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THE COMMON GIFT OF BAPTISM – A FIELD
FOR CATHOLIC LEARNING.
ECUMENICAL INVESTIGATIONS ALONG
ECCLESIOLOGICAL LINES
*Zajednički dar krštenja – područje za katoličko učenje.
Ekumenska istraživanja na tragu crkvenog nauka*

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Review article

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Summary

This article asks: What can the churches within the framework of a mutual recognition of baptism learn from each other with regard to being church together? An answer is attempted in three steps. First, a closer look at the so-called Magdeburg Agreement signed 2007 in Germany is taken in which eleven churches agreed on a mutual recognition of baptism. (The fact that the Coptic Orthodox Church in Germany was not among the signatories has been amended during the recent visit of Pope Francis to Egypt) The Agreement states a series of ecclesiological implications of baptism. Therefore, the second step looks at possible areas of Catholic learning and asks, what exactly is recognized by a mutual recognition of baptism? Areas of learning are identified in sacramentology, ecclesiology and the understanding of baptism itself. What is at stake respectively? Is baptism a sacramental act of salvation or a merely symbolic act of the human being? If baptism is only a personal act of confession and commitment, then the church serves no longer “as a sign and instrument” (LG1) by which God grants new life in the sacrament. Furthermore, which ecclesiological requirements and conditions – short of a mutual recognition as Church in the full sense of the word – have to be fulfilled for making a recognition of baptism possible? Finally, the contribution reflects on lifelong learning and Ecumenism of Life,

*taking into account ecumenical texts like *Becoming a Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of Our Common Baptism*. Does the process character of baptism which moves from the “I believe” of the person baptized towards the “we believe” of the Church not open up a path towards a common witness in one united church? The conclusion suggests that the churches should strive to learn together to become one Church.*

Key words: *Mutual recognition of baptism; “Magdeburg Agreement”; baptismal ecclesiology; “Becoming a Christian”; (not yet) full communion;*

Our baptism is a common gift which most of the churches involved into the ecumenical movement already share. What fields does this common gift open up for Catholic learning? Or put more generally: What can the churches within the framework of a mutual recognition of baptism learn from each other with regard to being church together? What can they learn together ecumenically?

1. THE MAGDEBURG AGREEMENT

I start my reflections from a concrete example: At an ecumenical service in the cathedral of Magdeburg on 29th April 2007, 11 of the 16 member churches of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen* (ACK), the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Germany, signed a document on the mutual recognition of baptism.¹ The initiative for this step came from Walter Cardinal Kasper: After the plenary meeting of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in 2001, at which the results of an opinion poll on the recognition of baptism had been debated, Cardinal Kasper recommended to the bishops' conferences that further steps should be taken towards initiatives to promote the mutual recognition of baptism – reaching further than the already existing agreements. The Magdeburg declaration is the first

¹ Magdeburg Cathedral was chosen, because it has the oldest baptismal font in continuous use in Germany, dating from the 10th century well before the breaking of unity with the Orthodox, – and because in Eastern Germany about 75-80% are not baptized.

instance this recommendation of Cardinal Kasper's has been realized. It is a national agreement that takes up some local and regional accordances in Germany some of which date back as far as the 1960ies: Among the 11 churches that signed this agreement were the major churches in Germany.² But sometimes it is more telling to know who did not sign: the Association of Mennonite Congregations in Germany, the Union of Evangelical Free Churches–Baptist Union in Germany, the Salvation Army in Germany, the Coptic Orthodox Church in Germany, and the Syrian-Orthodox Church of Antioch in Germany.

The document is subdivided into three paragraphs.³ The first one interprets our being reborn by baptism as being connected to Christ. The second one lists the conditions for a mutual recognition: Baptism has to be administered by water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This paragraph also insists on the uniqueness of baptism. In order to underline the ecumenical relevance of this mutual recognition, the third paragraph cites the Faith and Order document "*Baptism, Eucharist*

² For instance, the Evangelical Church in Germany, the Evangelical Methodist Church in Germany, the Roman Catholic Church (German RC Bishops' Conference), the major Orthodox Churches in Germany, and the Council of Anglican-Episcopal Churches in Germany.

³ Text of Magdeburg as published in F&O paper no. 207 "Baptism Today: Understanding, Practice, Ecumenical Implications" edited by Thomas F. Best, Liturgical Press, 2008, 228:
Christian Baptism: Jesus Christ is our salvation. Through him sinners have been reconciled to God (Rom 5:10), in order that we might be his sons and daughters. In enabling us to share into the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection Baptism achieves for us new birth in Jesus Christ. Whoever receives this sacrament and affirms through faith God's love becomes one with Christ and at the same time with his people at all times and in all places. As a sign of the unity of all Christians baptism binds us together with Jesus Christ who is the foundation of this unity. Despite differences in understanding of what it is to be the Church, there exists between us a basic common understanding of Baptism. Accordingly, we recognise every baptism which has been carried out according to the commission of Jesus in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit through the symbolic act of immersion in water or through the pouring of water over the person to be baptized. We rejoice over every person who is baptized [*Here the churches probably think of the situation in Eastern Germany, but not only there*]. This mutual recognition of baptism is an expression of the bond of unity which is based on Jesus Christ (Eph 4:4-6). A baptism which has been performed in this way is unique and unrepeatable. We confess together with the Lima Document: Our one baptism in Christ is "a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their fellowship" (WCC Faith and Order convergence text *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, "Baptism", para. 6). 29th April 2007

and Ministry” (BEM) of 1982. BEM and Magdeburg unanimously confess that baptism links us to Jesus Christ himself and to his people in all places and at all times. Thus, the two multilateral documents both stress the ecclesial dimension of baptism.

Although its key sentence reads “Jesus Christ is our salvation”, the Magdeburg agreement leaves no doubt that it has been brought about “despite differences in understanding of what it is to be the Church”. So, if baptism has all these ecclesiological implications, we should now ask what exactly is being recognized by a mutual recognition of baptism.

2. POSSIBLE AREAS OF CATHOLIC LEARNING

Taking this as my starting point I’d like to look more closely at possible areas of Catholic learning concerning (1) sacramentology, (2) ecclesiology and (3) the understanding of baptism itself.

2.1. *On the Ecclesiological Dimension of the Sacrament of Baptism*

A mutual recognition of baptism only makes sense, if it is based on an at least partial common understanding of that sacrament and its ecclesiological implications. This is the reason why Baptists, Mennonites and Pentecostals did not sign the Magdeburg agreement. Yet, the differences in the notion of baptism not only relate to the question whether one should baptize children or merely adults, they go deeper. First of all, a basic theological decision is at stake: Do I understand believing as a strictly personal act of confessing my faith and thus as a contribution and achievement of my own? Or do I mainly see it as a gift granted to me by God through the church? Does, therefore, baptism also serve, so to speak, as an *instrument* of salvation (UR 3)? Or does it only mean a symbolic act of man, a preceding or following sign of salvation, yet – a mere sign of one’s commitment, an attestation of one’s personal belief and thus a signal which points towards salvation, but does not bring it about? The answer to this question also engenders ecclesiological consequences. If baptism is only a personal act of confession and commitment, then the church serves no longer “as a sign and instrument” (LG1) by which God grants new life in the sacra-

ment. Instead of being incorporated into an already existing reality of salvation one volunteers to enter an alliance of believers gathered at their own will or, as Cardinal Kasper puts it “a church of voluntariness”.⁴

If, on the other hand, baptism is understood as sacrament of salvation, this means that it also brings what it proclaims, the redemption and salvation promised by God. Summing up we could say: By the sacrament of baptism we do not join the church like a club or a society, but we are received into the church like in an already given reality of salvation. On the other hand, also the doctrine of the salvific necessity of baptism has to be seen in the light of the proclamation of the Gospel and of personal believing which is in itself a gift of divine grace and not a merely human achievement. This is the lesson which the ecumenical dialogues with Mennonites and Baptists have taught the so called “historical” churches during the past years.⁵

For Roman Catholic learning there was yet another lesson to be learned which meanwhile, so many years after the *Ecumenical Directories*, is no longer controversial: to accept the notion of a “valid” sacrament administered in other churches than the Roman Catholic Church and – this actually is the main point to be stressed – which the Roman Catholic Church does not even recognize as churches, but as ecclesial communities.

2.2. *On the Ecclesiological Side of the Mutual Recognition of Baptism*

Accordingly, the main question of this section is: Which ecclesiological requirements and conditions have to be fulfilled for making a mutual recognition of baptism possible? Obviously, *the criterion* of mutually recognized baptism is not a full mutual

⁴ Walter KASPER, *Ekklesiologische und Ökumenische Implikationen der Taufe*, in: Albert RAFFELT et al. (ed), *Weg und Weite. Festschrift für Karl Lehmann*, Freiburg i.Br., 2001), p. 594., uses the term “Freiwilligkeitskirche”.

⁵ The results go even further: In May 2009 a major agreement on the common understanding of baptism was reached between Lutherans and Baptists in Bavaria “*Voneinander lernen – miteinander glauben. Ein Herr, ein Glaube, eine Taufe (Eph 4,5)*”. The document is available at: [http://www.google.be/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCEQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.gftp.de%2Fdownloads%2FKonvergenzdokument_Voneinander_lernen_miteinander_glauben_\(BALUBAG\).pdf&ei=MgNqVPvLbPCsAS4k4KgaQ&usg=AFQjCNH7HQJYtFFQaJBZdiyMh0HMmLQZg&sig2=6ijD3mMgTOUeX8tE6dxhqq&bv=79142246.d.cWc&cad=rja](http://www.google.be/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCEQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.gftp.de%2Fdownloads%2FKonvergenzdokument_Voneinander_lernen_miteinander_glauben_(BALUBAG).pdf&ei=MgNqVPvLbPCsAS4k4KgaQ&usg=AFQjCNH7HQJYtFFQaJBZdiyMh0HMmLQZg&sig2=6ijD3mMgTOUeX8tE6dxhqq&bv=79142246.d.cWc&cad=rja). (accessed 25/10/14)

recognition as churches. Nevertheless differences in evaluating the ecclesiological presuppositions or consequences of such a mutual recognition play a decisive role. If we ask what we can learn with integrity from others it is as a first step advisable in order to assess the significance of certain problems on the Roman Catholic side to look at the way how other churches deal with similar problems and thus learn from them.

In this case I focus my attention on the way in which the Orthodox Churches handle this problem: For them the still imperfect unity of the church has a major impact on the notion of baptism and the unity given in it. Already concerning BEM the Orthodox problems focussed mainly on its ecclesial implications. Later on the crucial question was asked pointedly by the *Final Report* of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC: "Is there space for other churches in Orthodox ecclesiology? How would this space and its limits be described?"⁶

In principle, the Orthodox churches have two answers to this: They either are guided by the position which St Basil adopted from St Cyprian. In the Baptismal Controversy of the second century Cyprian of Carthage had held: *salus extra ecclesiam non est* – "there is no salvation outside the Church",⁷ for there are no baptism, no eucharist and no other sacraments outside the Church. Salvation depends upon being a member of the Church, in this case the Orthodox Church, for divine grace is linked to this institution in such a way that only sacraments celebrated within it have any effect at all.⁸ Practically, concerning the conversion of a Christian to Orthodoxy, this means that in isolated, special cases exceptions are possible, if this serves the good

⁶ Final Report of the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC, no. 16 http://www.google.be/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CCEQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.oikoumene.org%2Fen%2Fresources%2Fdocuments%2Fassembly%2F2006-porto-alegre%2F3-preparatory-and-background-documents%2Ffinal-report-of-the-special-commission-on-orthodox-participation-in-the-wcc&ei=rQNqVOnCB4LsATCxiCADw&usg=AFQjCNFDjsSaq--vcesbMDeZjxa88iuZzQ&sig2=SrFYOD7IJHojR6i_hyipnw&bvm=bv.79142246,d.cWc. (accessed 25/10/14):

⁷ CYPRIAN, ep. 73, 21, ed. Hartel, CSEL 3.2, 795,3.

⁸ Cf. Dorothea WENDEBOURG, *Taufe und Oikonomia. Zur Frage der Wiedertaufe in der Orthodoxen Kirche*, in: Wolf-Dietrich HAUSCHILD, Carsten NICOLAISEN, Dorothea WENDEBOURG (ed.), *Kirchengemeinschaft - Anspruch und Wirklichkeit. Festschrift für Georg Kretschmar zum 60. Geburtstag*, Stuttgart 1986, p. 93.

and welfare of the whole church (keyword: *oikonomia*). In those cases the Orthodox Church bestows to the baptism administered in another church validity after the event; it does so by the grace only inherent to the Orthodox Church. There is no ecclesial quality whatsoever assigned to the other churches, which would justify the validity of their baptism. Yet this solution causes a lot of problems: Is it possible to deduce a general rule for the relationship among churches from isolated cases, even if they are regularly repeated in the same sense? What does it ecumenically mean to recognize the baptism of other churches only out of mere leniency?

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By way of contrast, the second Orthodox answer is shaped according to the position of Pope Stephen I., Cyprian's adversary. This position also influenced the canons of the Council of Nicea and was adopted by St Augustine.⁹ It differentiates between the canonical and charismatic boundaries of the church and holds that the Spirit can also operate outside the limits of the true church. If baptism is not recognized this is due to the rite by which it has been performed. Decisive for its recognition is that it is celebrated by naming the Trinity and by using water. This does not mean, however, that everyone who is baptized in the right way outside the Orthodox Church is already truly saved. But obviously this means that the rite by being performed already bestows a certain qualification to the recipient which lies beyond the salvific function of a particular church. This assessment according to the rite also opens up the possibility of *oikonomia* or *akribia*, yet it starts from different ecclesiological presuppositions regarding the non-Orthodox churches. Baptism and the Spirit still belong together, but the Spirit can also operate outside the boundaries of the Orthodox Church.

Both solutions are still advocated by the Orthodox. This is the reason why the major Orthodox Churches in Germany signed the Magdeburg declaration (subject to future regulations by a panorthodox council), and the minor ones did not.

In the light of the Orthodox solutions along the lines of baptismal ecclesiology the crucial question is now: What answer does the Roman Catholic Church offer? The Second Vatican Council declares: "Baptism therefore establishes a sacramental bond of unity which links all who have been reborn by it" (UR 22). This

⁹ AUGUSTINUS, *De baptismo* IV, 12,18, CSEL 51, 242ss.

‘sacramental bond of unity’ aims at an ecclesial reality already existing among all the baptized. How far does this bond of unity reach? Is it a bond joining all baptized individuals? Is it perhaps a bond between the singular baptized and his or her respective church? Is it even a bond between the churches themselves?

Unitatis redintegratio chooses a fourth option: It is a bond between the baptized and the Roman Catholic Church. All who “have been truly baptized are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect” (UR 3). Baptism incorporates us wholly into the Body of Christ. Yet this Body of Christ is not unreal or ultra-mundane. For this reason baptism makes us members of a concrete local church, a parish, a diocese, a district. Nor is it unhistorical or beyond history. Yet, unfortunately, during the history of Christianity there also occurred grave splittings, schisms and breaks. Therefore, at least at present, baptism incorporates us into a specific confessional church, into a denomination.

Becoming at the same time a member of Christ’s Body and a member of a denominational church are not two different phases following each other; rather they are two aspects of one and the same process. Thus, the effect of baptism has a double aspect: baptism constitutes a personal relationship to Christ that does not entirely coincide with the relationship towards the church. On the other hand, Christ never is without his Church. But there should be no conflict between the immediate relation to Christ independent of institutions and the salvation mediated by the church. For the church is no end in itself. On the contrary, it is totally dependent on Christ. Therefore, already in 1976, the then professor and later pope, Joseph Ratzinger, answered the question: “From whom do we receive this gift [i.e. of baptism and faith]? Well, in the first place from the Church, but also the Church does not have it of her own account [...] If faith constitutes an immediate gift of the Church, then we always also have to take into account that the Church as such can only exist as a gift of the Lord.”¹⁰ Therefore also baptism is not an act of the Church, but of God, for it is Christ himself who baptizes (see SC 7).

In order to combine its doctrine of baptism with an ecclesiological counterpart the Council develops its model of degrees of

¹⁰ Joseph RATZINGER, *Taufe, Glaube und Zugehörigkeit zur Kirche*, in: *Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift Communio*, 5 (1976.), p. 228 [my translation].

ecclesial membership (see LG 14-16). The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium* states a whole range of uniting elements of being church together, which exist outside the Roman Catholic Church and by which other Christians “in some real way [...] are joined with us in the Holy Spirit, for to them too He gives His gifts and graces whereby He is operative among them with His sanctifying power” (LG 15). The background of these statements on the so called “ecclesiology of elements” constitutes the complex relationship of invisible and visible Church, which is summed up by LG 8 in the expression “subsistit in”: “This Church constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him, although many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure.” Certainly in this context the “subsistit in” does not mean a cancellation of the Roman Catholic claim to substantial identity with the One Church of Jesus Christ. But, however one translates and interprets the Latin “subsistit in” – it logically justifies the assertion following it, that also outside of the visible structure of the Roman Catholic Church “many elements of sanctification and of truth are found”. For, despite an identification, the “subsistit in” still leaves some space for the view that there are real ecclesial elements in the churches and ecclesial communities separated from the Roman Catholic Church.¹¹ This is also confirmed by the *Responses*.¹² The Fathers of the Council were convinced that God’s Spirit

¹¹ See also Karl LEHMANN, *Zum Selbstverständnis des Katholischen, Zur theologischen Rede von der Kirche*. Inaugural Lecture at the Autumnal Plenary Session of the German Bishops’ Conference 24th September 2007, p. 13: “Die katholische Kirche erblickt in den anderen christlichen Glaubensgemeinschaften eine wirkliche Anteilnahme am Kirchesein. Sie kann ihren Anspruch auf eine substantielle Identität nicht preisgeben, hat aber ihren absoluten Anspruch im Sinne einer puren Identifikation reduziert. Wenn sie an dieser substantiellen Identität mit der Kirche Jesu Christi festhält, vertritt sie dennoch kein exklusives, absolutes Identitätsmodell. Man darf nicht übersehen, dass es bei dieser Lösung eine authentische Teilhabe, eine echte Partizipation an der *einen* Kirche gibt.” Christoph Schwöbel, starting from “*creatura verbi divini*” gives a diametrically opposed meaning to “subsistit in”: The visible church subsists in the One Church of Jesus Christ (*Grundlinien des Verständnisses der Kirche nach Lumen gentium. Eine lutherische Lektüre*, in: Eilert HERMS, Lubomir ŽAK (ed.), *Grund und Gegenstand des Glaubens nach römisch-katholischer und evangelisch-lutherischer Lehre. Theologische Studien*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck 2008., p. 519).

¹² Cf. *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church, Answer to Question 2:*

also operates outside the *ecclesia catholica*. Therefore, they could no longer only speak of singular ways of salvation for individual people outside the Roman Catholic Church, but of churches and ecclesial communities beyond their own church. These churches and ecclesial communities have elements of sanctification and truth and “[t]hese elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity.” Since they stem from Jesus Christ himself, they receive their validity from him, respectively from the Holy Spirit. These elements, among them especially baptism, bestow on those non-Catholic communities a new ecclesial quality. For by way of their authentic participation in the One Church of Jesus Christ they receive a certain degree of ecclesiality. Besides – as Cardinal Lehmann suggests – “there remains elbowroom for further qualitative growth in this participation”.¹³ According to the Catholic criteria not all have the same degree of participation in the One Church, for some have elements which lack to others. The term “elements” is perhaps not the luckiest way of putting it. For this reason Cardinal Ratzinger conceded in relation to *Dominus Iesus*: “Perhaps there is a better term than ‘elements’, but the meaning should be clear: The life of faith, to which the church serves, is a multilayered structure, and it is quite possible to discern elements that exist inside or outside of it.”¹⁴ Thus, the Second Vatican Council granted a new ecclesial status to non-Catholic Christians. They are in a certain relationship to the Roman Catholic Church, and this is the case not *despite* of their being baptized as Anglicans, Lutherans, Orthodox etc., but exactly *because* they are baptized *within* these churches.

After the Second Vatican Council these Conciliar teachings on baptismal ecclesiology were summed up and qualified as “vera communio, etsi nondum plena – real although not yet full

“It is possible, according to Catholic doctrine, to affirm correctly that the Church of Christ is present and operative in the churches and ecclesial communities not yet fully in communion with the Catholic Church, on account of the elements of sanctification and truth that are present in them.” http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20070629_responsa-quaestiones_en.html. (accessed 25/10/14)

¹³ K. LEHMANN, *Zum Selbstverständnis des Katholischen*, p. 14.

¹⁴ Joseph RATZINGER, *Interview “Es scheint mir absurd, was unsere lutherischen Freunde jetzt wollen”* (FAZ NR. 221, 22/09/2000), in: Michael J. RAINER (ed.), *Dominus Iesus, Anstößige Wahrheit oder anstößige Kirche. Dokumente, Hintergründe, Standpunkte und Folgerungen*, Münster, LIT 2001, p. 35.

communion” (UUS 45). On the one hand, baptism is no longer understood as only constituting a bond between individual Christians of other denominations and the Roman Catholic Church, but it also lays the foundations of a bond between the Catholic Church and the other churches and ecclesial communities. For “[t]here is an increased awareness that we all belong to Christ” – as Pope John Paul II. stresses in UUS 42. The increased awareness of belonging to Christ unites, and this is true not only of individual Christians. On the basis of the already reached accordances the Ecumenical Directory of 1993 speaks no longer only of a *certain* “imperfect communion”, but of a “*a real*, even if imperfect communion” (EcDir 129). And no. 22 underlines that “[b]aptismal communion tends towards full ecclesial communion”, for “those who are baptized in the name of Christ are, by that very fact, called to commit themselves to the search for unity.” This is also true of the Roman Catholic Church. In this respect the aspect of “vera communio” is stressed.

Yet this communion still remains “nondum plena”: In its ecumenical relations the Roman Catholic Church deals – according to its own documents – with two “classes” or “types”¹⁵ of ecumenical partners, churches and ecclesial communities. The Council did not mean to slander or insult anyone by using this classification. On the contrary, it is modelled after the terminology of the Ecumenical Movement and the WCC. Yet, while UR 19 still left open which of the churches in the West should exactly be classified as which,¹⁶ it is now usual in official documents to call all the Churches of the Reformation ecclesial communities and speak of them as being “not Churches in the proper sense” (DI 17), due to a “defectus” with regard to the sacramental priesthood and the apostolic succession in the episcopal ministry. In itself this terminology goes back to the WCC’s *Toronto Statement* of 1950 which speaks of “churches in the true and full sense of the word” (IV. 4). Yet the question is what the ecumenically relevant meaning of this Catholic terminology is. Can it really mean that Christian communities outside the Roman Catholic Church do not have any ecclesial quality at all? This would contra-

¹⁵ See for instance the article by Walter KASPER, *Wandel der ökumenischen Situation*, in: *Der christliche Osten*, 62 (2007), pp. 261-266.

¹⁶ UR 19: “In the great upheaval which began in the West toward the end of the Middle Ages, and in later times too, *Churches* and ecclesial Communities came to be separated from the Apostolic See of Rome” [my italics].

dict the Council and would belie a Pope who underlines in UUS 13 that “[i]t is not that beyond the boundaries of the Catholic community there is an ecclesial vacuum.” On the other hand the Roman Catholic side cannot be convinced that e.g. Apostolic Succession in the episcopal ministry forms part of the *essence* of the Church, and at the same time proclaim that it regards ecclesial communities which do not have this to the same extent as churches in the same sense.¹⁷ Decisive for the intensity of unity are the elements of sanctification and truth present in the respective churches. And this is not a mere Roman Catholic glass bead game. Since God has revealed himself, and made himself tangible in Jesus Christ in this world, he still wants to be found in the church and all its life – even today. “Therefore, it is not mere obstinacy as such, if the Roman Catholic Church insists on a dialogue on the structure of the church and the ‘objective’ means of sanctification.”¹⁸ Yet the Roman Catholic side has to be very careful not to slip inadvertently from a qualitative into a quantifying understanding. Here lies an important area of Catholic learning: It is vital to avoid an increasing exclusiveness, since Roman Catholic ecclesiology seems tempted to insist more and more on a *fullness* of the elements of sanctification and truth, until it recognizes any ecclesial qualities at all in its ecumenical partner. But can the sacramentality of the Church and the fullness of Catholicity be quantified at all? How does this go together with an organic, qualitative notion of the Church?

These problems inherent to the ecclesiological implications of baptism cause the major part of the problems we still encounter with baptism itself, even to the effect that baptism has “given dramatic visibility to the broken witness of the Church” (BEM 6, comm.). Thus, although baptism is mutually recognized and there even exist common baptismal certificates in some countries, a common ecumenical celebration is not yet possible.

¹⁷ Cf. Kurt KOCH, *Bleibende Aufgaben für die Ökumene aus katholischer Sicht*, in: Wolfgang THÖNISSEN (ed.), *Unitatis redintegratio. 40 Jahre Ökumenismusdekret – Erbe und Auftrag*, Paderborn-Frankfurt a. M., Bonifatius-Lembeck 2005, p. 302.

¹⁸ Eva Maria FABER, *Baptismale Ökumene, Tauftheologische Orientierung für den ökumenischen Weg*, in: Dorothea SATTLER, Gunther WENZ (ed.), *Sakramente ökumenisch feiern. Vorüberlegungen für die Erfüllung einer Hoffnung. Für Theodor Schneider*, Mainz, Grünewald 2005, p. 110.

2.3. *Lifelong Learning and Ecumenism of Life*

Are there any common perspectives, any solutions to the problem advocated in other churches or ecumenical institutions which could help to mend this broken witness of the Church? In other words: Are there any further lessons for the Roman Catholic side or all sides to be learnt?

An important convergence consists in realizing that baptism is oriented towards lifelong development and enacting. Already BEM holds that “baptism is related not only to momentary experience, but to life-long growth into Christ” (BEM 9). This is consistent with the latest results of the Faith and Order Commission. The document *Becoming a Christian: The Ecumenical Implications of Our Common Baptism* therefore explicitly and deliberately speaks of an “ordo” of Baptism meaning the sequence of the elements “formation in faith”, “baptizing in water” and “leading to participation in the life of the community” (19). The elements of this sequence can be arranged differently and assessed in various ways. But “[t]he churches differ in their understanding, not so much of the goal of this process as of its constituent parts and when, within the individual’s lifetime, they should occur” (One Baptism 58). On the Roman Catholic side similar statements concerning the process character of baptism are to be found.¹⁹

Certainly this is already true of the lives of individual Christians. Yet ecumenically decisive is the fact that the “I believe” of the person baptized tends towards the “we believe” of the church. We could ask accordingly: “Does not, in an analogous way, the faith witnessed in different confessional churches tend towards a common witness in one united church?”²⁰ Thus, the process character of baptism affects also ecumenical issues which are currently at stake: The baptismal process is coined by and dependent on a specific ecclesial space or ambience. And exactly how this ecclesial space should look like is currently much and controversially debated. Could not our mutual admitting that we are in a process of growing deeper into communion – as still imper-

¹⁹ Cf. e.g. UR 22: “of itself Baptism is only a beginning, an inauguration wholly directed toward the fullness of life in Christ.” The text lists “a complete profession of faith, complete incorporation in the system of salvation such as Christ willed it to be, and finally complete ingrafting in eucharistic communion.”

²⁰ Cf. E. M. FABER, *Baptismale Ökumene*, p. 113.

fect communion among each other and already full communion with Christ – open up a way for our mutual recognition as churches? The main condition for this would be that we continuously remember that the communion with Christ given in baptism is an undeserved free gift of God. This would be in keeping with the notion of baptism as conversion and the linking of baptism to justification. Ecumenism would then be a process reflecting the lifelong growth in and with Jesus Christ that baptism at the same time bestows and requires. The various churches and ecclesial communities would be in a phase of common companionship jointly growing deeper into the communion with Christ. This together being on the move towards Christ which comprises the whole life of the churches is called by Cardinal Kasper “ecumenism of life”²¹. And baptism is for the Cardinal the “starting point and point of reference for any ecumenism of life”.²²

CONCLUSION

Our ecumenical learning concerning the sacrament of baptism is a process, a process of rapprochement: coming closer to Jesus Christ means at the same time, automatically so to speak, coming closer to each other. And it shows the “need for the Christian churches [...] to walk the way of conversion towards more visible structural and sacramental unity”²³ from a christological as well as an ecclesiological point of view.

Catholic Learning is thus not only about learning from other traditions by exchanging gifts, but also – and even more relevantly so – about applying these gifts in one’s own church and about using them well for the edification of the *One Church* of Jesus Christ. Baptismal ecumenical ecclesiology thus proves to be a matter of praxis: Since baptism establishes a special relation, a “bond of unity” as the Second Vatican Council says and “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” (BEM) confirms, it has a strong ecclesiological impact. And beyond that it constitutes a special relationship among the different confessional churches that mutually recognize their baptism. Our common belonging to

²¹ Or “spiritual ecumenism”. See on this also Paul D. MURRAY, *Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning*, in: *Louvain Studies*, 33 (2008), p. 33.

²² Walter KASPER, *Sakrament der Einheit – Eucharistie und Kirche*, Freiburg i. Br., Herder, 2004, p. 59.

²³ P. D. MURRAY, *Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning*, p. 32.

Christ through baptism creates a bond of each individual Christian to Christ as well as to his or her church, a bond that transcends the historic and theological differences among the churches; and the mutual recognition of baptism emerges as a cornerstone of spiritual ecumenism, even if significant differences still remain. If – in view of all this – we do not ask what the others need to learn from us, but what we need to learn from others, then the problem can be pinned down to mainly concerning the relationship between the One Church and the different churches. What is, accordingly, the amount of actual effective ecclesial learning in the Roman Catholic Church in this respect? Couldn't we thus learn together – to use once more a phrase by Joseph Ratzinger – “that churches may remain churches and become one Church”?²⁴

ZAJEDNIČKI DAR KRŠTENJA – PODRUČJE
ZA KATOLIČKO UČENJE.

EKUMENSKA ISTRAŽIVANJA NA TRAGU
CRKVENOG NAUKA

Sažetak

Ovaj članak postavlja pitanje: Što mogu crkve, u kontekstu međusobnog priznanja krštenja, naučiti jedna od druge u nastojanju da budu crkveno zajedno? Pokušava se dati odgovor u tri koraka. Prvo, pažljivo se razmatra takozvani Magdeburški sporazum potpisan 2007 u Njemačkoj u kojem se jedanaest crkava dogovorilo o međusobnom priznanju krštenja. (Činjenica da Koptska pravoslavna crkva nije bila među potpisnicama je ispravljena za vrijeme nedavne posjete Pape Franje Egiptu) Taj Sporazum navodi niz eklezioloških implikacija krštenja. Stoga se u drugom koraku promatraju moguća područja katoličkog učenja i postavlja se pitanje, što se točno priznaje međusobnim priznavanjem krštenja? Područja učenja se pronalaze u sakramentologiji, ekleziologiji i razumijevanju samog krštenja. Što se dovodi u pitanje u svakom od ovih područja? Je li krštenje sakramentalni čin spasenja ili puki simbolični čin ljudske osobe? Ukoliko je krštenje samo osobni čin

²⁴ Joseph RATZINGER, *Die Kirche und die Kirchen*, in: *Reformatio*, 13 (1964), p. 105.

ispovijedi i predanja, onda crkva tu više ne služi kao “znak i sredstvo” (LG1) po kojem Bog daje novi život u tom sakramentu. Nadalje, koji se ekleziološki zahtjevi i uvjeti – u odsustvu međusobnog priznanja crkvenosti u punom smislu riječi – trebaju ispuniti da bi priznanje krštenja postalo moguće? Na kraju, ovaj prilog razmišlja o cjeloživotnom učenju i Ekumenizmu života, na osnovu ekumenskih tekstova kao što su Postati kršćanin: Ekumenske implikacije našeg zajedničkog krštenja. Zar nam upravo taj procesni karakter krštenja, koji kreće od riječi krštenika “vjerujem” prema riječi Crkve “vjerujemo”, ne otvara put ka zajedničkom svjedočenju u jednoj ujedinjenoj Crkvi? U zaključku se sugerira da bi crkve trebale težiti da uče zajedno da bi postale jedna Crkva.

Ključne riječi: međusobno priznanje krštenja; “Magdeburški sporazum”; krsna ekleziologija; “Postati kršćanin”; (još ne) puno zajedništvo;