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Formal Signing of the Agreement on Baptism Between the Lutheran Church in the Philippines and the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines

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*Formal Signing of the Agreement on Baptism
Between the Lutheran Church in the
Philippines
and the Roman Catholic Church in the
Philippines**

THE SERMON ON BAPTISM

THE MOST REV. TEOPISTO V. ALBERTO, D.D.¹

"The mutual recognition of baptism, in one sense or another, has been a foundation stone in the ecumenical discussions of the present century. However, closer examination of the assumptions and implications of this fact invariably brings to light deep and wide divergencies in theory and practice amongst the Churches of the World Council of Churches.... We would urge that... the churches in each place study the meaning of baptism together." (*The New Delhi Report*, ed. W.A. Visser't Hooft, London 1962, 118-119).

These words of Visser't Hooft, then Secretary General of the World Council of Churches, may be considered the starting point in the position of a problem, the partial solution of which in the Philippine scene is presented here today in the form of an agreement.

In 1968, a Joint Ecumenical Committee was set up by the Commission for Ecumenical Affairs of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines and the Roman Catholic Bishops' Commission for Promoting Christian Unity. 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 also gave their approval. Only some minor changes in the text were suggested by both groups. The result is the Joint Declara-

* At the Trinity Lutheran Church, 500 Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, Quezon City, Sunday, 6 February 1972, 3 o'clock P.M.

¹ Chairman of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

tion on the Sacrament of Baptism which is part of the Agreement itself.

In the real sense—and I speak here for the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines—the formal signing of the agreement on Baptism we are witnessing today constitutes one of the three top ecumenical events where the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines has been involved, the other two being the ecumenical encounter with Pope Paul VI at the Apostolic Nunciature in November 1970 and the admission of the John XXIII Ecumenical Center as an observer to the National Council of Churches in the Philippines in its 5th General Convention.

This represents also a positive advance in interchurch relationship, while at the same time it is a proof of the sincerity of the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines which has taken seriously the decree on Ecumenism of the II 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." (*Unitatis redintegratio*, art. 22, a). 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 (Ib. 3a). Together we share the same Lord and the same Spirit. "In the one Spirit we are all baptized into the one Body." (1 Cor. 12: 13). To all Christians the Spirit "gives His gifts and graces whereby He is operative among them with His sanctifying power." (*Lumen Gentium*, art. 15) "Faith, hope, and charity, with the other interior gifts of the Holy Spirit, as well as visible elements" (UR, art. 3 b) 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.

But incorporation into Christ means incorporation into the Body of Christ which is the Church. To insist on two distinct "incorporations" would be to deny the very unity that exists between Christ and His Church. And we must also admit that baptism from its very nature "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, art. 22 b). 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." (Ib. 22).

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; we rejoice and exult because we share in the same life of Christ and we long for the day when we may be able to share in the same Body and the same Blood at the same table of the Lord.

The importance of the agreement we are entering into today may be seen in the light of two principles: that baptism is necessary for salvation and that it can be conferred only once.

Baptism is 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. And yet, a just evaluation of the sacrament and the mutual recognition of each other's baptisms by different communities may sometimes be hindered because of a reasonable doubt about the baptism conferred in some particular case. (Cf. *Ecumenical Directory*, n. 11). It is to avoid difficulties which may arise, that the Lutheran Church in the Philippines and the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines, through their ecumenical Commissions, started a dialogue on this important matter. The dialogue has proven fruitful, and 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.

Hence, indiscriminate conditional baptism cannot be approved. The sacrament of baptism cannot be repeated, and therefore to baptize again conditionally is not allowed unless there is prudent doubt of the fact or of the validity of a baptism already administered (cf. *ib.* n. 14). The present agreement has also in view this particular situation; and the Lutheran and the Catholic Churches in the Philippines today give each other mutual guarantees of the seriousness with which they perform their sacramental duties.

It is obvious that there is among us—and this agreement is another proof of it—a fundamental desire to remain faithful to the teaching of Christ as the source of Christian virtue. And this desire can be the starting point of the method for applying the Gospel to our moral life (*ib.* 23), but only a starting point.

Let me conclude quoting words from the World Council of Churches and the words of the II Council of the Vatican in its Decree on Ecumenism.

"The achievement of unity will involve nothing less than a death and rebirth of many forms of church life as we have known them." (*The New Delhi Report*, 117).

All Christians must "aim at Christian perfection and, each according to his station, play his part that the Church, which bears in her own body the humility and dying of Jesus, may daily be more purified and renewed, against the day when Christ will present her to Himself in all her glory without spot or wrinkle . . . Christ summons the Church to continual reformation in her pilgrimage on earth." (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, arts. 4, f, and 6, b).

REMARKS

PEDRO S. DE ACHUTEGUI, S.J.²

One small step for interchurch relationship, perhaps one giant leap for Ecumenism in the Philippines is how we may characterize the event which is taking place today in the Trinity Lutheran Church.

Without any kind of 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 indelibly imprinted there by baptism. 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.

That is why "one great point to be held firmly by every baptized person—as John XXIII put it—is that the church remains for ever Christ's mystical Body, He is the head, each of us believers is related to it, we belong to it." (*Osservatore Romano*, 14-15 Nov. 1960, p. 2).

This is what we sincerely rejoice in today and make explicit at the moment we take this significant step in the official signing of the agreement on baptism between the Lutheran Church and the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines.

While the step is significant, its real meaning must be properly understood. The agreement does not mean that it is only now that the validity of baptism administered by the other church is acknowledged by Lutherans or Roman Catholics. This fact has always been recognized by sound theology, historical research and pastoral practice. From this point of view, therefore, the step we are taking today is not something entirely new. It confirms a doctrine already accepted; in that sense, it also makes the measure we are taking today retro-active. But what the agreement means is that the fact of the validity of the so-called Lutheran or Catholic baptism is now formally and

² Secretary, Roman Catholic Bishops' Commission for Promoting Christian Unity.

officially recognized by the authorities of both Churches in the Philippines, together with its various implications.

1) It means, first, an explicit acknowledgement that a certain unity, although not perfect, already exists between the members of both Churches by the fact that they have been baptized in the baptism of Christ which has been properly administered. This union, imperfect as it is, leads them to strive together for the living of a deeper Christian life, and for greater expression of their oneness in Christ and unity in all areas of faith.

2) There are also cases when it is important for the ministers and authorities of a Church to have moral certitude of the fact that an individual who belongs to another faith and approaches them for certain purposes is validly baptized. The reason is that Baptism properly and validly administered cannot be repeated even conditionally. Such cases may be a marriage to be contracted between a Lutheran and a Roman Catholic, the passing from one to the other Church, for reasons of conviction and conscience, etc. From now on, in virtue of the present agreement, the presentation of the baptismal certificate issued by one Church to the minister of the other Church, will be proof enough of the validity of the baptism conferred; thus situations are avoided which can cause friction or at least produce unpleasant reactions, as has been the case more than once in the past.

3) There is an added value to the agreement. In virtue of the guarantees mutually offered, the ministers and the authorities of the two churches involved commit themselves in a special way to the most conscientious fulfillment of all liturgical prescriptions regulating the administration of baptism in their respective Churches; thus the agreement "constitutes an act whereby our Churches mutually give guarantees of the validity of the baptism administered by their respective ministers."

4) It is important, however, to clarify in advance a possible misinterpretation of this event. The agreement entered into does not imply in any way either that the two Churches are merging or that from now on Lutherans may have their children baptized in the Catholic Church or Catholics in the Lutheran Church. Unfortunately the two Churches still remain *two*, not one, and they deeply deplore the division still existing. Even after the agreement, Catholic parents are duty-bound to have their children baptized and educated as Catholics, in the same way as Lutheran parents are duty bound to have their children baptized and educated as Lutherans. This is an imperative of their conscience and of the absolute honesty they owe God and their convictions.

5) 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 faith and a travesty of a sincere Christian agreement.

The agreement highlights the importance of the ultimate basis for our fraternal love as Christians, and for calling each other "brothers." It is a love, however, which does not prevent us from recognizing that there are still very serious divergencies in matters of faith and in our understanding of the vital means of grace, which we must work together to overcome. Nevertheless, these divergencies do not destroy or abolish the fundamental and very certain fact of our belonging to Christ by baptism. Let us pray that as we acknowledge "one baptism for the remission of sins," which we confess in the Creed, and as we profess that "we believe in God," we may soon also share and live in the "one faith": in the "One Lord, one faith, one baptism," of which the Apostle speaks. With this we may confidently 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" (Paul VI, A.A.S. 65 [1963], p. 852).

A G R E E M E N T O N B A P T I S M
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 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
Dr. Alvaro A. Carino, D.D.
President, Lutheran Church in
the Philippines

Feliciano Inay
Rev. Feliciano Inay
Secretary, Lutheran Church in
the Philippines

David Schneider
Rev. David Schneider
Chairman, Commission for
Ecumenical Affairs, LCP

FOR THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH
IN THE PHILIPPINES:

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

W. Brasseur 1969
Most Rev. William Brasseur, D.D.
Chairman, Bishops' Commission on
Liturgy

Cornelio de Wit
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
Mt. 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
John 3:3-6
Acts 2:38f.
Titus 3:5-7
1 Pet. 3:21

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.

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 reborn by means of it. This 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.

Eph. 4:3-6

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

Mt. 28:19

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.

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.

THE ADDRESS

THE REV. ALVARO A. CARIÑO, D.D.³

In the High Priestly prayer of our Lord we hear Jesus fervently saying:

"I pray...that they may all be one even as You, Father, are in me and I in You: that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me...that they may be one even as we are one...I in them and You in me that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that You have sent me and have loved them even as You loved me."

Reverend fathers, sisters and brothers in Christ, and friends: I believe that this fervent prayer of our Lord is being fulfilled in our times and is finding fulfillment today in our churches. I believe this is the case this afternoon between the Roman Church in our country and the Lutheran Church in the Philippines, as they both declare publicly an historical agreement on Christian Baptism.

Indeed a break-through in the centuries-old inherited strained relations between our churches was made when our representatives started to meet in dialog to discuss common concerns and matters that have kept our churches apart for many hundreds of years. Yes, a break-through was made through dialogs when our churches discovered that they have often misunderstood each other and, in effect, started to remove those misunderstandings.

³ President of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines.

I like to believe that this occasion, solemn that it is, and should be, for which you and I are gathered together this afternoon, is one of the fruitful results, under God, of the conciliatory dialogs that have been taking place between our churches. I like to believe that this occasion which brought us together today is an auspicious beginning of greater things to happen in church relations between our two churches on the one hand, and between ours and the various fragmented churches in our country on the other hand. For if this is not divine will, then whose will is it?

It is highly significant that a common agreement on the Sacrament of Holy Baptism has been arrived at by God's help through the dialog of our churches. It is significant because agreement on this holy doctrine presupposes essential agreement also on the doctrine of God into whom every person who is baptized properly is brought into fellowship with the Triune God. Indeed Baptism presupposes the public confession of the three articles of the Christian faith as found in the three ecumenical creeds subscribed to by believers.

Since Holy Baptism is Gospel and hence the "power of God unto everyone who believes," every person properly baptized is a member of Christ's body, a member of the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, as the Apostles' Creed puts it; it follows therefore that everyone who believes and is baptized, as Christ said: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," is a brother and sister of yours and mine and therefore my Christian concern to keep in the faith and to grow in grace of God in Christ. It is therefore a part of the concerns of members of our churches to exercise loving pastoral watchfulness over each other.

This occasion is itself a great break-through. Over 450 years of separation and even isolation from each other as church structures is a long time. To prolong this separation and even isolation from each other through non-dialog or the very refusal to get together to talk over the scandal which is created by willful separation is to cause many who should be members of the body of Christ to stumble and even perish. Jesus said in His prayer: "I pray . . . that they may all be one, that they may be also in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me". If our being one in Christ, our unity in Him proves to the world that Christ was sent to be Savior, Redeemer and Lord, it follows that disunity among God's people would prove that Christ was not sent. We thank God that the *skandalon* is being removed. This great occasion which brought us together is, I believe, the beginning of a great event. We also recognize with appreciation the efforts of the members of the Commission for Ecumenical Affairs and those of its counterpart in the Roman Catholic Church. These dedicated people have been instrumental in bringing about this historical consensus and hopefully, also, as a day of reconciliation.

The break-through has been made. Yet, without being pessimistic, we may not delude ourselves into thinking that the road ahead will be smooth and easy. Humanly speaking, the road shall be rough. Let us pray our common Father that He will not only break down the barriers of unity and the forces that inhibit the trend and progress of reconciliation among God's people. Reverend Fathers and brothers and sisters in Christ, let us lift up our hearts and our voices and praise God for this great day.

PROFESSION OF FAITH⁴

The Apostolic Creed (Ecumenical Text)

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.

He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again.

He ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit.

the holy universal Church

the communion of saints,

the forgiveness of sins,

the resurrection of the body,

and the life everlasting. Amen.

⁴ As recited by the participants during the signing of the Agreement.