



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Bishops Commission for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Relations

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THE RECOGNITION OF BAPTISM

1. The Catholic Church follows a long tradition of recognising the validity of baptism celebrated outside the Church. This tradition goes back to the third century and the dispute between Pope St Stephen I and St Cyprian of Carthage, and to the early fifth century and St Augustine's response to the Donatist crisis.
2. The Second Vatican Council went beyond the teaching of St Augustine and recognised not just the validity of baptism outside the Church, but also its fruitfulness (LG 15). The Council used language that stated that these churches and communities are a "means of salvation" (UR 3).
3. The special situation of eastern churches not in full communion with the Catholic Church was recognised by the Second Vatican Council, which declared that they "still possess true sacraments" (UR 15).
4. The *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (1993) indicates those elements that should be kept in mind in determining the recognition of baptism (n.95):
 - 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 baptises is to be presumed, unless there is serious ground for doubting that the minister intended to do what the Church does.
 - c. "Wherever doubt arises 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 judgement is passed on the validity of its baptism."
5. In cases where the fact of the baptism or the matter and form used are unable to be determined unambiguously, the person may be baptised conditionally.
6. From the late 1960s the Australian Catholic Bishops, through a series of acts, recognised the baptism of various ecclesial communities.
 - a. In 1969 the Australian Catholic Bishops ratified the policy "that conditional baptism be not administered when the fact of the administration of Baptism in the Anglican Church is duly certified".
 - b. In 1973 a similar determination was made about baptism in the Presbyterian Church: "that conditional baptism be not administered when the fact of the administration of Baptism in the Presbyterian Church is duly certified".

- c. Also in 1973, a determination was made about Baptism administered in the Methodist Church: “that conditional baptism be not administered when the fact of Baptism in the Methodist Church is duly certified”.
 - d. In 1976 the Australian Catholic Bishops adopted a similar policy in relation to the Lutheran Church of Australia: “that conditional baptism be not administered when the fact of Baptism in the Lutheran Church of Australia is duly certified.” In 1977 a joint statement to this effect was made by Episcopal Conference and the Lutheran authorities in Australia.
 - e. After the formation of the Uniting Church in Australia, the following determination was made in 1979 about baptisms administered there: “that baptism is not to be repeated when baptism according to the rites in use in the Uniting Church in Australia since its establishment has been duly certified.”
 - f. Finally, in 1980 a statement was made about baptisms administered in the Congregational Church in Australia before the formation of the Uniting Church: “that baptism is not to be repeated when baptism according to the rite of the Congregational Church in Australia has been duly certified.”
7. In 2004 the Catholic Church signed *Australian Churches Covenanting Together*. In so doing it indicated that it agreed to recognise baptism administered in the following churches and to promote the use of a Common Certificate of Baptism:
 - i. Anglican Church of Australia
 - ii. Antiochean Orthodox Church
 - iii. Armenian Apostolic Church
 - iv. Congregational Federation of Australia
 - v. Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia
 - vi. Lutheran Church of Australia
 - vii. Romanian Orthodox Church
 - viii. Uniting Church in Australia
 8. The Presbyterian Church of Australia has also aligned itself with this agreement.
 9. The following new member churches of the NCCA have also signed that part of *Australian Churches Covenanting Together* recognising baptism:
 - i. Mar Thoma Church
 - ii. Serbian Orthodox Church
 10. In 2007 the member churches of the National Council of Churches in Australia agreed to ensure that those churches that have agreed to the mutual recognition of baptism ensure that Certificates of Baptism include the wording: “N. was baptised with water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit” and that it contain the list of churches who have agreed to the mutual recognition of baptism.
 11. Some ecclesial communities do not prescribe a formula for the administration of baptism, and leave it to the decision of the minister. In order to recognise baptism in these cases it would be necessary to investigate the actual baptism and determine how it was administered.
 12. In those ecclesial communities which practice some form of dedication or commitment or where a person has been baptised in the Spirit, such rituals are not recognised as baptism by the Catholic Church. Similarly, the Catholic Church does not recognise the baptismal ritual administered by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

13. In the situation where the church or community in question normally practises baptism in a form recognised by the Catholic Church but it is uncertain that in a particular instance this has been followed, the baptism would be considered in the same way as a baptism that lacked form in the Catholic Church and would not be recognised. This may typically involve baptising in a form other than “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”.
14. There are many other churches and ecclesial communities with whom there is no formal mutual recognition of baptism. These should be dealt with on a case by case basis, applying the principles listed above in n.4.