

AGREEMENT ON BAPTISM BETWEEN THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES

Pedro S. de Achutequi, S.J.

On Sunday, February 6, 1972, an agreement on Baptism between the Lutheran Church in the Philippines and the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines was officially signed at Trinity Lutheran Church in Quezon City. The Most Rev. Teopisto V. Alberto, D.D., President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines and the Rev. Dr. Alvaro A. Cariño, D.D., President of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, were the main signatories. Some 300 people, Roman Catholics and Lutherans, representing both clergy and laity, participated in the prayer service.

A brief history of the preparation of this historic event may be useful to understand its reasons and its implications.

The Ecumenical Directory (or by its complete title, the *Directory for the Application of the Decisions of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council concerning Ecumenical Matters*)¹ devotes its second chapter to the topic of "The Validity of Baptism conferred by Ministers of Churches and Ecclesial Communities Separated from Us." It summarizes the main pronouncements of Vatican II on Baptism. The document presents the ecumenical aspect of Baptism in the following words:

¹ The Directory was issued on May 14, 1967 by the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, with the signatures of Augustin Cardinal Bea, then President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, and Bishop (now Cardinal) John Willebrands, then Secretary (now President) of the same Secretariat. The Directory had been approved and confirmed by Pope Paul VI on April 28, 1967. The document was published in *Atea Apostolicae Sedis*, Vol. LIX, 1967, pp. 574-592. A Philippine English edition was printed by St. Paul Publications, 2650 F. B. Harrison, Pasay City. We will cite it as Ecumenical Directory.

11. Baptism is, then, the sacramental bond of unity, indeed the foundation of communion among all Christians. Hence its dignity and the manner of administering it are matters of great importance to all Christ's disciples. Yet a just evaluation of the sacrament and the mutual recognition of each other's baptisms by different communities is sometimes hindered because of a reasonable doubt about the baptism conferred in some particular case . . .²

It establishes as a fact that "there can be no doubt cast upon the validity of baptism as conferred among the separated Eastern Christians."³

After developing the reasons for certain doubts regarding the baptism administered by other separated Christian Churches, and the conditions for admitting its validity, it states:

16. The whole question of the theology and practice of baptism should be brought up in dialogue between the Catholic Church and the other separated churches or communities. It is recommended that ecumenical commissions should hold such discussions with churches or councils of churches in various regions and, where convenient, come to a common agreement in this matter.⁴

It was in view of this recommendation of the *Ecumenical Directory* that the decision was made by the Bishops' Commission for Promoting Christian Unity to sound out the possibilities of starting a dialogue on the matter of Baptism. The next question was with what Churches could the dialogue start.

Prior to the publication of the *Ecumenical Directory* a symposium had been held at the Loyola House of Studies, School of Theology and Ecclesiastical Studies of the Ateneo de Manila University, on "Baptism and Ecumenism". The symposium was held on March 4, 1967. A summary of its proceedings was published in *Philippine Studies*.⁵ The Churches whose Baptism was object of study were: the various Aglipayan Churches (principally the Trinitarian group, juridically the Philippine Independent Church), the Iglesia ni Kristo, the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, the Protestant Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church, the Iglesia Evangelica Metodista en las Islas Filipinas, the Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Cristo, the United Church of Christ, and the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Cooperation from the Churches involved was secured, and the symposium was in a real sense ecumenical.

² Ecumenical Directory n. 11.

³ Ibid n. 12.

⁴ Ibid. n. 16.

⁵ Philippine Studies, Vol. XVI, No. 1 (1968), pp. 155-177.

The question then occurred why certain Churches were chosen for study in preference to others. The answer was as follows:

The criterion of choice consisted of the following considerations: a) a greater nearness in doctrine and ritual between these churches and the Roman Catholic Church; b) the importance of these churches both from the national and from the ecumenical viewpoint; c) finally, in some cases, these were the churches that cooperated cordially in a survey, conducted by a questionnaire or by personal interview; in other cases, the doctrines of the churches involved are sufficiently known from studies previously made.⁶

The decision to start the "official" conversations with the Lutheran Church in the Philippines came through various circumstances as a mature and spontaneously mature choice. There were no historical or immediate obstacles which would impede smooth sailing, as would be the case with some of the other churches; there would be no danger of confusion, because the number of faithful of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines was and is rather small (about 10,000); the validity of the baptism administered by the Lutheran Church could hardly be placed in doubt—as in contrast with some other groups; similar agreements were being contemplated in other countries between the Lutheran and the Roman Catholic Church; finally the Lutheran Church in the Philippines was very desirous of engaging in serious ecumenical conversations and in particular on the matter of Baptism.

Thus in 1968 a Joint Ecumenical Committee was set up by the Roman Catholic Bishops' Commission for Promoting Christian Unity and the Commission for Ecumenical Affairs of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines. After several months of theological study and reflection, the committee completed work on a tentative agreement which was then submitted to the hierarchy of both Churches for further study and comments.

In October 1970, the 9th General Convention of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines passed a resolution formally approving the document. Shortly afterwards the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines also gave their approval. Only some minor changes in the text were suggested—and accepted—by both parties. Thus the way was paved for the final step, although due to circumstances beyond control it was unduly delayed.

The formal signing of the agreement took place during a Scripture Service. Appropriate readings from the Epistle to the Ephesians (4:1-6)

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 158.

and the Gospel of St. John (3:1-8) were chosen for the occasion. Psalm 103 was read responsively, general intercessions and the profession of faith—with the ecumenical text of the Apostles' Creed—were recited by the community. The Thanksgiving Hymn (*Te Deum*) was sung by the choir, the Lord's Prayer was said in unison by the assembly, "A Mighty Fortress" was the concluding hymn.

The documents were signed during the service itself after the recitation of the Creed and before the signing of the *Te Deum*, preceded and followed by explanatory remarks and an address.

The text itself presented below together with the Joint Declaration, will be followed by an explanation of the meaning and implications of the agreement.

AGREEMENT ON BAPTISM BETWEEN THE LUTHERAN CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES

We, representatives of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines and the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines, hereby enter into an agreement in virtue of which we recognize that each Church administers the same baptism of Christ and that our respective ordinances and traditions comply with the biblical institution of baptism in their essential aspects.

Although our Churches have always recognized the baptism administered according to the New Testament, this present approval constitutes an act whereby our Churches mutually give guarantees of the validity of the baptism administered by their respective ministers.

The baptism thus administered is to be registered, while in doubtful cases the Churches will consult each other.

The implications of this agreement of mutual recognition are:

We rejoice in this expression of Christian unity;

We promise to honor the baptism that is definitely established as having been performed by the other body as God's own action, not to be repeated under any circumstances, not even conditionally;

We commit ourselves to a faithful observance of the baptismal rite as prescribed by our respective Churches;

We pledge to continue working towards unity in all areas of Church life and doctrine including those in which real and serious differences still exist.

The joint declaration hereby appended, prepared by the Joint Ecumenical Commission and approved by the authorities of our respective Churches, is hereby also approved.

In testimony thereof, we affix our signatures this 6th day of February, 1972, at the Trinity Lutheran Church, Quezon City, Philippines.

(Sgd.) Dr. Alvaro A. Cariño, D.D.
President, Lutheran Church in
the Philippines

(Sgd.) Most Rev. Teopisto V.
Alberto, D.D.
President, Catholic Bishops'
Conference of the Philippines

(Sgd.) Rev. Feliciano Inay
Secretary, Lutheran Church in
the Philippines

(Sgd.) Most Rev. William
Brasseur, D.D.
Chairman, Bishops' Commission on
Liturgy

(Sgd.) Rev. David Schneider
Chairman, Commission for
Ecumenical Affairs, LCP
For the Roman Catholic Church
In the Philippines:

(Sgd.) Most Rev. Cornelio de
Wit, D.D.
Chairman, Bishops' Commission
for Promoting Christian Unity

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY BAPTISM

The Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines and the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, after careful study, declare the following:

1. THE ESSENCE OF BAPTISM

The Sacrament of Holy Baptism is the spiritual cleansing of an individual by the washing of water with the Word of God, in obedience to Christ's command, and with faith in the promises which God attaches to this Sacrament.

Eph.5:26
Matt.28:19
1 Pet.3:21

2. THE NECESSITY OF BAPTISM

Holy Baptism is necessary for salvation, as our Lord said, "Unless one is born of water and the Holy Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of

God." Although God can save men without Baptism, Baptism should not be despised because we are bound to obey our Lord's clear word and command. Moreover, Baptism, being the sacrament of initiation, is necessary for all, for infants as well as for adults. John 3:5

3. THE EFFECTS OF BAPTISM

God acts through Baptism to accomplish His purposes in the person baptized. Rom. 6:6,11

Through Baptism, God gives to the baptized forgiveness of sins, rebirth into a new life in the Holy Spirit, and salvation. John 3:3-6;
Acts 2:38f.;
Titus 3:5-7;

He incorporates the baptized into the crucified and glorified Christ. 1 Pet.3:21
Rom.6:3ff.

By incorporating the baptized person into the living Christ. He also incorporates him into the Church, and thus adopts him into His own family, making him a brother to all other baptized persons. 1 Cor.12:13
Gal.3:27-28

He enables the baptized to begin and carry on a life of joyful service through the Holy Spirit, and to fight against all kinds of evil. Rom.6:1-23

4. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BAPTIZED

Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, those who have been baptized should walk in newness of life. Thus all Christians are bound to show forth by the example of their lives and speech that new man whom they put on at Baptism.

Baptism lays upon the baptized the responsibility to use God's Word regularly to enable him to repent, to receive forgiveness, and to grow in faith and good works. Acts 2:38-42

Our Lord's command places upon the Church the responsibility to instruct, and to baptize and encourage the baptized in the Christian faith and life. Mt.28:19-20

Baptism constitutes a sacramental bond of unity which joins together all who have been re- Eph.4:3-6

born by means of it. This one Baptism therefore demands that those who through it have been brought together into the body of Christ, strive together for greater expression of their oneness in Christ and for unity in all areas of faith.

5. VALIDITY OF BAPTISM

Baptism is valid if it is performed in accordance with Christ's command, that is, applying water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. By his power, God is present in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, so that when a man baptizes, it is God Himself who acts. There is only one baptism. Therefore, a person who is validly baptized should never be baptized again.

Mt.28:19

Eph.4:5

Except in cases of emergency, only an ordained minister of the Church will administer Holy Baptism.

6. THE RITE OF BAPTISM

In emergency cases, it is sufficient to use a simple rite, which includes at least applying water either by immersion or infusion to the person to be baptized and reciting the Baptismal formula.

Any further ritual and ceremonial elaboration of this basic rite may be prescribed by the Churches for the sake of order and its instructional value.

A common rite for those churches which have the same understanding of the nature of Baptism, though not necessary, would serve to make them more consciously aware of their oneness as well as to demonstrate their common understanding of it.

7. MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF BAPTISMAL VALIDITY

The Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines and the Lutheran Church in the Philippines hereby express their mutual recognition of the validity of Christian Baptism as it is per-

formed according to the rites of the respective Churches. The implications of such mutual recognition follow:

We rejoice in this expression of Christian unity;

We promise to honor the Baptism definitely established as having been performed by the other body as God's own action, not to be repeated under any circumstance, not even conditionally;

We commit ourselves to a faithful observance of the Baptismal rite as prescribed by our respective Churches;

We pledge to continue working toward unity in all areas of Church life and doctrine, including those areas in which very real and serious differences still exist.

GENERAL REMARKS ON THE MEANING OF THE AGREEMENT

In the general teaching of the New Testament, by a valid baptism the baptized person is organically united to Christ and His mystical body, he becomes by virtue of grace the adopted son of God and in consequence all those who are validly baptized are brothers. Although there is certainly a general brotherhood with the non-baptized, the non-Christians on the purely human level, there is not with them that specifically Christian brotherhood rooted in union with Christ.

These ideas are expressed in various documents of the Second Council of the Vatican. We believe that by the Sacrament of Baptism "man becomes truly incorporated into the crucified and glorified Christ, and is reborn to a sharing of the divine life."⁷ This first conversion to Christ through faith and baptism is the central and decisive conversion of the Christian, whether he be Orthodox, Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Anglican, or Protestant in general. All the baptized have a right to be called Christians.⁸ Together we share the same Lord and the same Spirit. "In the one Spirit we are all baptized into the one Body."⁹ To all Christians the Spirit "gives His gifts and graces whereby He is operative among them with His sanctifying power."¹⁰ "Faith, hope, and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as visible elements"¹¹ belong by God's gift to all Christians. In short there is a community of grace and fellowship among all believers reborn in Baptism and sharing the Holy Spirit.

⁷ Decree on Ecumensism, art. 22.

⁸ Ibid. art. 3.

⁹ 1 Cor. 12:13.

¹⁰ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, art. 15.

¹¹ Decree on Ecumenism, art. 3.

Incorporation into Christ means incorporation into the Church. This incorporation takes place through Baptism. And Baptism from its very nature "of itself, is only a beginning, a point of departure, for it is wholly directed towards the acquiring of fulness of life in Christ." Thus baptism is ordained "toward a complete profession of faith, a complete incorporation into the system of salvation such as Christ willed it to be, and finally, toward a complete integration into eucharistic communion."¹²

The importance of the agreement has to be seen in the light of two principles: that baptism is necessary for salvation and that it can be conferred only once. But since a just evaluation of the sacrament and the mutual recognition of each other's baptisms by different communities may be sometimes hindered because of a reasonable doubt about the baptism conferred in some particular case,¹³ for any difficulties that may arise a dialogue is the proper channel of solution. This is the reason behind the dialogue which has started between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, and which has culminated in the present agreement. It is to be hoped that the results of this dialogue may extend to other Christian communities that have the same serious desire of fidelity to Christ and want to give each other mutual guarantees of the faithful performance of Christ's baptism.

The immediate consequence is that indiscriminate conditional baptism cannot be approved. It will be allowed only when a prudent doubt of the fact or of the validity of a baptism already administered exists.

CONCRETE APPLICATIONS

While the step taken in the solemn signing of the agreement is significant, its real meaning must be understood. The validity of Baptism administered by Lutherans and Catholics had been always acknowledged by Catholics and Lutherans respectively. From that point of view the present agreement does not state anything new, although it implies that the measure taken in the explicit agreement makes the acknowledgement of Baptism retroactive. Moreover, what the agreement means is a formal and official recognition of the validity of the so-called Lutheran or Catholic baptism by the authorities of both Churches in the Philippines with its various implications. The most important among these implications are:

1) The explicit acknowledgement that a real — although imperfect — unity exists between the faithful of both Churches because of the

¹² *Ibid*, art. 22.

¹³ *Ecumenical Directory* n. 11

fact that their baptism has been properly administered. This union, even if still imperfect, should lead them to strive together for living in depth a true Christian life and looking together for a greater expression of their oneness in Christ as well as in all areas of faith, as far as it may be given them.

2) In virtue of the present agreement the presentation of the baptismal document issued by one Church will be proof enough for the minister of the other Church that the person in question is validly baptized. This will prevent unpleasant situations and needless frictions liable to arise in very concrete cases; such as in mixed marriages to be contracted between a Lutheran and a Roman Catholic when the baptismal certificate has to be presented, in sincere conversion or passing from one to the other Church for reasons of conscience, etc. No conditional baptism is to be administered in any of these cases, and — as mentioned above — this applies retroactively, to baptisms performed prior to this agreement.

3) The ministers and authorities of both Churches commit themselves to the most conscientious fulfillment of the prescriptions for the administration of baptism as they are embodied in their respective liturgical books. Thus the agreement "constitutes an act whereby our Churches mutually give guarantees of the validity of the baptism administered by their respective ministers."¹⁴

It would be deplorable, however, if the present agreement should be interpreted as if both Churches had achieved a merger — or at least taken the first step towards such a merger — and that from now on Lutherans might have their children baptized in the Catholic Church or Catholics their own ones in the Lutheran Church. Nothing is farther from the truth. Unfortunately the two Churches still remain *two*, not *one*, and they are the first deeply to deplore the division still existing. Catholic parents are obliged to have their children baptized and educated as Catholics, as Lutheran parents are also duty bound to have theirs baptized and educated as Lutherans, following the imperative of their conscience and convictions in *absolute* honesty. It would be similarly deplorable if the present agreement should be invoked as a reason or taken as a pretext for trying persuade the faithful of the other Church to have their children baptized in the Church to which the parents do

¹⁴ Fr. Jerome Hamer, O.P., Secretary of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, in a letter dated February 24, 1972 refers to the whole paragraph and shows his satisfaction and pleasure at its wording: "Je vous felicite de la formulation tres precise de votre deuxieme alinea: 'Although our Churches have always recognized the baptism administered according to the New Testament, this present approval constitutes an act whereby our Churches mutually give guarantees of the validity of the baptism administered by their respective ministers'."

not belong. This would be sheer proselytism, betrayal of their own faith, and a travesty of an ecumenical agreement for purposes far from ecumenical.

Three concrete suggestions may be offered here in the line of pastoral application. The first concerns directly the parish priests. The fact that the baptism administered by the Lutheran Church has been recognized as valid by the Catholic Church in the Philippines does not take away the need of a dispensation from the impediment of mixed religion, should a Catholic decide to marry a Lutheran. This dispensation, however, affects only the legitimacy, not the validity of a marriage properly celebrated in the Catholic Church.

The second suggestion is offered following the practice of a few bishops in the Philippines. It is the *opinion of this writer* that the faculty given by some bishops to his parish priests to dispense from the impediment of mixed religion, should be given to all parish priests over the Philippines, at least for the faithful of the Lutheran Church, and other Churches which may enter into the same agreement with the Catholic Church in the future. There would therefore be no need for the individual parish priests to have recourse to his bishop every time that a case of mixed religion is involved, when the validity of baptism of the non-Catholic party is assured.

Finally it would be advisable for Catholic priests living in territories where the Lutheran Church has its own pastors, to establish a dialogue on the agreement just reached and to study its nature, its meaning, and its implications from the pastoral point of view; so that what has been achieved at the national level, may have its application at the level of the local Church.

The ultimate basis for our fraternal love as Christians and for calling each other "brothers" is our baptism in Christ. This love, however, should not prevent us from acknowledging that there are still serious differences in matters of faith and in our understanding of the vital means of grace. While we must work together to overcome them, these divergencies do not abolish the fundamental truth of our belonging to Christ by baptism.

The agreement may be a small step for interchurch relationship, but it may also well be a giant step for ecumenism in the Philippines. With Pope Paul VI we may say that "hope is our guide, prayer our strength, charity our method, all at the service of the divine truth which is our faith and our salvation."¹⁵

¹⁵ A.A.S. 5 (1965) p. 852. The complete text of the homily, the address and the remarks, delivered respectively by the Most Rev. Teopisto Alberto, Rev. Dr. Alvaro A. Cariño, and the present writer, is found in the issue of *Philippine Studies*, January 1972, Vol. 20, No. 1.

THE CHURCH ON DIVORCE

The advocates of neopaganism, having learned nothing from the present sad state of affairs, continue daily to attack more bitterly the sacred indissolubility of marriage and the laws that support it, and contend that there must be a decision to recognize divorce, that other and more humane laws be substituted for the obsolete laws.

They bring forward many different causes for divorce, some deriving from the wickedness or sin of persons, others based on circumstances (the former they call subjective, the latter objective); whatever makes the individual married life more harsh and unpleasant. . . .

So there is prattle to the effect that laws must be made to conform to these requirements and changed conditions of the times, the opinions of men, and the civil institutions and customs, all of which individually, and especially when brought together, most clearly testify that opportunity for divorce must forthwith be granted for certain causes.

Others, proceeding further with remarkable impudence, believe that inasmuch as matrimony is a purely private contract, it should be left directly to the consent and private opinion of the two who contracted it, as is the case in other private contracts, and so can be dissolved for any reason.

But opposed to all these ravings stands the one most certain law of God, confirmed most fully by Christ, which can be weakened by no decrees of men or decisions of the people, by no will of legislators: "What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder" [Matt. 19:61]. And if a man, contrary to this law puts asunder, it is immediately illegal; so rightly, as we have seen more than once, Christ Himself has declared: "Everyone that putteth away his wife and marrieth another, committeth adultery, and he that marrieth her that is put away, committeth adultery" [Luke 16:18]. And these words of Christ refer to any marriage whatsoever, even that which is purely natural and legitimate; for indissolubility is proper to every true marriage, and whatever pertains to the loosening of the bond is entirely removed from the good pleasure of the parties concerned and from every secular power.

Pius XI.

Encycl. 'Casti Connubii',
(*cfr. Denz. 2249,2250*)