Church include:

##### **The Alexandrian Rite**

- The Coptic Catholic Church
- The Ethiopian Catholic Church

##### **The Antiochene Rite (West Syrian)**

- The Malankara (Malankarese) Catholic Church
- The Maronite Catholic Church
- The Syrian (Syriac) Catholic Church

##### **The Armenian Rite**

- The Armenian Holy Apostolic Church

### **The Byzantine Rite**

- The Melkite Catholic Church
- The Byzantine Slovak Catholic Church
- The Byzantine Ukrainian Catholic Church
- The Albanian Catholic Church
- The Byelorussian Catholic Church
- The Bulgarian Catholic Church
- The Greek Catholic Church
- The Italo-Albanian Catholic Church
- The Byzantine Yugoslav Catholic Church
- The Russian Catholic Church
- The Byzantine-Romanian Catholic Church
- The Ruthenian Catholic Church

### **The Chaldean Rite (East Syrian)**

- The Chaldean Catholic Church
- The Syro-Malabar Catholic Church

**\*Special Note:** Children who have celebrated the full initiation rite in the Eastern Church are to be further catechized concerning the sacrament of the Eucharist. The families should be encouraged to enroll them in the parish religious education program and to continue to bring their child to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

If a person of any of the above rites wishes to join the Latin rite (Roman Catholic) they will need to obtain permission of the Holy See. This is to be done outside the OCIA. Please contact the Chancery for assistance in this matter.

When a husband or wife is of a different rite, one may change to the rite of the other. If the marriage ends, the person who changed rites may return to their original rite.

## **2. Eastern Churches Not in Communion with the Roman Catholic Church**

The rites of initiation conferred by the Eastern Churches not in communion with the Roman Catholic Church are considered valid rites. The Churches included in this group are any of the (Eastern) Orthodox Churches and the Assyrian Churches of the East (also known as the Nestorian Church).

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An individual who wishes to enter into the Roman Catholic Church from an Eastern Church not in communion with Rome does not become a Latin rite Catholic but rather a member of the ritual rite indicated by their baptism. (E.g.: a Russian Orthodox becomes a Russian Catholic; a Syrian Orthodox a Syrian Catholic, and so forth.)

The Roman Catholic Church recognizes all of the sacraments of the Eastern rites. A child receives all of the rites of initiation (Eucharist and Confirmation) when baptized so a person should never be reconfirmed. Instead, after catechesis, these persons would simply make a profession of faith.

**THE QUESTION OF THE VALIDITY OF BAPTISM CONFERRED IN THE  
CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS [AKA MORMONS]**

By Fr Luis Ladaria, S.J.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has given a negative response to a "*Dubium*" regarding the validity of Baptism conferred in the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, more commonly known as the *Mormons*. Given that this decision changes the past practice of not questioning the validity of such Baptism, it seems appropriate to explain the reasons that have led to this decision and to the resulting change of practice.

**Doctrinal errors usually do not invalidate baptism**

This explanation becomes even more necessary if one considers that errors of a doctrinal nature have never been considered sufficient to question the validity of the sacrament of Baptism. In fact, already in the middle of the third century Pope Stephen I, opposing the decisions of an African synod in 256 A.D., reaffirmed that the ancient practice of the imposition of hands as a sign of repentance should be maintained, but not the rebaptism of a heretic who enters the Catholic Church. In this way, the name of Christ attains great honor for faith and sanctification because whoever is baptized in the name of Christ, wherever that has taken place, has received the grace of Christ (cf. Denzinger-Hüngerer [DH] 110-111). The same principle was upheld by the Synod of Arles in 314 (cf. DH 123). Well-known also is the struggle of St Augustine against the Donatists. The Bishop of Hippo affirms that the validity of the sacrament depends neither on the personal sanctity of the minister nor on his belonging to the Church.

**Right intention is the intention to do what the Church wants, what Christ wants**

Even non-Catholics can validly administer Baptism. In every case, however, it is the Baptism of the Catholic Church, which does not belong to those who separate themselves from her but to the Church from which they have separated themselves (cf. Augustine, *On Baptism* 1, 12,9). This validity is possible because Christ is the true minister of the sacrament: Christ is the one who truly baptizes, whether it is Peter or Paul or Judas who baptizes (cf. Augustine, *Treatise on the Gospel of John* VI, 1,7; cf. CCC n. 1127). The Council of Trent, confirming this tradition, defined that Baptism administered by heretics in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, with the intention of doing what the Catholic Church does is true Baptism (cf. DH 1617).

**The validity of doubtful baptism is presumed especially in the case of marriage, as in the case of the Christians of Nagasaki**

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The most recent documents of the Catholic Church maintain the same teaching. The Code of Canon Law prescribes that those who have been baptized in non-Catholic ecclesial communities (as long as there is no doubt regarding the matter or the form or the intention of the minister or of the person being baptized) should not be baptized again (cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 869 §2). Intrinsically connected to this problem is that of who can be the minister of Baptism in the Catholic Church. According to the Code, in cases of necessity, anyone can baptize, provided the intention is correct (cf. can. 861 §2). The Code of Canon Law confirms the fundamental elements of Tridentine teaching and makes more explicit what is the required correct intention: "The intention required is to will to do what the Church does when she baptizes. The Church finds the reason for this possibility in the universal saving will of God and the necessity of Baptism for salvation" (CCC, n. 1256. Evidently, the necessity of Baptism spoken of here is not to be understood in an absolute sense; cf. *ibid.*, nn. 1257-1261). Precisely because of the necessity of Baptism for salvation the Catholic Church has had the tendency of broadly recognizing this right intention in the conferring of this sacrament, even in the case of a false understanding of Trinitarian faith, for example in the case of the Arians.

Taking into account this deeply-rooted practice of the Church, applied without any doubt as to the multiplicity of non-Catholic Christian communities emerging from the so-called Reform of the 16th century, it is easily understood that when there appeared in the United States the religious movement of Joseph Smith around 1830, in which the matter and the words of the form of Baptism were correctly utilized, this Baptism was considered valid, analogously to the Baptism of so many other non-Catholic ecclesial communities. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, according to their teaching, received the priesthood of Aaron in 1829. Given the circumstances of the Church in the United States in the 19th century and the means of social communication at that time, even though the new religious movement gained a considerable number of followers, the knowledge that ecclesiastical authorities could have had of the doctrinal errors that were professed in this new group was necessarily very limited throughout the entire century. For the practical cases that emerged there was applied the response of the Holy Office of 9 September 1868 given for the Christian communities of Japan which had remained isolated and without priests from the time of the persecution at the beginning of the 17th century. According to this response: 1) those persons about whom there was doubt whether they were validly baptized should be considered Christians; 2) this Baptism should be considered valid with regard to the validity of marriage (Gasparri, *Fontes*, IV, n. 1007).

### **Current doubts about the validity of Mormon baptism**

In the 20th century, the Catholic Church became more aware of the Trinitarian errors that the teaching proposed by Smith contained, though he used the traditional terms, and therefore more and more doubts spread about the validity of the Baptism conferred by the Mormons, in spite of the fact that the form, as far as the substance of the terminology goes, coincided with that used by the Church. As a result, almost imperceptibly there developed difference of practice, insofar as those who had a certain



personal knowledge of the teaching of the Mormons considered their Baptism invalid, while the common practice continued of applying the traditional principle of the presumption in favor of the validity of such Baptism since there was no official norm in this regard. In recent years, as a result of a request from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Bishops' Conference of the United States undertook a detailed study of this delicate issue with the hope of coming to a definitive conclusion. On its part the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith undertook a new examination of the material that came from the United States and thus was able to resolve the proposed question.

What are the reasons which now led to this negative position regarding the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, which seems different from the position of the Catholic Church throughout the centuries?

### **Huge divergence on Trinity and baptism invalidates the intention of the Mormon minister of baptism and of the one to be baptized**

According to the traditional doctrine of the Catholic Church, there are four requirements for the valid administration of the sacrament of Baptism: the matter, the form, the intention of the minister, and the right disposition of the recipient. Let us examine briefly each of these four elements in the teaching and practice of the Mormons.

**I. The Matter.** On this point, there is no problem. Water is used. The Mormons practice Baptism by immersion (cf. Doctrine and Covenants [D&C] 20:74), which is one of the ways of celebrating Baptism (application of the matter) which is accepted by the Catholic Church.

**II. The Form.** We have seen that in the texts of the Magisterium on Baptism there is a reference to the invocation of the Trinity (to the sources already mentioned, the Fourth Lateran Council could be added here [DH 8021]). The formula used by the Mormons might seem at first sight to be a Trinitarian formula. The text states: "*Being commissioned by Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*" (cf. D&C 20:73). The similarities with the formula used by the Catholic Church are at first sight obvious, but in reality they are only apparent. There is not in fact a fundamental doctrinal agreement. There is not a true invocation of the Trinity because the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, according to the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, are not the three persons in which subsists the one Godhead, but three gods who form one divinity. One is different from the other, even though they exist in perfect harmony (Joseph F. Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* [TPJSI], Salt Lake City: Desert Book, 1976, p. 372). The very word divinity has only a functional, not a substantial content because the divinity originates when the three gods decided to unite and form the divinity to bring about human salvation (*Encyclopaedia of Mormonism* [EM], New York: Macmillan, 1992, cf. Vol. 2, p. 552). This divinity and man share the same nature

and they are substantially equal. God the Father is an exalted man, native of another planet, who has acquired his divine status through a death similar to that of human beings, the necessary way to divinization (cf. TPJS, pp. 345-346). God the Father has relatives and this is explained by the doctrine of infinite regression of the gods who initially were mortal (cf. TPJS, p. 373). God the Father has a wife, the Heavenly Mother, with whom he shares the responsibility of creation. They procreate sons in the spiritual world. Their firstborn is Jesus Christ, equal to all men, who has acquired his divinity in a pre-mortal existence. Even the Holy Spirit is the son of heavenly parents. The Son and the Holy Spirit were procreated after the beginning of the creation of the world known to us (cf. EM, Vol. 2, p. 961). Four gods are directly responsible for the universe, three of whom have established a covenant and thus form the divinity.

As is easily seen, to the similarity of titles there does not correspond in any way a doctrinal content that can lead to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The words Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, have for the Mormons a meaning totally different from the Christian meaning. The differences are so great that one cannot even consider that this doctrine is a heresy which emerged out of a false understanding of the Christian doctrine. The teaching of the Mormons has a completely different matrix. We do not find ourselves, therefore, before the case of the validity of Baptism administered by heretics, affirmed already from the first Christian centuries, nor of Baptism conferred in non-Catholic ecclesial communities, as noted in Canon 869 §2.

**III. The Intention of the Celebrating Minister.** Such doctrinal diversity, regarding the very notion of God, prevents the minister of the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* from having the intention of doing what the Catholic Church does when she confers Baptism, that is, doing what Christ willed her to do when he instituted and mandated the sacrament of Baptism. This becomes even more evident when we consider that in their understanding Baptism was not instituted by Christ but by God and began with Adam (cf. Book of Moses 6:64). Christ simply commanded the practice of this rite; but this was not an innovation. It is clear that the intention of the Church in conferring Baptism is certainly to follow the mandate of Christ (cf. Mt 28,19) but at the same time to confer the sacrament that Christ had instituted. According to the New Testament, there is an essential difference between the Baptism of John and Christian Baptism. The Baptism of the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, which originated not in Christ but already at the beginning of creation (James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* [AF], Salt Lake City: Desert Book, 1990, cf. pp. 110-111), is not Christian Baptism; indeed, it denies its newness. The Mormon minister, who must necessarily be the "priest" (cf. D&C 20:38-58.107:13.14.20), therefore radically formed in their own doctrine, cannot have any other intention than that of doing what the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* does, which is quite different in respect to what the Catholic Church intends to do when it baptizes, that is, the conferral of the sacrament of Baptism instituted by Christ, which means participation in his death and resurrection (cf. Rom 6,3-11; Col 2,12-13).

We can note two other differences, not as fundamental as the preceding one, but which also have their importance:

A) According to the Catholic Church, Baptism cancels not only personal sins but also original sin, and therefore even infants are baptized for the remission of sins (cf. the essential texts of the Council of Trent, DH 1513-1515). This remission of original sin is not accepted by the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, which denies the existence of this sin and therefore baptizes only persons who have the use of reason and are at least eight years old, excluding the mentally handicapped (cf. AF, pp. 113-116). In fact, the practice of the Catholic Church in conferring Baptism on infants is one of the main reasons for which the Mormons say that the Catholic Church apostatized in the first centuries so that the sacraments celebrated by it are all invalid.

B) If a believer baptized in the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, after renouncing his or her faith or having been excommunicated, wants to return, he or she must be rebaptized (cf. AF, pp. 129-131).

Even regarding these last elements it is clear that the Baptism of Mormons cannot be considered valid; since it is not Christian Baptism, the minister cannot have the intention of doing what the Catholic does.

**IV. The Disposition of the Recipient.** The person to be baptized, who already has the use of reason, has been instructed according to the very strict norms of the teaching and faith of the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. It must be maintained therefore that one cannot think that the Baptism received by that person is anything different from what he was taught. It does not seem possible that the person would have the same disposition that the Catholic Church requires for the Baptism of adults.

**Difference of views: Mormons hold that there is no real Trinity, no original sin, that Christ did not institute baptism**

Summing up, we can say: The Baptism of the Catholic Church and that of the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* differ essentially, both for what concerns faith in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in whose name Baptism is conferred, and for what concerns the relationship to Christ who instituted it. As a result of all this, it is understood that the Catholic Church has to consider it invalid, that is to say, cannot consider true Baptism, the rite given that name by the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints*.

It is equally necessary to underline that the decision of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is a response to a particular question regarding the Baptism of Mormons and obviously does not indicate a judgment on those who are members of the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. Furthermore, Catholics and Mormons often find themselves working together on a range of problems regarding the common good of the entire human race. It can be hoped therefore that through further studies, dialogue and good will, there can be progress in reciprocal understanding and mutual respect.

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