**BAPTISM**

I. THE INSTITUTION OF BAPTISM

1. Christian baptism is rooted in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, in his death and in

his resurrection. It is in corporation into Christ, who is the crucified and risen Lord; it is

entry into the New Covenant between God and God’s people. Baptism is a gift of God,

and is administered in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. St Matthew

records that the risen Lord, when sending his disciples into the world, commanded them

to baptize (Matt. 28:18–20). The universal practice of baptism by the apostolic Church

from its earliest days is attested in letters of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles,

and the writings of the Fathers. The churches today continue this practice as a rite of

commitment to the Lord who bestows his grace upon his people.

II. THE MEANING OF BAPTISM

2. Baptism is the sign of new life through Jesus Christ. It unites the one baptized with

Christ and with his people. The New Testament scriptures and the liturgy of the Church

unfold the meaning of baptism in various images which express the riches of Christ and

the gifts of his salvation. These images are some- times linked with the symbolic uses of

water in the Old Testament. Baptism is participation in Christ’s death and resurrection

(Rom. 6:3–5; Col. 2:12); a washing away of sin (I Cor. 6:11); a new birth (John3:5); an

enlightenment by Christ (Eph. 5:14); a re- clothing in Christ (Gal. 3:27); a renewal by the

Spirit(Titus 3:5); the experience of salvation from the flood(I Peter 3:20–21); an exodus

from bondage (I Cor. 10:1–2) and a liberation into a new humanity in which barriers of

division whether of sex or race or social status are transcended (Gal. 3:27-28; I Cor. 12:13).

The images are many but the reality is one.

*A. Participation in Christ’s Death and Resurrection*

3. Baptism means participating in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus

went down into the river Jordan and was baptized in solidarity with sinners in order to

fulfil all righteousness (Matt. 3:15). This baptism led Jesus along the way of the Suffering

Servant, made manifest in his sufferings, death and resurrection (Mark 10:38–40, 45). By

baptism, Christians are immersed in the liberating death of Christ where their sins are

buried, where the “old Adam” is crucified with Christ, and where the power of sin is

broken. Thus those baptized are no longer slaves to sin, but free. Fully identified with the

death of Christ, they are buried with him and are raised here and now to a new life in the

power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, confident that they will also ultimately be one

with him in a resurrection like his (Rom. 6:3–11; Col. 2:13,3:1; Eph. 2:5-6).

*B. Conversion, Pardoning and Cleansing*

4. The baptism which makes Christians partakers of the mystery of Christ’s death and

resurrection implies confession of sin and conversion of heart. The baptism administered

by John was itself a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Mark 1:4). The New

Testament underlines the ethical implications of baptism by representing it as an ablution

which washes the body with pure water, a cleansing of the heart of all sin, and an act of

justification (Heb. 10:22; I Peter3:21; Acts 22:16; I Cor. 6:11). Thus those baptized are

pardoned, cleansed and sanctified by Christ, and are given as part of their baptismal

experience a new ethical orientation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

*C. The Gift of the Spirit*

5. The Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of people before, in and after their baptism. It

is the same Spirit who revealed Jesus as the Son (Mark 1:10–11) and who empowered and

united the disciples at Pentecost(Acts 2). God bestows upon all baptized persons the

anointing and the promise of the Holy Spirit, marks them with a seal and implants in their

hearts the first instalment of their inheritance as sons and daughters of God. The Holy

Spirit nurtures the life of faith in their hearts until the final deliverance when they will

enter into its full possession, to the praise of the glory of God (II Cor. 1:21—22; Eph.

1:13-14).

*D. Incorporation into the Body of Christ*

6. Administered in obedience to our Lord, baptism is a sign and seal of our common

discipleship. Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each

other and with the Church of every time and place. Our common baptism, which unites us

to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity. We are one people and are called to

confess and serve one Lord in each place and in all the world. The union with Christ

which we share through baptism has important implications for Christian unity. “There

is... one baptism, one God and Father of us all ...” (Eph. 4:4—6).When baptismal unity is

realized in one holy, catholic, apostolic Church, a genuine Christian witness can be made

to the healing and reconciling love of God. Therefore, our one baptism into Christ

constitutes a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their

fellowship.

COMMENTARY (6)

*The inability of the churches mutually to recognize their various practices of baptism as sharing in the one baptism, and their actual dividedness in spite of mutual baptismal recognition, have given dramatic visibility to the broken witness of the Church. The readiness of the churches in some places and times to allow differences of sex, race, or social status to divide the body of Christ has further called into question genuine baptismal unity of the Christian community(Gal. 3:27—28) and has seriously compromised its witness. The need to recover baptismal unity is at the heart of the ecumenical task as it is central for the realization of genuine partnership within the Christian communities.*

*E. The Sign of the Kingdom*

7. Baptism initiates the reality of the new life given in the midst of the present world. It

gives participation in the community of the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of the Kingdom of

God and of the life of the world to come. Through the gifts of faith, hope and love,

baptism has a dynamic which embraces the whole of life, extends to all nations, and

anticipates the day when every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of

God the Father.

III. BAPTISM AND FAITH

8. Baptism is both God’s gift and our human response to that gift. It looks towards a

growth into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13). The necessity

of faith for the reception of the salvation embodied and set forth in baptism is

acknowledged by all churches. Personal commitment is necessary for responsible

membership in the body of Christ.

9. Baptism is related not only to momentary experience, but to life-long growth into

Christ. Those baptized are called upon to reflect the glory of the Lord as they are

transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit, into his likeness, with ever increasing

splendour (II Cor. 3:18). The life of the Christian is necessarily one of continuing struggle

yet also of continuing experience of grace. In this new relationship, the baptized live for

the sake of Christ, of his Church and of the world which he loves, while they wait in hope

for the manifestation of God’s new creation and for the time when God will be all in all

(Rom. 8:18-24; I Cor. 15:22-28, 49-57).

10. As they grow in the Christian life of faith, baptized believers demonstrate that

humanity can be re- generated and liberated. They have a common responsibility, here and

now, to bear witness together to the Gospel of Christ, the Liberator of all human beings.

The context of this common witness is the Church and the world. Within a fellowship of

witness and service, Christians discover the full significance of the one baptism as the gift

of God to all God’s people. Likewise, they acknowledge that baptism, as a baptism into

Christ’s death, has ethical implications which not only call for personal sanctification, but

also motivate Christians to strive for the realization of the will of God in all realms of life

(Rom. 6:9ff; Gal. 3:27-28; I Peter 2:21-4:6).

IV. BAPTISMAL PRACTICE

*A. Baptism of Believers and Infants*

11. While the possibility that infant baptism was also practised in the apostolic age

cannot be excluded, baptism upon personal profession of faith is the most clearly attested

pattern in the New Testament documents. In the course of history, the practice of baptism has developed in a variety of forms. Some churches baptize infants brought by parents or guardians who are ready, in and with the Church, to bring up the children in the Christian faith. Other churches practise exclusively the baptism of believers who are able to make a personal confession of faith. Some of these churches encourage infants or children to be presented and blessed in a service

which usually involves thanksgiving for the gift of the child and also the commitment of

the mother and father to Christian parenthood. All churches baptize believers coming from other religions or from unbelief who accept the Christian faith and participate in catechetical instruction.

12. Both the baptism of believers and the baptism of infants take place in the Church as

the community of faith. When one who can answer for himself or herself is baptized, a

personal confession of faith will be an integral part of the baptismal service. When an

infant is baptized, the personal response will be offered at a later moment in life. In both

cases, the baptized person will have to grow in the understanding of faith. For those

baptized upon their own confession of faith, there is always the constant requirement of a

continuing growth of personal response in faith. In the case of infants, personal

confession is expected later, and Christian nurture is directed to the eliciting of this

confession. All baptism is rooted in and declares Christ’s faithfulness unto death. It has its

setting within the life and faith of the Church and, through the witness of the whole

Church, points to the faithfulness of God, the ground of all life in faith. At every baptism

the whole congregation reaffirms its faith in God and pledges itself to provide an

environment of witness and service. Baptism should, therefore, always be celebrated and

developed in the setting of the Christian community.

COMMENTARY (12)

*When the expressions “infant baptism” and “believers’ baptism” are used, it is necessary to keep in mind that the real distinction is between those who baptize people at any age and those who baptize only those able to make a confession of faith for themselves. The differences between infant and believers’ baptism become less sharp when it is recognized that both forms of baptism embody God’s own initiative in Christ and express a response of faith made within the believing*

*community. The practice of infant baptism emphasizes the corporate faith and the faith which the child shares with its parents. The infant is born into a broken world and shares in its broken- ness. Through baptism, the promise and claim of the Gospel are laid upon the child. The personal faith of the recipient of baptism and faithful participation in the life of the Church are essential for the full fruit of baptism. The practice of believers’ baptism emphasizes the explicit confession of the person who responds to the grace of God in and through the community of faith and who seeks baptism. Both forms of baptism require a similar and responsible attitude towards Christian nurture. A rediscovery of the continuing character of Christian nurture may facilitate the mutual acceptance of different initiation practices. In some churches which unite both infant-baptist and believer-baptist traditions, it has been possible to regard as equivalent alternatives for entry into the Church both a pattern whereby baptism in infancy is followed by later profession of faith and a pattern whereby believers’ baptism follows upon a presentation and blessing in infancy. This example invites other churches to decide whether they, too, could not recognize equivalent alternatives in their reciprocal relationships and in church union negotiations.*

13. Baptism is an unrepeatable act. Any practice which might be interpreted as “rebaptism”

must be avoided.

COMMENTARY (13)

*Churches which have insisted on a particular form of baptism or which have had serious questions about the authenticity of other churches’ sacraments and ministries have at times required persons coming from other church traditions to be baptized before being received into full communicant membership. As the churches come to fuller mutual understanding and acceptance of one another and enter into closer relationships in witness and service, they will want to refrain from any practice which might call into question the sacramental integrity of other churches or which might diminish the unrepeatability of the sacrament of baptism.*

*B. Baptism—Chrismation—Confirmation*

14. In God’s work of salvation, the paschal mystery of Christ’s death and resurrection is

inseparably linked with the pentecostal gift of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, participation in

Christ’s death and resurrection is inseparably linked with the receiving of the Spirit.

Baptism in its full meaning signifies and effects both. Christians differ in their understanding as to where the sign of the gift of the Spirit is to be found. Different actions have become associated with the giving of the Spirit. For some it is the water rite itself. For others, it is the anointing with chrism and/or the imposition of hands, which many churches call confirmation. For still others it is all three, as they see the Spirit operative throughout the rite. All agree that Christian baptism is in water and the Holy Spirit.

COMMENTARY (14)

*(a)Within some traditions it is explained that as baptism conforms us to Christ crucified, buried*

*and risen, so through chrismation Christians receive the gift of the pentecostal Spirit from the*

*anointed Son. (b)If baptism, as incorporation into the body of Christ, points by its very nature to the Eucharistic sharing of Christ’s body and blood, the question arises as to how a further and separate rite can be interposed between baptism and admission to communion. Those churches which baptize children but refuse them a share in the eucharist before such a rite may wish to ponder whether they have fully appreciated and accepted the consequences of baptism.*

*(c)Baptism needs to be constantly reaffirmed. The most obvious form of such reaffirmation is the*

*celebration of the eucharist. The renewal of baptismal vows may also take place during such*

*occasions as the annual celebration of the paschal mystery or during the baptism of others.*

*C. Towards Mutual Recognition of Baptism*

15. Churches are increasingly recognizing one an-other’s baptism as the one baptism

into Christ when Jesus Christ has been confessed as Lord by the candidate or, in the case

of infant baptism, when confession has been made by the church (parents, guardians, godparents

and congregation) and affirmed later by personal faith and commitment. Mutual

recognition of baptism is acknowledged as an important sign and means of expressing the

baptismal unity given in Christ. Wherever possible, mutual recognition should be

expressed explicitly by the churches.

16. In order to overcome their differences, believer baptists and those who practise

infant baptism should reconsider certain aspects of their practices. The first may seek to

express more visibly the fact that children are placed under the protection of God’s grace.

The latter must guard themselves against the practice of apparently indiscriminate baptism

and take more seriously their responsibility for the nurture of baptized children to mature

commitment to Christ.

V. THE CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM

17. Baptism is administered with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy

Spirit.

18. In the celebration of baptism the symbolic dimension of water should be taken

seriously and not minimalized. The act of immersion can vividly express the reality that in

baptism the Christian participates in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

COMMENTARY (18)

*As seen in some theological traditions, the use of water, with all its positive associations with life*

*and blessing, signifies the continuity between the old and the new creation, thus revealing the*

*significance of baptism not only for human beings but also for the whole cosmos. At the same time, the use of water represents a purification of creation, a dying to that which is negative and*

*destructive in the world: those who are baptized into the body of Christ are made partakers of a*

*renewed existence.*

19. As was the case in the early centuries, the gift of the Spirit in baptism may be

signified in addition always; for example, by the sign of the laying on of hands, and by

anointing or chrismation. The very sign of the cross recalls the promised gift of the Holy

Spirit who is the instalment and pledge of what is yet to come when God has fully

redeemed those whom he has made his own (Eph. 1:13-14). The recovery of such vivid

signs may be expected to enrich the liturgy.

20. Within any comprehensive order of baptism at least the following elements should

find a place: the proclamation of the scriptures referring to baptism; an invocation of the

Holy Spirit; a renunciation of evil; a profession of faith in Christ and the Holy Trinity; the

use of water; a declaration that the persons baptized have acquired a new identity as sons

and daughters of God, and as members of the Church, called to be witnesses of the

Gospel. Some churches consider that Christian initiation is not complete without the

sealing of the baptized with the gift of the Holy Spirit and participation in holy

communion.

21. It is appropriate to explain in the context of the baptismal service the meaning of

baptism as it appears from scriptures (i.e. the participation in Christ’s death and

resurrection, conversion, pardoning and cleansing, gift of the Spirit, incorporation into the

body of Christ and sign of the Kingdom).

COMMENTARY (21)

*Recent discussion indicates that more attention should be given to misunderstandings encouraged by the socio-cultural context in which baptism takes place. (a)In some parts of the world, the giving of a name in the baptismal liturgy has led to confusion between baptism and customs surrounding name giving. This confusion is especially harmful if, in cultures predominantly not Christian, the baptized are required to assume Christian names not rooted in their cultural tradition. In making regulations for baptism, churches should be careful to*

*keep the emphasis on the true Christian significance of baptism and to avoid un- necessarily*

*alienating the baptized from their local culture through the imposition of foreign names. A name*

*which is inherited from one’s original culture roots the baptized in that culture, and at the same*

*time manifests the universality of baptism, incorporation into the one Church, holy, catholic and*

*apostolic, which stretches over all the nations of the earth.*

*(b)In many large European and North American majority churches infant baptism is often*

*practised in an apparently indiscriminate way. This contributes to the reluctance of churches which practise believers’ baptism to acknowledge the validity of infant baptism; this fact should lead to more critical reflection on the meaning of baptism within those majority churches themselves. (c)Some African churches practise baptism of the Holy Spirit without water, through the laying on of hands, while recognizing other churches’ baptism. A study is required concerning this practice and its relation to baptism with water.*

22. Baptism is normally administered by an ordained minister, though in certain

circumstances others are allowed to baptize.

23. Since baptism is intimately connected with the corporate life and worship of the

Church, it should normally be administered during public worship, so that the members of

the congregation may be reminded of their own baptism and may welcome into their

fellowship those who are baptized and whom they are committed to nurture in the

Christian faith. The sacrament is appropriate to great festival occasions such as Easter,

Pentecost and Epiphany, as was the practice in the early Church.