

Statement of
The Philippine Episcopal Church
and the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines

WHAT THE AGREEMENT ON BAPTISM MEANS

By

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The first contacts on this matter that led finally to the present, agreement, were made between the Secretariat of the Roman Catholic Bishops Commission for Promoting Christian Unity and Bishop Benito Cabanban in 1971, on the occasion of the visit to the Philippines of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Arthur Michael Ramsey. The formal conversations, however, started only in June 1977. The Joint Ecumenical Committee composed of members from both Churches prepared a tentative formula of agreement that was then submitted to the respective hierarchies for further study, comments and eventual approval. The Fifty-Seventh National Convocation of the Philippine Episcopal Church passed a resolution formally approving the document in June 1978. In July 1979, the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines gave also its final approval. Only some clarifications were requested and made to the satisfaction of all, and some very minor changes introduced into the final text.

With this as immediate background let me briefly explain what the Agreement means, what it does not mean, and some consequences that derive from it.

I. WHAT THE AGREEMENT MEANS

1. The Agreed Statement constitutes a formal recognition by the respective hierarchies that our two Churches administer a valid Baptism. Obviously, this fact has always been recognized by sound theology and historical research, although it must be confessed that at times the pastoral practice has not been consistent with the principles. Today's Agreement confirms a doctrine already accepted, and in that sense it makes the measure we are taking today retroactive.

2. The Agreement also officially recognizes that, in virtue of the Sacrament of Baptism validly administered, there is a certain real union among Christians of both Churches and between the Churches themselves. Baptism, thus, is recognized as being the sacramental bond of unity, indeed the foundation of communion among all baptized Christians.

3. This existing union, imperfect as it is, leads the members of both Churches to strive together for the living up of a deeper Christian life, and for greater expression of their oneness in Christ and unity in all areas of faith.

The present agreement, therefore, represents a little, yes, but still a positive step on the road to Christian unity.

II. WHAT THE AGREEMENT DOES NOT MEAN

1. The Agreement does not mean, operate or imply any kind of merger. Unfortunately the two Churches, although recognizing that there is a certain union between them, still remain two. This is a sad fact; but the sadness may operate as a challenge.

2. Neither does the Agreement mean that ministers of either Church are, or even can be, authorized to perform the ceremony of Baptism for the other. Such a conclusion is out of the scope and against the spirit of the Agreement. Episcopalian parents will continue having their children baptized in the Episcopal Church, and Roman Catholic parents will continue having their own children baptized in the Roman Catholic Church.

3. As corollary of what has been said, the present Agreement cannot in any way be used as a pretext for proselytism. In other words no member or minister of either Church may invoke this Agreement to try persuading the faithful of the other to have their children baptized in the Church to which the parents do not belong. This would be a betrayal of their own sincere faith and a travesty of a sincere Christian agreement.

Thus at the same time we rejoice for the unity we already have in Christ, and we are saddened for the division in which we still live.

III. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CONSEQUENCES THAT DERIVE FROM THE AGREEMENT.

1. The first practical consequence that results from the Agreement is obvious: Baptism can be conferred only once. Hence indiscriminate conditional baptism cannot be approved. The sacrament of baptism cannot be repeated; therefore, to be baptized again conditionally is not allowed unless there is prudent doubt of the fact or of the validity of a baptism already administered. The Philippine Episcopal Church and the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines today give each other mutual guarantees of the seriousness with which they perform their sacramental duties.

2. In virtue of today's agreement, the presentation of the baptismal certificate issued by either Church will be proof enough of the validity of baptism conferred when needed by ministers of the other Church. Such may be cases of inter-church marriage between an Episcopalian and a Roman Catholic, the passing from one Church to the other for reasons of conviction and conscience, or similar ones. By acknowledging the validity of the Baptism as certified by the document, situations can be avoided which may cause friction or at least produce unpleasant reactions, as the case has been more than once in the past.

3. The guarantees mutually offered by our Churches on the validity of the Baptism administered by them, commit both hierarchies and ministers to the most conscientious fulfillment of all liturgical prescriptions regulating the administration of baptism in the respective Churches.

In closing let me repeat with the Decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II that baptism "of itself is only a beginning, a point of departure, for it is wholly directed towards the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ" (UR, 22).

In 1972, a similar agreement was entered into between the Lutheran Church in the Philippines and the Roman Catholic Church. Today we may say that the ecumenical dialogue on basic questions even if proceedings at a slow pace has proven fruitful. Its results may extend to other Christian communities that have the same serious desire of fidelity to Christ and that want to give each other mutual guarantees of the faithful performance of Christ's baptism. But today's Agreement covers exclusively the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines and the Philippine Episcopal Church.

Without any religious triumphalism, but overwhelmed by God's gift to us, we joyously accept that a Christian, by the fact of being baptized, has been the object of God's special love, for he always bears not only the name of Christ on his forehead but Christ's actual image in his soul deeply and idelibly imprinted there by baptism. Hence we must be, "one in the Spirit, one in the Lord", since as the Apostle says: "There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism."