

A lush green forest with a waterfall cascading over mossy rocks. The water is white and frothy as it falls, surrounded by dense green foliage and moss-covered stones.

BAPTISM

CATHOLIC AND REFORMED

A STUDY DOCUMENT

from The Joint Commission on Doctrine of the
Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland

⊕ FOREWORD ⊕

Since 1977, a series of Joint Commissions on Doctrine has involved representatives of the Church of Scotland and the Catholic Church in Scotland. The present document emerged from the most recent phase of talks and their concentration on the ecclesiological significance of the Sacrament of Baptism celebrated in our two churches - and this against a background of international ecumenical engagement with this very issue.

The text in one sense is no more than a technical report of work in progress and even then a summarising of rich debate. However, we have rejoiced in the experience of fellowship and the depth of our mutual engagement; and the text also gives indication of how our two churches share the desire to fulfil the mission of God in today's Scotland. In significant ways we are about the same task. We own the same prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ: 'Father...this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.' (John 17: 3)

In September 2005, the members of the Joint Commission happily took the opportunity to hold a final meeting of this phase of talks in Rome. This allowed fruitful exchanges with representatives of our two churches based there and decisions were made about the future direction of our exchanges. We shall next attend to the healing of historical memories and also to the doctrine of sanctification, how God turns us into His 'holy people'. Here in Scotland, we hope and pray for energy and commitment in all the various settings where the Catholic Church and the Church of Scotland work. May the Lord deepen the sense of our common mission. 'There is but one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all and within all.' (Ephesians 4: 5-6)

Most Reverend Mario J. Conti

Reverend Dr Peter H. Donald

(Joint Conveners of the Joint Commission on Doctrine
of the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland)

December 2007

Text **John L. McPake** Questions **William R. McFadden**
with members of the Joint Commission on Doctrine



**BAPTISM:
CATHOLIC AND REFORMED**

**Members of the
Joint Commission on Doctrine from 2000**

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Most Rev. Mario J. Conti (Joint Convener)
Rt. Rev. Mgr Henry Docherty (Joint Secretary 2002-2005)
Rev. Thomas Shields (Joint Secretary)
Rt. Rev. Philip Tartaglia
Rt. Rev. Mgr. Philip Kerr
Very Rev. William R. McFadden,
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CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

Rev. Dr. Peter H. Donald (Joint Convener)
Rev. Dr. John L. McPake (Joint Convener 2002-2004)
Rt. Rev. Sheilagh Kesting (Joint Secretary)
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⊕ INTRODUCTION ⊕

1. The Joint Commission on Doctrine (JCD) was reconstituted, after initial discussions, on 2nd December 2002 under the Joint Convenership of the Most Rev Mario Conti, Archbishop of Glasgow and the Rev. Dr. John L. McPake, then Convener of the Panel on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland, who was succeeded by the Rev. Dr. Peter H. Donald in May 2004, with Mgr. Henry Docherty and the Rev. Sheilagh Kesting acting as Joint Secretaries.

2. At the outset it was noted that two developments had acted as catalysts in this reconstitution:

a) The reception given to the signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation* on the 31st October 1999 had created a climate in which the historic divisions between the churches of the Reformation and the Roman Catholic Church were no longer seen as insuperable in principle. Thus, an invitation to a renewed dialogue between a church of the Reformation, such as the Church of Scotland, and the Roman Catholic Church may, in part, be regarded as a response to this new climate.

b) The awareness of the fact that the doctrine and practice of baptism had, once more, become the subject of dialogue, particularly in the work of the Joint Working Group (JWG) shared between the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity and the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches on the subject of *The Ecclesial and Ecumenical Significance of a Common Baptism*. Equally, the Church of Scotland, through the Panel on Doctrine, was itself engaged in a process of reflection on the doctrine and practice of baptism and produced reports in 2002 and 2003 which expressed the fruit of that process. The dialogue within the JCD greatly enriched the latter stages of the discussions within the Panel on Doctrine.

3. Further to these two developments, and their catalytic effects in terms of renewing dialogue at a formal level, it should be stated that the

opening meetings of the reconstituted JCD were characterised by a frank acknowledgement that the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland and the Church of Scotland face a very similar situation in terms of the pastoral life of the Church. In particular, it was noted that the practice of baptism is frequently the point at which pastoral difficulties arise. This being the case, there was a shared sense that whatever doctrinal disagreements we might face, we were united in the ongoing challenge to live out the pastoral implications of our particular doctrinal affirmations and sacramental practices. Thus, we jointly affirm that the life of the Church is lived in ever conscious awareness of the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ: 'Father...this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.'(John 17: 3)

Reflection Questions (paragraphs 1-3)

Do you agree that the subject of baptism is a good one to encourage ongoing dialogue between the two Churches?

What are some of the 'pastoral difficulties' that both Churches experience in living out the ecclesial implications of baptism?

⊕ CATHOLIC AND REFORMED ⊕

4. In the course of the dialogue within the JCD, as in every dialogue, a particular challenge was to use terms which expressed the integrity of each partner, whilst at the same time respecting the integrity of the other. Equally, the connotations given to certain terms used in the dialogue varied and this led to a certain lack of clarity and occasional misunderstanding. Nevertheless, we have been able to recognise and comprehend the truths we share, as well as acknowledging areas in which we differ in what we hold or in our understanding of it. In the light of this, we may attempt to clarify certain terms in order to avoid common misunderstandings.

5. The Church of Scotland affirms that it 'is part of the Holy Catholic, or Universal, Church; worshipping one God, Almighty, all-wise, and all-loving, in the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, the same in substance, equal in power and glory', which 'receives the Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments...and avows the fundamental doctrines of the Catholic faith founded thereupon'. (*Articles Declaratory I*) In these terms, the Church of Scotland understands itself to be 'catholic' in terms of its life and doctrine, and thus a 'branch...of the Holy Catholic or Universal Church'. (*Uniting Act I*) In understanding itself to be a 'part' of the Church, the Church of Scotland affirms its participation in the fullness of 'the Holy Catholic or Universal Church', whilst being conscious that our experience of that fullness is only realised in communion with each other 'part' in obedience to 'the will of Christ'. (*Articles Declaratory VII*)

6. In affirming that it 'is part of the Holy Catholic, or Universal, Church', the Church of Scotland further acknowledges that its identity is shaped by its being 'a church of the Reformation', in terms of its 'adhere(nce) to the Scottish Reformation'. (*Articles Declaratory I*) The sense in which this is to be understood may be further refined by reference to the Church of Scotland being 'in historical continuity with the Church of Scotland which was reformed in 1560'. (*Articles Declaratory III*) That is, it is 'a Reformed Church' in terms of its historic adherence to the particular

tradition established by John Calvin and mediated to Scotland through John Knox. Thus, when we speak more broadly of 'the churches of the Reformation', we rightly understand that to embrace the Lutheran, Anglican and Reformed traditions, as well as others. The distinction between 'the churches of the Reformation' and 'the Reformed Church' explains, for example, why the resolution of historic disagreements between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation does not necessarily impact in the same way on the other 'churches of the Reformation'. Further, we see the identity of a Reformed Church' expressed in terms of the 'notes of the true Kirk', that is: 'first, the true preaching of the Word of God...secondly, the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus...and lastly, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered'. (*Scots Confession XVIII*)

7. The Roman Catholic Church on her part sees the charism of the gift of unity, and thus the sense in which she calls herself and is called 'catholic', as a gift already received by, and expressed within her: 'The unique Church of Christ which in the Creed we avow as one, holy, catholic and apostolic...constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in (*subsistit in*) the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the bishops in communion with him...although many elements of sanctification and of truth can be found outside her visible structure. These elements, however, as gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ, possess an inner dynamism toward catholic unity.' (*Lumen Gentium 8*) Where the holding of that gift has been impaired, the Catholic Church nevertheless acknowledges the reality of communion, albeit imperfect or incomplete, through our sharing in the one baptism. 'For men who believe in Christ and have been properly baptized are put in some, though imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church.' (*Unitatis Redintegratio 3*)

8. Where the Church of Scotland as 'a church of the Reformation' affirms its continuity with 'the Holy Catholic or Universal Church' in terms of its life and doctrine, the Roman Catholic Church emphasises the discontinuity which the Reformation of 1560 brought about: the communion of the Church with the Apostolic See was severed; the Mass was proscribed; the Episcopate was eventually abolished and a

new church order was introduced. The Catholic remnant of the pre-Reformation Church continued to hold fast, during the years after 1560, to the old order and to communion with the Apostolic See, benefitting in due course from the reforms of the Council of Trent (1545-1563). The penal experience of the Roman Catholic community in Scotland during the years after the Reformation was one of conflict and ostracism until the Relief Act of 1793 extended the right of freedom of worship to the community and the Relief Act of 1829 secured Catholic emancipation.

9. Therefore, whilst the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland and the Church of Scotland affirm their own participation in the catholicity of the Church, they do so in ways that reflect a different understanding of what constitutes that catholicity. For the Roman Catholic Church, catholicity is understood as a present reality manifest in the tradition of faith and moral practice and the bonds of love, which unite the local churches with the See of Peter through their Bishops. For the Church of Scotland, catholicity is formally expressed in 'the fundamental doctrines of the Catholic faith' founded upon the reception of the Word of God, and as a reality particularly manifest where the 'notes of the true Kirk' are found. In the light of this, the call to unity is a renewal of the call to consider the significance of the oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church.

10. The Church of Scotland understands itself to be *ecclesia reformata sed semper reformanda*, and this implies a continuing obligation for self scrutiny in the light of the Word of God. The Catholic Church is also conscious of the need for reform, and the embracing of the 'way of penance and renewal'. (*Lumen Gentium* 8) Aware of the 'discrepancy existing between the message she proclaims and the human weakness of those to whom the Gospel has been entrusted' (*Gaudium et Spes* 43), she speaks of the need to be *semper purificanda*.

11. In summary, the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland and the Church of Scotland affirm in different ways the catholicity of the Church as the body of Christ and the community of the Spirit. They acknowledge the historical difficulties in seeking unity, but declare that the renewed dialogue evident in the JCD is an obedient response to the prayer of our

Lord Jesus Christ for the oneness of His people in anticipation of our sharing in His revealed glory. (John 17: 20-26)

Reflection Questions (paragraphs 4-11)

How does the Church of Scotland understand itself as part of the Holy Catholic Church, and what are the main attributes of 'catholicity' as understood by both churches?

What do the words 'subsists in' contribute to the Catholic Church's understanding of herself, and what are the implications of this for the Church of Scotland?

How does this historical experience of religion in Scotland impact on the consciousness of people today?

⊕ THE FRUIT OF OUR DISCUSSION ⊕

1) BAPTISM

12. The JCD agreed at the outset to focus on the doctrine of baptism, given that the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Scotland acknowledge the validity of baptism performed within our respective Churches, and conscious of the fact that the Joint Working Group has made a study of the subject for presentation to the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity and the World Council of Churches at its Ninth Assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2006.

13. From the perspective of the Catholic Church, it was affirmed that: 'Baptism is the sacrament of faith. But faith needs the community of believers. It is only within the faith of the church that each of the faithful can believe.' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church 1253*) A helpful explanation of the significance of *ex opere operato* placed that theological formula within the context of the action of the Triune God. Thus, it is understood by the Catholic Church that: 'Celebrated worthily in faith, the sacraments confer the grace that they signify. They are efficacious because in them Christ himself is at work: it is he who baptizes, he who acts in his sacraments in order to communicate the grace that each sacrament signifies. The Father always hears the prayer of his Son's Church which, in the epiclesis of each sacrament, expresses her faith in the power of the Spirit.' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church 1127-1129*)

14. Further, it was noted that 'the Second Vatican Council restored... "the catechumenate for adults"' within the life of the Catholic Church. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church 1232; Sacrosanctum Concilium 64*) This restoration is expressed in the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (1972), wherein the relationship between the sacraments of initiation – the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and the eucharist – is expressed in terms of the growth and development of faith. Thus, whilst the rite of baptism of infants is the rite most commonly celebrated within the Catholic Church, it is to be understood within the context of the rite for adults, with the latter highlighting the significance of a person

responding in faith to the promise of God. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church 1246-1255*)

15. From the perspective of the Church of Scotland, it was affirmed that the action of the Triune God is the theological underpinning of the sacrament of baptism, and this was emphasised in the Act of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland governing the practice of baptism which was approved by the General Assembly of 2003. Thus: 'Baptism signifies the action and love of God in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, and is a seal upon the gift of grace and the response of faith.' (*Act IX 3, Acts of the General Assembly 2003*) Equally, the 'primary image' which shapes the understanding of baptism within this Act is that of a person being baptised 'upon profession of faith', with this 'primary image' being 'complemented by the image of the baptism of the household upon corporate profession of faith'. On this basis, provision is made for baptism to be 'administered to a child'. (*Act IX 4, 6, Acts of the General Assembly 2003; Reports to the General Assembly 2003 13/8*)

16. Alongside this, the possibility of provision being made within the Church of Scotland for a Service of Blessing was discussed, and this was raised in the light of the considerable decline in the numbers of children being baptised. This discussion helpfully reminded the JCD of the missionary context within which the life of the Church is lived out in contemporary society, where requests for baptism may be made by those with little understanding of the significance of the sacrament and in rare contact with the life of the Church. Further, the significance of the catechumenate was highlighted and it was noted that there was renewed interest within the Church of Scotland on this subject.

17. Presentations of our respective liturgies of baptism underlined the fact that there was a shared acknowledgement of the indispensability of the grace of God and the response of faith, and there was an affirmation that, in terms of intention, it was the same sacrament of baptism that was being celebrated in the Roman Catholic Church and in the Church of Scotland. The acknowledgement of a shared understanding of the sacrament of baptism led to the question being raised as to the possibility of a common baptismal text for our respective baptismal liturgies.

This would witness to our common understanding of the ecclesial significance of the sacrament and the acceptance of its validity across our respective churches.

18. The dialogue at this point paralleled that taking place in the JWG, and an exposition of the opening sections of the JWG's draft report furthered the JCD's own discussions. The significance of the theology of character within the teaching of the Catholic Church in relation to baptism was explored and was identified as a potentially fruitful, but relatively unexplored, theme. Thus, it is understood that: 'Incorporated into Christ by Baptism, the person baptized is configured to Christ. Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark (*character*) of his belonging to Christ...Given once for all, baptism cannot be repeated.' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church 1272-1274*)

19. The Church of Scotland has not traditionally made use of the theology and terminology of character in explicating the meaning of baptism. Nevertheless, the reality signified by such usage within the theology of the Roman Catholic Church in relation to baptism was one that the Church of Scotland acknowledged to be of profound spiritual significance. Thus, it is affirmed that: 'Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, not only for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church; but also to be unto him a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of his ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration, of remission of sins, and of his giving up unto God, through Jesus Christ, to walk in the newness of life: which sacrament is, by Christ's own appointment, to be continued in his church until the end of the world.' (*Westminster Confession of Faith XXVIII. 1*) This is expressed in the "Order for the Sacrament of Holy Baptism" which states that: 'Christ is present with us in the sacrament; it is he himself who baptises us, and by the Spirit of Pentecost he brings us into his Church ... In baptism, N...is assured of the love that God has for him/her, and the sign and seal of the Holy Spirit is placed upon him/her.' (*Common Order (1994)*)

Reflection Questions (paragraphs 12-19)

How do the two Churches acknowledge the validity of baptism performed by the other Church?

What is the role of faith in relation to both infant and adult baptism as celebrated in both the Catholic Church and the Church of Scotland?

2) JUSTIFICATION

20. A further exposition of the JWG report focused on the doctrine of justification. The raising of the doctrine of justification within this context served to remind the JCD of the reception of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. In turn, this led to a full discussion as to how much weight should be given to that document within the Scottish context.

21. A particular 'Reformed church' such as the Church of Scotland approaches the doctrine of justification from a different perspective to that of the Lutheran World Federation. Thus, it was noted that the *Scots Confession* of 1560 has no separate chapter on the doctrine of justification and that, for example, the expression *sola fide* is not used. That is not to say that the doctrine of justification is absent from the *Confession*. Rather, it is to say that it operates in a different manner from that found within the Lutheran tradition. Equally, the fuller exposition of the doctrine of justification in the *Westminster Confession of Faith of 1647 (XI)* does not alter this perspective. Further, it was noted that the doctrine of justification has not functioned as the historic place of doctrinal disagreement between the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed Church of Scotland.

22. A thorough analysis and critique of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* from the perspective of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Scotland served to elucidate the content of the *Joint Declaration*, and allowed the JCD to see this significant

ecumenical achievement within its particular context. It was acknowledged that the Joint Declaration marks a significant step towards the goal of ‘visible unity’, albeit that it does not fulfil all the criteria that would enable the realisation of full communion. Nevertheless, the ‘consensus in the basic truths’ (*Joint Declaration 14*) reached with respect to the doctrine of justification reminded the members of the JCD of the genuine possibility of a shared understanding in matters of fundamental doctrine.

23. However, one important point at which the JCD departed from the *Joint Declaration* was the assertion made that the doctrine of justification was ‘the crux of all disputes’. (*Joint Declaration 1*) The members of the JCD agreed that to focus on the doctrine of justification as ‘the crux’, in terms of the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Scotland, would have a distorting and misleading effect. It was affirmed that the doctrine of justification ought not to be viewed in isolation from the doctrine of sanctification, and that to focus on the former would lead to the neglect of a significant dimension of theological truth.

24. In the discussion of the *Joint Declaration*, it was noted that the model of ecumenical dialogue offered was of considerable interest, and further discussion on the theme of “The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue”, as then being discussed by the JWG, broadened this discussion. It is anticipated that a fuller discussion on this theme, as well as renewed attention being given to the ecclesial and ecumenical implications of a common baptism would shape the course of future dialogue within the JCD.

Reflection Questions (paragraphs 20-24)

How has the doctrine of justification been incorporated into the teaching of both the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church?

What are the “basic truths” that the document mentions reaching “consensus” on? (para.22)

⊕ CONCLUSION ⊕

25. The discovery within the JCD of so much that binds us together is testimony to the developments that have taken place during the course of our shared history, in which scholarship and inter-church dialogue have begun to alter long-held attitudes. We give thanks to God that the dialogue within the JCD has been characterised by emphasis being placed upon what we can say in common, while also throwing into relief those matters which remain points of division. Thus, the initially tentative explorations on matters of fundamental doctrine soon gave way to a much fuller experience of genuine dialogue. Therefore, the realisation of the extent to which there is a shared desire to express the same fundamental truths holds out the prospect of fruitful engagement in matters of common concern to the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland and to the Church of Scotland, not least in their shared pastoral concern for all the disciples of Christ.

26. *The Reformed-Roman Catholic International Dialogue: Towards a Common Understanding of the Church (1984-1990)* noted that the present situation of the Churches remains one in which the same words and the same biblical expressions may be received and understood in different ways, albeit that it is the same reality which is being addressed. The JCD is conscious that there should be no masking of the very real differences that have existed from the time of the Reformation, and which still shape the reality of much of the life of the Church in Scotland today. In the past, the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland read their histories selectively and polemically, and to some extent this legacy continues, often unconsciously, to influence the perspective of our people.

27. In the light of this, we acknowledge that a considerable journey remains to be travelled by the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland. Nevertheless, we affirm that our journey is a lived response to the prayer of Lord Jesus Christ: "That they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be one in us...so that the world may know that you have sent me." (John 17: 21)

Reflection Questions (paragraphs 25-27)

In what ways might we ensure that polemics are overcome and unity in diversity celebrated, and so encourage “genuine dialogue” at all levels between the two Churches?

What might be the benefits of introducing a Service of Blessing for families who have little or no formal contact with the Church community?

How might a common text of baptism express our shared witness and united commitment?

What specific steps are now necessary to ensure ongoing theological and pastoral dialogue between the two Churches?

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Since 2002 productive new conversations have opened up between the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland and the Church of Scotland.

The participants, known as the Joint Commission on Doctrine, have particularly homed in on the doctrine of Justification by Faith, a key issue in the Continental Reformation, which has now led, following a breakthrough in international dialogues on this matter, to agreements in the meaning and practice of Baptism.

This booklet makes available the conclusions of the Commission, and invites a wider discussion on a matter which could have wide repercussions for understanding and reconciliation not just in the Church but in the nation at large.

From time to time, questions to focus discussion are inserted to allow the matter to be discussed in local groups, both denominational and ecumenical.

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