

**OVIDIUS UNIVERSITY CONSTANTA
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DOCTORAL FIELD THEOLOGY**

**THESIS
--SUMMARY--**

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR:

Prof. Univ. Dr. Nicolae Brînzea

DOCTORAL STUDENT:

Fr. Pleșa Victor Marius

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DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
DOCTORAL FIELD THEOLOGY**

**THE ECUMENICAL MEANING OF BAPTISM
ACCORDING TO THE THEOLOGY OF THE
LEUENBERG AGREEMENT**

**„DIE TAUFE IM LEBEN DER
KIRCHEN. DOCUMENTATION OF ORTHODOX-
EVANGELICAL DIALOGUES IN EUROPE ”**

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Prof. Univ. Dr. Nicolae Brînzea

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Victor Marius**

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The Sacrament of Holy Baptism is by definition the most special of the Sacraments, it being the first contact of the human person with uncreated divine grace. Through it, man subjected to ancestral sin is cleansed and set free from death through death and resurrection with Christ. The Christian identity of the human person is also realized through Baptism, because once out of the "bath of the new birth" he carries in himself the Image of Christ, which defines man as a full member of His Church.

The Leuenberg agreement reached by the CPCE is based on the common understanding of the gospel that member traditions have. They consider it imperative that the theology of Baptism be based on the word of Scripture, the New, and the Old Testament, and that it contain the truth. "It is the task of the Church to preach this Gospel by word in the sermon, by individual counseling, by baptism and the Eucharist."[\[1\]](#). Then the document goes on to say, "In preaching, baptism, and the Eucharist, Jesus Christ is present through the Holy Spirit. Forgiveness in Christ is therefore shared with people, and in this way the Lord gathers His people. In this sense He uses many forms of service and service, as well as the confession of all who belong to His people."[\[2\]](#).

The importance of a correct understanding of the Sacrament results from the attention and lengthy research that the CPCE churches give to this subject. Although divergent theological situations do not pose a danger to the unity of the CPCE, the churches still demand new and new studies that further deepen the state of convergence. This extensive study process is also taken over by the South-East European Regional Group, a structure in which the Lutheran church collaborates with all the Reformed churches in Central and Eastern Europe. This collaboration regarding the practice and doctrine of the Sacrament of Baptism denotes, once again, the importance of the research topic.

The sacrament of Baptism has an unrepeatable and implicitly irrevocable character, these being solid points of convergence between the CPCE churches. This theology automatically leads to mutual recognition of the Sacrament, for if we accept that Baptism performed in the name of the Holy Trinity is unrepeatable, then it means that mutual recognition of the Sacrament of all churches is no longer an impediment to unity. Regardless of the denomination from which they come, the churches that administer Water Baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity, benefit from the recognition of its validity by the other churches, regardless of tradition.

Although the ecumenical dialogue has reached this point, where the unrepeatability of the Sacrament involves the recognition of Baptism performed in any of the churches, however, in reality there are still reservations, the recognition of validity being more tacit and not one brought to the declarative stage.

If the first major dialogue highlights general data of a Christological nature in each tradition, the second dialogue, completed in 1990, brings to the fore several common elements between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, because "both communities confess Christ as Lord and Savior, affirms the Trinitarian faith of the Apostolic Church over the years and observes a single baptism in the name of the Trinity. (...) Our churches share more common ground than we have been able to see so far."[\[3\]](#).

From the expression of the doctrine of each tradition in the ecumenical dialogue resulted elements of congruence visible in the final statement of the document: "The only baptism is therefore our common incorporation into Christ, in this life of worship and common mission in Him. This is the visible and effective sign and seal of this work full of the grace of the Spirit by which the Church is constituted. "[\[4\]](#).

The unity of all in Christ through the Holy Spirit in the work of Baptism presupposes the overcoming of the elements of divergence between the churches, the Mystery already expressing the belonging to Christ of all the baptized. Being a body through Baptism, "our continual separation into two communions is a public denial of what we are already in Christ."[\[5\]](#).

Another point of convergence that the two churches recognize refers to the fact that the Sacrament can be performed only once, and its repetition is impossible.[\[6\]](#). Having its foundation in the life of Christ, and being commanded by Him, "The mystery of baptism is from God."[\[7\]](#).

Divergent issues arise in the dialogue when it comes to the recognition of Apostolic succession, as a principle of recognition of Baptism. Without the mutual recognition of the Apostolic succession, one cannot yet speak of an agreement in the mutual recognition of the Mystery of the two traditions. In other words, the recognition of baptism, according to this dialogue, is dependent first of all on the recognition of apostolic succession.

In the dialogue with the Romanian Orthodox Church, the analysis of the Sacrament of Baptism was not performed by relating it to the other Holy Sacraments and to the interdependence between them, so that the document highlighted highlights a point of divergence between traditions. Future theological interventions are needed to resolve this point, but the document reaches a common agreement by stating that "together we can say that Jesus Christ Himself is the real sacrament."[\[8\]](#). This idea results from the action of Christ in each mystery, and therefore of Baptism, an action expressed in accordance with the verse in I Cor. 3, 9 "for we are laborers together with God. You are His field, His building "(I Cor. 3: 9).

Another nuance that evangelical theology expresses in this dialogue is that Baptism in their tradition offers the Holy Spirit in its entirety, apologizing somewhat for the absence of the Anointing along with Baptism. „Der Heilige Geist in seiner Fülle geschenkt wird"[\[9\]](#). Of course, this theology is totally different from the Orthodox Church's understanding of the Sacrament, which, according to Holy Scripture, Holy Tradition and the canons of the Ecumenical Synods, preserves unaltered the teaching of Baptism, Anointing and the Eucharist, each mystery being distinct but administered successively. so that the newly baptized may receive the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit, according to canon 7 of the Second Ecumenical Council of Constantinople, to be immediately prepared for union with Christ in the Eucharist.

Of course, the Sacrament of the Church has been analyzed from several perspectives throughout the ecumenical dialogues, here the sacrament of Baptism is in fact the third sub-theme in the process of analysis. The document analyzes, among others, the relationship between Baptism and Anointing, in Orthodoxy these being two distinct mysteries,

administration at the same time. Immediately after Baptism, in the Orthodox tradition, unlike the Protestant one, the Anointing is administered.

The official statement of the meeting in Durău highlights that “there are three basic components in the process of Christian initiation: death with Christ and sealing with the Holy Spirit. For Orthodoxy, Christian initiation finds its fullness in the Holy Eucharist. Lutherans do not normally speak of the Eucharist as a sacrament of initiation, but when an older child or adult is baptized, that person is immediately accepted to participate in the Eucharist.”[\[10\]](#).

Despite all these differences, it is worth noting the great step taken in the dialogue between Orthodoxy and Lutheranism, a step by which both churches recognized the common elements, keeping the desire for dialogue alive for future discussions that will aim to overcome the points where there are still misunderstandings.

According to Holy Scripture, the life of the Church is oriented in such a way that the deification of man through uncreated divine grace is possible. We have the basis for this work of the Church in several parts of Scripture from which we can remember: “His divine power has given us all that is for life and good piety, making us know the One who called us by His glory and by His power, by which He has bestowed upon us great and precious promises, that through them you might partake of the divine nature, escaping the corruption of the lust of the world”(II Peter 1: 4)

According to Orthodox theology, Holy Baptism is the Sacrament through which man enters the Church of God, becoming a living and active member of it. It is the “new birth,” as the evangelist puts it, by which man dies to the sin of the world in order to live with Christ. “Through Baptism, the candidate is born mystical in the spiritual life. Baptism leads everyone to the door that leads to the kingdom of grace, and allows participation in other Sacraments, or in the whole sacramental life of the Church.”[\[11\]](#).

Through the Sacrament of Baptism each man receives the new life in Christ and becomes a son of God by grace, inheriting by the appropriation of the fruits of objective salvation, eternal life. Immediately after receiving the Sacrament together with the Anointing and the Eucharist, the newly baptized is a full member of the Church of Christ where he experiences love both vertically with God and horizontally with his fellow men. “The Holy Eucharist preserves and continues this life and health, since the bread of life allows us to preserve what has been acquired and to continue life. Therefore, through this bread we live and by myrrh we are moved once we have been created through baptismal washing”[\[12\]](#).

The understanding of the Holy Sacraments can never be limited to the ritual place as a means of sharing grace, but must be experienced as realities based on the reality of Christ in the liturgical act. Regarding this, the theologian Mantzaridis stated, “The source from which the grace of the Mysteries derives is Christ. I have said that Christ regenerates and deifies in Himself the corrupt human nature, but not the individual hypostases. For the grace manifested in Christ to bear fruit, it must be made accessible to human hypostases.”[\[13\]](#). Hence the importance of the work together between the divine by grace and the will of man in the process of his deification.

In union with Christ through the grace of the Holy Sacraments, man is called to taste, even from this life, from eternal life, from the incorruptible life of God. This union is the gift of uncreated divine grace, so the gift of God in which man, out of the bath of Baptism, can participate freely. Once man is cleansed from sin he can access the snack of the body and blood of the Son of God, a snack that unites the creature with Christ "frees us from the law of the flesh, allows us to pray in spirit and in truth, makes us sons of God and realizes in us the new man in Christ "[\[14\]](#).

Some more recent ecumenical dialogues highlight an aspect worth considering, namely that the mutual recognition of Sacraments such as Baptism, the Eucharist and Ordination is the foundation of unity. These dialogues find that the different traditions would have largely the same doctrine of Apostolic origin, but exposed in different terms, which leads to division. "This means that those outside the Orthodox Church have the same essential faith, despite various expressions from different cultural, linguistic and religious contexts. So, the ecumenical dialogue puts forward as a specific objective a simple theological agreement or compromise, only in those areas where the division is clearly expressed in the life of the Church "[\[15\]](#).

The main real step in mutual recognition must be strictly in Baptism. Only when the subject is fully formulated as convergent, then other Mysteries such as the Eucharist and Ordination can be analyzed. However, the BEM document emphasizes the importance of mutual recognition of these Mysteries, as "an important sign of the means of expressing the baptismal unity given in Christ."[\[16\]](#). However, in order for there to be not only a document, but also a real agreement, it is imperative that all churches express in writing their desire for mutual recognition of the Mysteries.

From what has been highlighted we can understand that Baptism is truly the most important Sacrament that opens the way to the desired unity. This unity resulting from the mutual recognition of the nature of Baptism would pave the way for common communion. "Orthodoxy agrees that on the basis of Baptism as an incorporation into the Body of Christ and as a means of achieving membership in the Church, which is the Body of Christ, a serious convergence in ecclesiology can be achieved."[\[17\]](#).

The current ecumenical dialogue, which seeks the unity and consensus of the Christian churches in the main chapters of theology, uses the Sacrament of Baptism as the first step in affirming unity, even though there are still many divergent elements. However, the focus of the ecumenical dialogue of the last decade on this Holy Sacrament is due to the fact that it has numerous ecclesiological implications that imply direct ecclesial consequences for these Christian inter-relations. "The pure ecclesiological basis of the Sacrament of Baptism expresses the universal character of the redemptive work of Christ, from which is derived the divine grace of all the Sacraments of the Church, to which refers the special work of the Holy Spirit for the composition of the historical Body of Christ, which is the Church."[\[18\]](#).

Also, in the Orthodox Church, Baptism cannot be separated or thought apart from the Anointing and the Eucharist. Through Anointing the neophyte out of the water of Baptism, receives the seal of the Holy Spirit with His gifts. Like Baptism, the Anointing also has a personal character, the holy anointing and the gifts of the Spirit being given especially to

the newly baptized. "In anointing, the Holy Spirit descends upon us and remains in us as the personal gift of Christ from His Father. Anointing represents the fulfillment of Baptism, just as participation in the Eucharist represents the fulfillment of the Anointing. Baptism is also the preparation for the Anointing, which in turn is the preparation for participation in the Eucharist. "[\[19\]](#).

Baptism and Anointing can only be administered together, for the newly baptized enter the life of the Church, and this is not possible without the gifts of the Holy Spirit and without identity. "Baptism unites the believer not only with Christ, but also with His people, the Church. One is baptized in the community of faith to share his life, value, vision. Baptism, by bringing us into the glorified life of Christ, making us part of His deified humanity, integrates us into the Church, His Body, where death and resurrection are daily experienced in ascetic discipline in the life of prayer and in the Eucharist. "[\[20\]](#).

Baptism is not only the forgiveness of sins, but also redemption and communion with the Holy Trinity. Then it can be considered as deification, "as a result of receiving the sanctifying Holy Spirit; regeneration (anagennesis) - the candidate dies and rises with Christ; renewal of the life-force of the human spirit due to communion with the Holy Spirit, the Giver of life, therefore baptism is the fountain of life; the gift of adoption (Rom. 8:15) - baptismal adoption "[\[21\]](#).

From what is presented we understand that we cannot limit Baptism only to the fact that man receives *imago Dei*. Through Baptism, man actually receives the likeness of God, "in an ethical and ontological sense - which represents His garment of light, the same garment as that seen by the three apostles on Mount Tabor at the Transfiguration - of our Lord Jesus Christ."[\[22\]](#).

The expression *morphe Theou* is in full agreement with the *biblical account*, which denotes the impossibility of finding a substitute for *morphe* in general and the expression *morphe Theou* in particular. Nor can the act of the Transfiguration of the Son of God be likened to the metamorphoses of Hellenism. The Gospel Text of Matthew "And after six days Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves. And changed his countenance before them, and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him "(Matthew 17: 1-3).

It must be specified that the form to which the Apostle refers has an exact character, to which man must reach by personal effort and implicitly by collaboration with divine grace. So the verse in Gal. 4, 19 exemplifies a process of spiritual development, a process that requires a certain amount of time, depending on the zeal of each person.

The becoming of the Christian man presupposes, in the words of St. Paul, the reception of the image of Christ, that is, the man out of the water of Baptism receives the form of the Church, His ecclesial Body, in which all humanity is called to be an active member of each person. When man becomes a Christian through Baptism, Anointing, and the Eucharist, Christ Himself dwells in him, for the Apostle says, "For I through the law died unto the law, that I might live unto God. I was crucified with Christ; and I no longer live, but Christ lives

in me. And the life now I live in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me "(Gal. 2: 19-20).

Another theme by which the Apostle of the Gentiles preaches the theology of the image of Christ which is to take shape in man is mentioned in the epistle to the Ephesians where he says: from within, And let Christ dwell in your hearts by faith, rooted and grounded in love, That you may understand with all the saints what is the breadth, and the length, and the height, and the depth, And know the love of Christ above all. that you may be filled with all the fullness of God "(Eph. 3: 16-19).

The Church being the extension of the Body of Christ in history, it imitates in its actions the activity of Christ for us. Within it, all who receive the Holy Sacraments are reborn, from water and the Spirit, to the new life in and with Christ. Regardless of the number of members of the Church, it gives everyone the same image: that of Christ. Through it all receive their existence and identity from Christ. They all have a common center of existence and a single form of relationship by faith. That is why Father Staniloae points out that "all the statements of the blessed Apostle Paul belong to the death, resurrection and transfiguration of man, imprinting and dressing him in Christ, as ethical - ontological moments that are recalled in the ritual of baptism ... by participating in Christ the crucified and risen, the baptized take the form of Christ, or become together bearers of the image of Christ. Their new form is the form of Christ imprinted in them and through it in the Church. "[\[23\]](#).

By the fact that once he has received the Holy Sacraments of initiation, man becomes the image of the Son and the adopted son of the Father, that all members of the Church can define themselves as sons of God by grace. This also makes possible the deification of man, who having in himself the Image of Christ, acquires through personal effort, through collaboration with uncreated divine grace, the objective fruits of Christ's sacrifice, which he makes subjective for his own deification.

Once he enters the Church, man does not remain a mere spectator of the glory of God, he does not stand only to contemplate it, but participates "in the glory of the Son held by the incarnate Word and by the Head of the Church as man. Since He is organically bound to the body, His glory is spread throughout the body. "[\[24\]](#).

Receiving the Image of Christ through the Mysteries of Initiation also means receiving the garment of light of divine grace with which man must be a collaborator all his life by fulfilling the commandments and by all good deeds. Through the Sacraments man develops in the intimacy of the Holy Spirit, and the Saints of God radiate like Christ on Tabor, not by their power, but by the work of the Holy Spirit. To come to the knowledge of God by experiencing life in Him means an apophatic knowledge by which man does not speak of Him, but lives in Him, experiencing eternal life.

Another reason necessary for the demonstration that through the Mysteries of Initiation, man becomes a son of God by grace, we find him in the epistle to the Romans, where the Apostle teaches: The spirit of adoption, through which we cry: Abba! Parent! The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are sons of God. And if we are sons, we are also heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if we suffer with Him, that with Him we may

be glorified. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy of the magnification that shall be revealed to us. Because the creature is eagerly awaiting the revelation of the sons of God. For the creature was subjected to vanity - not of her own will, but because of the one who subjected her - with hope, For even the creature itself will be delivered from the bondage of corruption, to share in the freedom to magnify the children of God. For we know that all creation sighs together and is in pain together until now. And not only so, but we also have the sting of the Spirit, and we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body "(Rom. 8: 15-23).

In conclusion, we can state the importance of researching the process by which man receives the Image of Christ, research omitted by the famous BEM document, but absolutely necessary for a correct knowledge of the effect that the Mysteries of Initiation have on the recipient. Therefore, the interfaith and ecumenical dialogue between the Christian churches is particularly important for highlighting the commonalities of theologies, but although through Leuenberg Protestantism becomes a single theological voice, there are still many points in relation to Orthodox theology that do not allow mutual recognition. Baptism. What is important to note is that the document under analysis is an important step in Protestant theology returning to patristic theology in the early centuries, which may bring a closer knowledge of Orthodox theology, which has kept the truth of the faith unaltered.

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[6] *Taufe - neues Leben - Dienst* ... , thesis 5, page 27.

[7] "Die christliche Taufe, wie sie in den beiden Kirchen geübt wird, ist ein von Gott gegebenes Sakrament", in *Taufe - neues Leben - Dienst* ... , thesis 5, p. 27.

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[9] **Joachim Held, Klaus Schwarz** (Hg), *Die Taufe als Aufnahme in den Neuen* ... 195.

[10] The text can be found at <http://www.helsinki.fi/~risarin/lutortjointtext.html#bapt>

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[22] **Fr. Nicolae Moșoiu** , *Einige Überlegungen zum Ordo ...*, p. 171.

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