

Declaration concerning the mutual recognition of baptism by the synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands*) and the episcopacy of the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands

The general synod of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and the episcopacy of the Roman Catholic Church-community in the Netherlands make the following declaration on Holy Baptism and the administration of baptism. Although there is difference of conception in several points between the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands with regard to baptism, yet they recognize jointly, that baptism is sign and seal of the one covenant-community with the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, as this takes shape in Christ's Church, which is one by nature, and in which Christ gathers his own unto Him from all nations of the earth (compare Matthew 28: 19: "Go to the people of all nations and make them my disciples. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost").

Under this signification of baptism they perceive in here also a call on account of Christ to all of his own to, in connection to his Word, strive for the revelation of their unity in Him, who is their Principal.

Based on this joint recognition they consider it of the highest importance that a convention will be concluded between the Christian churches regarding:

the ceremony of baptism-administration,

the baptismal formula,

the context of baptism and church community.

1.

The ceremony of baptism-administration will have to be a cleansing with water. This can be performed by immersion in, sprinkling or wetting with water. The Scripture points to the secret which is coming about in baptism of being buried along in Christ's death: "that just as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6: 4).

In the water bath with the Word they see a sign of the sanctification and the justification in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (1. Corinthians 6: 11: "But ye are washed, ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God"), and of the cleansing in his blood, which He as a Mediator of the New Covenant has shed (Hebrews 9: 14... "shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?").

2.

This mysterious coherence between the cleansing with water and the cleansing in Christ's blood must be expressed as clearly as possible in the act of baptism. A simple wetting of the forehead of the person receiving baptism is by the Protestant Church in the Netherlands and the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands considered less correct as sign of cleansing, although it does not mean that the validity of a baptism which is administered like that should be denied, if otherwise the conditions of a valid administration of baptism have been fulfilled.

According to the common confession of our churches baptism is being performed with the words: "I baptise you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost (according to Matthew 28: 19).

Pronouncing the Trinitarian formula holds a true belief in Father, Son and Holy Ghost, as the pronounced intention to baptise presumes the intention to do that, which has been the church's purpose with the act of baptism from the beginning in obedience to her Lord.

The belief in the triune God must be present in the church community, in whose midst baptism is being administered, and is presumed to be present with the parents involved, or with those who have been placed in the parental rights.

3.

The minister of the baptism is presumed to act according to the faithful confession of the community to which the person to be baptised or the parents belong. His personal faith or confession is therefore not decisive for the validity of his administration of baptism, which he does not perform as a personal act, but in charge of the community involved.

Merely in case of well-founded doubt concerning the confession of a community regarding the triune belief and confession of the one church of Christ, will the validity of baptism, administered by a minister of this community, have to be questioned equally. In an assessment a risen doubt will not be resolved just by the use of the triune formula.

As in baptism the whole of the church community, in which the person to receive baptism will be admitted as a member, is involved, the minister of baptism has to be authorised to administer baptism by the community involved. Who is and who is not authorised to baptise by a church community, has to be left to the decision and the responsibility of the community concerned. Difference of church practice in this is of no consequence to the recognition of baptism.

In order to express that the entire church community is involved in baptism, baptism should be administered in the midst of the congregation as much as possible. Therefore it should be promoted that parents who offer their child for baptism can be present in an active way in the baptism of their child, and therefore it is incorrect that children should be baptised completely without knowledge and desire of their parents.

4.

Regarding the existing private-baptism on Roman Catholic side (the so called lay baptism), administered to children of roman-catholic parents, the Protestant Church in the Netherlands acknowledges its validity, starting from the principal that:

- a. such a baptism is not performed without faculty of the church community, therefore the not-official administer acts in charge of the church community;
- b. this private-baptism will be instituted by a public liturgical act of the official minister;
- c. for children of roman-catholic parents the consent of the parents with baptism of their child may be presumed as present reality.

5.

As we can not be born twice in Christ, baptism as the sacramental token of the incorporation in Christ and his church should not be repeated, even if the persons involved would wish so themselves. If someone of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands should change to the Roman Catholic Church or reversed, out of respect for the sanctity of baptism and for promotion of the mutual respect of both churches, a written baptismal proof which is asked and produced by the congregation or parish, should suffice.

6.

If someone of another church community changes to the Protestant Church in the Netherlands or the Roman Catholic Church, the following joint line of conduct will be followed:

- a. a written baptismal proof will be asked of the community or church in question;
- b. in case of serious doubt regarding the validity of a received baptism, there will be made inquiries with the official church authorities of the other church;
- c. in case of remaining doubt the arguments , based on which the validity of the received baptism is still uncertain, will be communicated , usually in writing, to the church of community involved.

*) Around 1967 the Roman Catholic Church achieved similar, but separate joint declarations with each of the three churches that have formed the Protestant Church in the Netherlands. Therein was the mutual recognition of baptism expressed. In this text is therefore the name "Protestant Church in the Netherlands" inserted where in those declarations the separate church was mentioned.