

*Agreement on Baptism between the
Lutheran Church in the Philippines and the
Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines*

Commented on by a Roman Catholic Theologian in Thailand

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 in the proper books, testimonies of which are to be given when requested, 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.

FOR THE LUTHERAN CHURCH
IN THE PHILIPPINES:

Dr. Alvaro A. Carino, D.D.
President, Lutheran Church in
the Philippines
Rev. Feliciano Inay
Secretary, Lutheran Church in
the Philippines
Rev. David Schneider
Chairman, Commission for
Ecumenical Affairs, LCP

FOR THE ROMAN CATHOLIC
CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES:

Most Rev. Teopisto V. Alberto, D.D.
President, Catholic Bishops'
Conference of the Philippines
Most Rev. William, Brasseur, D.D.
Chairman, Bishops' Commission on
Liturgy
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.

Through Baptism, God gives to the baptized forgiveness of sins, rebirth into a new life in the Holy Spirit, and salvation.

He incorporates the baptized into the crucified and glorified Christ.

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.

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: 6, 11

John 3: 3-6;

Acts 2:38f.;

Titus 3: 5-7;

1 Pet. 3: 21

Rom. 6: 3ff.

1 Cor. 12: 13

Gal. 3: 27-28

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 reborn by means of it. This

Eph. 4: 3-6

one Baptism therefore demands that those who through it have been brought together into the body of Christ, the Church, 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 performed 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.

It was refreshing from an ecumenical viewpoint to read the Agreement on Baptism between the Lutheran Church in the Philippines and the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines. Interesting also was the joint declaration on the Sacrament of Baptism approved by the authorities of their respective Churches. Both documents spelled out what I believe we have known and accepted pastorally for a long time. Their value is not so much in the new knowledge they have contributed as in the evidence of a spirit of mutual concern and cooperation, and an eagerness to grow into the unity that Christ asks of us. This surely is one of the welcome signs of the manifest activity of the Holy Spirit.

If you ask what the Agreement says to Thailand, I must confess that beyond encouraging us to greater ecumenical efforts, I do not think it will have far-reaching practical effects. Nor do I think the authors of the Agreement intended it so. Its value is rather inspirational. Our real problem, actually, is not so much with rebaptizing the Lutherans or Catholics that we will meet, (we already know what to do with them) as with trying to adapt our common Christianity to a Buddhist world. The Filipino world is basically Christian; ours is non-Christian. So while welcoming the dialogue that brings our respective Churches to a greater unity and encouraging all local initiatives, I think that we, both Protestants and Catholics in mission lands, are better equipped to face a different set of problems and should use our united efforts to study rather the questions raised by the non-Christian religions: where they fit into God's salvific plan and how we are to bring them into the unity of Christ. Perhaps we can leave to the European and American theologians the theological problems that divide Christians, and concentrate on those problems posed by the non-Christians, problems which are of tremendous importance for the future of the Church and which confront us constantly, trying, for example, to understand the "values" of Buddhism and how to use them, or perhaps studying how to integrate our Christians into the cultural life of a Buddhist country.

Hence while rejoicing in the publication of this ecumenical Agreement for the Christian Philippines, I hope that we in non-Christian countries will continue to be haunted by the problems "beyond ecumenism".

PAUL W. O'BRIEN, S.J.

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"Mother Tongue"

Theoretically, Christianity should be able to help people find an identity which transcends all others—"I am a Christian, and I belong to a people called Christian, and my primary loyalty is to God as I know him in Jesus Christ." Practically, however, this does not happen, and I think it is particularly difficult for it to happen to and among Chinese people.

Such an identity assumes that Christianity can be communicated and received in a way which transcends cultural influences. This is not possible. The Christian message and Christian ways of life are understood and communicated in terms of the cultural background of the interpreter and communicator. For Christianity to be an incarnational religion means that it becomes incarnational in terms of the cultural backgrounds of those who are seeking to continue the incarnation.