

# BAPTISM AND CHRISTIAN NAMES\*

## THE MEANING OF A RUBRIC

On the occasion of the publication of the *Ordo initiationis christianae adultorum* some people have searched for new elements or for something sensational to present to the public.

Among such people the rubrics of numbers 88 and 203, which concern the new name that is to be imposed at Baptism, have caused some interest. This act can take place at the beginning of the catechumenate (n. 88) or just before baptism (n. 203), according to the judgement of the Episcopal Conference.

The text of the rubric of n. 88 is as follows: "Sicubi vigent religiones non christianae, quae nomen novum initiatis statim imponunt, Conferentia Episcoporum decernere potest ut novis catechumenis iam nunc nomen imponatur **vel christianum** vel in culturibus localibus usitatum, non obstante praescriptione can. 761 CIC, **dummodo christiano sensu affici valeat**" (cfr. n. 203).

In a certain sense, this is really something new, as the prescription of the Code of Canon Law — already, however, reasonably fluid — is reduced in force: "Curent parochi ut ei qui baptizatur, christianum imponatur nomen; quod si id consequi non poterunt, nomini a parentibus imposito addant nomen alicuius Sancti..." (Can. 761). But what is the real meaning of this rubric and what reasons have inspired it?

1. First of all it must be said that the rubric of Nos. 88 and 203 was not formulated on the basis of particular contingent circumstances. The *Ordo* went through a long period of preparation and experimentation (cfr. the preceding article of the

\* This article is taken from the text of the Holy Father's address during the General Audience on 19 January 1972 as printed in *L'Osservatore Romano*, January 27, 1972.

same issue of *Notitiae*, pp. 88-89). The final redaction of the rubric of which we speak dates, in its present form, from June 1968.

2. With the new dispositions it is certainly not intended to discourage the use on the part of those to be baptized of taking the name of a saint.

As in the *Ordo* for the Baptism of Infants (n. 48) and in that for the Christian initiation of adults (n. 214) the possibility of inserting the invocation of the saints whose names are being taken by the baptized into the litany is foreseen.

In the christian tradition, the strong link between the person and the saint whose name he bears has always been favourably looked upon. It is a relationship of protection and, at the same time, an encouragement to reproduce the ideal of christian life realised by the saint-protector.

In the case of the adult the imposition of a christian name has a particular significance. Baptism is in fact the beginning of a **new life**. On this account, the change of name is most expressive of, so to speak, the change from the previous way of life to that which is christian.

Also in this regard one should remember the use by many monastic families and of religious of giving another name at the moment of entry into religious life.

This fact, rooted in psychology and in human tradition, is generally acceptable to newly baptized adults who, especially when they live in an environment that is non-christian are very proud of their christian name. It is a sign of their dignity and a continual recalling of their new state.

The new *Ordo* takes into account of all this, but considers also the particular situations in determinate cultures.

For example, in Japan, it was noted: "The baptismal name does not have to be exclusively that of a saint, but also could be another Japanese name which expresses a christian idea. In fact, Japanese names are very often imposed precisely because of their meaning. One might, at the same time, give the candidate a patron saint and allow him to keep his previous name." It was noted that the change of name is of importance in Japan, it being done there, for example, following the joining of some particular association.

This is the sense of the rubric. So much is true that it speaks of the possibility of taking a name which "*christianu sensu indui quaet*" and it adds "*Interdum . . . satis erit ut electo expalnetur significatio, christiana nominis antea accepti*" (Nos. 203 and 205).

The new disposition has a certain broadness. It wanted to be respectful to the Christian tradition of imposing a new name, preferably that of a saint, and at the same time to be attentive to the customs and sensibility of the various peoples. And so three possibilities are foreseen:

- the imposition of a christian name;
- the giving of a "local" name which, however, has a christian significance;
- the consenting to keep the name which the baptized already has, explaining to him the Christian significance.

3. This, evidently, does not concern anyone who has already been baptized for some time and who has already assumed a Christian name. Such people, that is, cannot find in the rubric in question any motive for abandoning the name of the saint which they have carried since the time of baptism. Such an abandonment, either when it is voluntary, or, of greater import, if it is imposed, could however appear as gesture which is not respectful to religion to which this name must be referred.

Nor does this article n. 88 of the *Ordo*, which we have quoted, touch per se, those who receive baptism at infancy, for whom the dispositions of Canon 761 still hold.

4. Considering the wide scope of the problem, the rubrical indications could not but be general. The application to concrete cases and to local situations will be carried out by the competent ecclesiastical authorities, more precisely by the Episcopal Conferences, who know the exigencies of their own countries, and the most fruitful methods for an effective pastoral of baptism, better.

In this, as in regard to other points, it applies to them (and not — might it be said incidentally — to non-ecclesiastical authorities) to give more precise norms, which will then have the value of law.

It is within their competence in law, for example, to judge whether some names are less convenient or less meaningful for a christian, and also, if they believe it necessary, that a candidate, desirous of keeping his own name, would also have to take the name of a saint.

5. The question of baptismal names, which might also appear at first glance to be of secondary importance, takes on prominence for the reason shown above, and for the meaning that can be justifiably attributed to it.

To be expected, above all, from a properly orientated pastoral of baptism is the awakening in the fruitful — over and above the outward signs, that is, the imposition of a "christian" name — of a consciousness of that "new life" which is inaugurated in the "bath of regeneration".

Truly the baptized is a "different man", a "new man", and this "difference" must be engraved profoundly into his existence and into his acts.

That does not mean any sort of misunderstanding, much less an abandonment or denial, of the most authentic values of human traditions and culture — which christianity, moreover, favours and elevates — but on the contrary, their being brought to advantage and their refinement. Christians, in fact, do not cease to be the sons of their own people, and altogether belong to those people "who are called and really are the sons of God."

#### TRIBUTE TO MSGR. JOVELLANOS

"I will never forget those precious minutes every morning at the pre-dieu with this man praying in common our morning devotions. His fatherly example gave me the inspiration to keep up the spirit of Christ in thick and in thin. His generosity to the poor of Tondo will put to shame those philanthropists of our time. It was and it is still a common sight to see hordes of indigents crowding the convent and they never left with empty hands. His undying zeal for souls is proverbial. Here is indeed a man of God!"

**Msgr. Amado Paulino, D.D.**