

The Powerpoint presentation offers an overview of the central teachings of the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church regarding Baptism. It is designed to offer background material to situate the *Baptism: Reformed and Catholic* document in context, with this document having been produced by the Joint Commission on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland. Similarly, it provides a context for the Service for the Renewal of Baptismal Vows, which was produced by the Joint Commission on Doctrine with input from the Scottish Episcopal Church. The Powerpoint presentation can be used as a teaching resource, or as a means to stimulate group discussion. The ideal context for it would be in an ecumenical setting, and it is hoped that discussion of the material would lead to a shared desire to renew our Baptismal Vows.

A CATHOLIC AND REFORMED PERSPECTIVE ON OUR COMMON BAPTISM

A PASTORAL RESOURCE

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

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A Catholic and Reformed Perspective on our Common Baptism

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1/ A Growing Understanding of our Common Baptism

The teaching of the 2nd Vatican Council (1962-1965) affirms that baptism 'constitutes a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been reborn by means of it (*Unitatis Redintegratio* 22)

This leads to the acknowledgement of our Common Baptism which has enabled long separated Christians to speak of sharing a real though incomplete communion (*Unitatis Redintegratio* 3)

The Church of Scotland 'affirms the validity of the sacrament of baptism administered in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, with water, in accordance with discipline of other members of the Universal Church' (*Act IX (2003)*)

Since 1970 a series of dialogues have taken place in order to foster mutual understanding and recognition between churches in the International Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches

Alongside this the World Council of Churches document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982) is foundational to the development of our common understanding of baptism

In 2007 the Joint Commission on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland published the fruit of their discussions on our Common Baptism in *Baptism: Catholic and Reformed*

In *Baptism: Catholic and Reformed* it is 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*)

‘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 (2003)*)

‘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*)

‘Baptism is a sacrament of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ...for the solemn admission of the party baptized into the visible Church...to be...a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, of...ingrafting into Christ, of regeneration [and] of remission of sins’ (*Westminster Confession of Faith 28.1*)

Thus, Baptism brings Christians into union with Christ, with each other, and with the Church of every time and place. It is incorporation into the life, death and resurrection of Christ, and therefore it is fundamental for Christian life (Matthew 28: 16-20; John 3: 5; Romans 6: 1-11; 1 Corinthians 6: 11, 10: 1-2, 12: 12-13; Galatians 3: 27-28; Ephesians 4: 4-6, 5: 14; Colossians 2: 12; Titus 3: 5; 1 Peter 3: 20-21)

Therefore, we affirm of our Common Baptism that:

- a) It has a foundational place in the Church and is part of our common heritage
- b) The primary aspect of its meaning is participation in Christ's death and resurrection
- c) It involves conversion, pardoning and cleansing
- d) It releases the gift of the Holy Spirit
- e) It incorporates into the Body of Christ; whatever the age of the person being baptised, baptism marks the beginning of a new life in Christ and in the Church, and this life is characterised by growth
- f) It is a sign of the Kingdom
- g) It is an unrepeatable act
- h) It is a part of the process of initiation
- i) It binds believers and their churches together
- j) It is an ever-present reality to be continually lived out

A recent study of all the international dialogues in which the Roman Catholic Church has shared, including the International Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, highlights that when we speak of our Common Baptism we understand it in terms of:

- a)The unity of the Word and the Sacrament
- b)The centrality of the liturgy for the life of the Church
- c)Baptism as having been instituted by Christ
- d)The necessity of the use of water in Baptism
- e)The necessity of the Trinitarian formula
- f)The effects of incorporation into Christ and the Church
- g)The gift of new life received in Christ
- h)Baptism as irrevocable and unrepeatable
- i)Baptism leading to a sharing in Christ's death and resurrection

The International Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches affirms that:

‘We have discovered anew that the Roman Catholic Church and the Reformed Churches are bound by manifold ties. Both communions confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, affirm the Trinitarian faith of the apostolic Church through the ages, and observe the one Baptism into the threefold Name.’ (*Towards a Common Understanding of the Church*, 4 (1990))

‘Our churches should give expression to mutual recognition of Baptism...Mutual recognition of baptism is to be understood as an expression of the profound communion that Jesus Christ himself establishes among his disciples and which no human failure can ever destroy.’ (*Towards a Common Understanding of the Church*, 152)

A ‘mutual recognition of Baptism’ already exists between the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church

Therefore, on this basis, it may be affirmed that: 'despite continuing divisions a real though imperfect communion already exists between Reformed and Roman Catholic Christians' (*Towards a Common Understanding of the Church*, 124)

This points us to two important conclusions that need to be held in tension:

1) There is 'a real though imperfect communion' between Christians in the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Scotland, and;

2) There are 'continuing divisions' between Christians in the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Scotland

These 'continuing divisions' relate to the understanding of the nature of the Church, and it is helpful to acknowledge the existence of these 'divisions' and to seek to identify the points at which they exist

2/ The Catholic Understanding of the Nature of the Church

In *Baptism: Catholic and Reformed* it is affirmed that:

‘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)

In the light of this, there are two issues that are central to the Roman Catholic understanding of the nature of the Church:

- 1) The Place of the Sacraments within the teaching of the Church
- 2) The Unity of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist as the Sacraments of Initiation

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* sets its teaching on the Sacraments within the context of “The Celebration of the Christian Mystery” and contends that it is the Liturgy of the Church which provides the true setting within which the Sacraments are to be received and understood.

‘As the work of Christ liturgy is also an action of his Church. It makes the Church present and manifests her as the visible sign of the communion in Christ between God and men.’ (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1071)

Insofar as the Sacrament is celebrated 'in accordance with the intention of the Church, the power of Christ and his Spirit acts through it'. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*,1128)

The sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation 'confer...a sacramental *character* or 'seal' by which the Christian shares in Christ's priesthood and is made a member of the Church according to different states and functions. This configuration to Christ and to the Church, brought about by the Spirit, is indelible'. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*,1121)

The Sacrament of the Baptism is one of the three 'sacraments of Christian initiation – Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist' which 'lay the *foundations* of every Christian life'. 'The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life.' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*,1212)

The Sacrament of the Eucharist is the 'source and summit' of the Christian life with the other sacraments being 'oriented towards it', and through it we 'unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1324, 1326)

In Catholic teaching there is an intrinsic link between Eucharistic communion and ecclesial communion, and as long as fundamental disagreements exist in matters of faith, and full ecclesial communion is not established, it is deemed not possible to share in Eucharistic celebration. However, under certain conditions, and given certain circumstances, it is permitted, under the authority of the local bishop, to give Holy Communion to other Christians.

3/ The Church of Scotland's Understanding of the Nature of the Church

In *Baptism: Catholic and Reformed* it is affirmed that:

‘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*)’

‘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 being a Church which “adheres to the Scottish Reformation”.
(*Articles Declaratory I*)’

‘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*)’

4/ The Ecumenical Implications of our Common Baptism

‘Recognizing that despite continuing divisions a real though imperfect communion already exists between Reformed and Roman Catholic Christians, what implications does this communion have for our understanding of the continuity of the Church?’ (*Towards a Common Understanding of the Church*, 124)

We are called in the light of the High Priestly Prayer of the Lord Jesus Christ to have as our goal the Oneness and Unity of the Church. (John 17: 21) In the light of our Common Baptism we are called to work towards the achievement of that goal.

The unity to which we are all called because of our Common Baptism is not uniformity, but a communion characterised by a unity in diversity rooted in a deepening spirituality whose roots lie in that Baptism

We live in the context of our shared land of Scotland. We are called to work out together, within our parishes and local communities, the implications of our Common Baptism

Our shared sense of calling should be expressed in a practical outworking of the implications of our Common Baptism

In practical ways, our Common Baptism might lead us to:

- a) Participation in the events in other churches
- b) Common baptismal certificates
- c) Sending and receiving representatives at each others celebrations
- d) Sharing catechesis for the newly baptised
- e) Pulpit exchanges
- f) Reclaiming the major Christian festivals as common times for celebrating baptism (e.g. Easter, Pentecost)
- g) Working towards the healing of memories
- h) Re-energising pastoral practices within each church regarding Baptism
- i) Develop shared projects between Denominational and Non-denominational schools
- j) Shared celebration of the Renewal of our Baptismal Vows

Helpful Resources:

World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: WCC, 1982).

John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1995).

Joint Commission on Doctrine, *Baptism: Catholic and Reformed* (Edinburgh: JCD, 2007).

Walter Kasper, *A Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism* (New York: New City Press, 2007).

Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits* (London: Continuum, 2009).