

## **The Mystery of the Church: C. Baptism and Chrismation as Sacraments of Initiation into the Church**

### **STATEMENT**

*The Lutheran—Orthodox Joint Commission, meeting in Sigtuna, Sweden in 1998, selected the topic “The Mystery of the Church” for the next round of conversations. The topic has been dealt with so far in three sub-topics: a) “The Mystery of the Church: Word and Sacrament” (Damascus, Syria, 2000, §2); b) “The Sacraments (Mysteria) as Means of Salvation” (Oslo, Norway, 2002, §6); c) “Baptism and Chrismation as Sacraments of Initiation into the Church” (Durau, Romania, 2004). Thus, the Oslo statement builds on the consensus previously achieved on the topic “Word and Sacraments (Mysteria) in the Life of the Church.” However, it also takes into account the earlier consensus, particularly that achieved in the 1998 statement: “Salvation: Grace, Justification and Synergy.” The commission’s previous work has affirmed both that “salvation is a real participation by grace in the nature of God” (Sigtuna, 1998 §6) and that the sacraments/mysteria are “means of salvation, i.e., specific divine acts of the church for the salvation of believers” (Damascus 2000 §2).*

*The present statement builds on the agreement reached in Oslo “to give emphasis to the sacraments of initiation of the ancient church, that is, baptism, chrismation, and the eucharist” (Oslo, 2002 §6). In Durau we have explored areas of convergence and divergence in the process of Christian initiation focusing on the three events of death with Christ, resurrection with Christ, and the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

*Our method has been to compare our respective rites of initiation because we believe that they clearly express the teaching of our churches. The Orthodox rites of Christian initiation are found in the Euchologion, which are translated into the various liturgical languages. The English translation used here is from the Service Book of the Antiochian Orthodox Church in America (1987). The Lutheran rites of holy baptism are based on The Baptismal Booklet (Taufbüchlein), which is an appendix to Luther’s Small Catechism in the Book of Concord (The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church), edited by Kolb and Wengert (2000). The rite of holy baptism in the Lutheran Book of Worship (1978), published in North America and used widely by other Lutheran churches, includes elements retrieved from the ancient patristic tradition under the influence of the Lutheran liturgical renewal movement.*

1. Lutherans and Orthodox agree that entry into the life of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is a gift given by God through the sacraments, which are enacted in the church. “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). In both traditions the sacrament of baptism is administered with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt. 28:19). Therefore, salvation is the work of the Triune God. In both traditions baptism is normally administered by an ordained minister: in Orthodox churches this is normally done by triple immersion, and in Lutheran churches normally by pouring water three times on the head. There is agreement between the two traditions that immersion is the most symbolically appropriate form of the administration of this sacrament. Lutherans and Orthodox also agree that in cases of emergency baptism may be

administered by lay persons. Our churches agree that the sacrament of baptism is unrepeatable.

2. There are three basic components in the process of Christian initiation: death with Christ, resurrection with Christ, and the sealing with the Holy Spirit. For Orthodox, Christian initiation finds its fulfillment 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 admitted to the eucharist.

3. In preparation for Christian initiation, Orthodox and Lutheran churches use their own rites of exorcism. In the Orthodox order of baptism the priest says, “O Lord ... look upon your servant; prove him/her and search him/her and root out of him/her every operation of the devil. Rebuke the unclean spirits and expel them, and purify the works of your hands ...” (Service Book, p. 147). In the Lutheran Baptismal Booklet the minister says: “Depart from [name] you unclean spirit, and make way for the Holy Spirit” (Book of Concord, p. 373).

4. Both Lutherans and Orthodox incorporate in their rite of initiation the renunciation of the devil and the confession of faith. The Orthodox priest asks the candidate for baptism, or the sponsor/godparent, the question, “Do you renounce Satan, and all his angels, and all his works, and all his service, and all his pride?” (Service Book, p. 148). Similarly the Lutheran minister asks: “Do you renounce the devil?” (Baptismal Booklet, p. 374) In the Orthodox rite this is immediately followed by a confession of Christ and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (325/381), while in the Lutheran rite the Apostles’ Creed is used. Thus, in both traditions the faith of the candidate for baptism or that of the sponsors/godparents is expressed through the confession of the creed.

5. Although theological discourse may ascribe different effects to our participation in Christ’s death and resurrection, they nevertheless form a unity in our liturgical rites and we will therefore treat them together in this document. Lutherans and Orthodox agree that our participation in Christ’s death and resurrection bestows on us the following gifts: death of the old Adam (cf. Rom 6:6), union with Christ (cf. Rom 6:5), redemption, sanctification, purification of flesh and spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 6:11), deliverance from death and the devil, forgiveness of sins, victory over the power of sin (cf. Rom. 6), illumination of the soul (cf. Heb. 6:4), regeneration, new birth (cf. Titus 3:5), new life in Christ, adoption as God’s children (cf. Rom 8:16), renewal of the image of God (cf. Col 3:10, Eph 3:10), eternal life, and incorporation into Christ’s body, the church.

6. The bestowal of these gifts is clearly attested in both the Lutheran and Orthodox rites of initiation. In the Lutheran order the minister addresses those present and explains the meaning of Baptism: “In Holy Baptism our gracious heavenly Father liberates us from sin and death by joining us to the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are born children of the fallen humanity; in the water of baptism we are reborn children of God and inheritors of eternal life. By water and the Holy Spirit we are made members of the Church which is the body of Christ” (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 121). The gifts are also highlighted in Luther’s Flood Prayer, which is reflected in most Lutheran rites: “... By the baptism of his own death and resurrection, your beloved Son has set us free from bondage to sin and death, and has opened the way to the joy and freedom of everlasting life. He made water a sign of the kingdom and of cleansing and rebirth... Pour out your Holy Spirit so that *those who are* here baptized may be given new life. Wash away the sin of all *those who are* cleansed by this water and bring *them* forth as *inheritors* of your glorious kingdom” (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 122).

7. In the Orthodox rite, the priest prays over the water of baptism "...Master of all, show this water to be the water of redemption, the water of sanctification, the purification of flesh and spirit, the loosing of bonds, the remission of sins, the illumination of the soul, the laver of regeneration, the renewal of the spirit, the gift of adoption to sonship, the garment of incorruption, the fountain of life. ... You have bestowed on us from on high a new birth through water and the spirit. Wherefore O Lord, manifest yourself in this water, and grant that he/she who is baptized in it may be transformed; that he/she may put away from him/her the old man, which is corrupt through the lust of the flesh, and that he/she may be clothed with the new man, and renewed after the image of Him who created him/her; that being buried, after the pattern of your death, in baptism, *he/she* may, in like manner, be a partaker or your Resurrection ...” (Service Book, p. 155-6).

8. Orthodox and Lutherans agree that the third component of Christian initiation is the gift and seal of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 4:30). In Lutheran rites, the gift of the Spirit is connected with the laying on of hands and either a post-baptismal blessing or a prayer for the Spirit. After the minister pours water three times on the head of the candidate in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, the Baptismal Booklet continues with the prayer: “The almighty God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has given birth to you for a second time through water and the Holy Spirit and has forgiven you all your sins, strengthen you with his grace to eternal life.” (Baptismal Booklet, p. 375)

9. It is also customary in Lutheran churches for the minister to lay both hands on the head of the newly baptized and to pray for the Holy Spirit: “God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we give you thanks for freeing your sons and daughters from the power of sin and for raising them up to a new life through this holy sacrament. Pour your Holy Spirit upon [*name*]: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence” (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, p. 124). The *Handbook of the Lutheran Book of Worship* notes that “the laying on of hands with the prayer for the gifts of the Holy Spirit signals a return to the liturgical fullness of the ancient church which was lost when confirmation became a separate rite.” (p. 31). According to the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, the minister may make the sign of the cross on the forehead of the newly baptized saying, “[*Name*], child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever” (p. 125). Lutheran churches that follow this rite have reclaimed the ritual action of chrismation and have clearly distinguished it as a distinct moment in the baptismal rite, though they do not define it theologically as a separate sacrament.

10. The gift of the Holy Spirit is more explicit in the Orthodox rite. Attending closely to patristic tradition, the Orthodox see a profound parallel between participation in the sacraments of the church and the historical unfolding of the economy of salvation as proceeding from the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit. After the immersion, the priest anoints the newly baptized with holy chrism (*myron*) saying: “... compassionate king of all, grant also to him/her the seal of the gift of your holy, and almighty, and adorable Spirit ...” (Service Book, p. 159). Thus, as Jesus Christ received the gift of the Holy Spirit in his human nature, so all who follow him must, after the pattern of the gathered church at Pentecost, receive that same gift. The Holy Chrismation (the anointing of the baptized with the holy *myron* and prayer for their reception of the Holy Spirit) is the distinct but inseparable sacrament that imparts to the individual believer the church’s own Pentecost. Endowed with the gift of the Spirit, believers are prepared and enabled to participate in the eucharist, the sacrament which effects their union with Christ, so that they truly become with him one body

(*syssomos*) and one blood (*homaimos*). Accordingly, in the Orthodox tradition, all those who have been baptized and chrismated are immediately admitted to the Eucharist, including infants. The Orthodox tradition places particular significance on the holy *myron*, which is prepared during the holy week every ten years from pure olive oil and over 50 other aromatic ingredients and symbolizes the ecclesial character of chrismation, which unites the newly baptized with the universal church through the Holy Spirit.

11. Orthodox and Lutherans at their meeting in Durau, October 6-15, 2004, found that the three components of Christian initiation are to a large extent included in each other's rites. These components find their fulfillment in the Christian's full participation in the life of Christ and his church through eating his body and drinking his blood in the holy eucharist. The topic for the meeting of the 13th Lutheran - Orthodox Joint Commission will be: The Mystery of the Church: D. The Holy Eucharist in the Life of the Church.

Plenary of the Lutheran-Orthodox Joint Commission  
Duràu, Romania  
6-15 October 2004