

would not consider baptism to be other than what he or she was correctly taught. It would not seem possible that the Mormon candidate would have the same disposition that the Catholic Church requires for the Baptism of adults.

In sum, the Baptism of the Catholic Church and that of the Latter-day Saints differ essentially both for what concerns faith in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and, for what concerns the relationship to Christ who instituted Christian Baptism. For these reasons, the Catholic Church considers Mormon baptism invalid; i.e., it does not consider true Baptism the rite given that name by the Church of Latter-Day Saints.

The CDF response is an objective and formal one to the question of sacramental validity. It offers and carries no personal judgments on the worth or integrity of individual believing Mormons. Catholics and Mormons sometimes find themselves working together on a range of pro-life and pro-family challenges sincerely seeking the common good of our society and the human community. These latter efforts are welcome and should be encouraged.

I conclude as I began with full gratitude to the Rev. Luis Ladaria, S.J. for his masterful doctrinal summary, which I have tried here merely to condense.

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Pamphlet 064

Is Mormon Baptism valid?

On June 5, 2001, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith answered a dubium (question) on the validity of Mormon baptism. The question posed was: Whether the baptism conferred by the community, “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” called “Mormons” in the vernacular, is valid. The Response was: Negative (AAS 93 [2001] p. 476).

That formal doctrinal response was published, as is, in the Acta without further explanation.

However, two excellent commentaries, one doctrinal by L. Ladaria, S.J., and, the other canonical by U. Navarette, S.J. were published immediately in L’Osservatore Romano (#31/1704) (August 1, 2001) pp. 4-6. The article by Fr. Ladaria on doctrine is so well constructed and explanatory that I could not improve on it and thus I simply cite his major points.

This is unusual because doctrinal errors usually do not invalidate baptism. From the earliest times, an African Synod in 256 A.D. determined that those baptized by heretics could be received into the Catholic Church without rebaptism. The same was true with St. Augustine’s great struggle with the Donatists; Augustine taught that the validity of the sacrament depends neither on the personal sanctity of the minister nor on his belonging to the Church.

The right intention is the intention to do what the Church wants, what Christ wants. The Council of Trent confirms this tradition, when it 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 (DS. 1617).

In the United States, the religious movement of Joseph Smith (Mormons) used the same matter (water) and almost the same form (Trinitarian) and this was considered valid. While the number of Mormons grew in the 19th and 20th centuries, it is fair to say that the number and kind of doctrinal errors professed in this group were not well-known in mainstream Christianity.

In the 20th century, the Catholic Church became more aware of the Trinitarian errors proposed by Joseph Smith—he did use traditional terms but the concepts and content diverge radically from orthodox Christianity.

According to traditional doctrine there are four requirements for the valid administration of sacramental Baptism: (1) the matter; (2) the form; (3) the intention of the minister; and (4) the right disposition of the recipient. Fr. Ladaria summarizes all four.

(1) The matter. On this point there is no problem, water is used and Mormons practice baptism by immersion.

(2) The form. At first hearing, the Mormon formula sounds Trinitarian: “Being commissioned by Jesus Christ, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The words are similar but the doctrine is not. There is not a true invocation of

the Trinity because the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in Mormon doctrine, are not three persons in which subsists the one Godhead, but three gods who form one divinity.

One is different from the other. The very word “divinity” here is functional, not substantial, because this divinity originates when the three gods decide to unite. This “divinity” and “man” share the same nature and are substantially equal. God the Father is an exalted man, native of another planet. God the Father has relatives. God the Father has a wife, the Heavenly Mother, and they procreate sons in the spiritual world. Their first-born is Jesus Christ, who acquired his divinity in a pre-mortal existence. Even the Holy Spirit is the son of heavenly parents. Four gods are directly responsible for the universe, three of whom established a covenant and thus formed the divinity.

Thus, the similarity of titles (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) does not correspond at all with the doctrinal content of the Christian Creeds about the Holy Trinity. These words (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) have, for Mormons, an entirely different meaning from the true Christian meaning.

(3) The intention of the minister. This profound doctrinal diversity (re the very notion of God) prevents the Mormon minister 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 is even clearer when we consider the Mormon belief that Baptism was not instituted

by Christ but by God and began with Adam. For them, Christ simply commanded this Adamic baptism and did not institute it himself. Mormon baptism originated not in Christ, but as the beginning of creation, and is not, therefore, Christian Baptism, the newness of which is denied.

The Mormon minister (i.e., priest), formed in Mormon doctrine, has an intention very different in respect to what the Catholic Church intends to do when it baptizes. True Christian Baptism intends the conferral of the Sacrament instituted by Christ which means participation in his death and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-11; Col. 2:12-13).

While not as fundamental as the prior points of doctrine, there are other differences as well. According to Catholic doctrine, true Baptism removes both personal sins and original sin, so that even infants are baptized. Mormon doctrine denies the existence of original sin and therefore baptizes only those who have the use of reason and are at least eight years old. In fact, the Catholic practice of infant baptism is one of the main reasons that Mormon doctrine says that the Catholic Church apostatized in the first centuries so that sacraments celebrated by the Catholic Church are all invalid.

Further, Mormons practice re-baptism, i.e., a Mormon who renounces his faith or is excommunicated from it, must be re-baptized. Thus, they accept no permanent sacramental “character” and again here do not intend to do what the Church does.

(4) Disposition of the recipient. Presumably, since the Mormon candidate for baptism

already has the use of reason, when instructed
in Mormon doctrine on baptism, that candidate