

## ***From Conflict to Communion: Baptism and Original Sin***

“The churches do, in fact, fiercely disagree with each other on practically any important point of baptismal theology. What really leaps to the eye is **not unity but disunity in the area of baptism.**”<sup>16</sup>

The following material is a chapter from the article, [\*“From Conflict to Communion: Going Home to Rome,”\*](#) which addresses various issues in the LWF/Vatican report *From Conflict to Communion* (C2C). C2C purports to be a candid look at where things stand between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. In fact **C2C** has an agenda: It directs Lutherans to be **PC** so that in time they can be **RC**.

The full article includes the following chapters:

1. **Lutherans and Catholics agree/disagree on baptism**
2. C2C declares JDDJ has the “highest level of authority” (¶197)
3. Justification must decrease so that unity may increase
4. C2C conceals the Catholic rejection of “faith alone”
5. C2C’s focus on “Luther’s theology” disguises a caricature of Luther
6. Why not rescind the 1521 excommunication of Luther?
7. C2C creates a caricature of Luther on scripture by omitting its gospel center
8. C2C hides the Vatican view: Lutherans are not really, truly “Church”
9. C2C assumes papal primacy and infallibility are inevitable
10. Mary, Mary, why are they hiding you?
11. C2C glides over the ordination of women
12. C2C kicks the can down the road: Lutherans must concede to unity on Rome’s terms

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### ***1. Lutherans and Catholics agree/disagree on baptism***

C2C says that through baptism Lutherans and Catholics “recognize each other mutually as Christians” (¶239). To be sure, Lutherans and Catholics agree that baptism is a sacrament through which God acts and saves sinners. Both traditions use water and baptize in the name of the Triune God. These sacramental commonalities are key links in Lutheran-Catholic fellowship. Yet vital differences remain:

- a. **Lutherans and Catholics disagree on the “why” of infant baptism.** Lutherans and Catholics hold to infant baptism for different reasons. For Catholics infant baptism is an irreversible development of tradition. For Lutherans infant baptism is the perfect expression of the gospel.
- b. **Lutherans and Catholics disagree whether or not real sin remains after baptism.** For Catholics baptism eliminates original sin; what is left (intentions, desires) is weakness

(*fomes*, concupiscence), but not sin.<sup>8</sup> For Lutherans original sin remains in the one baptized as a total state (*simul totus iustus et totus peccator*).<sup>9</sup>

- c. **Lutherans and Catholics disagree on the depth of sin (*totus peccator*).** For Catholics sin is a willful action violating God's law. For Lutherans sin is not limited to willful acts but is transpersonal, a pervasive state of being which includes rebellion against God and the desire to be God.<sup>10</sup>
- d. **Lutherans and Catholics disagree on baptismal grace plus reward (*totus iustus*).** For Catholics baptism gives a clean slate so that a person's cooperation with God can be called "merit."<sup>11</sup> For Lutherans baptism gives Christ who has fulfilled all things: "The law

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<sup>8</sup> *The Response of the Catholic Church to JDDJ* (See footnote 2 above.) clarifies Catholic doctrine on concupiscence and *simul iustus et peccator*:

"According, indeed, to the doctrine of the Catholic Church, in baptism everything that is really sin is taken away, and so, in those who are born anew there is nothing that is hateful to God. It follows that the concupiscence that remains in the baptized is not, properly speaking, sin. **For Catholics, therefore, the formula "at the same time righteous and sinner,"** as it is explained at the beginning of n. 29 [JDDJ Eerdmans 21] ("*Believers are totally righteous, in that God forgives their sins through Word and Sacrament ... Looking at themselves ... however, they recognize that they remain also totally sinners. Sin still lives in them...*") **is not acceptable.**" Bolding added for emphasis added here and below.

<sup>9</sup> On baptism as a total exchange: "To put it most simply, the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of Baptism is to save." Large Catechism (LC) IV:24-25; *Book of Concord* (Tappert) (BC) 439. See also LC IV:44-46; BC 442: "Through Baptism we obtain perfect holiness and salvation."

In C2C the *totus/totus* is lost: "The image [the joyful exchange] shows that something external, namely Christ's righteousness, becomes something internal. It becomes the property of the soul" (§108). To the contrary, Christ's righteousness becomes the believer's own but in such a way that it remains the righteousness of Jesus Christ, grounded outside of the believer (*extra nos*) and thus alien to him (*iustitia aliena*). The believer is taken outside of himself and transplanted into Christ.

<sup>10</sup> The Apology on concupiscence: "[Luther] taught that the remnants of original sin in man are not in their nature neutral, but they need the grace of Christ to be forgiven and the Holy Spirit to be mortified." Apology (Ap) II 45; BC 106. See also Ap II:35-41; BC 104-106.

JDDJ's Annex (2b) on concupiscence: "In the Catholic understanding concupiscence is an inclination.... [I]t can be recognized from a Lutheran perspective that "desire [concupiscence] can become the opening through which sin attacks... the tendency to oppose God.... Sin has a personal character." Contrary to the Annex, the difference has not been solved. For Lutherans sin has a transpersonal character; it is the power determining persons even before they agree and even determines them to agree to sin, as Wilfred Härle explains in "Roma Locuta," *Deutsches Pfarrblatt* 99 (1999) 407-409, reprinted in *epd Dokumentation* (Sept 20, 1999) 11-15.

<sup>11</sup> See *The Response of the Catholic Church to JDDJ*, Clarification #3:

"The Catholic Church maintains...that the good works of the justified are always the fruit of grace. But at the same time, and without in any way diminishing the totally divine initiative, they are also the fruit of man, justified and interiorly transformed. We can therefore say that **eternal life is, at one and the same time, grace and the reward given by God for good works and merits.**"

C2C avoids clear language and precise distinctions. For example, C2C acknowledges that "each side does not understand exactly the same thing by the words "sin," "concupiscence," and "righteousness" (§135) but insists

says, 'do this,' and it is never done. Grace says, 'believe in this,' and everything is already done."<sup>12</sup> Thus Lutherans teach that good works following baptism do not contribute to salvation.<sup>13</sup>

- e. **Lutherans and Catholics disagree on baptism and penance.** For Lutherans life is a daily baptism and repentance is a return to baptism.<sup>14</sup> For Catholics another sacrament is added, the sacrament of penance, to absolve and make satisfaction for sins committed after the purity of baptism is lost.
- f. **Lutherans and Catholics disagree on who can be a sponsor at baptism.** A Lutheran can only be a witness, not a godparent or sponsor at a Catholic baptism.<sup>15</sup> A Catholic can be a godparent or sponsor at a Lutheran baptism.
- g. **Lutherans and Catholics disagree on prayer to Mary at baptisms.** Catholics **require** prayer to Mary at baptism (and ordination). Lutherans pray to Christ alone.

By papering over the above differences, C2C misleads readers about the scope and significance of Lutheran-Catholic unity in baptism. As one Lutheran ecumenist notes: "The churches do, in fact, fiercely disagree with each other on practically any important point of baptismal theology. What really leaps to the eye is **not unity but disunity in the area of baptism.**"<sup>16</sup>

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that JDDJ has achieved "a consensus in the basic truths of the doctrine of justification" (¶138) and remaining differences are "acceptable" (¶139). See C2C ¶¶135-39. On C2C's ambiguous language, see also Issue #4 below: "Justification must decrease so that unity may increase."

<sup>12</sup> "Heidelberg Disputation" (Thesis 26) 1518; *Luther's Works (LW)* 31:56.

<sup>13</sup> "No consensus has been reached concerning the importance of good works for salvation." *No Consensus on the "Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification"? A Critical Evaluation by Professors of Protestant Theology.* Trans. Oliver K. Olson, *dialog* 38:1 (1999) 71-72, here 72. This is the first of two petitions against JDDJ by German Professors of Protestant Theology.

<sup>14</sup> LC IV:65-67, 86; BC 444-46.

<sup>15</sup> Code of Canon Law ¶1874.2: "A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community is not to participate except together with a Catholic sponsor and then only as a witness of the baptism."

<sup>16</sup> Peder Nørsgaard-Højen, "Baptism and the Foundations of Communion," *Baptism and the Unity of the Church*. Eds. Michael Root and Risto Saarinen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 69.