

ADRIAN BOLDIȘOR

Faculty of Orthodox Theology of the University of Craiova, Romania

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7850-3789>

Importance of the Sacrament of Baptism for the Contemporary World The Orthodox Perspective

1. The Orthodox interpretation of Baptism – 2. “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” (BEM) – 3. The Orthodox Churches’ responses to BEM – 4. “Growth in Agreement”: Dialogues between the Orthodox Churches and the other Churches – 5. “The Nature and the Mission of the Church”

1. The Orthodox interpretation of Baptism

Baptism is the sacrament in which, from immersion in water, in the name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, a person who is baptized is cleaned from original sin and all sins which he or she committed before this very moment. The person is born into a new spiritual life and becomes a part of the Body of Jesus Christ, i.e. the Church.

The Church Fathers speak about Baptism in different ways. The different names used depend on whether one is speaking of the visible or invisible aspects of Baptism. In connection with the visible aspect, some exemplar names are as listed: bath (Justin the Philosopher and the Martyr, P.G. 6, 421), holy spring (Augustine, P.L. 41, 381), etc. While speaking of the invisible aspects of Baptism, names used are: light (Clement of Alexandria, P.G. 8, 281), the Sacrament of light (Saint Gregory of Nazianz, P.G. 36, 361), charism (Clement of Alexandria, P.G. 8, 281), holiness (Saint Gregory of Nyssa, P.G. 35, 351), perfection (Saint Gregory of Nazianz, P.G. 36, 361), rebirth in God (Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, P.G. 7, 657), spiritual birth (Saint

Cyril of Jerusalem, P.G. 16, 231), the death of sins (Saint Basil the Great, P.G. 31, 424), the water of eternal life (Saint Cyprian of Carthage, P.L. 4, 391), etc.

St. Paul the Apostle presents some images of Baptism, as for example: circumcision – “In him also you were circumcised, not in a physical sense, but by being divested of the lower nature” (Colossians 2:11); grave – “By Baptism we were buried with him, and lay dead, in order that, as Christ was raised from the dead in the splendor of the Father, so also we might set our feet upon the new path of life” (Romans 6: 4); crucifixion – “We know that the man we once were has been crucified with Christ, for the destruction of the sinful self” (Romans 6: 6).

The Sacrament itself was instituted by Jesus Christ. This fact was preceded by preparation and Baptism was prefigured in: circumcision (Colossians 2: 14), the water and the ark of Noah (1 Peter 3: 20-21), the passage through the Red Sea and the fellowship of Moses in cloud and the sea (1 Corinthians 10: 2), the supernatural rock which accompanied the Israelites in the desert (1 Corinthians 10: 4), the John’s baptism (John 1: 29-35), etc.

Jesus Christ gave the Sacrament of Baptism after his Resurrection, in the very moment of His Ascension, as we read in the Bible: “Go forth therefore and make all nations my disciples; baptize men everywhere in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matthew 29: 19-20), and “Those who believe it and receive Baptism will find salvation” (Mark 16: 16). Other biblical quotations are: John 3: 5; Acts 10: 47-48; Acts 8: 36-37; Acts 2: 38. In the Orthodox understanding, Baptism (from βάπτισμά, βάπτειν) is valid in the form of immersion, and without any use of water, it is null.

While speaking on the sacraments, the contemporary Orthodox theologians use the language of Church Fathers – it concerns especially the Sacrament of Baptism. Vladimir Lossky speaks about two wills in the Sacraments - the priest’s will and the receiver’s will: “The Sacraments and sacred rites which are carried out within the Church thus admit of two wills and of two operations taking place simultaneously”¹. John Meyendorff speaks about Baptism and Eucharist, quoting Gregory Palamas, who says that our entire salvation is rooted in these two Sacraments because they recapitulate the entirety of the economy of God and humankind². Another famous theologian, Paul Evdokimov, notes in *L’Orthodoxie* that Baptism is the bath of eter-

¹ Vladimir Lossky. 1957. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. London: J. Clarke, 187.

² Jean Meyendorff. 1975. *Initiation à la Théologie Byzantine. L’histoire et la doctrine*. Paris: Cerf, 255: “Ainsi Grégoire Palamas proclame que tout notre salut est enraciné dans ces deux sacrements puisqu’ils récapitulent la totalité de l’économie du Dieu-homme, et Nicolas Cabasilas compose son ouvrage célèbre sur *La Vie en Christ* comme un commentaire du baptême, de la chrismation et de l’eucharistie”.

nity. Baptism is the complete recasting of a human being into the image of God. It is the restoration of our Adam-like nature, recapitulated by Christ's saving work. Christ's burial and resurrection are transposed in the symbolism of Baptism. The Greek term βαπτίζω signifies immersion into water, and the early Church's practice was to insist on Baptism by full immersion. Hermas speaks of descending into water. The profound link between the descent into hell and the descent into water is lost totally in Baptisms which practice infusion or aspersion³.

2. "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" (BEM)

In 1982, the Faith and Order commission of the World Council of Churches gathered in Lima prepared the famous document known as *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), which was issued for the first time in July 1982. This document is, in fact, the result of a long process of study in Faith and Order, in many encounters: Lausanne (1927), Accra (1974), Bangalore (1978), and Lima (1982):

This Lima text represents the significant theological convergence which Faith and Order has discerned and formulated. Those who know how widely the churches have differed in doctrine and practice on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, will appreciate the importance of the large measure of agreement registered here. Virtually all the confessional traditions are included in the Commission's membership. That theologians of such widely different traditions should be able to speak so harmoniously about Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry is unprecedented in the modern ecumenical movement⁴.

This text has been thought of as a "convergence text", i.e. a text which seeks to bring together varying points of view in a single document with the aim of highlighting points of agreement as a part of the Churches' efforts to realize visible unity.

³ Paul Evdokimov. 1959. *L'Orthodoxie*. Neuchâtel: Delachaux&Niestlé, 274–275: "Le baptême est le bain d'éternité et par cela, ἀναγέννησις: La refonte totale de l'être humain ou son plasma reçoit la vraie figure à l'image de Dieu. C'est la restauration de notre nature adamique récapitulée en Christ par son œuvre de salut. La mort – ensevelissement et la vie – résurrection du Christ se transposent dans le symbolisme du baptême. Le terme βαπτίζω signifie plonger, immerger, et la pratique ancienne insiste sur le seul mode de collation par immersion, et Hermas parle de la descente dans l'eau. Le lien très profond avec la descente aux enfers disparaît totalement de la pratique des baptêmes par infusion ou par aspersion".

⁴ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. 1982. (Faith and Order Paper No. 111). Geneva: World Council of Churches, ix.

The passage dedicated to the Baptism consists of six pages and it is structured in five chapters, as follows: *The Institution of Baptism*, *The Meaning of Baptism*, *Baptism and Faith*, *Baptismal Practice*, and *The Celebration of Baptism*. Some of those chapters have sub-chapters and some commentaries. The text has many biblical references which prove the commission's desire to understand Christianity's roots. The *Institution of Baptism* has in the center the final verses of the Gospel according to Matthew (28:18-20). BEM affirms that the practice of Baptism is confirmed in the New Testament. Since, there are many images of Baptism in the entire Bible, BEM tries to discover all of them. Therefore, in the document Baptism is seen as: *Participation in Christ's Death and Resurrection*, *Conversion, Pardoning and Cleansing*, *The Gift of the Spirit*, *Incorporation into the Body of Christ*, *The Sign of the Kingdom*. Concerning the relation between baptism and faith the text affirms that "Baptism is both God's gift and our human response to that gift. It looks towards a growth into the measure of stature of fullness of Christ"⁵.

A significant part of the text is related to the *Baptismal Practice*. BEM speaks about *Baptism of Believers and Infants*, *Baptism-Chrismation-Confirmation*, and *Towards Mutual Recognition of Baptism*. This last part tries to put together two practices in the Churches: believer Baptism and infant Baptism:

In order to overcome the differences, believer Baptism and those who practice infant Baptism should reconsider certain aspects of their practices. The first may seek to express more visibly the fact that children are placed under the protection of God's grace. The latter must guard themselves against the practice of apparently indiscriminate Baptism and take more seriously their responsibility for the nurture of baptized children to mature commitment to Christ⁶.

BEM speaks about the celebration of Baptism and concludes that Baptism is administered in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with the usage of water. The sacrament should be celebrated during a public worship, "so that the members of the congregation may be reminded of their own Baptism and may welcome into their fellowship those who are baptized and whom they are committed to nurture in the Christian faith"⁷.

The commentaries refer to the recognition of the different practices of Baptism by the Churches, the issue of infant Baptism and believers Baptism, Baptism

⁵ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. 1982, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.* 6.

⁷ *Ibid.* 6–7.

as a Sacrament, the relation between Baptism and Eucharist, the administration of Baptism with or without water and the formula used in Baptism, the socio-cultural context in which Baptism takes place. All those commentaries attempt to consider all Churches' traditions and try to find some common points of discussion and, perhaps, real understanding.

3. The Orthodox Churches' responses to BEM

The Lima text was sent to all members of the WCC including the Roman-Catholic Church, for official responses, requesting their submission before 31. December 1984. According to the proposal, the Churches had to respond to four points:

the extent to which your church can recognize in this text the faith of the Church through the age; the consequences your church can draw from this text for its relations and dialogues with other churches, particularly with those churches which also recognize the text as an expression of the apostolic faith; the guidance your church can take from this text for its worship, educational, ethical, and spiritual life and witness; the suggestions your church can make for the ongoing work of Faith and Order as it relates the material of this text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry to its long-range research project towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today⁸.

The statements of the Churches were published by Max Thurian in six volumes⁹ which represents very important documents for a better understanding. In those volumes we can find obviously the statements of the Orthodox Churches' (the Russian Orthodox Church¹⁰, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church¹¹, the Finnish Orthodox Church¹², the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria¹³, the Romanian Or-

⁸ *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. 1982, p. x.

⁹ Max Thurian (ed.). 1986–1988. *Churches respond to BEM. Official responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" text*, Faith and Order Papers: 129, 132, 135, 137, 143, 144. Geneva: World Council of Churches.

¹⁰ Max Thurian (ed.). 1986–1988. *Churches respond to BEM. Official responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" text*, 5–12.

¹¹ Max Thurian (ed.). 1986–1988. *Churches respond to BEM. Official responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" text*, v. II, 13–23.

¹² *Ibid.* 24–29.

¹³ Max Thurian (ed.). 1986–1988. *Churches respond to BEM. Official responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" text*, v. III, 1–3.

thodox Church¹⁴, the Orthodox Church in America¹⁵, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople¹⁶, and the Church of Greece¹⁷). For a majority of them BEM was seen as an important step in the ecumenical movement. But there are two exceptions. The first was made by the Russian Orthodox Church whose response begins with a different perspective *Vis-a Vis* the Lima text:

The Lima text of 1982 is not *consensus* on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, i.e. it does not represent a full agreement in faith, experience of life and liturgical practice of the churches in these matters. Actually, it is only a statement of opinions shared by a group of theologians, rather than a dogmatic affirmation of the churches, setting forth their teaching (their dogmatic and ecclesiology)¹⁸.

Another approach is found in the letter presented by the Church of Greece:

the special committee of theologians, despite the fact that it encourages all types of theological evaluation of the Lima texts, considers not only of no value but even harmful any type of official or non-official ecclesiastical reply¹⁹.

All statements concerning the Sacrament of Baptism have the same structure: an appreciation of the BEM, the points with which the Orthodox Churches cannot agree, and some proposals for the future perspectives in Faith and Order. It has to be noted that the Orthodox responses are concordant with decisions made during the Pan-Orthodox Encounter from June 1985: “it appears to us that we, as Orthodox, should welcome the Lima document as an experience of a new stage in the history of the ecumenical movement. In general, we see BEM as a remarkable ec-

¹⁴ Max Thurian (ed.). 1986–1988. *Churches respond to BEM. Official responses to the “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” text*, v. III, 4–15.

¹⁵ Ibid. 15–26.

¹⁶ Max Thurian (ed.). 1986–1988. *Churches respond to BEM. Official responses to the “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” text*, v. IV, 1–6.

¹⁷ Max Thurian (ed.). 1986–1988. *Churches respond to BEM. Official responses to the “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” text*, v. V, 1–3.

¹⁸ Max Thurian (ed.). 1986–1988. *Churches respond to BEM. Official responses to the “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” text*, v. II, 5. See also: Max Thurian, Geoffrey Wainwright. (ed.). 1983. *Baptism and Eucharist. Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdrnans.

¹⁹ Max Thurian (ed.). 1986–1988. *Churches respond to BEM. Official responses to the “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” text*, v. V, 3.

umenical document of doctrinal convergence²⁰. About Baptism, the same Pan-Orthodox Encounter declares that there are some issues to be clarified, namely: the relation between the unity of the Church and baptismal unity; the role of the Holy Spirit in Baptism and the relationship between Baptism and Chrismation; the role of exorcism; a better explication of the terms: sign, sacramental sign, symbol, celebrant, ethical life. The participants at this Symposium decided that the Orthodox Churches should present separate responses to the BEM.

In all Orthodox statements the issue concerning infant Baptism and believers' Baptism has been revealed as very important and at the same time problematic: "the document dissociates infant Baptism from adult Baptism and only acknowledges the possibility of infant Baptism in the apostolic age (B11), although that was the current practice in the church (Acts 2:39; 16:15, 33; 1 Corinthians 1:16; 110 Carthage)"²¹. For Orthodox Churches, BEM put in opposition to child Baptism and adult Baptism, and therefore it is better not to speak about "believers' Baptism", but about "adult Baptism". "If we speak of believers' Baptism, there is always a danger not to see the Christological nature of Baptism, but to move to the area of anthropology and to speak of a person's intellectual or spiritual abilities to confess the faith"²².

Another problem is associated with the relationship between Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist, and the role of the Holy Spirit. It is about the meaning and the understanding of the Sacraments in Orthodoxy, and about the different words used in BEM. "The terms sign and symbol, used in the document as technical terms for the three Sacraments, do not express the real partaking of the charisma of the Holy Spirit which is characteristic of Baptism, by which the original sin and personal sins are forgiven"²³. So, in the Orthodox understanding of the sacrament, original sin plays an important role which is forgiven during Baptism, because the believer dies in life to sin and is born into the life of the Holy Spirit. There is a relationship between the three Sacraments of initiation: Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist. From the Orthodox perspective, BEM does not speak

²⁰ Max Thurian (ed.). 1986–1988. *Churches respond to BEM. Official responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" text*, v. I, 123. See more about this encounter: Gennadios Limouris, Nomikos Michael Vapouris (ed.). 1985. *Orthodox Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press.

²¹ Max Thurian (ed.). 1986–1988. *Churches respond to BEM. Official responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" text*, v. III, 5. (The Romanian Orthodox Church Response).

²² Max Thurian (ed.). 1986–1988. *Churches respond to BEM. Official responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" text*, v. II, 26. (The Finnish Orthodox Church Response).

²³ Max Thurian (ed.). 1986–1988. *Churches respond to BEM. Official responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" text*, v. II, 5. (The Romanian Orthodox Church Response).

“enough” about the relationship between these Sacraments and uses terms which cannot be accepted by Orthodox Churches: “unacceptable to the Orthodox conscience are the terms *sign, sacramental sign, rite, ethical orientation* and others, because in many places their use does not show the sacramental character of the Sacrament”²⁴.

Other issues are connected with: the understanding of Tradition in Orthodoxy, the role of the catechetical teaching, the use of the name Jesus of Nazareth and not Jesus Christ, the triple immersion in water, the aspect of the unity of the Church only in Baptism (BEM) and not in all the Sacraments (Orthodoxy), the importance of continual growth in faith following Baptism. These critiques and proposals present the Orthodox conception of Baptism as a practice of the Church during the centuries, beginning from the Apostolic era.

4. “Growth in Agreement”: Dialogues between the Orthodox Churches and the other Churches

The dialogue between different Churches forms an important step to improve the mutual relationships and to resolve different problems. These dialogues have been ongoing at the international level since 1971. In many cases the Orthodox Churches were involved in the dialogues with the others: the Anglican Communion, the Oriental Orthodox Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, the Old Catholic Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Roman Catholic Church. There were no special discussions about Baptism, but in the statements, we can see some references which prove that Baptism was considered an important point for a better understanding.

The Anglican – Eastern Orthodox Dialogue focused especially on the issue of the ordination of women. But, in 1984, the participants decided that: “We are agreed about the integral link between faith and worship, between the Tradition of the Church and its liturgical life. We are agreed in our general understanding of Baptism, although we have not discussed this in detail”²⁵. The presentation of Baptism is in connection with the unity of the Church in Christ. “The unity of Christians with Christ in Baptism is a unity of love and mutual respect which transcends all human division, of race,

²⁴ Max Thurian (ed.). 1986–1988. *Churches respond to BEM. Official responses to the “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” text*, v. II, 16. (The Bulgarian Orthodox Church Response).

²⁵ Jeffrey Gros, Harding Meyer, William G. Rusch (ed.). 2000. *Growth in Agreement, II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982–1998*. Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge: Eedmans, 101.

social status and sex”²⁶. Both traditions agree that while speaking about Baptism, it is understood as a continuous growth in faith.

The Eastern Orthodox – Oriental Orthodox Dialogue is focused on the problem of terminology. In 1990, both Churches decided on the issue of the so-called rebaptism: “Churches of both families should agree that they will not re-baptize members of each other, for recognition of the Baptism of the churches of our two families, if they have not already done so”²⁷. Another issue, in connection with Baptism, but more practical, was about the participation of bishops at the same baptismal act. In this case, the president of the service will be the bishop belonging to the Church of the baptized person.

The Lutheran – Orthodox Dialogue at the beginning focused on the divine Revelation, Scripture and Tradition, and the Canon. But in 2000, the subject *The Mystery of the Church: Word and Sacraments* was discussed. Here one can find among others: “Both of our traditions teach that the visible and material elements of the Sacraments, such as water, bread and wine, constitute concrete and unchangeable elements of the operations of the triune God in the history of salvation”²⁸. The discussions continued in 2002, when it was emphasized that the Sacraments are instituted by Jesus Christ and revealed through the Holy Spirit in the Church. The important role of the Sacraments of Initiation was emphasized. Baptism has to be administered in water, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is the participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, and the believers are incorporated into the Body of Christ, the Church. “For the Orthodox this incorporation is completed through Chrismation, in which the baptized receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For Lutherans, anointing with the Holy Spirit takes place within the rite of Baptism itself, and finds its expression in the laying-on of hands after water of Baptism”²⁹. In 2004, another encounter between those Churches took place and it was dedicated to Baptism and Chrismation. The participants added some clarification: baptism is normally administered by an ordained minister; the role of exorcism in Baptism; the participation in Christ’s death and resurrection, the rite of initiation.

The Old Catholic Churches – Eastern Orthodox. In 1985 and 1987 two important dialogues about *Sacramental Teaching* took place. In the statement we find

²⁶ Jeffrey Gros, Harding Meyer, William G. Rusch (ed.). 2000. *Growth in Agreement, II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982–1998*, 86.

²⁷ Ibid. 198.

²⁸ Ibid. 25.

²⁹ Ibid. 28.

that Baptism is God's gift in which believers become members of the Church and "is free from the dominion of sin and is born again to a new creature in Christ by partaking of mystery of the divine work of salvation in Christ"³⁰. The Sacrament of Baptism is prefigured in the Old Testament and it is seen as an essential element to enter the Kingdom of God. It is administered with water, in the name of the Triune God. The Baptism of the Adult and the Baptism of Infants are the same; the differences are only understood in connection with the time of reception of the divine grace. "Participating in the mystery of the life, death and resurrection of Christ through Baptism has as a natural and immediate consequence the possibility and necessity of the baptized partaking in the gift of the Holy Spirit poured out at Pentecost and acceding to the Sacrament of Eucharist"³¹.

Eastern Orthodox – Roman Catholic Dialogue is older than all other inter-church dialogues. There are many points of discussion, some of them about the Sacraments, including Baptism, one of the seven Sacraments recognized by both Churches. In 1987, the discussed subject was *Faith, Sacraments and the Unity of the Church*. A part of this topic was dedicated to the Sacraments of Initiation and their relation to the unity of the Church. There is a strong connection between Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist. Baptism, according to this dialogue, is with water and the Spirit, in the name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The history itself and the Church Fathers show that the three Sacraments were always understood together. The participants discussed many practical issues and their understanding of those three Sacraments in the early Church. Baptism of infants was practiced from the beginning of the Church's life. There are some essential points of doctrine regarding Baptism: the necessity of Baptism for salvation; the effects of Baptism for all life, the liberation from original sin; incorporation into the Church; the relation with the death and resurrection of Christ; the role of the Holy Spirit in Baptism; the necessity of water as the bath of new birth³². It is important to understand the role of spiritual formation as a neophyte in the faith. "Finally, it is to be recalled that the Council of Constantinople, jointly celebrated by the two Churches in 879–880, determined that each see would retain the ancient usage of its Tradition, the Church of Rome preserving its own usages, the Church of Constantinople its own, and the thrones of the East also doing the same"³³.

³⁰ Jeffrey Gros, Harding Meyer, William G. Rusch (ed.). 2000. *Growth in Agreement, II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982–1998*, 255.

³¹ Ibid. 256.

³² Ibid. 667.

³³ Jeffrey Gros, Harding Meyer, William G. Rusch (ed.). 2000. *Growth in Agreement, II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982–1998*, 668.

5. “The Nature and the Mission of the Church”

In 2005, *The Nature and Mission of the Church: A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement* was published. This text is a continuation of other texts issued before: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*; *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*, and *Church and World: the Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community*.

The purpose of this study is finally to give expression to what the churches can now say together about the nature and mission of the Church and, within agreement, to explore the extent to which the remaining church-dividing issues may be overcome. (...) The present text is to enable churches to begin the first steps towards the recognition of a convergence that has emerged in a multilateral context³⁴.

The paper has four chapters: *The Church of the Triune God*, *The Church in History*, *The Life of Communion in and for the World*, and *In and for the World*. In the third chapter we find an entire paragraph related to Baptism. The chapter begins with the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed where we confess “one Baptism for the remission of sins”. Baptism is administered in water, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. “Baptism is thus a basic bond of unity. The recognition of the one Baptism into Christ constitutes an urgent call to the churches to overcome their divisions and visibly manifest their communion in faith and through mutual accountability in all aspects of Christian life and witness”³⁵. In Baptism we participate in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is emphasized that “Baptism involves confession of sin, conversion of heart, pardoning, cleansing and sanctification”³⁶. Baptism is connected with one’s entire life and not only with a single moment.

After these remarks and many biblical references, the text makes a link to the solidarities among all the people. All of us, who are baptized, are part of the Body of Christ and we receive the Holy Spirit “which is the privilege of God’s adopted children (cf. Romans 8: 15f), and so they enjoy, in anticipation, that participation in the divine nature which God promises and wills for humankind (cf. 2 Peter 1:

³⁴ *The Nature and the Mission of the Church. A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*. 2005. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 10.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 44.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

4)³⁷. At the conclusion of the section on Baptism, some difficult issues have been raised: infant Baptism and Baptism for those who are able to offer a personal profession of faith; the practice of re-baptism; the different understanding of the terms “Ordinance” and “Sacrament”; the differences in the formula “in the name of Jesus Christ” or the trinitarian formula; the differences in use or not of the water as an indispensable instrument of Baptism, “those communities which believe that Baptism with water is necessary, and those which do not celebrate Baptism, yet understand themselves as sharing in the spiritual experience of life in Christ”³⁸. Most of these issues are mentioned also in the BEM. The text does not use the term “believers’ Baptism”, but it uses another expression which is closer to all traditions: “Baptism is for those who are able to offer a personal profession of faith”. This text became an important step in the discussions for the visible unity.

*

In 1998, Michael Root and Risto Saarinen published a book entitled *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*, which attempted to be an opportunity for many traditions to witness their understanding concerning the problems indicated in the title. In this book we can find a paper written by Merja Merras, an Orthodox lecturer from the University of Joensuu, Finland, entitled *Baptismal Recognition and the Orthodox Churches*. The study focuses on the understanding of the Baptism in the early Church. In the text we read among others: “from the earliest times, in receiving Baptism the neophytes had to learn and utter one of the creeds; a creed marked the boundaries of the doctrine against those who were seen as heretical. The creeds became longer as more heresies broke out and spread”³⁹. So, in the earliest Church, Baptism was connected “with all the dogmas” and was seen inseparable from the prayers and the doctrine of salvation, the core of the dogmas: *lex orandi lex credendi est*. The different rites were not real problems for the Church; the actual rite of Baptism is in connection with the Baptism described by Saint John Chrysostom. According to these affirmations, “the Orthodox Church has not fully recognized the Baptisms of other churches but has decided to follow the principle of economy concerning the Baptism of the Roman Catholic Church and the churches of the Reformation”⁴⁰. This means that

³⁷ *The Nature and the Mission of the Church. A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*. 2005, 45.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 46.

³⁹ Michael Root, Risto Saarinen (ed.). 1998. *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*. Geneva: World Council of Churches, 142.

⁴⁰ Michael Root, Risto Saarinen (ed.). 1998. *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*, 144.

the Orthodox Church recognizes in other practices of Baptism those elements which are necessary for a valid Baptism and which were important for the early Church in its separation from the heretical groups. Baptism is understood in Orthodoxy as the beginning of our full life in Christ. “Only the gift received in Baptism or in anointing (whichever expression we are accustomed to) and renewed in the Eucharist will carry us if we remain faithful to our choice. This is the view of the early Church, and it continues in the Orthodox Church, though several times in historical difficulties we have lost the capability to express it clearly”⁴¹.

The Sacrament of Baptism is related to the Sacraments of Chrismation and Eucharist. For Orthodoxy, to be in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, means to hold together all the dogmas and liturgy in love, in our goal to obtain *theosis*: “our faith may fail, but our faithfulness can nevertheless stay. It is hard work, not just emotions. Love is deeds, not words or feelings”⁴², and that means what Saint Peter said: “to be partakers of the Divine Nature”. For these reasons, we need to discuss what the term “church” means for all traditions which strive for mutual recognition of baptism.

In June 2006, the Faith and Order Commission of WCC discussed the text, *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition*⁴³. The paper intends to be a continuation of *BEM* and *The Nature and Mission of the Church*, with special emphasis on baptism. The central ideas in this text are: that Baptism is seen not as a single moment, but a process in the life of the people; Baptism is seen reflected in the life of a Christian; ongoing formation in faith; and life in the Christian congregation.

We cannot say that the issues connected with Baptism are easy to resolve. We only attempt to present, objectively, the understanding of Baptism in the Orthodox Church, in the time during which the WCC has engaged with this question. If we can understand in the right way the Sacrament of Baptism in Orthodoxy and in other traditions, we can hope that, with God’s help, we can be closer not only in one point, but in all truth.

⁴¹ Ibid. 146.

⁴² Ibid. 146.

⁴³ *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition*, http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p2/fo2006_14_onebaptism_en.pdf (14.01.2019).

*

Bibliography

- Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. 1982. (Faith and Order Paper No. 111). Geneva: World Council of Churches.
- Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry. Report on the Process and Responses*. 1990. Geneva: World Council of Churches.
- Evdokimov Paul. 1959. *L'Orthodoxie*. Neuchâtel: Delachaux&Niestlé.
- Gros Jeffrey, Meyer Harding, Rusch William G. (ed.). 2000. *Growth in Agreement, II. Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982–1998*. Grand Rapids, Michigan – Cambridge: Eedmans.
- Limouris Gennadios, Vaporis Nomikos Michael (ed.). 1985. *Orthodox Perspectives on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press.
- Lossky Vladimir. 1957. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. London: J. Clarke.
- Meyendorff Jean. 1975. *Inition a la Théologie Byzantine. L'histoire et la doctrine*. Paris: Cerf.
- Root Michael, Saarinen Risto (ed.). 1998. *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*. Geneva: World Council of Churches.
- The Nature and the Mission of the Church. A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement*. 2005. Geneva: World Council of Churches.
- Thurian Max, Wainwright Geoffrey. (ed.). 1983. *Baptism and Eucharist. Ecumenical Convergence in Celebration*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eedmans.
- Thurian Max (ed.). 1986–1988. *Churches respond to BEM. Official responses to the "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" text*, Faith and Order Papers: 129, 132, 135, 137, 143, 144. Geneva: World Council of Churches.
- One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition*, http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p2/fo2006_14_onebaptism_en.pdf (14.01.2019).

*

Abstract: Baptism has been a focus of significant discussion in the ecumenical movement, as the different churches seek a common understanding of Baptism, with the goal of mutual recognition. The Orthodox Church has been involved in these conversations from the beginning. The present article is an attempt to trace the participation of the Orthodox representatives in these dialogues on Baptism, both at the level of the World Council of Churches and in bilateral dialogues. It explains the Orthodox understanding of Baptism as a Sacrament, how this understanding is reflected (or not) in ecumenical agreements on Baptism. It will also review official Orthodox responses to some of these agreements. The author

attempts to demonstrate that the Orthodox Church's contributions to these sometimes-difficult dialogues have shown a commitment to seeking a common understanding of Baptism. Finally, this paper will examine the present state of ecumenical dialogue on Baptism, and evaluate its prospects for the future.

Keywords: Baptism, Orthodoxy, BEM, mission, dialogue.

Streszczenie: Znaczenie sakramentu chrztu dla współczesnego świata. Perspektywa prawosławna. Chrzest był przedmiotem ważnych dyskusji ruchu ekumenicznego, zwłaszcza wówczas, kiedy różne Kościoły poszukiwały wspólnego rozumienia tego sakramentu w celu wzajemnego uznania go. W dyskusje te od samego początku był zaangażowany Kościół prawosławny. Niniejszy artykuł jest próbą ukazania udziału przedstawicieli Prawosławia w dialogu na temat chrztu, zarówno na poziomie Światowej Rady Kościołów, jak i w dialogu bilateralnym. Autor wyjaśnia prawosławne rozumienie chrztu jako sakramentu oraz ukazuje, w jaki sposób rozumienie to jest obecne w ekumenicznych uzgodnieniach na temat chrztu. Tekst zawiera także przegląd oficjalnych wypowiedzi Prawosławia dotyczących niektórych uzgodnień. Autor, ukazując wkład Kościoła prawosławnego do tego, po części trudnego, dialogu, podkreśla starania w poszukiwaniu wspólnego rozumienia chrztu. Na końcu artykułu został zaprezentowany aktualny stan dialogu ekumenicznego na temat chrztu oraz dokonano oceny perspektyw na przyszłość.

Słowa kluczowe: chrzest, prawosławie, BEM, posłanie, dialog.

