

the first Christian centuries, nor of Baptism conferred in non-Catholic ecclesial communities, as noted in Canon 869 §2.

III. **The Intention of the Celebrating Minister.** Such doctrinal diversity, regarding the very notion of God, prevents the minister of the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* from having the intention of doing what the Catholic Church does when she confers Baptism, that is, doing what Christ willed her to do when he instituted and mandated the sacrament of Baptism. This becomes even more evident when we consider that in their understanding Baptism was not instituted by Christ but by God and began with Adam (cf. Book of Moses 6:64). Christ simply commanded the practice of this rite; but this was not an innovation. It is clear that the intention of the Church in conferring Baptism is certainly to follow the mandate of Christ (cf. Mt 28,19) but at the same time to confer the sacrament that Christ had instituted. According to the New Testament, there is an essential difference between the Baptism of John and Christian Baptism. The Baptism of the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, which originated not in Christ but already at the beginning of creation (James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* [AF], Salt Lake City: Desert Book, 1990, cf. pp. 110-111), is not Christian Baptism; indeed, it denies its newness. The Mormon minister, who must necessarily be the "priest" (cf. D&C 20:38-58.107:13.14.20), therefore radically formed in their own doctrine, cannot have any other intention than that of doing what the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* does, which is quite different in respect to what the Catholic Church intends to do when it baptizes, that is, the conferral of the sacrament of Baptism instituted by Christ, which means participation in his death and resurrection (cf. Rom 6,3-11; Col 2,12-13).

We can note two other differences, not as fundamental as the preceding one, but which also have their importance: A) According to the Catholic Church, Baptism cancels not only personal sins but also original sin, and therefore even infants are baptized for the remission of sins (cf. the essential texts of the Council of Trent, DH 1513-1515). This remission of original sin is not accepted by the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, which denies the existence of this sin and therefore baptizes only persons who have the use of reason and are at least eight years old, excluding the mentally handicapped (cf. AF, pp. 113-116). In fact, the practice of the Catholic Church in conferring Baptism on infants is one of the main reasons for which the Mormons say that the Catholic Church apostatized in the first centuries, so that the sacraments celebrated by it are all invalid.

B) If a believer baptized in the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, after renouncing his or her faith or having been excommunicated, wants to return, he or she must be rebaptized (cf. AF, pp. 129-131).

Even in regard to these last elements it is clear that the Baptism of Mormons cannot be considered valid; since it is not Christian Baptism, the minister cannot have the intention of doing what the Catholic does.

IV. **The Disposition of the Recipient.** The person to be baptized, who already has the use of reason, has been instructed according to the very strict norms of the teaching and faith of the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. It must be maintained therefore that one cannot think that the Baptism received by that person is anything different from what he was taught. It does not seem possible that the person would have the same disposition that the Catholic Church requires for the Baptism of adults.

**Difference of views: Mormons hold that there is no real Trinity, no original sin, that Christ did not institute baptism**

Summing up, we can say: The Baptism of the Catholic Church and that of the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* differ essentially, both for what concerns faith in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, in whose name Baptism is conferred, and for what concerns the relationship to Christ who instituted it. As a result of all this, it is understood that the Catholic Church has to consider invalid, that is to say, cannot consider true Baptism, the rite given that name by the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*.

It is equally necessary to underline that the decision of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is a response to a particular question regarding the Baptism of Mormons and obviously does not indicate a judgment on those who are members of the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. Furthermore, Catholics and Mormons often find themselves working together on a range of problems regarding the common good of the entire human race.

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**Pamphlet 146**

## **THE QUESTION OF THE VALIDITY OF BAPTISM CONFERRED IN THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER- DAY SAINTS**

**Fr Luis Ladaria, S.J.**

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has given a negative response to a "*Dubium*" regarding the validity of Baptism conferred in the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, more commonly known as the *Mormons*. Given that this decision changes the past practice of not questioning the validity of such Baptism, it seems appropriate to explain the reasons that have led to this decision and to the resulting change of practice.

**Doctrinal errors usually do not invalidate baptism**

This explanation becomes even more necessary if one considers that errors of a doctrinal nature have never been considered sufficient to question the validity of the sacrament of Baptism. In fact, already in the middle of the third century Pope Stephen I, opposing the decisions of an African synod in 256 A.D., reaffirmed that the ancient practice of the imposition of hands as a sign of repentance should be maintained, but not the rebaptism of a heretic who enters the Catholic Church. In this way, the name of Christ attains great honour for faith and sanctification because whoever is baptized in the name of Christ, wherever that has taken place, has received the grace of Christ (cf. Denzinger-Hüngermann [DH] 110-111). The same principle was upheld by the Synod of Arles in 314 (cf. DH 123). Well known also is the struggle of St Augustine against the Donatists. The Bishop of Hippo affirms that the validity of the sacrament depends neither on the personal sanctity of the minister nor on his belonging to the Church.

**Right intention is the intention to do what the Church wants, what Christ wants**

Even non-Catholics can validly administer Baptism. In every case, however, it is the Baptism of the Catholic Church, which does not belong to those who separate themselves from her but to the Church from which they have separated themselves (cf. Augustine, *On Baptism* 1, 12,9). This validity is possible because Christ is the true minister of the sacrament: Christ is the one who truly baptizes, whether it is Peter or Paul or Judas who baptizes (cf. Augustine, *Treatise on the Gospel of John* VI, 1,7; cf.

CCC n. 1127). The Council of Trent, confirming this tradition, defined that Baptism administered by heretics in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, with the intention of doing what the Catholic Church does is true Baptism (cf. DH 1617).

### **The validity of doubtful baptism is presumed especially in the case of marriage, as in the case of the Christians of Nagasaki**

The most recent documents of the Catholic Church maintain the same teaching. The Code of Canon Law prescribes that those who have been baptized in non-Catholic ecclesial communities (as long as there is no doubt regarding the matter or the form or the intention of the minister or of the person being baptized) should not be baptized again (cf. *Code of Canon Law*, can. 869 §2). Intrinsically connected to this problem is that of who can be the minister of Baptism in the Catholic Church. According to the Code, in cases of necessity anyone can baptize, provided the intention is correct (cf. can. 861 §2). The Code of Canon Law confirms the fundamental elements of Tridentine teaching and makes more explicit what is the required correct intention: "The intention required is to will to do what the Church does when she baptizes. The Church finds the reason for this possibility in the universal saving will of God and the necessity of Baptism for salvation" (CCC, n. 1256. Evidently, the necessity of Baptism spoken of here is not to be understood in an absolute sense; cf. *ibid.*, nn. 1257-1261). Precisely because of the necessity of Baptism for salvation the Catholic Church has had the tendency of broadly recognizing this right intention in the conferring of this sacrament, even in the case of a false understanding of Trinitarian faith, as for example in the case of the Arians.

Taking into account this deeply-rooted practice of the Church, applied without any doubt as to the multiplicity of non-Catholic Christian communities emerging from the so-called Reform of the 16th century, it is easily understood that when there appeared in the United States the religious movement of Joseph Smith around 1830, in which the matter and the words of the form of Baptism were correctly utilized, this Baptism was considered valid, analogously to the Baptism of so many other non-Catholic ecclesial communities. Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, according to their teaching, received the priesthood of Aaron in 1829. Given the circumstances of the Church in the United States in the 19th century and the means of social communication at that time, even though the new religious movement gained a considerable number of followers, the knowledge that ecclesiastical authorities could have had of the doctrinal errors that were professed in this new group was necessarily very limited throughout the entire century. For

the practical cases that emerged there was applied the response of the Holy Office of 9 September 1868 given for the Christian communities of Japan which had remained isolated and without priests from the time of the persecution at the beginning of the 17th century. According to this response: 1) those persons about whom there was doubt whether they were validly baptized should be considered Christians; 2) this Baptism should be considered valid with regard to the validity of marriage (Gasparri, *Fontes*, IV, n. 1007).

### **Current doubts about the validity of Mormon baptism**

In the 20th century, the Catholic Church became more aware of the Trinitarian errors which the teaching proposed by Smith contained, though he used the traditional terms, and therefore more and more doubts spread about the validity of the Baptism conferred by the Mormons, in spite of the fact that the form, as far as the substance of the terminology goes, coincided with that used by the Church. As a result, almost imperceptibly there developed difference of practice, insofar as those who had a certain personal knowledge of the teaching of the Mormons considered their Baptism invalid, while the common practice continued of applying the traditional principle of the presumption in favour of the validity of such Baptism, since there was no official norm in this regard. In recent years, as a result of a request from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Bishops' Conference of the United States undertook a detailed study of this delicate issue with the hope of coming to a definitive conclusion. On its part the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith undertook a new examination of the material that came from the United States and thus was able to resolve the proposed question.

What are the reasons which now led to this negative position regarding the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, which seems different from the position of the Catholic Church throughout the centuries?

### **Huge divergence on Trinity and baptism invalidates the intention of the Mormon minister of baptism and of the one to be baptized**

According to the traditional doctrine of the Catholic Church there are four requirements for the valid administration of the sacrament of Baptism: the matter, the form, the intention of the minister, and the right disposition of the recipient. Let us examine briefly each of these four elements in the teaching and practice of the Mormons.

I. **The Matter.** On this point there is no problem. Water is used.

II. **The Form.** We have seen that in the texts of the Magisterium on Baptism there is a reference to the invocation of the Trinity (to the sources already mentioned, the Fourth Lateran Council could be added here [DH 802]). The formula used by the Mormons might seem at first sight to be a Trinitarian formula. The text states: "*Being commissioned by Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*" (cf. D&C 20:73). The similarities with the formula used by the Catholic Church are at first sight obvious, but in reality they are only apparent. There is not in fact a fundamental doctrinal agreement. There is not a true invocation of the Trinity because the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, according to the *Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, are not the three persons in which subsists the one Godhead, but three gods who form one divinity. One is different from the other, even though they exist in perfect harmony (Joseph F. Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* [TPJSI, Salt Lake City: Desert Book, 1976, p. 372). The very word divinity has only a functional, not a substantial content, because the divinity originates when the three gods decided to unite and form the divinity to bring about human salvation (*Encyclopaedia of Mormonism* [EM], New York: Macmillan, 1992, cf. Vol. 2, p. 552). This divinity and man share the same nature and they are substantially equal. God the Father is an exalted man, native of another planet, who has acquired his divine status through a death similar to that of human beings, the necessary way to divinization (cf. TPJS, pp. 345-346). God the Father has relatives and this is explained by the doctrine of infinite regression of the gods who initially were mortal (cf. TPJS, p. 373). God the Father has a wife, the Heavenly Mother, with whom he shares the responsibility of creation. They procreate sons in the spiritual world. Their firstborn is Jesus Christ, equal to all men, who has acquired his divinity in a pre-mortal existence. Even the Holy Spirit is the son of heavenly parents. The Son and the Holy Spirit were procreated after the beginning of the creation of the world known to us (cf. EM, Vol. 2, p. 961). Four gods are directly responsible for the universe, three of whom have established a covenant and thus form the divinity.

As is easily seen, to the similarity of titles there does not correspond in any way a doctrinal content which can lead to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The words Father, Son and Holy Spirit, have for the Mormons a meaning totally different from the Christian meaning. The differences are so great that one cannot even consider that this doctrine is a heresy which emerged out of a false understanding of the Christian doctrine. The teaching of the Mormons has a completely different matrix. We do not find ourselves, therefore, before the case of the validity of Baptism administered by heretics, affirmed already from