

GUIDELINES FOR RECOGNITION OF BAPTISMS

Prepared by the CCCB Episcopal Commission for Doctrine

These Guidelines consist of 3 sections:

- I. A discussion of what is required for a valid baptism.
- II. General principles for recognition of baptisms in other churches or ecclesial communities.
- III. A list of churches/ecclesial communities, indicating whether baptisms performed therein should be recognized as valid, invalid, or require further investigation.

Also included is an appendix listing relevant magisterial sources on the topic.

These guidelines are intended only as an aid to pastors and those who assist them and are not intended as a pastoral, canonical, or theological treatment of the numerous issues linked to the question of baptismal validity.

I. REQUIREMENTS FOR BAPTISMAL VALIDITY

In brief, what is required for baptismal validity is:

1. Correct matter and form:

- a. Application of water – whether by pouring or by immersion.¹
- b. Use of the Trinitarian formula. The minister declares that the person is being baptized “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”² This must be

1 The 1983 *Code of Canon Law* (§854) makes clear that sprinkling is not to be used by Catholics, even though it was allowed in the 1917 *Code*. The 1990 *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* describes baptism as “washing with natural water with the invocation of the name of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (675-§1). While baptism by sprinkling can be valid, there is often uncertainty regarding whether or not the water actually touched the skin of the person being baptized.

2 Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 1993. n. 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.”

pronounced by the same person who administers the water, and at the same time. Inserting additional words or deliberately modifying the Trinitarian formula may invalidate the baptism.³

2. **Intent of the minister** to do what the Church does (this does not necessarily mean holding the Catholic doctrine of baptism).
3. **Intent/consent of the baptized** (if an adult).

Thus, some factors that would *invalidate* a baptism include:

- The use of a substance other than water (cf. 1a).
- The use of sprinkling, when the water does not clearly touch the skin of the person being baptized. (cf. 1a).
- The use of a formula which changes or omits the names of the Persons of the Trinity, such as “I baptize you in the name of the Creator, the Redeemer, and the Sanctifier”⁴ (cf. 1b).
- Having one person pour the water while another person pronounces the words of the formula (cf. 1b).
- Baptism in a community whose beliefs are so far removed from Trinitarian faith (*e.g.*, Mormonism) that the minister does not truly intend Christian baptism (cf. 2).
- A lack of consent to be baptized on the part of someone who has reached the age of reason (cf. 3).

II. GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR RECOGNITION OF BAPTISMAL VALIDITY

1. Baptisms in Eastern Churches

“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.”⁵

2. Baptisms in Other Ecclesial Communities

In the *Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* n. 95 we read: “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

3 In response to a *Dubium* submitted by the CCCB, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith responded in 2012 that while such additions or modifications must be examined on a case-by-case basis, they often manifest a lack of intention to do what the Church does, in which case they would render a baptism invalid.

4 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Responses to Questions Proposed on the validity of Baptism conferred with the formulas “I baptize you in the name of the Creator, and of the Redeemer, and of the Sanctifier” and “I baptize you in the name of the Creator, and of the Liberator, and of the Sustainer,”* 2008.

5 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* 99a.

are serious reasons for doubting that the minister has observed the regulations of his or her own Community or Church.”

Thus, a certificate or other form of attestation of baptism from an ecclesial community that is known to baptize validly is normally sufficient to establish the validity of baptism. The question is complicated, however, by the fact that even in some ecclesial communities whose prescribed norms for baptism are valid, it is known that some of their ministers deviate on occasion from what is necessary for validity (as in the replacement or modification of the Trinitarian formula). For this reason, in such cases one should inquire into the individual circumstances of the baptism to verify its validity (cf. Part I). This could be done by querying the baptized person (if baptized as an adult), the baptizing minister, or a witness.

III. REFERENCE LIST OF VARIOUS CHURCHES / ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES

The list below gives the common names of various churches and ecclesial communities.

“**V**” indicates that a baptism in that church or ecclesial community is **valid** when carried out according to the church or community’s established norms.

“**I**” indicates that the baptism is **invalid**.

“**?**” indicates that the practice of baptism in that community is not completely uniform or regulated, and so further investigation will be required to determine validity. In this case, the criteria found in Part I can be used as a reference.

It is important to point out, however, that a “**?**” does *not* indicate the necessity of a conditional baptism (in the case of a candidate for full initiation); it simply means that the validity cannot be known without investigation into the particular case. Conditional baptism should be performed in cases where “even after careful investigation, a serious doubt persists.”⁶

Likewise, a “**V**” does not necessarily mean that the baptism was certainly valid; it simply indicates that the prescribed norms of that community are valid. Whenever there is reason for doubt, further investigation is required.

⁶ *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* 99d. Also cf. *Code of Canon Law*, §§864 and 869, and *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* 679 and 672-§2.

ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY / CHURCH	VALIDITY
Adventists (Seventh-Day)	?
African Methodist Episcopal	V
Amana Church Society	I
American Ethical Union	I
Amish	V
Anglican (Episcopalian)	V
Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarene)	?
Apostolic Church	I
Apostolic Faith Mission	I
Assembly of God	V
Assyrian Church of the East	V
Baptist	V
Bohemian Free Thinkers	I
Children of God	I
Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association	V
Christadelphians	I
Christian and Missionary Alliance	?
Christian Community (Rudolf Steiner)	I
Church of Christ	V
Church of Daniel's Band	I
Church of Divine Science	I
Church of God	V
Church of Illumination	I
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons)	I
Church of Revelation	I
Church of Scientology	I
Church of the Brethren	V
Church of the Lord Jesus Christ (Winona, ON)	I
Church of the Nazarene	V
Congregational Church	V
Disciples of Christ	V
Doukhobors (Church of the Universal Brotherhood)	I
Eastern Churches (Orthodox)	V
Erieside Church	I
Evangelical Churches	V
Evangelical United Brethren	V

First Church of Christ, Scientist (Mary Baker Eddy) - no baptism	I
Foursquare Gospel Church	V
General Assembly of Spiritualists	I
Hephzibah Faith Missionary Association	I
House of David Church	I
Iglesia ni Kristo (Phillippines)	I
Independent Church of Filipino Christians	I
Jehovah's Witnesses (Watchtower Society)	I
Liberal Catholic Church	V
Lutheran	V
Masons / Freemasons - no baptism	I
Mennonite Churches	?
Methodist	V
Metropolitan Community Church	?
Moonies (Reunification Church)	I
Moravian Church	?
National David Spiritual Temple of Christ Church Union	I
National Spiritualist Association	I
The New Church	I
New Jerusalem Church	I
Old Catholic	V
Old Catholic Church of the Union of Utrecht	V
Old Roman Catholic	V
Oriental Orthodox (monophysite)	V
Pentecostal Churches	?
People's Church of Chicago	I
Philippine Independent Church (valid after 1961)	?
Philippino National Church	V
Polish National Catholic Church (member of the Union of Utrecht)	V
Presbyterian	V
Presbyterian Church in Canada	V
Quakers (Society of Friends) no baptism	I
Reformed	V
Salvation Army (no baptism)	I
Shakers	I
Society of St. Pius X (Archbishop Lefebvre's group)	V
Spiritualist Church	I

Unitarian Universalist	I
Unitarians	I
United Church of Christ	V
United Church of Canada	V
United Reformed	V
United Society of Believers	I
Uniting Church in Australia	V
Universal Emancipation Church	I
Waldensian	V
Worldwide Church of God (invalid before mid-1990's)	I
Zion	V

APPENDIX: SOME MAGISTERIAL SOURCES TO BE CONSULTED

1983 *Code of Canon Law*, n. 849-878.

1990 *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, n. 672-691.

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 1993, n. 92-101.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1213-1284.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Responses to Questions Proposed on the validity of Baptism conferred with the formulas "I baptize you in the name of the Creator, and of the Redeemer, and of the Sanctifier" and "I baptize you in the name of the Creator, and of the Liberator, and of the Sustainer,"* 2008.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Response to a 'Dubium' on the validity of baptism conferred by "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints", called "Mormons,"* 2001.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Notification on the validity of baptism conferred in "The New Church,"* 1992.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Notification on the validity of baptism conferred in the "Christian Community" or "Die Christengemeinschaft" of Rudolf Steiner,* 1991.

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (CCCCB, 1987) n. 205-206.

Rite of Baptism for Children (CCCCB, 1989) General Introduction n. 18-29.