

Declaration regarding the marriage between reformed and roman-catholic Christians (Signed May 8, 1971)

Preamble

The Dutch Reformed Church, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands on the one side and the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands on the other side, have recognized the administration of each others baptism in joint declarations. They confess that baptism is sign and seal of the covenant-community with the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. They also recognize the appeal on account of Christ to all His own to, in connection to His Word, strive for the revelation of their unity in Christ.

See Ubp 74.2

Further to their joint declaration the churches above mentioned have also given serious consideration to the question of how they should act united regarding the marriage between reformed and roman-catholic Christians. The Remonstrant Brotherhood was also taking part in this consideration.

Without prejudice to the still existing differences the churches take the position that the community with the Lord is present in these marriages. They think however, that there can be special difficulties connected to these marriages, which are the consequence of the separation of the churches caused by the differences in confession and practice of faith. In connection with both these aspects the churches look upon it as their calling to give these members pastoral support. In view of this the churches jointly publish this declaration.

A. Biblical starting points

1.

The churches recognize marriage as an institution by God, who created human man and woman, and brought them together to form a unity with each other through love and loyalty and in this way preserve the human race (compare Genesis 2: 18-25). Matrimony is by its origin and purpose a union between one man and one woman, which binds them for life (compare the Gospel according to Matthew 19: 3-9).

2.

The churches confess as well, that God Himself made matrimony to a token of the faithful covenant between Him and His people (Hosea 2: 8, 19).

3.

The cohabitation of man and woman is disturbed by sin. But matrimony may also take part in the reconciliation of Jesus Christ. Therefore matrimony reaches its richest development and purpose, when man and woman give themselves to one and other in this faith. Thus matrimony, as a matrimony "in the Lord", becomes an image of the bond between Christ and his congregation (compare Ephesians 5: 32). In view of this the churches should see it as their calling to point out the deep meaning of a matrimony "in the Lord" to their church members in preaching, teaching and pastoral support.

B. The religious-mixed marriage

4.

Two Christians from different denominations getting married may accept their cohabitation as a religious community according to the word of the apostle Paul: "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all" (Ephesians 4: 5 and 6). However, in such a marriage special difficulties can occur in view of prayer life, the use of the Holy Scripture, taking part in worship, the experience of sacraments, baptism and education of children. Although the churches can not take over the responsibility of husband and wife, it is her duty to point out these difficulties to those who get married and give them pastoral support. It remains the most important calling of the churches with those who decide on such a marriage, to find a way towards a joint experience of their matrimony as an image of the bond between Christ and his congregation, in spite of the separation of churches and the consequences of this separation in this matrimony. Therefore the churches will give special pastoral care to the couple. Also it is necessary that the churches jointly give attention to those contemplating a religious-mixed marriage, in teaching or discussion.

C. The blessing of the Church

5.

Whenever a roman-catholic and a reformed Christian have decided to enter into marriage with one and other, the churches, in the execution of pastoral support, will let themselves be guided not so much as by what divides them, but by what unites them.

6.

If one of the partners decides to change to the church of the other, the churches will respect this decision. It is however important that the motives which have led to this decision have been discussed in the pastoral

talks with the bride and groom. It is self-evident that the blessing of the church will take place in the church to which they than both belong.

7.

If both partners wish to remain member of their own church, the blessing of marriage will, if possible, be given in one of the churches involved. The churches consider it not correct to have this marriage blessed in both churches, because this would reduce the meaning of the blessing of marriage. If the blessing of marriage takes place in one of the churches, the minister and priest involved should communicate with one and other to consider together with the bride and groom the manner of blessing of marriage. The church performing the blessing of marriage will be ready to invite the minister or priest of the other church involved to be present at the service and after consideration, take part in the service in a responsible manner.

8.

In the decision on the question whether to have the marriage blessing in a reformed or roman-catholic church the choice of the bride and groom is of very high importance, although of course the churches themselves are entitled to have their say in this. As a rule the order of worship and the marriage formulary which are used in the service will be those of the church where the marriage is blessed.

9.

Given the fact that there are couples who express explicitly the desire to celebrate Communion or Eucharist in the blessing of the marriage, the churches are of the opinion that they will have to reflect as soon as possible on the possibilities and problems connected with this. In the present situation the churches find that it is in general not desirable during this period of reflection to have Communion or Eucharist in a service where a mixed marriage is blessed.

10.

The questions being asked of the bride and groom (in a given case are being asked by bride and groom of one and other), should be discussed in advance by them and by their priest and minister, especially when these questions involve the Holy Baptism and the Christian education of their potential children. It goes without saying that there will be asked no other questions of the marrying couple than the ones asked in public: they will in mutual respect for each others religious conviction live their marriage and raise their children in the spirit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

D. The pastoral support to religious-mixed marriages

11.

If the couple has decided each to continue to be member of their own church, the priest and minister of both churches will have to consider with each other and with the married couple how the pastoral support will be given. The pastoral support should also aim for the partners in marriage, in respect for each others conviction, to take an actual interest in each others church- and faith experience.

12.

A number of religious-mixed couples has the understandable desire to participate together in Communion and Eucharist. The minister and priest have to point out the forms of open Communion and restricted open Eucharist, which have been already accepted by several churches or will possibly be accepted in the future. The entire problem around intercommunion makes separate consideration between the churches urgently necessary.

13.

Generally the emphasis of pastoral support to religious-mixed couples will have to be a conscious search for a mutual confession and experience of faith. The use of the Holy Scripture, prayer, taking part in worship and Christian service rendering will take an important role in this.

E. Holy Baptism and education of children from a religious-mixed marriage

14.

The three above-mentioned reformed Churches and the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands have in a joint declaration pronounced upon the unique meaning of Holy Baptism as token of the covenant of God with His people. The pastoral support to these couples may take the line that baptism is sign and seal of the one covenant-community with the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, as this takes shape in Christ's Church, which is one by nature.

15.

The choice of the church community in which the parents want to have their children baptized is the responsibility of the parents. Various circumstances can influence the choice, but in any case should the future education of the child be involved in the considerations. As token of the recognition of this baptism an announcement and/or note in the baptismal register could also be made of this in the congregation or parish where the baptism does not take place.

16.

Also in the determination of the line of conduct in the education of the children from a religious-mixed marriage is serious consideration by the parents necessary. Both should have a positive attitude towards an

education in the spirit of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as they have taken upon them in answering the baptismal questions. It is advisable that the family will focus on one church.

17.

The churches consider it of great importance that the school education is given in the spirit of the Gospel. Therefore they advise in their pastoral support to the parents to apply their Christian responsibility also in the choice of schools.