

Concordia Theological Monthly

Volume 41

Article 42

7-1-1970

Theological Observer

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Recommended Citation

Schneider, David and Piepkorn, Arthur Carl (1970) "Theological Observer," *Concordia Theological Monthly*. Vol. 41, Article 42.

Available at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/ctm/vol41/iss1/42>

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THEOLOGICAL OBSERVER

LUTHERANS AND ROMAN CATHOLICS IN THE PHILIPPINES REACH AGREEMENT ON BAPTISM

A Bulletin of the LCP Commission for Ecumenical
Affairs to the Members of the LCP

REV. DAVID SCHNEIDER

January 21, 1969

On Jan. 8, 1969, a joint committee of Roman Catholic priests and Lutheran pastors completed work on an interchurch agreement which, if adopted by their respective churches, will express mutual recognition of each other's baptizing as God's work, fully acceptable in either church.

The text of the proposed agreement was presented to the Board of Directors of LCP and to the Philippines Roman Catholic Bishops' Commission for Promoting Christian Unity during January 1968. The text is to be examined carefully by both churches before final action will be taken.

At present the proposed agreement is to be viewed by all as a recommendation of the joint committee. *It must not be considered an official statement of either church or both churches* until and unless both churches, in their own respective process of decision making, adopt the text of the agreement as an official statement and agree to its publication as such. The importance of clarity on the present status of the text will be obvious to all.

Roman Catholics who served on the joint committee are the following: Frs. Pedro Achutegui, Florencio Cuerquis, Vicente San Juan, Pedro Sevilla.

Lutherans who served on the joint committee are the following: Pastors Jose Fuliga, Robert Plagens, David Schneider, Gerald Wyneken.

The text follows:

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:

5

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

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

10

this sacrament.

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."

John 3:5

15 Although God could save men without Baptism, never-
 theless, 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
 20 adults.

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

John 3:3-6

25 forgiveness of sins, rebirth into a new life in
 the Holy Spirit, and salvation.

Acts 2:38 f.;

He incorporates the baptized into the
 crucified and glorified Christ.

Titus 3:5-7;

1 Pet. 3:21

Rom. 6:3 ff.

By incorporating the baptized person into the
 30 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

He enables the baptized to begin and carry on
 a life of joyful service through the Holy Spirit,

Gal. 3:27-28

35 and to fight against all kinds of evil.

Rom. 6:1-23

4. *Responsibilities of the Baptized*

Those who have been baptized should walk in
 newness of life, just as Christ was raised from the
 dead by the glory of the Father. Thus all Chris-

40 tians 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 responsi-
 bility to use God's Word regularly to enable him to
 45 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 baptize, and to instruct and
 encourage the baptized in the Christian faith and

Mt. 28:19-20

50 life.

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

Eph. 4:3-6

55 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, infusion or sprinkling 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.

STUDY GUIDE FOR
"A PROPOSED BAPTISMAL AGREEMENT"

Background

1. The Roman Catholic Church usually rebaptizes (sometimes conditionally) people baptized in Protestant (including Lutheran) churches.
2. Most Philippine Protestant churches rebaptize people baptized in the Roman Catholic Church and in other Protestant churches.
3. The LCP does not rebaptize people who have been baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity by a church which confesses its loyalty to the Holy Trinity.
4. If a person has been baptized more than once, some people in the Philippines mistakenly believe that the last Baptism is the valid one and that it cancels the previous one.

Foundation Ideas

1. Properly speaking, there is no such thing as "Lutheran Baptism," "Roman Catholic Baptism," or "Protestant Baptism." If an act is a true Baptism, it is a Christian Baptism, no matter who performs it. There is only one Baptism, as Ephesians 4:5 makes clear and the Nicene Creed affirms.
2. If a person receives Christian Baptism, it cannot be cancelled by anything, although its blessed fruit can be lost if the baptized person turns his back on Jesus Christ and *remains* an unbeliever.
3. LCP should recognize as *being* valid a Baptism performed properly within a church body which publicly confesses faith in the Triune God. Such a Baptism is God's action, not to be repeated.
4. If and when LCP sees that a church body confesses faith in the Triune God and baptizes properly, LCP should move to declare publicly her recognition of Baptism as performed in the other body.
5. LCP's public declaration of baptismal recognition is meant both to express what she believes to be proper baptismal practice and to demonstrate unity which exists in Christ with other church bodies, in and through Baptism.
6. Instead of simply stating her recognition of the validity of another Christian group's Baptism, LCP should work with the other group to state the basis of recognition, for the Christian education of the members of both bodies, as well as to make a public witness.

WHAT WOULD YOU ADVISE?

Read the proposed statement of baptismal recognition, prepared for possible adoption by the LCP and the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines.

Read the "background" for the statement and the "foundation ideas" which lie under the statement.

Now give advice, based on the statement, to the following troubled people:

1. "Aling Claring" was baptized in the Roman Catholic Church when she was a child, but she has been baptized several more times by different denominations during her long life. Now in her twilight years she has decided to become a Lutheran and has studied the doctrine course. She wants the Lutheran pastor to baptize her, in order to cancel out the previous

Baptism and replace it with a Lutheran Baptism. She says she will not be able to die in peace unless the pastor baptizes her.

2. "Young Alfrede," baptized in the Lutheran Church, has fallen in love with a beautiful girl who happens to be a Roman Catholic. The girl also loves him, and they hope to be married, but the girl's family insists that the couple be married in the Roman Catholic Church and that Alfrede be baptized by a priest. Alfrede does not know what to do.

3. Mr. Reyes, a Lutheran, feels that if LCP enters into an agreement with the Roman Catholic Church on Baptism, it will give to Roman Catholics and other Protestants the idea that LCP is trying to return to the Roman churches and intends to give up the message of salvation by the grace of God in Christ. Mr. Reyes would like to hear the opinion of the Lutherans in your congregation.

4. A Roman Catholic mother has had her newly born child home from the hospital for only a few days when it becomes very ill. Before taking it back to the hospital she wants it baptized. Since she cannot take the child to her parish priest, she baptizes it herself, in the presence of two of her older children. In baptizing, the mother calls the child by name and pours water on its head "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

Upon hearing of the child's illness, the father leaves his work and rushes to the hospital. The first thing he wants to do is have the child baptized by a clergyman — even the Lutheran pastor, who is the only clergyman around. The father feels that the Baptism performed by the mother is not as strong as one performed by an ordained clergyman. What will the pastor say to the father?

5. Mrs. Santes is eager to have her child baptized as often as possible by various churches and sects. She feels that the child will thus be more fully protected from sickness and harmful accidents.

Now that you have studied the proposed agreement and "tried it on for size" in the situations listed above, do you feel that the Lutheran Church in the Philippines should officially sign the agreement with the Roman Catholic Church?

A RESPONSE

This draft agreement is a document of great ecumenical importance.¹ For one thing, it illustrates the determination of the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines to implement practically the new ecclesiological insights of Vatican II's dogmatic constitution on the church and the same council's decree on ecumenism. The great disparity in size between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church in the Philippines (just under 25,000,000 in contrast to just over 5,000 members according to Douglas J. Elwood's 1968 study) underlines the seriousness of the Roman Catholic Church's determination.

For another thing, this draft agreement is a heartening evidence of the determination of the Lutheran Church in the Philippines to respond with courage and in faith to every challenge that confronts it in a country crucially located on the rim of Asia.

An American finds the contrast in situation between the Philippines and his own country interesting. In North America the offensive behavior is usually on the side of badly instructed

¹ See also in this connection Paul C. Empie and William W. Baum, editors, *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue, II: One Baptism for the Remission of Sins* (New York: USA National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation, 1966).

Roman Catholic priests who routinely administer conditional baptism to those who enter their denomination from other church bodies. In the Philippines the offensive behavior is largely on the side of non-Roman-Catholics (but, happily, not Lutherans) who have used rebaptism as a device to alienate their converts from the Roman Catholic Church as much as possible.

Here and there the English version of the agreement could read a little more smoothly. For example, "the baptized" in line 24 and occasionally afterward is awkward; "the person who is baptized" or "the baptized person" would be preferable.

More substantive is the use of "should" in line 66. "Should" is too weak. Both churches acknowledge "one baptism for the forgiveness of sins" in the Creed. The Formula of Concord, Solid Declaration, 2, 69, asserts that those returning to the sacraments "dare not be baptized again." The Large Catechism, Baptism, 55, says that to repeat baptism would be "to blaspheme and desecrate the sacrament in the worst way." Paragraph 78 insists that the work and the significance of baptism continues and remains. Under these circumstances, "can never validly" would be more accurate than "should."

Lines 67—68 raise a minor issue. Roman Catholic pastoral practice tends to regard as valid any baptism administered with a correct Trinitarian formula and the simultaneous pouring of water, even if the individual who baptizes is not himself or herself a baptized Christian. Lutheran pastoral practice, instructed by paragraph 67 of the Treatise on the Authority and Primacy of the Pope, tends to see only an already baptized person as an acceptable minister of baptism even in an emergency. For the purpose of the draft document, of course, this would normally make little difference, since in the Philippines the transition to the Lutheran Church of a Roman Catholic baptized by an unbaptized person in an emergency is likely to be an extremely rare phenomenon.

In line 72 "infusion" is probably a mistake for "affusion," that is pouring." "Sprinkling" in the English-speaking religious world usually describes the shaking of a few drops of water in the direction of the head of a candidate for baptism. Since "baptism" means basically a "washing," it implies both for Roman Catholics and Lutherans the application of water in such a way in such a quantity that the water runs over the candidate's head. In our opinion the final text of the document ought to omit the reference to "sprinkling" as a legitimate mode of baptism.

Lines 78—82 raise an admirable point. We understand that an interdenominational baptismal rite for at least optional and occasional use is being produced by the Roman Catholic/Lutheran colloquium in Canada.

The intention of line 95 is laudable, but as it stands it may turn out in practice to be too restrictive. It might help to obviate the difficulty if the sentence read: "We commit ourselves to a faithful observance of the Baptismal rites prescribed or authorized by our respective Churches."

The "Study Guide" is a commendable pedagogical device that should help to make the agreement significant and important at the lay level. This is especially true of the situational "case history" items in the section "What Would You Advise?"

In the Study Guide itself the use of "Protestant," in paragraphs 1 and 2 of the "Background" section, especially with the parenthetical explanation, "including Lutherans," is regrettable. Except in the purely negative sense of "non-Roman-Catholic Christians," Lutherans are not Protestants, and in view of the heterogeneous theological variety that the term

"Protestant" implies particularly in the Philippines, Lutherans ought not be party to the use of the term to describe them. In line 2 of paragraph 1 of "Background" the word "other" could well replace "Protestant." In line 1 of paragraph 2 the designation "non-Roman-Catholic" could well replace "Protestant"; in line 2 "Protestant" could well be struck. In line 2 of paragraph 1 of "Foundation Ideas" the words "or any other denominational kind of baptism" could well replace "or 'Protestant Baptism'."

To the Lutheran Church in the Philippines and to their Roman Catholic counterparts, our congratulations!

THE STAFF

by **ARTHUR CARL PIEPKORN**