Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church

Lutheran-Mennonite-Roman Catholic Trilateral Conversations 2012–2017

Report of the
Lutheran-Mennonite-Roman Catholic
Trilateral Dialogue Commission

On behalf of
The Lutheran World Federation
Mennonite World Conference
Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

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In This Issue

On the evening of January 21, 1525, a small group of university students, village priests, and lay people gathered in a private home in the shadow of Zurich's Grossmünster Church for a secret worship service. According to an account of the event preserved in the Hutterite *Chronicle*, the participants—all part of a larger renewal movement led by the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli—agreed "in the fear of God . . . that one must first learn true faith" before receiving "true Christian baptism as a covenant of a good conscience with God." Following a "fervent prayer"—and "well aware that they would have to suffer for this"—Georg Blaurock asked Conrad Grebel to baptize him "with true Christian baptism on [the basis of] his faith." Blaurock then baptized the others. "And so, in great fear of God, together they surrendered themselves to the Lord . . . and confirmed one another for service in the Gospel."[1] Just as October 31, 1517—the day Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the doors of Wittenberg's Castle Church—has become the accepted date for the beginning of the Protestant Reformation—so too, the adult baptisms on January 21, 1525, mark the beginnings of the "Anabaptist" (=rebaptizer) movement, whose descendants today include such groups as the Amish, Mennonites, and Hutterites.

To be sure, such dates are useful fictions. As with the Reformation, the Anabaptist movement did not begin at a single moment; nor were the earnest reformers who gathered to enact the ritual fully aware of the meaning or significance of what they had done. But their action that evening clearly had consequences. Although the report of Sebastian Franck that the rebaptizing movement "spread so rapidly that their teachings soon covered the whole land" was almost certainly an exaggeration, the baptisms in Zurich clearly inspired others in the surrounding Swiss territories to follow their example. Already the next day, accounts began to trickle into Zurich of additional baptisms in Zollikon, Wytikon, and other nearby villages. In the following weeks, Conrad Grebel was reportedly baptizing people in Schaffhausen; George Blaurock had embarked on a baptizing campaign into the Tyrol; Hans Brötli began baptizing in Hallau; and Lorenz Hochrütner was doing the same in St. Gall.

In subsequent years, leaders within the Anabaptist movement would articulate a range of theological beliefs and practices that distinguished

1. *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethern, known as Das große Geschichtbuch der Hutterischen Brüder*, trans. and ed. by the Hutterian Brethren (Rifton, N.Y.: Plough Publishing House, 1987), 45.

the group from both the magisterial Reformers and the Catholic tradition. And, indeed, the Anabaptists themselves were far from unified on many points. Yet one defining characteristic of the movement about which all parties—friends and enemies alike—agreed was their conviction that baptism should only be administered to those believers who had freely confessed their faith in Christ and committed themselves to follow in the way of Jesus.

Religious and civil authorities reacted harshly to the practice. On March 7, 1526, the Zurich City Council decreed that rebaptism was a capital offense, a policy extended to the entire Holy Roman Empire in the Imperial Edict of Speyer in 1529. In the decades that followed, some 2,000 to 3,000 Anabaptists were juridically executed—generally on charges of sedition—and thousands more were fined, imprisoned, tortured, or exiled for their convictions.

Although executions of the Anabaptists had largely ceased by the end of the seventeenth century, the practice of adult (or credo-) baptism persisted as a defining feature of all the "free church" groups who descended from the Anabaptist movement, and as a significant point of division within the larger Christian world.

In light of this context, the document that follows in this issue of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* is a truly momentous statement, one that has the potential of overcoming divisions within the Body of Christ that have persisted for nearly 500 years.

Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church is the result of five years of intensive conversation among representatives of the Lutheran, Catholic, and Mennonite communions, meeting on behalf of the Lutheran World Federation, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and Mennonite World Conference. The work of this trilateral dialogue consciously built on the foundation established by two previous international dialogues that brought Mennonites into conversation with Catholics and Lutherans, and on fifty years of ecumenical exchange between Catholics and Lutherans, which culminated in 1999 in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*.

In the report that follows, each of the participating groups offers a biblical and theological basis for its distinctive understanding of baptism, organized largely around their respective understandings of sin and grace. The report then turns to a description of the ritual itself in each of the three traditions, focusing especially on the relationship of baptism to Christian faith as it is nurtured in the context of the Christian community. A third section asks how baptism is connected to Christian discipleship in

each communion, outlining the personal, ecclesial, and public dimensions of faith in daily life.

What clearly sets "Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church" apart from other statements on the doctrine of baptism is the vulnerability evident throughout the document. Included alongside these theological affirmations is an open recognition of the tension each group has experienced between theology and praxis—an honest appraisal of the pastoral challenges or misconceptions that have emerged around baptism in the church life of each tradition. From the beginning, participants in the dialogue committed themselves to the practice of "receptive ecumenism"—that is, a readiness to receive differences in belief and practice as a gift; or, if not as a gift, at least as a question that could prompt new thoughts about their own identity and ways of being the church. In a closely related way, the group also sought ways of acknowledging ongoing differences in belief and practice, while simultaneously recognizing common ground on the Christian truths that they shared—a posture sometimes described as "differentiated consensus." "It is our hope," the document asserts, "that this report may assist our communities in discerning whether our differences in the practice of baptism could be an acceptable diversity that does not, in and of itself, constitute an insuperable obstacle to greater unity among us (§82).

The points of common ground expressed in "Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church" are almost certain to surprise, and maybe even unsettle, readers, perhaps especially those theologians and historians who are long accustomed to describing the distinctive virtues of their own tradition against the foil of the beliefs and practices of the other two. Thus, for example:

> . . . all three of our communions wholeheartedly agree that baptism is intended not as an isolated, self-enclosed event, but as an important moment that is to be lived out throughout the course of one's life. It is intended by God to enable and to unfold into a life of discipleship. (§83)
>
> . . . Catholics, Lutherans, and Mennonites can fully agree that the lifelong living out of the gift of faith which is celebrated in baptism has not only personal but also ecclesial and public dimensions. (§89)
>
> . . . [all agreed that] discipleship entails a spirituality that . . . involves a lifelong process of repentance, conversion, and transformation. (§90)

Readers eager to ask about the practical outcomes of these dialogues should pay particular attention to the conclusion of the document. There

each of the three traditions briefly restates their "convictions held" regarding baptism, along with the "gifts received" in the course of the conversations from the other two groups. But the real work ahead lies in the sections titled "challenges accepted" and "for consideration." Mennonites, for example, accept among other things the challenge of "making the remembrance of our baptism a lifelong motif of discipleship" (§128) and of formulating "a fuller theology of the child, particularly with regard to the age of accountability and the salvific status of older children who have reached the age of accountability" (§129). Perhaps even more challenging, Mennonite representatives—affirming that there is "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:4-5) and building on a deeper understanding of the centrality of baptism to a life of faith in the Lutheran and Catholic traditions—propose that their fellow Anabaptist-Mennonite churches consider "receiving members from infant baptism churches on the basis of their confession of faith and commitment to discipleship without repeating the water rite" (§132).

Following through on that consideration does not imply a renunciation of a 500-year-old tradition of baptism upon confession of faith or a repudiation of the sixteenth-century martyrs who died for their convictions. But it does suggest the possibility of reframing an identity often rooted in opposition—e.g., "neither Catholic nor Protestant"—as one based on the principle of "reconciled diversity" within the Body of Christ.

Clearly, "Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church" will not be the last word on the subject of baptism in our communions. Its relevance and reception, especially among our majority churches in the Global South, remains an open question. Nevertheless, the document that follows, appearing nearly five centuries after the first adult baptisms in Zurich, offers an invitation to reframe the narrative of Catholic, Lutheran, and Anabaptist-Mennonite identities in relation to each other, and provides a context for lively discussion and debate within each of our communions. That process of reception is initiated in this issue of *MQR* in the form of commentaries on the document by a leading theologian from each of the three traditions. We are deeply grateful to **Peter Casarella**, **Timothy Wengert**, and **Irma Fast Dueck** for modeling this crucial next step of critical engagement.

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– John D. Roth, editor

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Lutheran-Mennonite-Roman Catholic Trilateral Conversations 2012–2017

Contents

The Status of this Report

This report conveys the work and perspectives of the international commission composed of Lutherans, Mennonites, and Roman Catholics. The communions who appointed the commission members publish it as a study document in the hope that, through wide discussion both within the three communions and beyond, it will contribute to better mutual understanding and greater faithfulness to Jesus Christ.

PREFACE

It was with the twin goals of increasing mutual understanding and helping one another grow in faithfulness to Jesus Christ that a trilateral dialogue took place between Lutherans, Mennonites, and Roman Catholics, from 2012 to 2017. Over the course of the five-year period, the dialogue followed the well-established interchurch conversation method of annual one week meetings hosted successively by the communions. At each meeting papers were presented by delegation members as the trilateral commission explored the respective understandings of key theological and pastoral themes related to baptism and incorporation into the body of Christ.

The trilateral dialogue was a result of efforts in recent decades for reconciliation and greater cooperation between Mennonites, Lutherans, and Catholics. Those steps toward overcoming historical conflicts generated the desire to take up theological and pastoral issues surrounding baptism, which continues to be a source of tension between the communions. The decision to enter into deeper theological conversation was grounded in the mutual conviction that Jesus Christ calls his disciples to be one and that therefore Christians have a solemn responsibility to never acquiesce to division in the Body of Christ.

Three chapters follow the introduction in this report. The first of these, "Baptism with Respect to Sin and Grace," presents differences and similarities in understanding the relationship of baptism to sin and grace, while also explaining briefly the history that has shaped the distinctive interpretations. Chapter Two, "Baptism: Communicating Grace and Faith," looks at the various aspects of the celebration of baptism in each community, considering it both as the means of incorporation into the Church and as one important moment within the life-long process of being a Christian. Chapter Three, "Living Out Baptism in Discipleship," considers how baptism should and can be lived out during the entire course of one's life as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The conclusion summarizes convictions held, gifts received, and challenges accepted by each delegation during the course of the dialogue. Recommendations for future work in follow-up trilateral dialogues are also presented.

It should be noted that a trilateral dialogue is rare. Most international dialogues are bilateral and a few multilateral. The trilateral format created a uniquely enriching dynamic that nudged each communion to reflect on its own theology and practice of baptism in the light of the two other's theology and practice. This fruitful process brought into sharper focus many convictions and practices regarding baptism as well as greater clarity in understanding the theology underlying those convictions and

practices. The unique dynamic of the trilateral dialogue led also to a healthy exchange of gifts and challenges in multiple directions.

With this report, we believe that Mennonites, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics not only can take a significant step towards increased mutual understanding, but also make an important contribution to the wider ecumenical conversation on baptism as it relates to the justification and sanctification of the sinner. Given the challenges of our times it is our hope that common perspectives on baptism, as communication of saving grace and faith in Jesus Christ, will serve to advance not only oneness in the body of Christ but also the evangelizing mission of the Church.

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INTRODUCTION

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-13).[1]

1. One of the most widely distributed and positively received ecumenical agreements in history—the Faith and Order convergence statement *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM) of 1982[2]—affirmed that, "Through baptism, Christians are brought into union with Christ, with each other, and with the church of every time and place. Our common baptism, which unites us to Christ in faith, is thus a basic bond of unity. The union with Christ which we share through baptism has important implications for Christian unity."[3] Nevertheless, baptism has been a source of disagreement and division between our three traditions.

2. The trilateral conversations between Mennonites, Lutherans, and Catholics on baptism,[4] about which the following pages will report, trace their origin to the positive outcome of earlier international bilateral dialogues between our communities. The Mennonite World Conference (MWC) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) engaged in a round of international conversations from 1998 to 2003, which resulted in the report entitled *Called Together to be Peacemakers*.[5] Its report noted that,

> Mennonites and Catholics are agreed on the basic meaning and importance of baptism as a dying and rising with Christ, so that 'just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we

1. The English translation of the Bible used in this document is the *New Revised Standard Version* (NRSV), (Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, copyright 1989, 1995).

2. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (BEM), Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982); text available at https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

3. *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, 2, D6.

4. The word "baptism" is written in lower case in the body of this report, except when quoting from documents which use capitals.

5. *Called Together to Be Peacemakers: Report of the International between The Catholic Church and the Mennonite World Conference, 1998-2003*. Text available in Jeffrey Gros, Thomas F. Best, Lorelei F. Fuchs (eds), Growth in Agreement III, Faith and Order Paper 207 (Geneva: World Council of Churches 2007), 206-267; text available at https://mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/report_cathomenno_final_eng.pdf and at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/mennonite-conference-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20110324_mennonite_en.html [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

> too might walk in newness of life' (Rom 6:4). We both also emphasize that baptism signifies the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the promised presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and the church.[6]

The MWC also engaged in international dialogue with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) from 2005-2008, resulting in a common document entitled *Healing of Memories: Reconciling in Christ*,[7] which led to a ceremony of request for and bestowal of forgiveness for events of the past, culminating in the celebration of reconciliation between the two churches at the LWF assembly at Stuttgart in July, 2010. The report noted that "Both Mennonites and Lutherans agree that baptism cannot be seen as an isolated event. Thus, how baptisms are recognized must be understood within a larger framework that explores how the practice of baptism is related to a larger set of theological doctrines."[8]

3. Precisely because of such agreements and because of the importance of baptism for the life of our churches, both dialogues identified as a high priority for future work that it be given further and more sustained exploration. The Mennonite-Catholic text stated:

> Discussion is needed concerning our divergent views on the role of the faith of the church as it bears on the status of infants and children. This would include a comparative study of the theology of sin and salvation, of the spiritual status of children, and of baptism. The question of recognizing or not recognizing one another's baptism requires further study. It is necessary to study, together, the history of the origin and development of the theology and practice of baptism for the purpose of ascertaining the origin of infant baptism, assessing the changes brought about with the Constantinian shift, the development of the doctrine of original sin, and other matters.[9]

For its part, the Mennonite-Lutheran report noted:

> . . . Lutherans feel misunderstood by Mennonites when Mennonites assess the Lutheran practice of baptism according to their own framework. Conversely, Mennonites feel misunderstood by Lutherans when Lutherans assess the Mennonite practice according

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6. *Called Together to be Peacemakers*, § 129.

7. *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ. Report of the Lutheran–Mennonite International Study Commission* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation and Mennonite World Conference, 2010); text available at:

https://mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/oea-lutheran-mennonites-web-en.pdf and at: https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/OEA-Lutheran-Mennonites-EN-full.pdf [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

8. *Healing Memories*, 89.

9. *Called Together to be Peacemakers* §§ 141-143.

> to their own framework. Clearly, both sides experience great anguish in this conflict since the deepest convictions of their faith seem to be at stake and each side can easily feel misunderstood by the other. The members of this study commission hope that neither the Anabaptism-Mennonite rejection of infant baptism nor the condemnation of Anabaptists in Article IX [of the *Augsburg Confession*] will remain a church-dividing issue. Nevertheless, we have not yet found a way to bridge the divide between the two churches regarding their teaching and practice of baptism. Further conversations are needed, perhaps especially among our MWC and LWF member churches. Among other topics, those conversations will have to address our mutual understandings of the relationship between divine action and human (re)action in baptism. Engaging these questions will require deeper biblical accounts of our understanding of baptism and will require that these understandings be considered within a broad theological framework.[10]

These quotations from our previous reports explain why a meeting of representatives of the MWC, the LWF, and the PCPCU in Strasbourg, France, March 21-23, 2011, recommended that their respective church bodies form an international trilateral dialogue to consider the subject of baptism.

4. At that meeting of 2011 in Strasbourg, the purpose of the dialogue was described in the following terms: "To continue on the paths of increased mutual understanding and cooperation on which these communions have advanced in recent years by focusing on foundational matters concerning the understanding and practice of baptism" and "to help one another grow in faithfulness to Jesus Christ as we face the pastoral and missional challenge to the practice and understanding of baptism in our time."[11] It was intended that the trilateral form would allow each communion to reflect on its own theology and practice of baptism under the eyes of the others' theology, especially as related to the overcoming of sin and entrance into the Church and into a life of discipleship. The commonalities and differences thereby uncovered, first of all, helped each church to bring into sharper focus some of its most cherished convictions regarding baptism. This would further allow for an exchange of gifts and challenges so as to assist all three communions in mutual understanding and in greater fidelity to their calling and mission as churches. Naturally such a conversation would also consider the contrast between the Mennonite practice of admitting to baptism only

10. *Healing Memories*, 89-90.

11. Quotations taken from the unpublished minutes of the meeting of the MWC, the LWF, and the PCPCU in Strasbourg, France, March 21-23, 2011.

those who are capable of personally professing their faith and the Lutheran and Catholic practice of admitting also infants to baptism. The theological rationale undergirding such diverse practices would need to be considered.

The Itinerary of These Trilateral Conversations

5. After looking at the steps leading up to the trilateral conversation, we first considered two primary issues: a review of the previous experiences of each of our churches in dialogue about baptism at an international level, and an initial presentation of how each of our communities understands baptism. Three fundamental themes emerged as demanding our attention: 1) the relation of baptism to sin and salvation; 2) the celebration of baptism and its relation to faith and to membership in the Christian community; and 3) the living out of baptism in Christian discipleship. Each of these topics then became the focus of one of the successive week-long yearly sessions. In addition to the presentation and discussion of papers from one of the members of each community concerning the topic under discussion in a given year, another feature contributed to our conversations: our annual meetings included presentations by each of our communities of its liturgical celebration of baptism. This allowed the commission members to have a better "feel" for the way in which their partners' understand and experience baptism. The structure of the report follows the threefold outline of topics which are listed above. Chapter One will consider how our three churches see baptism in relation to the overcoming of sin. Chapter Two will look at the celebration of baptism as well as the relation of baptism to faith and to membership in the community. Chapter Three will consider the role of baptism in the life-long process of discipleship. A concluding section will summarize our findings and allow each of our three churches' delegations to list gifts that they have received through the experience of this trilateral conversation, gifts that they believe they can offer to the other two communities, challenges to their own understanding and practice of baptism uncovered by these discussions, and suggestions that they might offer to their respective communities from what they have learned.

A Word about the Report's Use of the Bible

6. Bible study within the context of shared worship was a valued part of our yearly sessions. All three of our communities regard the revealed Word of God as normative for the life and teaching of the Church. Because of this, Scripture will be used throughout the entire report. Each of our traditions employs various biblical passages in its understanding of baptism. At times, the interpretations by our respective traditions of such

passages may differ considerably. For example, the passage about Jesus welcoming little children (Mark 10:13-16) has been understood by some as pertinent to the question of the baptism of infants, while others reject such an interpretation. Effort will be made to be attentive to such differences and not to presuppose that a given text is interpreted in the same way by all of our communities.

Chapter One
Baptism with Respect to Sin and Grace

7. God's original design in creation is recounted in the opening pages of the Scriptures, the first chapter of which concludes with the verse: "And God saw everything which he had made and it was very good" (Gen. 1:3). Human beings were intended for communion with God, in whose image and likeness they were fashioned (see Gen. 1:27). However, when sin entered human history through disobedience (see Gen. 3:1-24), the original design of a loving relationship between God and human beings was overturned. Since that time, insofar as we contradict and become estranged from God, our basic human situation is one of misery and hopelessness. It is precisely in the knowledge of God, and of the relationship that we were designed to have with God, that the full evil of sin is revealed. But God overcame this situation by reconciling human beings with himself, liberating them from the powers of evil, healing them, and giving them life in abundance (see Jn. 10:10). It is Jesus Christ who is in the center of this encounter: God has become a human being (i.e., assumed human nature), who lived, and suffered and died for all of humankind. In Jesus Christ, God has demonstrated and brought about his design not to be a God unrelated to the human beings he created. It is only through this divine initiative that that human situation of perdition can be overcome, that is, by grace. God "desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2.4). Thus he intends to communicate his grace to each and every human person individually, in their families and communities. Baptism plays a central role in this communication that leads people into salvific communion with God. Our Catholic, Lutheran, and Mennonite communities have reflected theologically on this encounter between God and human beings in light of the biblical witness about it. Over the course of time, various understandings of the reality of sin and grace, and of faith and discipleship, have helped them to consider the human situation of estrangement from God and the ways to overcome it. They have also reflected on the place and role of baptism in this process. There are many common elements in their respective understandings, but also differences. For understanding baptism, reflection upon the experience of sin and

grace is especially important. Differences in perceiving baptism may often correlate with differences in understanding sin and grace. This chapter aims at identifying both common features and differences in the relation of baptism to sin and grace. It presents briefly the positions of the three communities in a way that overcomes traditional misunderstandings and misrepresentations of each other's perspectives.

Catholic Understanding of the Relation of Baptism to Sin and Grace

8. The Catholic understanding of how sin and grace relate to baptism is the product of many centuries of reflection, beginning with the testimony of the Scriptures, especially the New Testament teaching of St. Paul. They are also conditioned by various circumstances over the course of history which have occasioned deeper consideration of one or another aspect of this relation.

9. Across the centuries, the Catholic Church has held a constant teaching on the centrality of Jesus Christ in God's salvific plan for restoring the world to himself. A particularly clear and succinct presentation of this salvific plan for restoration was articulated at the beginning of Pope John Paul II's very first encyclical,[12] devoted to presenting Jesus Christ as the redeemer of all human beings:

> Through the Incarnation God gave human life the dimension that he intended man to have from his first beginning; he has granted that dimension definitively—in the way that is peculiar to him alone, in keeping with his eternal love and mercy, with the full freedom of God—and he has granted it also with the bounty that enables us, in considering the original sin and the whole history of the sins of humanity, and in considering the errors of the human intellect, will and heart, to repeat with amazement the words of the Sacred Liturgy: "O happy fault . . . which gained us so great a Redeemer!"[13]

This Christological way of contextualizing Catholic belief about original sin finds an even stronger expression in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

> The doctrine of original sin is, so to speak, the "reverse side" of the Good News that Jesus is the Saviour of all men, that all need salvation and that salvation is offered to all through Christ. The Church, which has the mind of Christ [see 1 Cor. 2:16], knows very well that we

12. Pope John Paul II, *Redemptor hominis*, Encyclical, 4 March 1979 (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1979); text available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

13. *Redemptor hominis*, 1.

> cannot tamper with the revelation of original sin without undermining the mystery of Christ.[14]

10. A few authoritative voices from early Christian tradition have interpreted the New Testament witness in a way that has had a lasting impact on how Catholics think of the relation of sin and grace to baptism today. An Eastern Father of the Church, John Chrysostom (347-407), explicitly relates both sin and grace to baptism. His testimony shows the authority enjoyed by the traditions of the East for the belief of the whole Catholic community. It also speaks to the practice of baptizing children as examined in Catholic, Mennonite, and Lutheran conversations.

11. In his catechetical instructions of those preparing for baptism, John Chrysostom wrote that:

> It is on this account that we baptize even infants, although they may not have sinned, that they may be given the further gifts of sanctification, justice, filial adoption, and inheritance, that they may be brothers and members of Christ, and may become dwelling-places of the Spirit.[15]

This text is from instructions obviously intended for those old enough to understand them. What it says about the relation of baptism to the forgiveness of sin (justice) and to positive transformation (filiation, inheritance, grace, indwelling) concerns not only the infants, who are the explicit subject of the comment, but also all who are to be baptized, including those to whom the catechesis was directed. Baptism freed all the baptized from sin and imparted to them new life.

12. At the same time that John Chrysostom was serving as bishop of the Eastern metropolis of Constantinople, Augustine (354-430) was the bishop of Hippo in Northern Africa. It would be difficult to overstate the profound impact of his understanding of grace over against the thought of Pelagius, who seemed to put into question the New Testament teaching of justification by faith and not by the works of the law. It certainly had an impact on the controversies at the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation. It also played a decisive role much earlier, in the teachings of the (provincial) Council of Orange of 529, which rejected interpretations of the New Testament which present the earning of salvation by free human acts as compatible with the conviction that we are saved gratuitously through the death of Christ on the Cross.

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14. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, rev. ed. (London: Burns & Oates, 1999), §389: text available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

15. St. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, III, 6, transl. Paul W. Harkin (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1963), 57. (A critical edition of the original Greek text with French translation can be found in: *Huit catéchèses baptismales*, III, 6, *Sources chrétiennes*, no. 50, 1956, 154).

13. The Council of Orange emphasized several important points, highlighting, in various ways, the unconditional initiative of God in bringing about human salvation. For example, it is the Holy Spirit who initiates the beginnings of any desire for cleansing from sin, for faith and its increase, for assent to the preaching of the Gospel.[16] The free will of human beings "has been weakened through the sin of the first man," in such a way that they no longer have "the ability to seek the mystery of eternal salvation by themselves without the revelation of God."[17] Grace is not preceded by merit, and any good works performed by human beings are due to the grace that precedes them.[18] Furthermore, "after grace has been received through baptism, all baptized persons have the ability and responsibility, if they desire to labor faithfully, to perform with the aid and cooperation of Christ what is of essential importance in regard to the salvation of their soul," adding that

> we also believe and confess to our benefit that in every good work it is not we who take the initiative and are then assisted through the mercy of God, but God himself first inspires in us both faith in him and love for him without any previous good works of our own that deserve reward, so that we may both faithfully seek the sacrament of baptism, and after baptism be able by his help to do what is pleasing to him.[19]

Most of the above-mentioned teachings explicitly include supporting citations of various New Testament passages. It seems fair to summarize the teaching of the Council of Orange in a few succinct points: 1) an emphasis upon the initiative of God; 2) grace inspires a response to God of faith and love; 3) grace calls for the performance of good deeds; and 4) that to deny such teachings amounts to contradicting the witness of the Bible.

14. The context of the sixteenth-century Reformation provided the setting, vocabulary, and tone of an official teaching dedicated explicitly to the Catholic understanding of original sin. The "Decree on Original Sin" of the Fifth Session of the Council of Trent (June 17, 1546)[20] is based on the Apostle Paul's argument in Romans 5:12, and thus begins with Adam's

16. See canons 4-7 of the Council of Orange, 529, in Heinrich Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals,* 43rd ed., ed. Peter Hünermann et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2012), 374-377. The canons referred to in this and subsequent footnotes are those of the Council of Orange in 529.

17. See canon 8; Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds*, 378.

18. See canon 18; Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds*, 388.

19. See Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds*, 397.

20. See Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds*, and *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, vol. 2 (London/Washington DC: Sheed & Ward/Georgetown University Press, 1990), 665-667.

transgression of the divine commandment in paradise. Through this act, Adam immediately lost holiness and justice and incurred the wrath and displeasure of God and consequently death.[21] This had consequences for all of Adam's descendants, who also suffer the loss of that holiness and justice which God had bestowed in paradise. Being born under the power of evil, they do not live in paradise and do not receive that holiness and justice that had been the case for Adam. In addition, Adam transmitted to all of his descendants not only the consequences of his sin of disobedience, that is, death and bodily vulnerabilities—almost as one inherits certain conditions from one's parents—but also the guilt of Adam's sin is transmitted to all human beings. But such guilt is "the death of the soul," that is, eternal death.

15. The Decree of Trent also addresses the question of how the sin of Adam has spread to all and how it can be removed. It is passed on by propagation and not through imitation.[22] This sin is in every person as one's *own* sin. It can be overcome neither by the powers of human nature nor by any other remedy than that of the merit of the one mediator, Jesus Christ. He is described in Romans 5:9 ("we have now been justified by his blood) and 1 Corinthians 1:30 as our "righteousness and sanctification and redemption." After having said that Christ is the only remedy for original sin, the Council of Trent anathematizes those who deny that the merit of Christ cannot properly be conveyed to both adults and infants through the sacrament of baptism—with reference to Acts 4:12, John 1:29, and

21. *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*, 1511.

22. There has been an important advance in the interpretation of Rom. 5:12, which traditionally had been the source of thinking of the transmission of original sin by generation. Pope John Paul II alluded to this advance, when he pointed out: "In a modern translation, the Pauline text reads as follows: 'Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, so death spread to all men because one man sinned' (Rom 5:12). In the original Greek we read: *eph o pantes emarton,* an expression which was translated in the old Latin Vulgate as: *In quo omnes peccaverunt*, 'in whom (a single man) all sinned.' But what the Vulgate translates as 'in whom' from the very beginning the Greeks clearly understood in the sense of 'because' or 'inasmuch.' This sense is now generally accepted by modern translations. However, this diversity of interpretations of the expression *eph o* does not change the basic truth in St. Paul's text, namely, that Adam's sin (the sin of our first parents) had consequences for all humanity. Moreover, in the same chapter of the Letter to the Romans (5:19), and in the preceding verse: 'One man's trespass led to condemnation for all men' (Rom 5:18), St Paul connects the sinful situation of all humanity with the fault of Adam. [...] Therefore, original sin is transmitted by way of natural generation. This conviction of the Church is indicated also by the practice of infant baptism, to which the conciliar decree refers. Newborn infants are incapable of committing personal sin, yet in accordance with the Church's centuries-old tradition, they are baptized shortly after birth for the remission of sin. The decree states: 'They are truly baptized for the remission of sin, so that what they contracted in generation may be cleansed by regeneration' (DS 1514)." This explanation is found in paragraphs 3 and 5 of the Audience given by the pope on October 1, 1986. The text is available in Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese at https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/audiences/1986/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19861001.html [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

Galatians 3:27.[23] The decree also speaks about the effects of baptism. The guilt of sin is remitted through the grace of Christ given in baptism. All that pertains to the very essence of sin is removed; not only is it not merely "imputed," but, in the reborn, there is nothing that God hates, as suggested by Romans 8:1. There is nothing that prevents their entrance into heaven. However, concupiscence from original sin remains. It has sometimes been called "sin" because it comes from sin and inclines to sin, but in the Catholic view it is not sin in the proper sense and does not harm those who resist and do not consent to it.[24] Nevertheless, those who have been baptized do commit sins of greater or lesser magnitude and, among the means of receiving pardon for these offenses, the reception of the sacrament of reconciliation (or confession) plays a privileged role.

16. The understanding of the Council of Trent needs to be nuanced by comments made during the Lutheran and Catholic commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation. In his sermon in the Cathedral in Lund on October 31, 2016, Pope Francis expressed a way in which Catholics could appreciate and profit from some of the Reformation emphases on justification:

> As we know, Luther encountered that propitious God in the good news of Jesus, incarnate, dead, and risen. With the concept 'by grace alone,' he reminds us that God always takes the initiative, prior to any human response, even as he seeks to awaken that response. The doctrine of justification expresses the essence of human existence before God.[25]

These words reflect something of the development in Catholic understanding of Luther which has resulted from fifty years of their bilateral dialogue with Lutherans.

17. Subsequent to Trent, new circumstances occasioned by European exploration of lands previously unknown to them, led to further Catholic reflection on the relation between baptism, sin, and grace. The new

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23. See Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds*, 1513. At the same time, this teaching does not reject any baptism administered with water and the trinitarian formula (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), even if administered by those who, for their part, may reject the baptism of infants. Thus, when baptism is administered with water and the trinitarian formula by Mennonite and Anabaptist communities, the Catholic Church recognizes its validity.

24. See Denzinger, *Compendium of Creeds*, 1515 and also *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ),* The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church, signed October 31, 1999 (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), §30.—https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-joint-declaration-doctrine-justification-20th-anniversary-edition [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

25. "Homily of Pope Francis," Common Ecumenical Prayer at the Lutheran Cathedral of Lund, 31 October 2016, *Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity Information Service* 148 (2016), 19; text available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/information_service/pdf/information_service_148_en.pdf [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

awareness that Christians gained of vast populations in parts of the world that they had rarely, if ever, visited gave rise to questions about how the traditional Christian doctrines concerning sin, grace, and baptism applied to the great number of people who had never heard of Christ. Biblical teachings such as those that stated that there is no name other than that of Jesus by which human beings can be saved (see Acts 4:12) and, on the other hand, that God wills the salvation of all human beings (see 1 Tim. 2:4) demanded reconciliation, since the practical inability of fulfilling the first seemed to contradict the fulfillment of the second. Various attempts to resolve this puzzle, especially in terms of rehabilitating the traditional themes of baptism by desire and baptism by martyrdom, sought to address this apparent problem.[26]

18. Although the Second Vatican Council did not devote a text focused precisely to this relation, reflecting on the situation of the many human beings who are not baptized, it did affirm that:

> those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life. Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel. She knows that it is given by Him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life. But often men, deceived by the Evil One, have become vain in their reasonings and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator.[27]

19. Catholic reflection on the transmission of original sin has continued in more recent times:

> How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? The whole human race is in Adam "as one body of one man" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *De malo* 4, 1). By this "unity of the human race" all men are implicated in Adam's sin, as all are implicated in Christ's justice. Still, the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand. But we do know by Revelation that Adam had received

26. See the efforts by Francis A. Sullivan in *Salvation Outside the Church? A History of Christian Thought about Salvation for Those "Outside"* (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992).

27. *Lumen gentium*, The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Nov. 21, 1964, §16. Text available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

> original holiness and justice not for himself alone, but for all human nature. By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affected the human nature that they would then transmit in a fallen state (see Council of Trent, DH 1511-1512). It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice. And that is why original sin is called "sin" only in an analogical sense: it is a sin "contracted" and not "committed"—a state and not an act.[28]

20. The relation of baptism to sin and grace, with the necessary nuances that have been uncovered over the centuries, is well expressed in *Redemptor hominis*, the source with which this Catholic presentation began:

> It was precisely this man in all the truth of his life, in his conscience, in his continual inclination to sin and at the same time in his continual aspiration to truth, the good, the beautiful, justice and love that the Second Vatican Council had before its eyes when, in outlining his situation in the modern world, it always passed from the external elements of this situation to the truth within humanity: "In man himself many elements wrestle with one another. Thus, on the one hand, as a creature he experiences his limitations in a multitude of ways. On the other, he feels himself to be boundless in his desires and summoned to a higher life. Pulled by manifold attractions, he is constantly forced to choose among them and to renounce some. Indeed, as a weak and sinful being, he often does what he would not, and fails to do what he would. Hence he suffers from internal divisions, and from these flow so many and such great discords in society.[29]

21. In their contemporary understanding of the relation of baptism, sin and grace, Catholics emphasize that their view of original sin could be misunderstood if it were to be interpreted in such a way as to imply that the universal extent of sin could be separated from the New Testament teaching about the universal extent of God's will for salvation. A very considerable number of people have not been baptized in the past and most probably will not be in the future. It would be a misinterpretation and misunderstanding of Catholic belief to conclude that, while the extension of original sin is universal, the remedy of this situation is confined only to those baptized as Christians. God brings about his salvific

28. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 404.

29. *Redemptor hominis*, §4b, quoting Vatican II's *Gaudium et spes* On the Relation of the Church to the Modern World, §10; text available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_04031979_redemptor-hominis.html [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

action through the sacraments; but God's salvific action is not confined by these special means entrusted to the Church. God's universal salvific will can be effective beyond our ways of knowing precisely how it accomplishes its work. As the Second Vatican Council taught: "since Christ died for all men (Rom. 8:32), and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery."[30]

Lutheran Understanding of the Relation of Baptism to Sin and Grace

22. Lutheran understanding of sin is focused on the condition of the human heart or inner self or human "nature" which is the origin of acts of the will. Sinful acts are understood as fruits of the sin of the human person, which is sin in the proper sense. The *Augsburg Confession*, art. II says: "They teach that since the fall of Adam all human beings who are propagated according to nature are born with sin, that is, without fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence. And they teach that this disease or original fault is truly sin."[31] This makes clear that Lutherans have a strictly theological concept of sin that is different from a moral concept of good and evil acts. For a moral understanding an act of the will is good if the respective judgment of practical reason including the goal is right, the circumstances of the act are taken into consideration, and the act is chosen because it is good. Moral reflection also asks for the final good to be happiness (for example, in Aristotle).

23. In contrast to this, a theological approach sees God as the final goal and the starting point of all our acting. Augustine demonstrated that the final goal of human action is either God or we ourselves, and argued that in a theological sense, only love for God for God's sake makes our acting right. Luther understands human love of God as the final goal with reference to Jesus' understanding of the fulfillment of God's law, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mk. 12:30). While scholastic theologians understood this commandment to love God as requiring an act of *will*, Luther took it to demand the dedication of the *whole person*, not only of the *will*. The wholeness of the person includes one's desires, affections, emotions, and longings. They are all present in us before we make any decision of the will, and they manifest our estimation of and relation to things and people in the world in which we live. Luther has a place for deep psychological experience in his theology:

30. *Gaudium et spes*, §22.

31. *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert, trans. Charles P. Arand (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 37, 39.

we are spontaneously slow to do good works, and we feel a reluctance in us to fulfill God's law with our will and corresponding external acts, while we are quite quick to wish or even do the opposite. From Jesus' explanation of the commandment to love God Luther insists that God desires our wholehearted dedication to him and his will, but we realize in ourselves that we cannot offer this to God. We do not have complete power over our whole person including our affects, desires, and longings. No scholastic theologian had claimed this. They had only required that we should not consent to the evil desires in us by moderating our affections and not letting them become acts of the will. Indeed, we are free not to kill a person whom we hate, but it is not so easy to overcome hatred.

24. There are two possibilities to deal with this situation: (a) Moral reflection is satisfied if the evil desire is not fulfilled by an act of the will; it will challenge the person to struggle against the evil desire by developing virtues, but the basic argument is: nobody is obliged to do anything that is beyond his capacities (*ultra posse nemo obligatur*). (b) Luther argues from the perspective of God: It is God's holy will that we dedicate our whole life to him, but God's will does *not* adapt to *our* capacities, rather his will reveals our situation before God: that we are unable to fulfil his will. "Through the law comes the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). Therefore, we desperately need the gospel of God's grace. The law of God shows us our inability to fulfil his law. If the final goal of my life is either God or I myself, and I cannot devote my whole person to God, then it is I and not God who is the final goal of my life. Thus, I am a human being turned in upon myself (*homo incurvatus in se ipsum*). There may be many morally good acts done by such a human being, but this person attributes also these good acts to herself and thus seeks herself in everything, even in good works. Luther's definition of sin is: not trusting in God, instead looking for one's own benefit in everything (*in omnibus quaerere quae sua sunt*). This is different from egoism. Egoism can be overcome by acting in a just way (giving everyone their due), but according to Luther without grace this person will be proud of, and wish to be admired on account of, their just works, seeking their own benefit even in these good things. The notion of the total depravity of the sinful person is misleading, because it creates the impression that nothing good can be found in him or her. What Lutherans want to say is that a person cannot liberate themselves from this sinful situation by their own capacities since every act is an act of being turned in upon oneself. Thus, one has clearly to distinguish Luther's transmoral concept of sin from a moral understanding of good and evil to which the will in its freedom is related.

25. In light of this understanding of sin, it becomes clear why actual sin is not in the foreground for Luther. Of course, he is aware that what is

confessed in the sacrament of confession are certain evil acts that burden people. Because of the radical character of sin, the overcoming of sin requires the dying and rising of the person; this happens in baptism. But as a matter of experience, even after baptism, the flesh plays an evil role in the faithful that hinders them from fully fulfilling the will of God and completely giving their heart to God (see Gal. 5:17). Baptism obviously does not fully eradicate original sin. Therefore, Luther calls for returning again and again to baptism. The baptismal promise received in faith is justification. In justification one has to distinguish two aspects that cannot be separated: (a) Justification is forgiveness of sins for those who believe and trust in the promise of the gospel. Luther often describes this by using forensic terminology, as Paul does in the letter to the Romans, but he can also use other models, like that of the mystical marriage: faith is so to speak the ring between the soul, the bride, and Christ, the bridegroom. According to the laws of marriage the possession of the bride (sin) becomes the possession of the bridegroom, and the possession of the bridegroom (righteousness) becomes the possession of the bride. In this respect, sin is forgiven completely, a person is made totally righteous (*totus iustus*). (b) When the Holy Spirit uses the word of promise, spoken in proclamation or communicated through the sacrament, he also begins to transform the person. He does this by creating new desires, longings, and acts of the will, in her. But, as we all experience, this transformation is never completed, there is the continuing struggle between spirit and flesh in us. We cannot rely on our transformation, but we can absolutely rely on Christ's promise. Yet because this transformation is never completed as long as we live, we never get to the point of offering our person in fullness to God, and this precisely is sin. Therefore, Luther says: The justified person is at the same time a sinner.

26. This does not mean that no transformation takes place; it means that Luther takes the holiness of God seriously. God's holiness requires our complete dedication. Therefore: with respect to the gospel the believer is righteous; with respect to the law she is sinner. Luther does not deny growth in holiness, but as long as we have not reached the final goal we remain sinners with respect to what God expects from us. Luther's understanding of sin has an enormous self-critical impulse while at the same time calling to move forward on the way of sanctification. Luther—one must emphasize this over and over again—also perceives justification as changing the person. Justification is not merely God's justifying judgment that remains external to a person and leaves a person unchanged; rather the relationship of the promise of forgiveness and communion and faith changes a person deeply. But since a person's transformation is never complete or perfect, even under the working of the Holy Spirit, Luther calls the faithful *sinners* with respect to God's holy

law, while with respect to the promise of the gospel those who believe in it, are righteous. This *simul iustus et peccator* ("at once justified and a sinner") does *not* mean that the person who is justified, is not transformed, rather, Luther emphasizes: "The enslaving power of sin is broken on the basis of the merit of Christ. It is no longer sin that 'rules' the Christian, for sin is itself 'ruled' by Christ to whom the justified are bound in faith."[32] This means that the faithful are able to prevent the sin of the heart from manifesting itself in evil deeds. Christians can actually do good works. In his morning prayer, used daily by millions of Lutherans, Luther asks God: "that you would also protect me today from sin and all evil, so that my life and actions may please you completely. For into your hands I commend myself: my body, and my soul, and all that is mine. Let your holy angel be with me, so that the wicked foe may have no power over me. Amen."[33]

27. Baptism is understood by Luther as a sacrament in the sense of Augustine—that the word comes to the element and makes the sacrament. The word of baptism is a promise that (a) effects what it says, and that (b) requires faith. Promise and faith build a salvific relationship. Faith needs the promise because it does not rely on itself but on the external word of the promise. But a promise is given in vain if the person to whom it is given does not believe in it. Both parts of this relationship require each other. Thus Luther can say what at first glance seems to be paradoxical: "But we must so consider it [the promise] as to exercise our faith in it, and have no doubt whatever that, once we have been baptized, we are saved. For unless faith is present or is conferred in baptism, baptism will profit us nothing; indeed, it will become a hindrance to us, not only at the moment when it is received, but throughout the rest of our lives."[34]

28. Baptism happens at a certain place and at a certain time, but the promise of baptism lasts a lifetime. God promises the person who is baptized: "You are my child forever." In faith we come back to this promise. When a sinner is received into communion with God, this is at the same time forgiveness of sins. Because the renewal of life begins in baptism, but endures for the whole lifetime of the faithful, asking for forgiveness and being received again into communion with God means: returning to the promise of baptism. Therefore, Luther holds the sacraments of baptism and confession closely together.

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32. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, § 29.

33. *The Book of Concord*, Minneapolis 2000, 363.

34. Martin Luther, "The Babylonian Captivity of the Church," in *Word and Sacrament II: Luther's Works*, ed. Abdel Ross Wentz and Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 36:59.

Just as the truth of this divine promise, once pronounced over us, continues until death, so our faith in it ought never to cease, but to be nourished and strengthened until death by the continual remembrance of this promise made to us in baptism. Therefore, when we rise from our sins or repent, we are merely returning to the power and the faith of baptism from which we fell, and finding our way back to the promise then made to us, which we deserted when we sinned. For the truth of the promise once made remains steadfast, always ready to receive us back with open arms when we return.[35]

29. The Christian life is a life of faith in one's baptism to which the believer always returns. In baptism, God does not only promise to give *something*, forgiveness of sins, rather he gives *himself* to the baptized. This self-giving of God is repeated over and over again in the proclamation of God's word and in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Since baptism is seen as *God's* promise, it is valid even if human beings do not trust in it, according to the rule: "If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself" (2 Tim. 2:13). In this perspective, there is no basic difference whether a person is baptized as infant or adult, both are called to continue to trust in their baptism's promise as long as they live.

Mennonite Understanding of the Relation of Baptism to Sin and Grace

30. "Sin" was most often talked about in Anabaptism and later Mennonitism[36] in relation to the victory of God's grace over sin and evil in Christ on the cross.[37] The fallen nature of humanity was confessed without reservation but most often in the context of God's freeing, sanctifying grace. Although it was confessed as true,[38] "original sin" did not have the priority it was given in other sixteenth-century churches,

35. *Luther's Works*, 36:59.

36. A historical note: In the sixteenth century, the ancestors of Mennonites mostly referred to themselves as "brothers and sisters" or "baptism-minded." They were called "Anabaptists" mostly by their detractors. Gradually, the term "Mennonite" became their name in most countries in honor of one of their founders, Menno Simons. Beginning after World War II the term "Anabaptist" was reclaimed in a positive sense as a broader way of designating the movement, to include communities that arose over the centuries from the original impulse, such as Hutterites, Amish, Brethren in Christ, and the Brethren communities of the turn of the 18th century. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century some non-European Mennonite communities that arose out of North Atlantic Mennonite missions have begun to describe themselves as "Anabaptist" according to the same logic that arose after World War II. This is also the case for some North American congregations.

37. Pilgram Marpeck, *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, ed. William Klassen and Walter Klaassen (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 1999) 112-124 [note: Pilgrim Marpeck is sometimes written Marbeck]; Menno Simons, *Complete Works of Menno Simon* (Elkhart, Ind.: J.F. Funk and Brothers, 1871), 108-116.

38. Balthasar Hubmaier, *Complete Writings*, ed. H. Wayne Pipkin and John Howard Yoder (Harrisburg, Va.: Herald Press, 1989), 86.

where it was indispensable to their understanding of baptism. More often Anabaptists addressed the subject when pressed to do so in debate with other confessions. Nevertheless, one can distinguish four different understandings of what original sin is:

> It is described as an inborn incurable sickness, as the loss of power to distinguish between good and evil, as a poison which has wrought a corruption within nature originally good, and as the natural reason of the mature man which over-extends itself into the realm of the supernatural. Original sin was not denied by any of the Radical Reformers, but none of them saw it as it was seen within the Magisterial Reformation, primarily in its Augustinian light, as the bondage of the will.[39]

31. Whether or not they used the term "original sin" Anabaptist theologians taught that without Christ the human condition was hopeless. Menno Simons had a strong sense of the sinful state of humanity and did not shy away from the term. He writes,

> The Scriptures as I see it speak of different kinds of sin. The first kind is the corrupt, sinful nature, namely, the lust or desire of our flesh contrary to God´s Law and contrary to the original righteousness; sin which is inherited at birth by all the descendants and children of a corrupt, sinful Adam, and is not inaptly called original sin. . . . The second kind of sins are the fruits of this first sin and are not inaptly called actual sin by theologians.[40]

32. Mennonite theology shares the interpretation of the Genesis creation narratives in the larger Christian tradition that humanity—as part of creation—is infected by sin. This infection by sin is a result of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. It leads to death in two ways: first, the physical death of Adam and his posterity; second, eternal death from which only Christ can redeem. The three most influential historic Mennonite confessions of faith reiterate these assertions. Yet the emphasis in their writings is on the declaration that it was God's intention to offer reconciliation to all of humanity.[41]

33. One current Mennonite confession of faith describes this conviction in the following way: "We confess that, beginning with Adam and Eve,

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39. Alvin J. Beachy, *The Concept of Grace in the Radical Reformation* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1977), 38.

40. Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*: *1496-1561*, ed. John C. Wenger, transl. Leonard Verduin (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1966) 563, cf. 130, 948.

41. Dordrecht (1632), Articles 2-6, 63-65; Ris (1766), Articles 8-11, 86-88; Mennonite Brethren (1902), Article 2, 164-166, in Howard J. Loewen, *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God: Mennonite Confessions of Faith in North America: An Introduction* (Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1985).

humanity has disobeyed God, given way to the tempter, and chosen to sin. Because of sin, all have fallen short of the Creator's intent, marred the image of God in which they were created, disrupted order in the world, and limited their love for others."[42] Further, it states, "Through sin, the powers of domination, division, destruction, and death have been unleashed in humanity and in all of creation. They have, in turn, further subjected human beings to the power of sin and evil, and have increased burdensome work and barren rest."[43]

34. Sin's general infection of all of humanity and the created order affects the life of individuals, groups, social orders, structures, and institutions.[44] Sin is part of the human condition, and it affects the entire person. At the same time, "No one aspect of human beings, such as reason or sexuality or the physical body, should be singled out as the primary carrier of sinfulness."[45] Not the flesh, not procreation, not any natural process as such is sinful; rather sin must be understood as being rooted in "knowledge." We come to know ourselves and our transgressions (Ps 51, especially v.3) in the light of God's revelation. Only conscious acts have the quality of obedience or disobedience, faith or sin, and it is only when we are sinning consciously and deliberately that this inborn tendency may be understood as "original sin."[46] In most Anabaptist writings weight is placed on conscious acts of disobedience as sin. But there is also a concern for the disposition of the heart. Jesus' warning in the Sermon on the Mount that someone who lusts after a woman has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Mt. 5:27-28) is often cited.

35. Two background assumptions are at work in Mennonite thinking in holding onto the tension between the fall and redemption. The first one is

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42. *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective: Summary Statement* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1995) Art. 7, "Sin," 31-34, 31.

43. Ibid.

44. ". . . 'powers,' 'principalities,' 'gods of the nations,' and 'elemental spirits of the universe,' though not necessarily evil, are prone to distort God's purposes for them. They can corrupt and enslave humanity (Isa. 42:17; 45:20; Gal. 4:9; Eph. 2:1-3; 6:12; Col. 2:15). Sin is thus not only an individual matter, but involves groups, nations, and structures. Such organizations have a "spirit" that can incite persons to do evil they would not have chosen on their own. Governments, military forces, economic systems, educational, or religious institutions, family systems, and structures determined by class, race, gender, or nationality are susceptible to demonic spirits. Human violence toward each other, enmity between peoples, the domination of men over women, and the adverse conditions of life and work in the world--these are all signs of sin in humanity and in all creation (Gen. 3:14-19; 4:3-16; 6:11-13; 11:1-9; Rom. 8:21)." *Confession of Faith*, "Sin," Commentary No. 2, 32f.

45. *Confession of Faith*, "Sin," Commentary No. 5, 33.

46. Robert Friedmann, 212f., referring to *Verantwortung,* by Pilgram Marpeck, 248ff. Marpeck's emphasis on the power and universality of sin "saves him from any Pelagian optimism in his concept of man" in Torsten Bergsten, *Pilgram Marbeck und seine Auseinandersetzung mit Caspar Schwenckfeld* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri AB, 1958), 80.

that we cannot escape from our responsibility before God; the second and related matter is that even after Adam's fall God remained gracious and did not withdraw his breath from mortals. The image of God, though broken, remained in each human being. In God's prevenient grace he used this vestige of awareness of himself to appeal to each human being to choose between a life remaining in sin and a new life in light of the forgiveness of sins in Christ.[47] It is clear from the texts referred to that the authors did not understand such awareness of God in a Pelagian sense. That is, "they did not deny the reality of sin nor did they even deny the inheritance of a tendency to sin from our first parents. But they did not accept this tendency toward sinning as inevitable fate."[48]

36. Through Christ's resurrection and the consequent reign of the Spirit, human nature has been restored to the potential it had before the fall (2 Cor. 5:16-17; Gal. 6:15). The Spirit reveals Christ, whoever responds "become[s] a partaker of the divine character, the being of Jesus Christ and the power and character of the Holy Spirit, and conforms themselves to the image of Jesus Christ" (also 2 Pet. 1:4).[49] That is, the image of God has been restored; the believer bears God's image and continues to grow in the capacity to love rather than retaliate.[50] Although the inborn tendency to sin is never entirely overcome, the Christian has been set free to obey God (see Rom. 8:10-13).

37. Thus, the heart of the Anabaptist understanding of salvation is that, by grace, transformation is possible, in which the "natural person" is transformed into a "spiritual person." By that is meant that someone who is turned in upon themselves in self-love can turn outward and grow in love for God, neighbor, and enemy. Menno Simons "has the vision of a translocation from the realm of sin and evil into the kingdom of God."[51] The new birth, for Menno,

> consists, verily, not in water nor in words; but it is the heavenly, living, and quickening power of God in our hearts which flows forth from God, and which by the preaching of the divine Word, if we accept it by faith, quickens, renews, pierces, and converts our hearts,

47. One of the most succinct confessional statements on this matter is Ris, in Loewen, *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God,* Articles 10-11, 87-88.

48. Richard Kauffman, "Sin,"in *Mennonite Encyclopedia,* vol. 5, 824.

49. Dirk Philips, *The Writings of Dirk Philips: 1504-1568,* ed. Cornelius J. Dyck, William Echard. Keeney, and Alvin J. Beachy (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1992) 294.

50. Marpeck, *Writings,* 60-64, 122-127.

51. Richard E. Weingart, "The Meaning of Sin in the Theology of Menno Simons," in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology,* ed. Wayne H. Pipkin (Elkhart, Ind.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994) 27.

> so that we are changed [. . .] from the wicked nature of Adam to the good nature of Jesus Christ.[52]

38. In the Anabaptist tradition the justification of the sinner changes a person´s standing before God in a forensic sense but also brings about a metamorphosis of the person in a moral sense (see Rom. 7 and Rom. 8; 2 Cor. 3:17-18, 5:11-21; Eph. 2:8-10). The promise of these passages, that the Spirit fashions us to become more and more Christ-like, appealed to the Anabaptists as well as to later generations of Mennonites seeking renewal of the church. As they understood it, true faith comes to expression in love; in fact, the goal of faith is love. The source of both faith and love is the Spirit, as portrayed in Romans 8. The church is made up of those who have come to faith (justified) and are growing in love toward God, neighbor, and enemy (being sanctified). The sanctified life is one in which believers surrender themselves to the promise of God's provision for them. This surrender frees them to live the life Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere.[53] Mennonites know from their own experience that to try to live such a life in one's own power inevitably leads to legalism. The founding leaders and later ones learned from Scripture and experience that on earth the Christian life is never perfected. We grapple with weakness and sin as long as we live. We can continue living in the spirit of Christ only by forgiveness. In that sense not only Romans 8 but also Romans 7 describes the path of discipleship.

39. Newer developments in theology have urged reflection on the dialectic framework of individual and structural sin. This shift has helped theologians to turn away from one-sided legalistic and individualistic interpretations of sin. "In sinning, we become unfaithful to the covenant with God and with God's people, destroy right relationships, use power selfishly, do violence, and become separated from God."[54] Violence can be expressed in direct acts as well as in unjust structures like economic or cultural discrimination. Violence is a conscious or unconscious human form of action that negates the will of God. In Mennonite understanding nonviolence is a profound mark, a litmus test, of following the will of God in discipleship to Christ.

40. "Baptism," states the earliest Anabaptist confession of faith, "shall be given to all those who have been taught repentance and the amendment of life, and who believe truly that their sins are taken away,

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52. *Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 265, see also 87-113.

53. Matt 6:25-33, Phil 3:7-11. See also Berndt Hamm, "Das reformatorische Profil des täuferischen Rechtfertigungsverstàndnis," in *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter*, 71 (2014), 148-160.

54. Confession of Faith, "Sin," 31.

and to all who desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. . . ."[55] Conversion and baptism are commonly described with language taken from the larger Christian tradition: dying and coming to life with Christ (Rom. 6:1-4); incorporation into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12-13); receiving the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's assurance that one is a beloved of God (Mt. 3:16-17). All these elements of the believer's conversion by the Holy Spirit are recapitulated in water baptism in the name of the Trinity. For Mennonites incorporation into Christ's universal body happens by means of baptism into a local congregation where the covenant with Christ and fellow believers is lived out. Baptism represents both "God´s action in delivering us from sin and death, and the action of the one who is baptized, who pledges to God to follow Christ within the context of Christ´s body, the church."[56] It is an outward and public testimony to the inward baptism of the Spirit. Baptism enacts a believer's renunciation of evil, repentance, forgiveness, and death to sin through grace. The church, as the agent of the Spirit, tests and affirms the candidate's faith and brings him into the local covenant community.

41. One of the great challenges early Anabaptism faced was to explain how God's grace embraces children. Some of them held that before the age of discernment children are not affected by Adam and Eve´s disobedience; they remain in innocence. Many Anabaptist theologians held that the Bible's warnings against sin concerns people who have come of age. Other theologians held that Scripture insists all human beings—including children—are affected by the inherited tendency to sin, but cannot be held accountable until they have reached the age of discernment. Until that time the atoning work of Christ includes them as heirs of salvation.[57]

42. To the question "Is baptism necessary for salvation?" Mennonite tradition has generally held that God's grace begins its saving work inwardly, as described above. Salvation is a gift that begins its work in the individual as Spirit-to-spirit. In other words, people who receive God's gift belong to him even if they are not baptized. But God's saving work also has a corporate dimension; it takes us from the solidarity of sin to the solidarity of grace, which is the body of Christ, the church (Col. 1:13). In the presence of grace and faith, inward and outward reality cannot be separated. Thus water baptism is both the testimony of the believer that God's grace has come to her and the testimony of the Spirit through the church to the candidate that she belongs to Christ and his body. In 1

55. Schleitheim Confession of 1527, in Loewen, *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God*, 79.

56. *Confession of Faith*, "Baptism," Commentary No. 1, 47.

57. "To innocent and minor children sin is for Jesus' sake not imputed."—*Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, 116.

Corinthians 12 the universal body of Christ and its local expression are inseparable. The fullness of salvation is completed outwardly with the act of baptism in which the believer is initiated into the body of Christ and the local congregation. At the same time God is not bound to sacramental acts like baptism in his quest for us. In the mystery of God's love there is a hidden work of Christ reaching beyond the church.

Common Perspectives and Differences

Romans 5:12 and the Issue of Original Sin

43. Recent exegetical work has helped to resolve a matter that contributed to stirring up conflict during the Reformation. At that time, the notion of "hereditary sin" was influential among Catholics and Lutherans and functioned as part of their rationale for the practice of baptizing infants. The Anabaptist movement rejected both that notion and such a practice. The concept of hereditary sin was based primarily on the inaccurate Vulgate translation of Romans 5:12: "As through one man sin has come into this world […] in whom all have sinned (*in quo omnes peccaverunt*)." The Latin phrase "in quo" is not correct. The Greek original, *ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον*, should be rendered "because" and not "in whom," such that in English this verse would read: "just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned."[58]

44. It was incumbent upon Paul to explain how one can affirm that all human beings are sinners. He answers: Adam, in whom all are included as a corporate personality, sinned and so all humankind sinned when Adam sinned (Rom. 5:16-19). But for the individual person, this sin would be only something coming from outside like a disease inherited from one's parents. To make clear that each of us is included in God's judgment, Paul adds: "because all have sinned." This is not a contradiction but it indicates that, while the power of sin is already present before one commits any sin, everybody realizes and manifests this power of sin in her own acting and behaving. Sin is a power before us, behind us, and around us. And at the same time it is what we all do in our own person over and over again.

45. In light of the correct translation of Romans 5:12, one has to give up the concept of "hereditary sin." Giving up that concept in no way weakens Paul's teaching about "original sin," but rather corrects a misunderstanding of it. Paul took great pains in Romans 2 and 3 to demonstrate that all human beings have sinned, and that the grace of Jesus' redemption is for all: "The righteousness of God through faith in

58. The *Nova Vulgata* (1979) has "eo quod" rather than "in quo." This change reinforces the reading taken up by the Trilateral Commission.

Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:22-23). Contemporary exegesis has changed our approach to the topic of original sin. Paul's teaching concerning the power of sin surrounding us concerns how this power affects the individual in his or her personal struggle with sin. Today, a way to help people understand this teaching about the pervasive power of evil is to make reference to social or structural evils, such as unjust economic systems or cultures of racial or nationalistic prejudice.

God's Reconciling Grace and Conversion

46. Catholics, Lutherans, and Mennonites agree that sin can only be overcome by grace, by the divine initiative, by the Holy Spirit. On their own, human beings do not have the ability to leave behind the hopelessness of life under the power of sin. The divine initiative has always been and remains a foundational aspect of our respective theologies of baptism. God, in his redemptive work in Christ, appeals to us to receive a new life in light of the forgiveness offered in Christ. Traditionally, regarding this saving activity, Catholics speak of human cooperation, while Lutherans speak of human passivity. Mennonites, for their part, are sensitive to the human role in coming to salvation. There has been long and seemingly endless debate on this topic with many misunderstandings. To overcome them, the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* has offered the following common affirmation concerning human dependence upon grace, with which Mennonites can also agree:

> We [Catholics and Lutherans] confess together that all persons depend completely on the saving grace of God for their salvation. The freedom they possess in relation to persons and the things of this world is no freedom in relation to salvation, for as sinners they stand under God's judgment and are incapable of turning by themselves to God to seek deliverance, of meriting their justification before God, or of attaining salvation by their own abilities. Justification takes place solely by God's grace.[59]

The *Joint Declaration* then acknowledges that different emphases in interpreting this relation of grace and its reception by human beings allow the two communities to claim a "differentiating consensus" in which the following nuances may be considered as compatible with the fundamental agreement achieved.

Because Catholics and Lutherans confess this together, it is true to say: When Catholics say that persons "cooperate" in preparing for and

59. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, § 19.

accepting justification by consenting to God's justifying action, they see such personal consent as itself an effect of grace, not as an action arising from innate human abilities. According to Lutheran teaching, human beings are incapable of cooperating in their salvation, because as sinners they actively oppose God and his saving action. Lutherans do not deny that a person can reject the working of grace. When they emphasize that a person can only receive (*mere passive*) justification, they mean thereby to exclude any possibility of contributing to one's own justification, but do not deny that believers are fully involved personally in their faith, which is effected by God's Word.[60]

Communicating Grace in Baptism

47. There is also agreement among us that the universal grace of God in Christ is communicated in the Holy Spirit to all human beings and that, among the various means of the communication of grace, baptism plays a decisive role. The Church has an important role in this. Christ instituted his community that it might preach the gospel, baptize, and make disciples of all nations (see Matthew 28:19-20). But we see differences in defining the role of baptism and in identifying the addressees to whom the grace of baptism should be offered. Catholics, Lutherans, and Mennonites agree that the Holy Spirit acts through baptism, communicating grace to people. It is instituted by Jesus himself. Lutherans and Catholics, following Augustine, consider the sacrament a "visible word." While Mennonites stress that the Holy Spirit acts internally, they also emphasize that the Holy Spirit uses the external proclamation of the Word of God and the celebration of baptism as necessary parts of that communication.

48. As Mennonites understand it, there are three actors in baptism: God the Holy Spirit, the church, and the candidate. Water baptism is the recapitulation and completion of Spirit baptism.[61] The water set aside for baptism is a sign of the Spirit's immediate presence and activity regenerating the person. This is one aspect of what Jesus means when he says, "No one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit" (Jn. 3:5). The second actor in baptism is the church, in the person of the minister and the gathered congregation. Moved by the Spirit their act of baptizing the candidate confirms that she is "beloved" of God (Mk. 1:11), that she is a child of God (Rom. 8:15-16). In the act of baptism the believer witnesses to the truth that God in Christ has come into his life and saved him. In submitting to baptism the believer enacts his

60. Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, §§ 19-21.

61. Short Confession [1610]; Confession of Jan Cents [1630], in *Confessions of Faith in the Anabaptist tradition, 1527-1660,* ed. Karl Koop, trans. Cornelius J. Dyck (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 2006).

unequivocal, public "yes" to God's gift of grace in Christ, somewhat like a bride and groom give each other their unreserved yes in a wedding. In a similar way the candidate pledges herself to Christ and the body of Christ. The pronouncement of the trinitarian formula (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) seals this "yes" of the church and the believer. Since infants are not able to express these inner processes, they cannot be baptized, according to the Mennonite understanding.

49. Catholics and Lutherans have been convinced that God's grace should be offered also to infants since they share in the sin of Adam. Anabaptists, too, think that infants need grace since they also suffer of the consequences of Adam's sin, but they affirm that all infants participate in the reconciling grace of Christ even without baptism. Catholic and Lutheran doctrines call for the baptism of infants and even state that baptism is needed for their salvation, although they acknowledge the challenge of seeing how that teaching and practice relates to God's will that all be saved (see 1 Tim. 2:4). Humbly admitting that full comprehension of the inscrutable ways of the Lord cannot be fully grasped by us, one can simply entrust the unbaptized to the mercy of God. With respect to the necessity of infant baptism for salvation, the relationship between Catholics and Lutherans, on one hand, and Mennonites, on the other, has changed. None of them would confine salvation to those who are baptized. Since Jesus commanded his followers to make disciples of all nations and baptize them, one can be sure that that baptism actualizes the salvation intended by God. God may have other ways to bring infants to salvation than baptism, even though this is still seen as the most appropriate way for their children by faithful Catholics and Lutherans.

Transformation and Continuing Need for Forgiveness

50. All three communions agree that baptism received in faith (or later appropriated in faith) enacts the forgiveness of sins and leads to a transformation of the baptized person (Acts 2:38; 22:16). For Catholics, in baptism the communion with God is restored through the gift of grace that brings with it faith, love for God, and hope; only remnants of original sin or the inclination to sin (concupiscence) remain. Thus the person is justified through baptism. Something similar occurs when, without losing the sacramental character of baptism, one loses justifying grace through mortal sin and through the sacrament of reconciliation (or confession) his or her communion with God is restored again.[62] Sin ultimately finds its

62. See: *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), § 1272, "Incorporated into Christ by Baptism, the person baptized is configured to Christ. Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark (character) of his belonging to Christ. No sin can erase this mark,

source in the heart, but Catholics would only attribute sinfulness to an activity (thought, word, deed) or omission that is freely chosen.

51. Mennonite teaching is similar to the Catholic understanding, emphasizing the deep change that comes through regeneration. Only a tendency to sin remains. A more common way for Mennonites to say this is that sanctification is never complete as long as we live. Because of this, the temptation to commit sin remains. There is growth in grace but the struggle between the spirit and the flesh in the faithful remains throughout their lives (Gal. 5:16-26). In this sense one can say that sin has its roots in the heart. But identifying an action as sinful requires that the person freely choose that action; sin can be spoken of properly only when human freedom is engaged.

52. Faithful Lutherans live in precisely the same situation as described above in the perspective of Catholics and Mennonites, but they understand it differently. While Catholics and Mennonites focus their concept of sin on acts of sin, for Luther, sin has its central place in the hearts of the people.

53. In the *Joint Declaration,* Catholics and Lutherans have characterized the situation of the baptized person with respect to sin in the following way:

> We confess together that in baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies and truly renews the person. But the justified must all through life constantly look to God's unconditional justifying grace. They also are continuously exposed to the power of sin still pressing its attacks (see Rom. 6:12-14) and are not exempt from a life-long struggle against the contradiction to God within the selfish desires of the old Adam (see Gal. 5:16; Rom. 7:7-10). The justified also must ask God daily for forgiveness as in the Lord's Prayer (Mt. 6:12; 1 Jn. 1:9), are ever again called to conversion and penance, and are ever again granted forgiveness.[63]

In order to describe the situation of the justified with respect to "concupiscence" or the tendency to sin which remains after justification, the *Joint Declaration* coined the phrase "contradiction to God within the selfish desires," which allows for a common description and avoids the controversial use of the word "sin." But the lifelong struggle with sin should be understood as the lifelong striving for holiness.

54. All three communities find something of this positive dimension reflected in Ephesians 2:8-10: "For it is by grace you have been saved,

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even if sin prevents Baptism from bearing the fruits of salvation. Given once for all, Baptism cannot be repeated." See also, CCC, § 1273-74.

63. Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification, § 28.

through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Chapter Two
Baptism: Communicating Grace and Faith

55. The previous chapter of our report explored the convergences and divergences in our respective understandings of the relation between baptism, sin, and salvation. Now we will look at the celebration of baptism. This requires, firstly, situating baptism within the lifelong process of being a Christian, and secondly, describing the understanding and practice of baptism, its inseparability from saving faith, and its role in uniting the baptized with other Christians by incorporation into the Church. Finally, we address the tensions between our theology and our praxis of baptism.

The Place of Baptism in the Lifelong Process of Being a Christian

56. All three of our communities understand the celebration of baptism as one moment within a lifelong process that has various stages and dimensions. The bilateral report *Healing Memories* noted that "baptism is an event at a certain moment in a person's life, but receiving baptism and living it is the lifelong task of a Christian. [. . .] Both Mennonites and Lutherans agree that baptism cannot be seen as an isolated event."[64] Catholics too share this view. In *Called to be Peacemakers*, they state that baptism is the beginning and basis of the whole Christian life.[65]

57. All three of our churches recognize the primacy of the loving initiative of God's grace in this process. When the baptism of an adult is celebrated—which is possible in all three of our communities—a number of stages usually precede baptism. A person seeking baptism does so because he is attracted to divine love by grace and moved to conversion. This call to repentance is already seen in the ministry of Jesus' precursor, John the Baptist (see Mt. 3:2; Mk. 1:4; Lk. 3:2-3) and in the inauguration of the kingdom of God by Jesus himself (see Mt. 4:17; Mk. 1:15). When an adult requests baptism, he begins a process of formation and catechesis with the purpose of growing in faith and putting into practice the desire to follow Jesus and embrace a new identity. The community is involved in this formation and in discerning the candidate's readiness for baptism.

64. *Healing Memories*, 87-89; the first of these statements is from a Lutheran section of the report, while the second shows Mennonite agreement with it.

65. See *Called to be Peacemakers*, § 115.

The actual event of baptism is celebrated in worship and begins a lifelong process of daily appropriation by repenting for sin, striving to live a holy life, participating actively in the life of the Church both internally and in the external mission of witnessing to the gospel and inviting others to see the joy of life in Christ and to embrace it by becoming Christians too. This lifelong process of Christian discipleship aims toward its ultimate fulfillment in the fullness of eternal life promised and accomplished by Jesus' victory over sin and death. All of these convictions are held in common by our three communities.

58. There are also differences in understanding the various stages and dimensions of discipleship by our respective communities. Mennonites, for example, hold that Jesus' own words clearly indicate that preaching and repentance precede baptism and that baptism with water is seen as an expression of the covenant relationship between God, the newly baptized individual, and the Church. Their tradition has interpreted 1 John 5:6-12 as pointing to a recognition, already in the early Christian community, of three distinct expressions of baptism: baptism of the Spirit, water baptism, and baptism of blood. They write:

> Water baptism is an outward sign of a prior transformation in the believer by which the Holy Spirit has moved the individual to repentance of sin and offered assurance of God's mercy and grace. The covenant of water baptism witnesses to this baptism of the Spirit and serves as a public affirmation that the believer is prepared to give and receive counsel and admonition within the community of believers. Water baptism also testifies publicly to a readiness to receive a baptism in blood.[66]

These words suggest that baptism with water is seen by Mennonites as an "outward sign" which witnesses to baptism in the Spirit and which testifies to the willingness, in fidelity to the covenant, to undergo the shedding of one's blood.

59. For their part, Lutherans note that

> Baptism is essentially an act of God, performed through human actions and words. [. . .] Faith does not create what a person believes, but in the process of hearing and seeing, perceiving and receiving, faith trusts in what is given to the person: God himself in his word of promise, visibly and audibly extended to the baptized in baptism. [. . .] since baptism is the visible word of God's promise to accept a person into communion with him as his child and to forgive all the

66. *Healing Memories*, 85.

> sin of the baptized, trusting in this promise is the first and basic response to baptism.[67]

Whatever appears to contradict this communion will become a reason for mourning and repentance.

60. In their dialogue with Mennonites, Catholics have summarized their vision of baptism as follows:

> Baptism for Catholics is above all the sacrament of that faith by which, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we respond to the Gospel of Christ. Through baptism one is incorporated into the Church and is built up in the Spirit into a house where God lives. [. . .] Catholic teaching regarding baptism may be put in six points: 1) baptism is the beginning of the Christian life and the door to other sacraments; 2) it is the basis of the whole Christian life; 3) the principle effects of baptism are purification and new birth; 4) through baptism we become Christ's members and are incorporated into his Church and made sharers in its mission; 5) confirmation that completes baptism deepens the baptismal identity and strengthens us for service; and 6) lastly, as true witnesses of Christ the confirmed are more strictly obligated to spread and defend the faith by word and deed.[68]

61. Thus, there is much agreement between our three communities about the fact that the beginning and unfolding of Christian discipleship entails a process with various stages and dimensions. Our divergences concern the relationship of these various elements, especially in our contrasting views and practices regarding the baptism of infants. Deeply rooted in Mennonite origins, tradition, and identity is the conviction that personal profession of faith by the recipient on the occasion of baptism is the dominant model witnessed to in the New Testament and even suggested by Jesus' own words when he commissions the disciples to baptize in Matthew 28 and Mark 16. Therefore, baptism is only possible for those who are capable of repenting and accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior in faith. In contrast, Lutherans and Catholics both believe that the baptism of infants is not only possible but required by what the New Testament says about the universal offer of grace to all, including infants, and the need for all human beings, because of their solidarity in the sin of Adam, to receive baptism, which places them in solidarity with the new Adam, Jesus Christ (see Rom. 5: 12-18). The benefits associated with baptism—such as, new life in Christ (see Rom. 6: 3-4; Col. 2: 12-13), the gifts of the Holy Spirit (see Eph. 4: 4-7; 1 Cor. 12:4-13) and the promise of

67. *Healing Memories*, 87.

68. *Called to be Peacemakers*, § 115.

eternal life (see Jn. 3:5)—begin to have an immediate effect on the one who is baptized and should not be denied to children.[69]

62. Nevertheless, all three churches embrace the teaching of the New Testament that human beings are sinners and stand in need of redemption. Through grace by faith in the saving action of Jesus Christ, human beings make the passage from the state of sinfulness to that of children of the Father, endowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. All three communities forcefully affirm the gratuity and primacy of God's grace in initiating and fostering this change. All three also affirm the necessity of a human response of faith, made possible by grace, to this divine initiative. Mennonites are convinced that, according to Scripture, a personal response is a precondition for the reception of baptism. Infants are not yet capable of such a response, but with proper care and formation, there is good hope that the Holy Spirit will engender it when they have grown to a stage of human development that they do become capable. Both Lutherans and Catholics agree with Mennonites that the Holy Spirit makes possible a personal response of faith in individual human beings and that such a personal confession and commitment is absolutely necessary for genuine discipleship. Without it, baptism cannot bear the fruit it was instituted by Christ to produce. At the same time, they believe that the practice of infant baptism is in no way excluded by the words of Scripture and even that the absolute gratuity of God's saving action in Christ and the Spirit is more clearly expressed by the baptism of those who are too young to speak for themselves. The divine life of grace already begins to flow in the newly baptized which, with proper guidance and formation, will blossom into a full personal profession of faith and commitment to a life of discipleship. In their Christian understanding of divine-human relations, all three communities affirm both the primacy of the divine initiative of grace and the necessity of a personal response of faith. They also affirm that Christian discipleship is a lifelong process of which baptism constitutes a fundamental and originating moment for the believer's relation to God and to the Church. A fundamental question with regard to this lifelong process resides in the timing of the celebration of

69. The Joint Working Group of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, in its report entitled *Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism*, paragraph 47, agreed that "biblical descriptions of the pattern of initiation normally refer to adults." It went on to add: "For some churches the Scriptures only authorize the baptizing of those who make a personal act of conversion and a personal confession of faith. For others the Scriptures provide no compelling reason for refusing baptism to children not yet capable of such personal decisions, when they are presented by those who are responsible for them and are entrusted by them to the Church for their formation and instruction. Furthermore, descriptions in *Acts* of the baptism of whole households must be taken carefully into account." *Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity Information Service* 117 (2004), 194; text available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/information_service/pdf/information_service_117_en.pdf [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

baptism. Agreement that Christian discipleship is a lifelong process and that baptism is one of the important events within this process would seem to place the traditional controversy over the ordering of the various elements involved in becoming a Christian in a new framework.

The Celebration of Baptism

63. All three of our communities agree that Jesus Christ himself is at the origin of our celebration of baptism. He instituted and commanded the practice of baptizing new members of the community, saying, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:19). The baptismal rite which developed in response to this command found a relatively stable format rather early in Christian history and included elements such as a proclamation of the Word of God, the renunciation of sin, and the public profession of faith and baptism with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Each year a valuable component of our trilateral conversation was the presentation by one of our communities of its way of celebrating baptism.[70] In what follows, some of the distinctive emphases of each community are presented.

64. The Catholic presentation of the celebration of baptism listed the following elements[71]: tracing the sign of the cross on the forehead of the person to be baptized; the proclamation of the Word of God enlightening the candidate and the assembly and eliciting the response of faith; exorcisms signifying the liberation of the person from sin and the power of evil; anointing with oil and explicit renunciation of evil; a prayer invoking the Holy Spirit over the water to be used in the rite; the dialogical profession of the articles of faith as contained in the creed; the triple immersion or pouring of water three times over the head of the person to be baptized with the pronunciation of the trinitarian formula during this immersion or pouring; the anointing with chrism to reflect that the newly baptized is a member of the priestly, prophetic, and royal people of God; the clothing with a white garment to symbolize putting on Christ; the bestowal of a candle lit from the candle used during the Easter Vigil to

70. A publication including various rites of baptism with commentaries and including examples from the Catholic, Mennonite, and Lutheran traditions: *Baptism Today. Understanding, Practice and Ecumenical Implications*, ed. Thomas Best, Faith and Order 207 (Geneva/Collegeville, Minn.: WCC Publications/Liturgical Press) 2008; text available at https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.214.

71. It should be noted that there are two separate (but similar) groups of rites for the Sacrament of Baptism in the Catholic Church: the Rite of Baptism for one Child [or children], and the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA). The term "child" refers to an infant or young child of before age of reason (usually seven). What follows is a list of the elements similar to both rites even though some differences may not be specified. For example, in the case of a child under the age of reason, the "explicit renunciation of evil" is pronounced by parents and godparents.

symbolize being enlightened by Christ who is the light of the world; touching the ears and mouth during the "*Ephphetha*" prayer[72] asking for the grace to hear and proclaim the word of God; the prayer of the Our Father; and the conclusion with a solemn blessing.

65. Not all of these elements are of equal importance; profession of faith and baptism with water in the trinitarian formula enjoy pride of place. When the newly baptized is an adult, the conferral of the sacrament of confirmation and the reception of the Eucharist also form essential parts of the celebration. This reflects the Catholic understanding of baptism as only one of the three "sacraments of initiation," along with confirmation and the Eucharist. The godparents, with the aid of the entire Christian community, accompany the newly baptized on the path of discipleship. In the baptism of an infant, the role of the parents and godparents has the importance of helping the child personally, under the influence of the grace of the Holy Spirit, to reject evil, confess faith in Christ, and commit him- or herself to a life of active Christian discipleship in the Church. In the Latin rite of the Catholic Church, the postponement of reception of the Eucharist and of confirmation serves the function of acknowledging the gradual appropriation of the faith and of the effects of Christian initiation begun with baptism as an infant. Every Sunday Catholics renew their profession of faith with the recitation of the Creed and every year during the celebration of Easter, they liturgically renew their baptismal faith commitment.

66. The explanation of the Lutheran rite of baptism points out that Luther himself preserved various elements of the celebration of baptism inherited from the tradition. Distinctive modifications included removing some details, such as the blessing of the font, and over time, the addition of Luther's *Flood Prayer*. This prayer related baptism to the cleansing of the world in the flood at the time of Noah and to the deliverance of the people of Israel from slavery by means of the exodus through the Red Sea. The vows spoken by the godparents and the reading of Mark 10:13-16 (where Jesus tells the disciples to let the little children come to him) clearly witnessed to the Lutheran acceptance of infant baptism. The essential elements of Lutheran baptismal liturgies were and continue to be: a prayer modeled on Luther's *Flood Prayer;* a reading from the Gospels (usually Mark 10 and/or Matthew 28); the Lord's Prayer; the renunciation of the devil and/or evil; an emphasis on the forgiveness of sin; the Creed (often in question-and-answer form); the vows of parents and/or godparents; the

72. The following words constitute the "Ephphetha" prayer (also known as *the Prayer Over Ears and Mouth*): "The Lord Jesus made the deaf hear and the mute speak. May He soon touch your ears to receive his word, and your mouth, to proclaim his faith, to the praise and glory of God the Father. Amen."

use of water; and the triune name. These elements show the Lutheran conviction that by baptism the baptized person is introduced into the body of Christ, while the local parish in which baptism takes place is called to support and strengthen the baptized in their lives of faith. Lutherans especially emphasize the agency of God in the celebration of baptism. It is not the water which saves but the Word of God which, when in addition to the water, creates the sacrament.[73] Faith is the trusting response to God's promise to save. Thus Luther can write: "[it] is not baptism that justifies or benefits anyone, but it is faith in the word of promise to which baptism is added. This faith justifies, and fulfills that which baptism signifies. For faith is the submersion of the old man and the emerging of the new (Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9-10)."[74]

67. Mennonite members of the dialogue noted that there are common themes but no single form of baptism in their tradition. A variety of models and liturgical elements of baptism can be found, but a common element to all of them is the exclusive practice of "believers' baptism." A baptismal service might be preceded by a believer's request to be baptized or upon the pastor's announcement of a baptismal service, after which baptismal classes are arranged, during which instruction in the faith is provided by the congregation. The names of those requesting baptism are made known to the whole congregation or to the church council, providing an opportunity for church members to approve the desire of the candidate or ask the person to postpone baptism for the time being. A recent Mennonite minister's manual points out that

> The request for baptism must arise out of a personal confession of sin, the experience of grace and forgiveness (which sometimes comes in a crisis event and sometimes gradually) and a commitment to Jesus Christ and the congregation. It is of utmost importance that the nature of God's initiative and our response be made clear to baptismal candidates.[75]

Prior to baptism, the individual candidate composes and presents to the congregation or church council a personal profession of faith, including elements such as the repentance of sin, a confession of faith in Christ, and a commitment to follow him as a responsible member of the baptizing congregation. The congregation is seen as the manifestation of the Church universal, the body of Christ. The worship service in which a candidate is baptized is celebrated by the whole congregation and

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73. In Luther's *Large Catechism*, concerning baptism, as printed in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 458, and quoting Augustine, *Tractate 80* on John 15:3.

74. *Luther's Works*, 36:66.

75. *Minister's Manual. Mennonite Church USA/Canada*, ed. John D. Rempel, (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1998), 40.

includes readings from the Bible, typical readings being Matthew 28 (the great commission), Romans 6 (being buried and resurrected with Christ), 1 Peter 3 (the response of a good conscience toward God), or 2 Corinthians 5 (being a new creation, reconciled with God and with one another). The proclamation of the Word is followed by a sermon expounding the meaning of baptism. The person is baptized with water, usually by the pastor or by another member of the congregation mandated for this role, who pronounces the trinitarian formula "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." A blessing, often with the laying on of hands, the presentation of a verse from the Bible and a baptismal certificate and the response of the congregation, usually including the praying of the "Our Father," concludes the celebration. Sometimes the service continues with the celebration of the Lord's Supper, as a welcoming and incorporating act of the new members into the table-fellowship.

68. All three churches agree that baptism cannot be repeated. Catholics consider baptism, together with confirmation and ordination, as a sacrament which imparts a permanent "character" on its recipient. However, in Catholic teaching there is a provision for when there is reasonable doubt about the validity of a particular baptism, a person may be baptized "conditionally." For Catholics, it is Christ who baptizes (see CCC 1127); a human being cannot nullify the action of Christ by "re-baptizing" another. Thus, from a theological perspective, re-baptism has no reality but stands in opposition to the action of Christ. For Lutherans, to "re-baptize" would amount to distrust in God's promise that he has accepted the baptized into communion with him which would make God a liar and not trustworthy. This dialogue has helped Mennonites understand the profound reality that is a stake for Catholics and Lutherans when Mennonites and other credo-baptists baptize someone already baptized by the other churches. From their own vantage point Mennonites also see baptism as a definitive step of handing over one's life to God, a definitive response to God's grace which is therefore not to be repeated. If a Mennonite congregation does administer baptism to those who wish to join their community but who had received baptism as infants in another community, they do not consider it to be a "re-baptism," since they understand baptism as being possible only on the personal profession of faith.[76]

Sacrament and/or Ordinance

69. The question of the non-repeatability of baptism provides occasion to address the fact that, for all three communities, it is correct to say that

76. On this practice, *Healing Memories*, 86, noted that "…member congregations in the Mennonite World Conference are not all of one mind regarding the baptism of new members who were previously baptized as infants in other traditions."

"something happens" in the celebration of the rite of baptism. Lutherans, Mennonites, and Catholics agree that there are three actors engaged in the liturgy of baptism—God, the individual, and the community—and that the action of God has priority in the celebration. At the same time, different nuances can be detected in how each church understands what happens. Lutherans stress the efficacy of baptism as based upon God's promise, given through the sacrament. They write: "Baptism is essentially an act of God performed through human actions and words. [. . .] '[It] is not a work that we offer to God, but one in which God, through a minister who functions in his place, baptizes us, and offers and presents the forgiveness of sins according to the promise [Mark 16:16], "The one who believes and is baptized will be saved".'"[77] For their part, Mennonites have stated that "baptism is understood not only as a sign that points beyond the baptismal ritual to its historic and spiritual significance, but that in and through baptism the individual and the community of faith undergo effectual change." Concerning this change, they add: "While there is the recognition in Mennonite theology and in Mennonite confessions that 'something happens' in the very act of baptism, baptismal transformation in and through the ritual is conceivable only if and when it is verified in the faith and life of the individual undergoing baptism and of the baptizing community."[78] Catholics understand baptism, along with the other sacraments as actions of Christ himself:

> By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes (see Augustine, *In Ioannem* VI,1,7). [. . .] In the liturgy, the sanctification of the man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs; in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members.[79]

All three thus emphasize the activity of God in speaking of what might be called the "objective" occurrence which takes place in baptism, though Mennonites explicitly mention that the verification of this occurrence is to be sought in the evidence which can be seen in the faith and life of the baptized.

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77. *Healing Memories*, 87, quoting from Melanchthon's *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Art. XXIV, 18.

78. *Called to be Peacemakers*, § 123.

79. *Sacrosanctum concilium*, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Dec. 4, 1963, § 7; text available at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

70. A further paragraph from *Called to be Peacemakers* provides a succinct description of the convergence and the divergence between the Mennonite and Catholic understandings of the efficacy of baptism:

> Both Mennonites and Catholics view sacraments and ordinances as outward signs instituted by Christ, but we have differing understandings of the power of signs. For Mennonites, ordinances as signs point to the salvific work of Christ and invite participation in the life of Christ. For Catholics, in addition to participating in the life of Christ, signs also communicate to those who receive them, the grace proper to each sacrament.[80]

Here one notices three verbs used to describe what happens in "sacraments or ordinances" which are signs instituted by Christ: they "point to" Christ's salvific work, they "invite" participation in the life of Christ, and they "communicate" grace.[81]

71. The appearance of the words "sacrament" and "ordinance" in the previous quotation invites the following common reflections. While over time some have claimed that these two terms suggest two different conceptions of the special rites of the church, in our discussions it has become clear that significant points of agreement are in no way weakened by the fact that Mennonites commonly refer to baptism as an ordinance, while Lutherans and Catholics speak of it as a sacrament. We fully agree that baptism was instituted by Christ and that we celebrate it in obedience to his command. We further agree that something significant occurs during its celebration, although we understand that occurrence in different ways. Mennonites stress that baptism expresses the change which occurs in the person who has come to repentance, while Lutherans and Catholics stress the instrumental nature of the sacrament in that it achieves what the outward sign symbolizes. While this difference is important and should not be overlooked, nevertheless all three communities agree that a tremendous change in life occurs when, in baptism, the person baptized becomes a member of the church which is the body of Christ. We all acknowledge that grace is truly present, strengthened, and brought to greater completion in baptism.[82]

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80. *Called to be Peacemakers*, § 135.

81. This quote suggests that Catholics but not Mennonites accept the third verb: "communicate." Our discussions suggest that some within the Mennonite family could accept the notion that baptism communicates grace. Meanwhile, it would seem that Catholics and Lutherans share the same viewpoint on this issue.

82. On this issue, the Faith and Order study text, *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition*, § 30, states: "Most traditions, whether they use the term 'sacrament' or 'ordinance,' affirm that these events are both *instrumental* (in that God uses them to bring about a new reality) and *expressive* (of an already existing reality). Some traditions emphasize the instrumental dimension. . . . Others emphasize the expressive dimension." *One Baptism: Towards Mutual*

Baptism and Faith

72. All three churches agree that baptism and faith are intimately and inseparably related. Jesus' final message to the apostles in the Gospel of Mark—"he who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mk. 16:16)—link the two together and indicate that together they impart the gift of salvation. The faith of the individual believer is necessary for the reception of this gift of salvation and leads to a life of committed Christian discipleship, following the way that Jesus outlines in the gospel.

73. Nevertheless, perhaps the most obvious contrast between our communities concerning baptism is the way in which we conceive the relation of baptism to faith and the consequence that this has for determining who may be baptized. The first theme listed in the Mennonite understanding of baptism from their dialogue with Lutherans reads as follows: "Proclamation of the gospel, repentance, confession of faith in Jesus Christ, and a public commitment to a life of discipleship must precede water baptism."[83] They conclude that, since small children do not sin and are not yet capable of that ability to understand which would allow them to profess an "owned faith," they should not be baptized. In their view, no child is lost; they are saved without baptism. In the *Brotherly Union of Schleitheim* of 1527, the Anabaptist forebears of today's Mennonites called infant baptism an "abomination." At roughly the same time, Article IX of the Lutheran *Augsburg Confession* countered the Anabaptist view by stating that, since the grace of God is bestowed in baptism, baptism is necessary for salvation; therefore, children should be baptized.[84] "Infants can and should be baptized since the Great Commission sends Christians to 'all' people and Jesus' blessing of the children includes the statement that children can participate in the kingdom of Heaven (Mark 10:13-16)."[85] The Catholic view is similar to that of the Lutherans:

> Born with a fallen human nature and tainted by original sin, children also have need of the new birth in Baptism to be freed from the power of darkness and brought into the realm of the freedom of the children

Recognition, Faith and Order Paper 210 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2011); text available at https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.217 [accessed Dec. 1, 2018]; Something similar is found in *Ecclesiological and Ecumenical Implications of a Common Baptism*, the report of the Joint Working Group of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, § 24: "Most would affirm of ordinances / sacraments both that they are expressive of divine realities, representing that which is already true, and also that they are instrumental in that God uses them to bring about a new reality. The two approaches represent different starting points in considering the interdependence of faith as an ongoing process and faith as a decisive event."

83. *Healing Memories*, 85.

84. These two documents are quoted in *Healing Memories*, 84-85.

85. *Healing Memories*, 88.

> of God to which all men are called. […] The Church and the parents would deny a child the priceless grace of becoming a child of God were they not to confer Baptism shortly after birth.[86]

This careful wording avoids drawing the conclusion that unbaptized children cannot be saved.

74. For Lutherans and Catholics, this does not mean that baptism is unrelated to faith.

> Luther's strong emphasis on what God does in baptism does not mean that faith is not also important. [. . .] faith itself is indispensable for baptism. "Faith alone makes the person worthy to receive the saving, divine water profitably. Because such blessings are offered and promised in the words that accompany the water, they cannot be received unless we believe them from the heart. Without faith baptism is of no use, although in itself it is an infinite, divine treasure."[87]

Regarding infants, Jesus' statement that only those who receive it as little children inherit the kingdom of God (Mark 10:15),

> [S]hows that infants can have faith, that is, experience God's assurance (trust). When infants are baptized, they are not baptized simply with reference to the faith of parents and godparents. Instead, parents and godparents pray to God to give and nurture the faith of the newly baptized. This faith must grow as they grow; it will need proclamation of the gospel, catechesis, and Christian life in community.[88]

For their part, Catholics affirm that, "Baptism is the sacrament of faith, but faith needs the community of believers. It is only within the faith of the Church that each of the faithful can believe. The faith required for baptism is not a perfect and mature faith, but a beginning that is called to develop."[89] Baptism is the beginning of a new life in which the faith of

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86. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 1250. In 1547, the Catholic bishops at the Council of Trent rejected the opinion that one should not be baptized before reaching the age of discernment and being capable of a personal act of faith; Heinrich Denzinger (ed.), *Enchiridion symbolorum*, ed. Adolf Schönmetzer (Freiburg in Breisgau: Herder, 1967) § 1626.

87. *Healing Memories*, 87; the words within quotation marks are from the *Large Catechism*, "Baptism," 29, Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 460.

88. *Healing Memories*, 88. This verse provides a good example, pertinent to the theme of our report, about how a particular Scriptural passage may lead to different and even conflicting interpretations. Mark 10:15—"whoever will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it"—especially when linked to the previous verse Mark 10:14—"let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these"—while for Lutherans encourage the baptism of infants, for Mennonites provide clear evidence that they do not need to be baptized.

89. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 1253. See also *Called to be Peacemakers*, § 115.

each believer, whether baptized as an infant, child or adult, must grow, with the assistance of the whole community. As noted above, the fact that development after baptism is needed may be seen as the reason for delaying the other sacraments of initiation—confirmation and Eucharist—until one is old enough to embrace the further maturing of ecclesial membership which those sacraments make possible. Of course, the religious upbringing of children is very important to Mennonites and a significant portion of the membership of their churches is comprised of those who were raised in Mennonite families. The conviction which distinguishes their baptismal theology from that of Lutherans and Catholics on this question has been perhaps most succinctly described as follows: "In the Mennonite churches, the practice of making a profession of faith on behalf of a person being baptized who does not at the moment of baptism realize the basic meaning and implications of his or her baptism, is not acceptable."[90]

75. These differences need to be understood within the context of the fact that all three of our communities are convinced that the faith of the individual is a sharing in the faith of the whole Church. All acknowledge that the faith which is shared at the moment of baptism must be nurtured and matured with the help of the community through catechesis, Bible study, fraternal correction and encouragement. All hold that the ecclesial communion of the Body of Christ into which one is incorporated at baptism provides the principal environment for lifelong growth, nourished by the proclamation of and reflection upon the Word of God, by the celebration of the Lord's Supper / Eucharist and other rites or sacraments, by the pastoral care provided within the community, and by the ongoing engagement of believers in the activities of worship, witness, and service. The faith of the Church and of each individual believer impels those who are baptized to participate in Christ's mission in and for the salvation of humankind. To these commonly held convictions about the relation of the faith of the individual to the faith of the community as a whole must be added our confidence that those who, through no fault of their own, remain unbaptized are not to be considered as excluded from the inscrutable ways of the loving mercy of God (see Rom. 11:33), who desires all to be saved (see 1 Tim. 2:4). Together these shared views place our inherited differences concerning the relation between baptism and faith into a new framework. They invite reflection about the relation between baptism and membership in the community of the Church, which is the theme of the next section of this chapter.

90. *Called to be Peacemakers*, § 137.

Baptism and Community

76. For all of our churches, baptism is intimately related to entering the Christian community and, therefore, also to our understanding of the Church. The Mennonite summary of basic convictions about baptism in *Healing Memories* includes the following ecclesiological affirmations:

> Baptism marks the incorporation of the believer into the Church of Christ through integration into a local church (i.e., a congregation). Even though the faith of the believer cannot ultimately be judged by another person, the congregation must affirm the request of a person who desires to be baptized by discerning signs of conversion, faith, and commitment to a life in discipleship. Baptism upon confession of faith allows baptism to be voluntary instead of involuntary; it safeguards the freedom of the individual conscience.[91]

Such an understanding of baptism emphasizes the nature of the Church as a voluntary community. It reflects the way that baptism is often presented in the Acts of the Apostles, in such passages, for example, as the baptism of the three thousand on Pentecost (Acts 2:37-41) or of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-38). This attention to the freedom of requesting baptism and of entering the Church of Christ is not intended to obscure the primacy of the divine activity in the work of salvation. When the individual is mature enough to understand her need for repentance and is moved to profess faith in Jesus and commit herself to a life of discipleship, it is always the grace of God that makes such actions by the individual possible. Lutherans and Catholics, while not denying the importance of a personal confession of faith which is freely embraced, nevertheless express their understanding of the relation of baptism to the Church in ways that emphasize the fact that the newly baptized belongs to the communion which is the Church: "Baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit leads us into communion with the triune God and into sharing in his blessings and thus also knits believers together into a communion."[92] One of the principal obligations and responsibilities of

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91. *Healing Memories*, 86. It is important to add here that the apparent identification of the "local church" with "a congregation" in this passage presenting the Mennonite vision of baptism should not be understood as if the strong emphasis upon the congregation within Mennonite thought and structure does not allow them to see baptism as entrance into that larger reality which Scripture speaks of as the Body of Christ. Furthermore, for other Christians "local church" may have a meaning other than that of a congregation. For example, within the Catholic Church, the "local church" is most often correlated with what its canon law calls a "particular church," which is a diocese under the guidance of a bishop.

92. *Church and Justification*, Lutheran-Roman Catholic International Dialogue, (1993), § 68. Text in Jeffrey Gros FSC, Harding Meyer, William G. Rusch (eds), *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations at World Level 1982-1998*, Faith and Order Paper 187 (Geneva: WCC Publications/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 484–565; text available at https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.194/page/484 [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

the members of the community is to offer formation in Christian life and teaching, not only to its younger or more recent members, but in a way that continues throughout life. Furthermore, Catholic teaching has applied this relation between baptism and communion in Christ to the recognition of a degree of unity already existing between members of our currently divided Christian communities: "Baptism, therefore, constitutes a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been reborn by means of it."[93]

77. These passages place emphasis upon the fact that baptism establishes a relationship of communion with the Triune God and with all those who make up the Christian community, which would include the entire communion of saints that is mentioned in the Apostles' Creed. All three traditions understand the Church as the people of God, the body of Christ and the temple or community of the Holy Spirit. The Lutheran-Catholic statement *Church and Justification* formulates this trinitarian identity of the church precisely in relation to baptism:

> Baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Mt. 28:19) leads us into communion with the triune God and into sharing in his blessings and thus also knits believers together into a communion. Baptism is calling and election by God and makes us God's possession: thus also creating the community of those who are called and chosen, "God's own people" (1 Pet. 2:9). In baptism we are baptized into Christ's body, partaking of his death and resurrection, and putting on Christ: consequently the baptized also constitute "one body . . . one with another" (Rom. 12:4f.) and are one communion in which creaturely and social divisions no longer count for anything (see Gal. 3:26-28). The baptized receive the Holy Spirit: they are thus also bound together into one communion "in the one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:21f; Eph. 4:3f.).[94]

Mennonites expressed their understanding of the ecclesial dimension of baptism in the report *Called to be Peacemakers*:

> The baptismal commitment to faith and faithfulness is not an individualistic action, as baptism and church membership are inseparable. The person is "baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13), the body of Christ, the church. The baptismal candidate's affirmation of faith is an affirmation of the faith of the church, and an affirmation made in the context of the community of believers to which the baptized person is joined as a responsible member. The new church member declares a willingness to give and receive care and counsel

93. Unitatis redintegratio, § 22.

94. *Church and Justification*, § 68.

> and to participate in the church's life and mission. The individual relates to the trinitarian God in a deeply personal way, and also together in and with the community of believers where grace is experienced and faith is affirmed in and with the people of God.[95]

Thus, all three churches relate baptism to the Church: it is a public witness to the faith of the Church and the occasion for the incorporation of new believers into Christ and into the Church. The fundamental difference seems to be succinctly expressed in the Mennonite insistence that "church membership entails a free and voluntary act."[96] Lutherans and Catholics do not deny the need for personal response and commitment on the part of the baptized but, in light of their conviction that the church is a communion, they believe that such response and commitment may, in the case of infants, be subsequent to the moment of baptism and be an effect of the grace of that sacrament.

78. There are many other aspects of the overall ecclesiology of each of our churches. Our current trilateral conversation has focused on baptism and, therefore, it has considered only the question of the relation of baptism to the specific ecclesiological issue of entrance into the body of Christ, the Church. We all agree both that those who are baptized are called to committed participation in the life of the Church and that the faith of the individual is formed and matured within the Church as a communion of believers. The special concern of Mennonites to committed participation prompts them to admit to baptism only those who have devoted themselves to repentance and who have made a public profession of faith. The concern of Lutherans and Catholics about the primacy of God's grace and the call to a lifelong response and participation in the life of the Christian community has prompted them to affirm not only the possibility but the appropriateness of baptizing infants. Might not Lutherans and Catholics acknowledge the decision of parents to foster a mature faith in their children prior to the request for baptism that has determined Mennonite practice as an authentic approach to Christian initiation? Might not Mennonites acknowledge that, given an assurance of familial and congregational commitment to provide formation in faith and discipleship, the choice of parents to request baptism for their young children, as practiced by Lutherans and Catholics, is an authentic approach to Christian initiation? Can we acknowledge that the different concerns do not contradict each other, and are grounded in basic aspects of the gospel? By the term "authentic approach," we mean that it is based

95. *Called to be Peacemakers*, § 122.

96. *Called to be Peacemakers*, § 90.

on mutually recognizable biblical concepts of grace, faith, and church as they have been interpreted by each of the three communions.

Tension Between Our Theology and Our Praxis

79. All three of our churches see repentance, faith, and committed discipleship as necessarily related to Christian life within the body of Christ, the Church, which has as one of its essential starting points the celebration and reception of baptism. In this sense, some Catholic theologians have commented that their church's *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults*[97] can be considered as the "normative" expression of initiation, since, even though most Catholics are baptized as infants, it is the form that fully expresses the meaning of baptism. The baptized, under the irreplaceable assistance of the grace of the Holy Spirit, are meant freely to convert from sin, have faith in Jesus Christ, and embrace full, conscious, and faithful participation in the life of the Christian community.

80. This fact accounts for the cogency of the Mennonite practice of baptizing only those capable of making a personal profession of faith. A possible question about this practice, however, is whether it sufficiently coheres with what the New Testament seems to teach about the relation between baptism and salvation. While it is true that God's saving action is not limited to ecclesial means, the benefits which Scripture associates with baptism make it seem to Lutherans and Catholics not only reasonable but even incumbent upon Christian parents to want to see that such benefits are shared with their children. Moreover, the practice of baptizing only those who make a prior confession of faith leads at least some Mennonites to question whether the baptism which a vast number of Christians have received as infants is authentic. Mennonites would acknowledge that many of those baptized as infants, over the course of their lives, have in fact repented, professed faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, committed themselves to a life of discipleship within the Church, and shared in the mission of evangelization and service in the world. Nor would they deny that many who have been baptized as infants have professed their faith even to the point of martyrdom, a witness which Mennonites particularly value, in light of the historic persecutions that

97. The *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA*), or *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adultorum (OICA),* was promulgated in 1972 as part of the *Rituale Romanum* post Vatican II. It has subsequently been developed as a process for prospective catechumens who are above the age of infant baptism. Up until 1969, there was a single baptismal rite for all, in which the priest spoke to the baby as if to an adult and the godparents replied on the child's behalf. Vatican II sought to address this in *Sacrosanctum concilium:* "The rite for the baptism of infants is to be revised, and it should be adapted to the circumstance that those to be baptized are, in fact, infants." § 67. The Vatican published a rite for the baptism of infants in 1969. However, history clearly shows that it is the rite for adults that is the model of the baptismal process. The rite for children is simply a pastoral adaptation of the rite for adults.

have been a tragic, yet noble, part of their history. If one follows the logic of the Mennonite practice of baptism, the "baptism" of these Christians was not truly baptism. The recognition of true faith and discipleship among those baptized as infants has led many Mennonite congregations not to "re-baptize" individuals who wish to join their community but who were baptized as infants in another community. Finally, Mennonite churches have not been immune to the major difficulty which faces Lutherans and Catholics on this matter. It is the breaking of the link between baptism and committed Christian living—that those who have been baptized no longer practice the faith.

81. Both Catholics and Lutherans see baptism as a sacrament by means of which God's powerful grace washes the recipient of sin, inaugurates new life, and incorporates him or her into the communion which is the Church. It calls forth a serious, committed response of repentance, faith, and lifelong discipleship, which is made possible under the powerful action of the Holy Spirit. When an infant is baptized, the parents, godparents, and congregation are expected to fulfill the important role of formation so that such a commitment can be personally made as the child grows. How then can one explain the fact that so many individuals baptized as infants do not seem to have made such a committed response? Part of the reason for this lack of response is that, when baptism is requested for an infant, the pastor takes the request as a sign of willingness to raise the child as a Christian and is perhaps not sufficiently attentive to whether there is credible evidence that this will take place. The sincerity of those making the request is presumed and hope is placed in the Holy Spirit's power to assist the whole community, not only the family, so that the church's proclamation of the Word and its pastoral ministry may fulfill its duty of Christian formation. Lutherans and Catholics do not condone infant baptism where there is no reasonable hope of subsequent formation. Pastors need to act upon this challenge with greater consistency, which can require much courage; there should be no "indiscriminate baptism." In some parts of the world, baptism of infants is part of the cultural tradition. This can be a beneficial situation if the culture tends to support the further Christian formation of its members. If, on the other hand, the culture does not foster Christian values and the baptism of an infant is no more than a familial celebration without any intention of leading to a life of faithful discipleship within the Christian community, it would be better that baptism be postponed.[98] Great pastoral

98. See, for example, the words of the Catholic document *Pastoralis actio* of Oct. 20, 1980: "Assurances must be given that the gift thus granted [of the blessings of God's prevenient love which frees from original sin and communicates a share in divine life] can grow by an authentic education in the faith and Christian life, in order to fulfill the true meaning of the sacrament. […] But if these assurances are not really serious there can be grounds for

care and discernment must be exercised when children are brought forth for baptism.

82. There was substantial agreement between our three communities that strengthening the link between baptism and committed Christian living presents a significant challenge for Christian families today. There are two aspects to this challenge. The first is the challenge of continuing trends in society towards materialism and consumerism, which make living a committed Christian life increasingly counter-cultural and difficult for the newly baptized. The second is the challenge that many church formation programs for young people and adults are ineffective in forming active and committed Christian disciples. Consequently, there was agreement that struggling to overcome the tension between theology and praxis will require, in part, a renewal of Christian faith formation for children, youth, and adults that includes a proper discernment of the signs of the times. This is no easy task, but nevertheless understood to be essential for our three communities.

83. During the sixteenth century, Mennonites unequivocally rejected the practice of infant baptism, while Lutherans and Catholics unequivocally affirmed its necessity. Given the significant convergences reflected in this chapter concerning the place of baptism within the lifelong process of being a Christian, the principal elements in the celebration of baptism and the relation of baptism to faith and to membership in the church, it seems justified to claim a rather substantial agreement between our three communities about many of the aspects of the theology of baptism. In light of this, our communities may wish to review the opposing positions regarding its celebration which were at the root of their divisions concerning baptism. Ecumenical dialogue can, on occasion, produce the unexpected fruit of revealing that seemingly contradictory positions—such as those concerning whether or not infants may or should be baptized—actually turn out to be different but compatible ways of looking at the same reality. It is our hope that this report may assist our communities in discerning whether our differences in the practice of baptism could be an acceptable diversity that does not, in and of itself, constitute an insuperable obstacle to greater unity among us.

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delaying the sacrament; and if they are certainly non-existent the sacrament should even be refused." This text can be found in Denzinger/Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion symbolorum*, §4672.

CHAPTER THREE
LIVING OUT BAPTISM IN DISCIPLESHIP

84. The first chapter of this report presented how each of our three communities understands the relation between baptism and sin, highlighting common perspectives and differing emphases. It concluded with reflections concerning Paul's teaching about sin in Romans 5. It concerns the necessary initiative of the Holy Spirit in bestowing reconciling grace for overcoming sin and bringing about conversion, the communication of grace in baptism, and the recurrent need for forgiveness even after baptism. Chapter Two considered various aspects of the celebration of baptism: how it needs to be seen as an important moment in the lifelong process of being and becoming a Christian, how each of our churches celebrates the rite of baptism, how baptism relates to the faith of the individual and of the community, how baptism relates to membership in the church, and how tensions appear between our theology and practice of baptism. Differences among us were not overlooked, but commonly held convictions concerning these issues provided better mutual understanding and a more adequate framework for reflecting on a fundamental disagreement between us, that is, differing convictions about whether a personal profession of faith by the one to be baptized is or is not a precondition for the celebration of baptism. At the outset of this third chapter an important and substantial agreement can be recognized. In contrast with the earlier chapters where some differences still seem rather difficult to reconcile, all three of our communions wholeheartedly agree that baptism is intended not as an isolated, self-enclosed event, but as an important moment that is to be lived out throughout the course of one's life. It is intended by God to enable and to unfold into a life of discipleship.

85. The New Testament provides a wealth of teaching concerning the new way of life made possible by Christ through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Several passages explicitly relate baptism to a sharing in Christ's death and resurrection leading to forgiveness and freedom from slavery to sin and the regeneration to a new life of righteousness. "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into his death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:3-4). Paul goes on to write: "So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 6:11). The relation between baptism, Christ's death and resurrection, and the new life of the baptized finds expression in other places in the Pauline corpus. "You were buried with him [Christ] in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead

in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him. . ." (Col. 2:12-13). To the Galatians, Paul writes: "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ Jesus have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27). The First Letter of Peter gives the following comment on the fact that in Noah's ark a few were saved through water: "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3:20-21). All of these passages explicitly emphasize that baptism is to be followed by a transformation in life of the person who is baptized.

86. This transformation is also described in many verses that do not explicitly refer to baptism. Several passages speak of this change as a "new birth" or a "new creation": "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). "You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23). "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:17-18). The new life is life in the Spirit, who transforms one into a child of God: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom. 8:14-17; see Gal. 3:26). The Letter to the Ephesians expresses the way of life of God's children with the language of "imitation" and of "walking": "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:1-2). "For once you were in darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord" (Eph. 5: 8-10). The Letter to the Philippians urges its readers "let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ" (1:27) and exhorts them to have the mind of Christ (see 2:5). Indeed, Paul states: "For me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21).

87. Another very important New Testament passage about baptism contains the words of Jesus as he takes leave of the eleven disciples at the close of the Gospel of Matthew. These words were to have a decisive influence on the form in which baptism is celebrated by all three of our churches: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go

therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Mt. 28:18-20). Here baptism is linked explicitly with discipleship, which refers to following Jesus as many did who came to believe in him during his earthly ministry. Such imitation of Christ is conveyed in a New Testament writing which is particularly devoted to describing the meaning of Baptism: ". . . Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). Believers seek to live out their baptism by obeying the will of the Father as conveyed in the message and life of Jesus. The apostle Paul states that no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit (see 1 Cor. 12:3); it follows that every believer is a disciple. The faith of believers needs to mature (see Eph. 4:12-13, which speaks of maturation and attaining unity of faith, or Lk. 17:5, where the apostles ask the Lord to increase their faith). The disciple has a personal relation to Christ, is a follower of Jesus, and like Jesus seeks to do the Father's will. This union finds a powerful expression in John's gospel: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, and you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:4-5).

88. All of these positive statements about baptism, transformation of life, and discipleship should not be allowed to obscure the New Testament message of the need to continually struggle against sin. Notwithstanding his glowing descriptions of the new life that occurs for the believer, Paul, looking back over his own shortcomings, is keenly aware of the need to rely continually on the power of grace for ongoing conversion.

> I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. […] For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom. 7:15; 22-25).

In another place we read, "For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want" (Gal. 5:17).

89. The biblical witness presented in the previous paragraphs provides a basis for much agreement among us regarding the fact that every baptized person needs to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ as the way

of living out his or her baptism. But this only takes place together with the other members of the Christian community and, moreover, impels disciples to witness their faith to the wider world outside the visible borders of the church. Thus Catholics, Lutherans, and Mennonites can fully agree that the lifelong living out of the gift of faith which is celebrated in baptism has not only personal but also ecclesial and public dimensions. These dimensions are interwoven in such a way that they cannot be completely separated. For clarity of presentation, they will provide a structure for the following paragraphs, because the personal, ecclesial, and public dimensions of discipleship are so interrelated. Thus, some degree of repetition in what follows is unavoidable.

Personal Dimension of Living out Baptism in Christian Discipleship

90. We hold much in common concerning the personal aspect of discipleship. It entails the joy and gratitude for the gift of saving grace and communion with God received in Baptism (see Phil. 4:4—"Rejoice in the Lord always"). The regeneration under power of the Holy Spirit can and hopefully will mature over the course of life. Believers in our churches have opportunities to recall their baptism and to renew their baptismal commitment on various occasions. Discipleship entails a spirituality that grounds the believer's conduct and interaction with others in the light of teachings based on the Scripture and their ecclesial tradition. It involves a lifelong process of repentance, conversion, and transformation. Alongside these shared convictions, the following paragraphs intend to shine light on some of the distinctive emphases of each of our traditions with regard to the personal dimension of living out one's baptism.

91. Catholics consider it misleading to separate the personal lives of those who have been baptized from their ecclesial community and to their vocation to witness to Christian faith in everyday life. One can nevertheless indicate, from a Catholic perspective, several aspects of discipleship which pertain in a special way to the individual. Baptism is the beginning and basis of a person's entire Christian life. It is the gateway to life in the Spirit, incorporation into the Church, the doorway opening access to the other sacraments, and the call to share in the mission of the Christian community in the world. The Catholic emphasis upon the sacraments is particularly strong. Baptism is grouped together with confirmation and Eucharist as the three "sacraments of initiation." A person would hardly be understood as living out their baptism while refraining from receiving those other sacraments. In recognition that discipleship requires continual efforts of repentance and conversion, Catholics believe that two additional sacraments find their roots and ultimate institution in the healing ministry of Jesus—the sacraments of reconciliation (or confession) and of anointing of the sick. In the course of

life, a Christian needs healing and these sacraments were given by the Lord, whose ministry was characterized by forgiving the sinner and healing the sick. Furthermore, the important roles of pastoring and of faithful and fruitful married love are understood as being blessed and aided sacramentally through the sacraments of ordination and marriage. For a Catholic, one lives out discipleship by preparing oneself, with the help of God's grace, to receive the sacraments in such a way that one is open to be transformed by their divinely promised effectiveness. Sacraments are precious means that Christ has entrusted to the Church to assist her members in living out their baptism. In addition to the sacraments, initial and ongoing formation is of great importance. For those who are capable, some of this formation precedes baptism, but for all—including those baptized as adults—formation in faith is a lifelong endeavor. This formation can take various forms: weekly participation in the liturgy where the Scripture is proclaimed and preached and the Eucharist celebrated, catechesis, Bible study or seminars, conferences, parish missions, days of recollection, prayer groups, and pilgrimages to shrines honoring Christ or the saints, to name only some of its principal forms. Sanctity is woven into how Catholics view discipleship. Vatican II devoted one of the eight chapters of its Constitution on the Church (*Lumen gentium*, Chapter Five) to the "universal call to holiness." Furthermore, the attention given to the "theology of the laity" by theologians and bishops in recent decades pointed out that, by initiating a person into Christian life—the very word "Christ" meaning "one who is anointed"—baptism associated the baptized person with the *tria munera* or threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. Living out baptism means, therefore, witnessing to the word of God (prophet), offering one's life as a spiritual sacrifice (priest), and promoting in society the reign of God (king). All of these functions point to another dimension of discipleship: the mission of evangelization. Of course, baptism is of decisive importance for the individual who receives it. But one who is concerned only with saving one's own soul has not yet understood or fully benefited from the grace of baptism. Mission is directed both internally to the Christian community—building up the body of Christ, the Church—and externally—at times seeking to remedy the social ills that plague humanity and at other times sharing explicitly the joy of the gospel and inviting others to faith in Jesus Christ.

92. The opening article of *The Schleitheim Confession* of 1527 is one of the earliest Anabaptist explanations of how that tradition viewed baptism.

> Baptism shall be given to all those who have learned repentance and amendment of life, and who believe truly that their sins are taken away by Christ, and to all those who walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and wish to be buried with Him in death, so that they may be

> resurrected with Him and to all those who with this significance request it (baptism) of us and demand it for themselves.[99]

This walking in newness of life becomes visible not only in individual terms but also in relation to the brothers and sisters of the believing community. God's grace aims at and effects a "new creation" to which baptism witnesses. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the baptized commit themselves to lead a life that corresponds to this new reality, made possible by the Christ event. It is not that, in baptism, one becomes wholly Christ-like, but that one truly hands oneself over to Christ and surrenders to live according to His Word, will, and rule. Mennonites often refer to Jesus' interpretation of God's commandments in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7 and Luke 6) in order to explain in practical terms, what a life participating in that new reality of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God might entail. Discipleship is understood as learning from and walking in the way of Christ.

93. The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* puts it this way:

> Baptism is done in obedience to Jesus' command and as a public commitment to identify with Jesus Christ, not only in his baptism by water, but in his life in the Spirit and in his death in suffering love. […] Those who accept water baptism commit themselves to follow Jesus in giving their lives for others, in loving their enemies, and in renouncing violence, even when it means their own suffering or death. […] who commit themselves to follow Christ in obedience as members of his body, both giving and receiving care and counsel in the church.[100]

The goal of post-baptismal discipleship, rooted in ethical and doctrinal teaching, is for believers to take the call of Christ so seriously that they would be willing to face torture and death. Given their strong emphasis on discipleship and sanctification, Mennonites seek to offer preparation for baptism so that it provides instruction in the gift of salvation as well as the whole biblical story and that of their own tradition. Also of great importance is reflection on the experience of conversion and what it means to be a follower of Christ in the world. Many congregations ask candidates for baptism to tell the story of their personal journey of faith. Jesus' teaching about fraternal correction in Matthew 18:15-20 has been a

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99. *The Schleitheim Confession,* 1527; text available at http://www.anabaptists.org/history/the-schleitheim-confession.html [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

100. *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective,* (General Board of the General Conference Mennonite Church, Mennonite Church General Board, USA, 1995), art. 11; text available at http://www.anabaptistwiki.org/mediawiki/index.php?title=Confession_of_Faith_in_a_Mennonite_Perspective_(Mennonite_Church_USA,_Mennonite_Church_Canada,_1995) [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

guiding text concerning church discipline and how to deal with sins within the community. Individuals must be prepared to bear responsibility with and for each other and to promote the welfare of all. Nurturing them on this path are corporate worship, including the Lord's Supper and other forms of community life and celebration.

94. In a Lutheran understanding baptism is the source of a new life in which the personal and the communal dimensions are mutually dependent and cannot be separated. Baptism is the promise of God's grace alone (*sola gratia*), so that living out baptism means to continue to listen to God's word in proclamation, Bible study, catechesis, and so forth, and to receive God's grace—his self-giving—over and over again in the Lord's Supper. While grace cannot be earned by human works, it is the source of good works by which the believer responds to the love of God and serves God and the neighbor without the self-centered intention of earning grace and righteousness. Lutheran theology has often been accused of preventing or neglecting good works. But this is not an accurate assessment when one takes into account Lutheran Christian education that strongly emphasizes the role of the Ten Commandments and their explanation in Luther's two Catechisms. To follow God's law in the Ten Commandments is the fruit of faith. In light of the revelation of God's merciful justice and unconditioned grace in Jesus Christ, the commandments not only order human behavior in a just and merciful way, but also provide direction in living out the twofold commandment to love God and neighbor. Understood this way, the Ten Commandments foster a realistic self-perception of believers, because those who seriously attempt to follow the Ten Commandments will also experience shortcomings and failure. This is why believers need to return to their baptism time and again. Being baptized and believing in the Triune God implies participation in the priesthood of Jesus Christ. The priesthood of all the baptized means that they are called to bring the good news of God (the gospel) to other human beings, and that they bring the concerns of others to God in prayer. It also may include the sacrifice of time and life for others. By fulfilling these tasks, baptized people live out their baptism.

Ecclesial Dimensions of Living out Baptism

95. "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:12-13). These verses relate baptism to being united in the one body of Christ, enlivened by the one Spirit. The Letter to the Ephesians states that Christ bestowed various gifts upon the Church "for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the

knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:12-13). All three traditions appreciate and affirm the fact that living out one's baptism is rooted in the communion of the Christian community. It is there that the Word of God is proclaimed and the sacraments/ordinances are celebrated, including especially the Eucharist / Lord's Supper. Various other ecclesial moments, for one or more of our communities, are related to discipleship, such as the rite of confirmation, the celebration of marriage, the ordination of ministers, or the rite of foot-washing. The community of love which is the church is the setting for mutual accountability, fraternal correction, and a variety of forms of ongoing Christian formation. All three churches provide special programs of formation for young people, yet it must be admitted that there is for all of us often a gap between the aim of such formation and its effective realization in lives of those to whom it is offered. Active and committed participation in the life of the community is the *ambience* in which discipleship can grow and flourish. This communal context also invites believers to have humility in acknowledging failures within the church and to work for repentance, one aspect of which is also the ecumenical imperative to work for the reconciliation and unity of the churches. What distinctive aspects of this "ecclesial dimension" of living out baptism may be pointed out? To that we now turn.

96. Anabaptist and Mennonite groups share the view that baptism is to be followed by a life of Christian discipleship. Not only that, they also teach that such a life is sustained and encouraged by the community of believers. Mutual support, as exemplified in the Lord's Supper, and mutual accountability, as expressed in the rule of Christ (Mt. 18), correspond with the voluntary character of believers' baptism in response to the divine initiative of grace. This, in turn, is based upon an ecclesiology of the visible church. The church witnesses that there is a new creation in Christ by the quality of communion among brothers and sisters. Baptism initiates believers into a new people in which prior identities of nationality, ethnicity, gender, social status, and so forth, are transcended.

97. For Anabaptists and Mennonites there is no private salvation; it happens in the fellowship of believers. The vertical and the horizontal dimensions of salvation do not exist independently from each other. There is no peace with God without peace with sisters and brothers, no fellowship with God without sharing of possessions, no divine forgiveness without willingness to forgive human offenders. Fraternal admonition and church discipline presupposes growth in grace but also the continuing lack of wholeness in each believer and in the body. The church as a new humanity already anticipates the fulfillment of God's promise in the coming kingdom. One recent confession of faith characterizes accountability in the following way:

> The church interprets God's will, discerning what is right and what is wrong. All believers hold each other accountable for a Christ-like walk of faith. The purpose of accountability is to heal and restore through repentance and not punish or condemn. The church excludes those who consistently disregard discipline.[101]

98. For Lutheran understanding, the promise of the Triune God conveyed in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper calls for trusting in the One who gives himself to human beings in that promise. Thus it is important for them to know in whom they trust and what they can expect from him. This is the reason why Lutheran churches have felt the need not only to rely on the religious education offered in the respective homes through fathers and mothers using the *Small Catechism* and to invite baptized children to worship services, but also to offer a special and regular catechesis to them. After not being widely practiced at the beginning of the Reformation, the rite of confirmation was introduced as a regular practice in Lutheran churches during the eighteenth century. Confirmation includes a catechetical process in confirmation classes over a longer period of time. In some Lutheran churches this education is part of the church calendar and takes place over the course of at least an entire year; in some, the main part of the teaching takes place in confirmation camps where the youth live together with the teachers (clergy and lay). The catechetic process ends with a confirmation service in which the young confirmed Christians confess their faith together with the congregation, are blessed, and receive Holy Communion for the first time.

99. Through confirmation young Christians become eligible to serve as godparents and pass on their baptismal experience in helping others to grow into their baptism. They receive the right to be candidates in the *presbyterium* of their congregation and of synods of the church. In this way they live out the common priesthood, imparted to them through baptism and faith in God. They should seek continuous formation in their understanding of Christian faith. Then they become knowledgeable about right preaching and the administration of the sacraments, and about the right practice of *diakonia* and pastoral care in the church. So they are able to exercise their responsibility for the life of the church.

100. In times of social trauma, receiving confirmation can have serious consequences for those who have been confirmed. In Nazi Germany, some young people drew the consequence that they could not join the *Hitler-Jugend* ("Hitler-Youth") since they had promised fidelity to God in confirmation. In the German Democratic Republic, many young Christians who, instead of participating in the *Jugendweihe* (secular youth

101. International Community of Mennonite Brethren, *What We Believe,* 2004; text available at http://www.icomb.org/what-we-believe/ [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

initiation) chose to be confirmed, were not allowed to attend high school or university. Thus living out their baptism had far-reaching consequences for them.

101. Catholics have a strong sense of being part of the worldwide Church founded by Christ and entrusted by him to the guidance of the successors of his chosen apostles, with Peter at their head. Living out one's baptism means taking an active part in this "catholic" community, receiving nourishment and support from it and contributing to it. Much of what was listed above about the personal dimension of discipleship cannot be understood without reference to its ecclesial context. The sacraments which play such an important role in the life of the individual are celebrated within the community. The Eucharist is the source and summit of the life of the Church; from a Catholic perspective, regular participation in its celebration is absolutely essential to living out one's baptism. One might add here the fundamental role of the liturgy in structuring and animating Catholic life. The liturgical year, especially with its seasons preparing for and celebrating the great feasts of Christmas and Easter, provides the setting for renewing the sentiments of expectation, conversion, and hope for the whole community. The sense of belonging to the communion of saints is fostered by the celebration of their memory throughout the year, inspiring believers with their example and teaching. Formation in discipleship is ecclesial, beginning in the family, which is considered to be the "domestic church." Special emphasis, in light of the common Catholic practice of baptizing infants, is given to the formation of young people preparing to commit themselves to living out their faith with the special help of an additional outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of Confirmation. In addition to these instances of formation, one might here add a word about the special regard which Catholics give to the official teaching of the bishops whose teaching is commonly referred to with the word "magisterium." Much of this teaching pertains precisely to how one can authentically live out one's baptism. Such teaching can extend to the worldwide community, such as in exhortations on the vocations of lay persons, priests, members of religious congregations and bishops or encyclical letters on family life or the environment, but it is also adapted to local contexts by bishops' conferences, individual bishops, priests, catechists, and theologians. Synods at various levels of ecclesial life are intended to elicit the active participation of all the faithful under the guidance of their pastors. The *sensus fidei* or *supernatural instinct* that believers have concerning their faith is recognized as a gift of the Holy Spirit to be appreciated and valued as part of the community's discernment of the direction in which the Church

is called to advance.[102] Discipleship means active participation in both the internal life and external outreach of the Church, according to the various possibilities that are offered by the situation, talents, and role of each believer.

Public Dimensions of Living out Baptism

102. In the synagogue at his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus opened the book of the prophet Isaiah to chapter 61 and read: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Lk. 4:18-19), adding: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk. 4:21). The social implications of the message and work of Jesus, so intimately tied to the inauguration of the reign of God, was understood by the first generation of Christians, as the apostle Paul wrote: "For the kingdom of God does not mean food or drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14:17). Regarding the public dimension of discipleship, our three traditions agree that baptism impels one to participate in the mission of reconciliation, justice, and peace inaugurated by Jesus, inviting our contemporaries to come to know Jesus Christ and experience the joy of faith in him and in his message. It means witnessing, by word and action, to the truth and goodness of the gospel in the public square, being guided by the principle "as Christ has done for me, so I must do for my neighbor." All of our communities continue to make efforts to engage in humanitarian work of various kinds in service to those in need. To live out one's baptism means participating in the mission which, through the anointing that each Christian has received in baptism, Christ has shared with the Church for its activity in the world. Recent global developments imply that this also includes sharing in efforts to care for and protect God's creation. Christian presence and activity in some societies has also demonstrated the truth of Jesus' teaching that his followers would be met with opposition and, at times, hatred and persecution (Mt. 5:10-12). The baptism of blood endured by Christians of our still divided churches may be rightly seen as an "ecumenism of the martyrs," urging us to seek that greater unity that their

102. This definition comes directly from Section 2 of the document *Sensus fidei in the life of the Church* (2014), published by the International Theological Commission of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It is a "supernatural" instinct because it comes from the gift of faith (grace), so it is more than a collective or group "common sense" of believers. The subjects of the *sensus fidei* are individual members of the Church. Each member has this *sensus fidei* which together works for the edification of the Church. Commissio Theologica Internationalis, *Sensus Fidei: In the Life of the Church* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2014); text available at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

noble witness inspires. What distinctive emphases in this third category of the public dimension of discipleship can be discerned within our three traditions?

103. Discipleship in the public place has two distinct dimensions in a Lutheran perspective. It involves the question of how Christians can witness to their faith in society at large, and the related question about the relationship and sharing of responsibilities between church and state.

104. The first question needs to be addressed in light of the strong emphasis given by the Reformers to the priesthood of all believers. Baptized Christians live out their baptism in three estates of society: family, government, and church (*status oeconomicus*, *status politicus*, *status ecclesiasticus*). Those three estates complemented one another, and each was equally important in living out Christian vocation. In the age of confessionalization, but especially after the Enlightenment, the understanding of the church's societal role grew stronger in Lutheran churches. The aftermath of the Second World War was, however, the turning point which led to Lutheran churches taking wider responsibility through advocating human rights as well as living out their diaconal responsibility both on national and international level. Lutheran World Federation was founded under these circumstances in 1947. Since its beginning it has kept proclamation of the gospel, diakonia, and advocating for such Christian values as justice and peace among its foundational responsibilities. One important reason for Lutheran churches to assemble in the LWF as a global communion is to be able to address together issues of discipleship in the public space. The vocation to live out baptism in discipleship in the public space was affirmed and renewed by the 12th LWF Assembly in the commitment to reconciliation, communion building and prophetic diakonia, amid many social and economic factors that "put 'freedom' to the test."[103]

105. Since the churches' discipleship in the public space entails addressing offenses against human rights, inhumanities, inequalities, and injustices, this may require reflection and decision on how to relate to politics and governmental decisions. It is well known across denominations that Luther had defined the relationship between church and political sphere in his doctrine of the two kingdoms, recently better known as two realms. Luther's main motivation was to bring the Church back to its primary role, i.e. preaching the gospel. In order to do that, church needed to be liberated from worldly power and politics. This did

103. "Message," in *Liberated by God's Grace: Assembly Report, LWF Twelfth Assembly, Windhoek, Namibia, 10–16 May 2017* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2017), 56; text available at www.lwfassembly.org /sites/default/files/resources/12A-Assembly%20Message%20 EN.pdf [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

not mean however that church would be isolated from the world. On the contrary, Luther wanted the Church to serve the world through pure preaching of the gospel. According to the doctrine of the two realms both of them are instituted by God, and are instruments of God's love and providential will for human flourishing. But they have distinct responsibilities. While in the spiritual realm the church is responsible for preaching the gospel, in the secular realm the state is responsible for safeguarding order, peace, and justice in the society. The two realms are not opposed, but complement one another. However, Luther insisted on the distinction between the two so that the state could not invade the spiritual realm and constrain consciences, and vice versa, the church could not interfere in secular government. For Luther, the doctrine of two realms meant that the Christian should obey political power because it, like the church, was instituted by God.[104]

106. In the course of history, the doctrine of two realms has been often interpreted in a rigid way that led Lutherans to unconditional adoption of political and social circumstances,[105] without criticizing or contradicting the misuse of political power or inhumane action. Lutherans have to admit especially with regard to twentieth-century European history, that too often "they regarded the political and social structures of this world as God-given, not asking whether they should engage in contradicting them and contribute to changing them according to the will of God."[106] Only later, however, did Lutheran theologians underline that the confessional writings also define circumstances under which Christians should be critical towards political power. While *The Augsburg Confession* XVI states, "Christians are necessarily bound to obey their own magistrates and laws," the article continues with reference to Acts 5:29 that this does not apply when magistrates and laws "commanded to sin; for then they ought to obey God rather than man."[107]

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104. *Confession Augustana*, XXVIII:18, in Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 93.

105. See *Healing Memories. Implications of the Reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites*, LWF Studies 2016/2 (Leipzig: Evangelischer Verlagsanstalt/Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2016); text available at https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/dtpw-studies-201602-healing_memories-en-full.pdf [accessed Dec. 1, 2018]; Bernd Oberdorfer, "Law and Gospel and Two Realms. Lutheran Distinctions Revisited," in *Global Perspectives on the Reformation: Interactions between Theology, Politics and Economics*, ed. Anne Burghardt and Simone Sinn, LWF Documentation 61/2016 (Leipzig: Evangelischer Verlagsanstalt/Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2016), 39; text available at https://www.lutheranworld.org/content/resource-global-perspectives-reformation [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

106. *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ.* Report of the Lutheran–Mennonite International Study Commission 83, see footnote 6.

107. Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 51.

107. The Second Vatican Council of the Roman Catholic Church (1962 to 1965), opened its *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et spes)* with the words: "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts."[108] After positing the principle that Christ is the key to an authentic understanding of human dignity, community, and activity, the text presents Catholic teaching about marriage and the family, culture, the economy, political activity, and peace, always with the presupposition that those who live out their baptism as disciples of Jesus Christ must be concerned for their fellow human beings. That treatment of specific issues amounts to a harvest of teachings about social questions that began in the late nineteenth century and has continued up until the present time, with contributions on general principles of Christian social responsibility, on the economy, and on the protection of the environment.[109] In 2005, the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* was published exploring God's plan of love for human beings, the social mission of the Church, the dignity of the human person as made in the image of God, and principles of the Church's social doctrine. Basing these principles on the dignity of each person, they emphasize the importance of fostering the common good and the universal destination of goods which have been bestowed upon all of humanity by the creator. They insist upon subsidiarity, which fosters the participation of all opposing a system of social organization in which everything is determined from above, and instead prefers a system where contributions of more local initiatives are given their due respect. Especially the principle of solidarity is encouraged, by which human beings share their gifts and talents with one another, assisting and supporting those who are in particular need.[110] This substantial body of doctrine, of course, is meant to be put into practice. There have been and continue to be many examples of this taking place. At times this occurs by means of Catholic groups and movements, both at a local level and globally, dedicated to addressing a particular issue, such as the promotion of economic justice or the care for those who are most vulnerable. Other responses to human need are more of a

108. *Gaudium et spes*, § 1.

109. For contributions on these three themes see, respectively, the encyclical letters *Centesimus annus* (1991) of John Paul II, *Caritas in veritate* (2009) of Benedict XVI, and *Laudato si'* (2015) of Francis.

110. *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,* Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, June 29, 2004; text available at http://www.vatican.va/ roman_curia/pontifical_ councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

structural nature, such as the establishment of schools and hospitals. Care for the poor and response to those suffering from epidemics or natural disasters have taken many forms. Recalling these positive activities should not lead one to forget the failures to live up to this social teaching, not only in the past but today as well. A particular emphasis of Pope Francis has been to call the Christian community to make an effort to be a Church of the poor, which is itself poor and which reaches out to those on the periphery. He urges Christians to understand the Church less as a powerful institution and more along the analogy of a "field hospital," caring for God's wounded children.

108. A recent Mennonite confession of faith states: "We believe that the church . . . is the new community of disciples sent into the world to proclaim the reign of God and to provide a foretaste of the church's glorious hope."[111] God's design for a new humanity, already initiated but not yet fully realized, reaches beyond the boundaries of the church. The church is not an end in itself, but a reality that God has brought into being to serve all humankind. Membership is not based on ethical performance, but is the gift of belonging enacted in baptism in the name of God the creator of all, Christ the reconciler of all, and the Holy Spirit the healer of all. The missionary function of the church is to extend forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing beyond itself. In this way it participates in the *missio Dei* for the renewal of the world. At the heart of the divine mission is peacemaking. The pursuit of peace is an eschatological anticipation of the kingdom. Believers are baptized into this mission and sustained by God's promise.

> Nonresistance is not simply a matter of refusing to bear arms in wartime, although that is certainly included. Rather it is a totally new life orientation in which all human relationships are governed by patience, understanding, love, forgiveness, and a desire for the redemption even of the enemy. It is part of the new way of ordering human relationships under the new covenant.[112]

As the International Communion of Mennonite Brethren has professed,

> We believe that peace with God includes a commitment to the way of reconciliation modeled by the Prince of Peace. [. . .] The church belongs to the in-breaking Kingdom of God. The citizens of the Kingdom model an alternative community, challenging godless values of this world's cultures. The people of God join in the struggle

111. *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (Article 9: The Church of Jesus Christ).

112. Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism in Outline: Selected Primary Sources* (Kitchener, Ont: Herald Press, 1984), 264.

for justice, yet are prepared to suffer persecution knowing that sin, guilt and death will not prevail.[113]

Differing and Diverging Emphases

109. The previous paragraphs have sought to be attentive not only to commonly held convictions but also to the distinctive emphases of our three communities concerning the personal, ecclesial, and public dimensions of discipleship. While all three churches are agreed that baptism is intended to be lived out throughout one's life and while all agree about many of the ways of acting which either express or contradict discipleship, it must be frankly admitted that we do not always agree about what counts for Christian authenticity in some specific issues. There is not complete consensus about what authentic discipleship means. Each of our traditions appeals to the guidance of Scripture, but the biblical message must be applied to the questions and circumstances of today and the processes involved within each of our churches for making such applications have distinctive characteristics. Clearly the discernment of what counts for an authentic following of Jesus leads to a consideration of our different understandings of how the Church is meant to function. Some communities place particular emphasis on deliberations by the local congregation, others on teaching directed to the worldwide communion, others to some instance in between. All three of our churches acknowledge the importance of conscience in living out one's baptism with integrity, yet it should also be emphasized that a person's conscience must be formed in fidelity to the gospel.

110. Even when a church takes a particular stance concerning what can be considered an authentic following of Christ, often there can be a significant discrepancy between that position and the feelings, convictions, and actions of some, even a substantial proportion, of its membership. Under the influence of contemporary media, legislation, and popular culture, many traditional Christian values have been abandoned, a situation that has affected many believers.

111. From an ecumenical perspective, we need to consider what to do when the ecclesial discernment of our churches about the authentic way of living out baptism results in incompatible conclusions. An example which brought this point home during our conversations occurred when one of our annual meetings took place at a venue which was hosting, during the same period, a meeting of military chaplains. For Lutherans and Catholics, such ministry to their adherents serving in the armed forces seems appropriate; for Mennonites such ministry could appear to support people whose line of work includes the willingness to use lethal force in a

113. International Community of Mennonite Brethren, *What We Believe*.

way that is not compatible with the teachings and spirit of the New Testament. We do not agree that the Christian community is called to be a peace church, in the strict sense of embracing pacifism under any and every circumstance. However, when such disagreement occurs, the result should not be that each church goes its separate way. Rather, whatever collaboration remains possible can still unite us. Even without agreement about the requirement of being a peace church, Christian communities can nevertheless work together to promote peace and defuse violence by seeking to overcome its causes. Or, to use another example, churches or individuals within churches, even if they disagree on specific issues such as same-sex unions, can still work together to promote respect for the dignity of every human being. Even if we do not agree with the discernment of other Christians, we can nevertheless acknowledge their attempt to seriously live out their baptism in discipleship. While all three traditions strongly affirm that baptism and discipleship have serious implications for how one lives, discernment of what counts for authentic discipleship regarding particular issues and the weight that such discernment has for ecclesial unity were not the specific mandate for our conversations. These issues have urgent ecclesiological implications and suggest themes for dialogue in the future.

112. Even though some understandings seem incompatible, many are complementary. The distinctive theological traditions of our communities and the way in which those traditions influence the practice of discipleship, as expressed earlier in this chapter, show quite naturally varying perspectives concerning how baptism is to be lived out, both in comparing traditions and within each one. Presuming that the diverse ways of living out baptism intend to be rooted in common faith in Jesus Christ—the way, the truth and the life (Jn. 14:6)—and to live out the gospel, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, it is reasonable to hope that many differences would be both complementary and even mutually enriching. Many of them can be seen as expressive of the great variety that is part of God's design for the church. In recent years the ecumenical movement has been characterized as an "exchange of gifts." This approach will now also provide the inspiration and structure for the conclusion of our report.

CONCLUSION

113. "By one Spirit we were baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). At the conclusion of this report, we thank God for the opportunity to have met for five years, within the context of shared worship and Bible study, for the purpose of engaging in conversations concerning a very important

aspect of our lives as members of the body of Christ. We have explained to each other the theology and practice of our communities on several important aspects of baptism. Regarding this topic, our earlier bilateral dialogues called for further discussion about the theology of sin and salvation, about the baptism of infants, about the role of the living faith of the church as it has significance for the spiritual condition of infants and children, and about the recognition of one another's baptism. We have also made further efforts to bridge, within a broad theological framework, the divide between us by looking more closely at our understandings of the relationship between divine action and human response in our readings of what the Bible reveals about baptism.[114]

114. The present report has attempted to respond to these tasks by exploring the relation of baptism to salvation from sin (Chapter One), its celebration within the church (Chapter Two), and its opening the door to discipleship in Christ (Chapter Three). We are grateful for the opportunity to have listened to one another and to have learned from one another. Not content simply to repeat the oppositions that have been a cause of division in the past, we have tried to appreciate the truths embedded in each other's view and practice of baptism. This entailed sharing the convictions which one's own tradition has preserved but also receiving and benefiting from the gifts which the other two traditions brought to our dialogue. Such an experience has also been occasion to help one another grow in faithfulness to Jesus Christ, as we face the pastoral and missional challenge to the practice and understanding of baptism in our time. Only our churches themselves can determine whether and how their theology and practice of baptism may call for renewal and have an impact upon the ultimate goal of responding to the Lord's will for unity (see Jn. 17:21). We hope this offers a more complete and less unilateral account of the theology and practice of baptism within our three traditions. As such, our report shows that some of the positions that have divided us in the past were really expressions of authentic insights that we all can share. We believe that this result can be a valuable contribution to further progress toward unity between our churches.

115. One aim of our conversations has been for each of us to look again at our own tradition through the eyes of our dialogue partners. This has made it possible for the members of each church to bring into focus some of the convictions that are dear to our hearts concerning our self-understanding, to express some of the gifts that we have received from one another, and to reflect upon the challenges that these conversations pose for our consideration in the years ahead. In line with this aim, the

114. For these responses, see *Called to be Peacemakers*, §§ 141-143, and *Healing Memories*, pages 89-90.

following paragraphs, composed respectively by the representatives of each communion, express what these conversations have led them to conclude regarding their cherished convictions, regarding the gifts they have received from one another, and regarding the ways may offer challenges to our churches for ongoing reflection about their theology and practice of baptism.

Concluding Mennonite Reflections

Convictions Held

116. We believe that the community gathered in the name of Jesus is called to receive the guiding wisdom of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we strive to be such a hermeneutical community, interpreting God's Word together, from the vantage point of those without political power.

117. We believe that the church at all levels, especially in its congregations, is called to be a web of relational communities in which people usually know one another well enough to discern their gifts of ministry and take responsibility for their mutual well-being, as the members live out their baptism.

118. We believe that baptism on confession of faith is the norm in the New Testament and the apostolic church, as scholars in diverse Christian traditions affirm. We are one of the churches that witnesses to and practices this pattern.

119. We believe the Sermon on the Mount provides guidance for the Christian life in private, ecclesial, and public realms. We believe that such discipleship is possible because the kingdom of God was inaugurated in Jesus Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit. In most Mennonite churches nonviolent peacemaking is considered essential to grasping and living this new reality.

Gifts Received

120. We are thankful that, after centuries of conflict concerning baptism, this dialogue has been possible and fruitful. We are grateful for the gifts of trust, patience, and receptivity that our partners have given us throughout the entire process.

121. Through the dialogue we have realized that many of our historic prejudices about Lutheran and Catholic understandings of baptism never were, or are no longer, true. We have seen that we share a trinitarian and Christocentric faith and its expression in discipleship.

122. We have learned about the indispensability, in Catholicism, of the recipient's faith for the fruitful reception of a sacrament. We are grateful to learn that, in Catholic understanding, the saving power of the Holy Spirit is not limited to the sacrament of baptism. This encourages us to

revisit our own understanding. We have discovered that Lutheran theology affirms the centrality of discipleship as a response of gratitude for grace. Both churches hold to the primacy of the Bible and place the Bible at the center of theology and spirituality, as we do. At the same time they have a developed understanding of tradition in relation to Scripture and its role in guiding the church from which we can learn.

123. To understand one another's theology and practice of baptism it has been helpful to consider together the larger process of initiation into Christ, the church, and discipleship. Doing so reveals important parallels with Catholics and Lutherans. For example, while churches that practice believers' baptism do not baptize infants, most of them practice the dedication of children by parents, as well as nurturing and instruction in church and home of those children. It is the hope of the parents that their children will eventually arrive at an owned faith, at which point they will be baptized into Christ and his body. Lutherans and Catholics share this hope when they baptize infants and nurture children.

Challenges Accepted

124. We welcome the challenge this dialogue has brought us to more clearly see a commitment to the unity of the body of Christ as integral to our sense of church and mission. Working for church unity enlarges our faithfulness to the gospel rather than, as is sometimes feared, reducing it. We recognize the pain that those traditions express when we baptize someone who has been baptized as an infant in their churches, which suggests to them that we consider their baptism invalid.

125. We have much to learn concerning the faithful practice of "reconciled diversity." By the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit this practice holds together divergent realities in unity. One of these realities is the fostering of deep convictions arising from obedience to the gospel. The other is a willingness to learn from and cooperate with those of different convictions that also arise from obedience to the gospel.

126. We have been challenged to acknowledge that the beginning of infant baptism is not co-terminus with the rise of the state church. Infant baptism was practiced in some settings before Constantine. Baptism on confession of faith remained the dominant form of baptism after a Christian social order had been established. In some settings infant and believers' baptism were practiced side by side without being church dividing.

127. We have been challenged in our understanding of conversion and baptism to better hold together an awareness of our continuing tendency to go against God and the possibility of leading a life following Jesus Christ faithfully.

128. We have been challenged not to allow our concern for the human response in conversion and baptism to overshadow the divine initiative in every aspect of salvation, including baptism.

129. We have been challenged to develop greater consistency and depth in preparing people for baptism and in making the remembrance of our baptism a lifelong motif of discipleship.

130. We have been challenged to formulate a fuller theology of the child, particularly with regard to the age of accountability and the salvific status of older children who have reached the age of accountability. Clarity at these points would enrich the dedication of parents and newborn children as well as their subsequent nurture.

For Consideration

131. With these gifts and challenges in mind and heart we continue to affirm our historic belief that the baptism of believers is the normative teaching and practice of the New Testament. We reaffirm this teaching and practice as normative today. At the same time we respect those who make a theological case for infant baptism that is linked integrally to a personal confirmation of faith and a life of discipleship as an adult.

132. We affirm our oneness with the whole body of Christ in trinitarian faith lived out through trust in and obedience to Jesus Christ. We believe that this oneness is greater than our disagreement concerning particular practices of baptism and their timing.

133. On the basis of this shared faith and in respect for the intention of those who baptize infants—setting them on the path toward life in Christ—we propose that Anabaptist-Mennonite churches consider:

a. receiving members from infant baptism churches on the basis of their confession of faith and commitment to discipleship without repeating the water rite. If the candidate requests rebaptism a process of discernment prior to her/his reception should include conversation between the candidate, the church of origin, and the receiving church in respect for one another and unity in the body of Christ;

b. honoring the nurturing that candidates received toward Christ in their church of origin (where that is the case);

c. asking all members, including those now being received, 1) to affirm our theological-ecclesiological interpretation and practice of baptism and 2) to respect those churches which practice baptism into a life of faith and discipleship differently as brothers and sisters in the one body of Christ;

d. enriching (or developing) practices of thanksgiving and blessing of newborn children and their parents as well as committing local congregations to nurture and care for them;

e. providing occasions for all members to "remember their baptism" and renew their baptismal commitments in both congregational and interchurch settings.

f. calling for collective and individual soul searching as to why it has been so difficult for us to hold together the quest for purity and the quest for unity, among ourselves and with other churches.

We pray that this trilateral dialogue on the matter of baptism might bring its three partners to greater integrity and faithfulness in living the whole gospel in a broken world.

Concluding Lutheran Reflections

Convictions Held

134. Lutherans believe that baptism is the great promise of God, given once and for the whole life, to receive a human being into communion with the Triune God. Thus they are called to ground their Christian life on a word and action of God who is faithful even though they might not be faithful. Luther emphasized, "And this is the reason why our theology is certain: it snatches us away from ourselves and places us outside ourselves."[115] Since human beings are never able to have full insight into their inner state, and their inner life often changes, they cannot fully trust in themselves. It was Luther's liberating insight not to set his eyes on his contrition when he asked for forgiveness, but on Christ's promise. Thus assurance of faith and the joy of the gospel filled his heart.

135. When Lutherans believe in the promise of Christ, they do not describe it in terms of a decision of their will to believe, rather as a situation of eye-opening that has happened to them, as was the case with the two disciples of Jesus on the way to Emmaus. Their eyes were closed, but they encountered Jesus when their eyes were opened. In a similar way Luther describes coming to believe as illumination:

> I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, *enlightened* me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith.[116]

115. *Luther's Works*, 26: 387.

116. Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 355-356.

136. While Lutherans emphasize that faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit, they continue to say,

> When, however, people have been converted and thus have been enlightened, and the will has been renewed, then such people desire the good (insofar as they are born anew and are new creatures) and 'delight in the law in the inmost self' (Rom. 7:22). As Paul says, 'For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God' [Rom. 8:14] [...] This leading of the Holy Spirit is not a *coactio* (or a compulsion), but rather the converted person does the good spontaneously […] It follows from this […] that as soon as the Holy Spirit has begun his work of rebirth and renewal in us through the Word and the holy sacraments, it is certain that on the basis of his power we can and should be cooperating with him, though still in great weakness. This occurs not on the basis of our fleshly, natural powers but on the basis of the new powers and gifts which the Holy Spirit initiated in us in conversion."[117]

Gifts Received

137. The gift that Lutherans received from Mennonites is the gift of reconciliation. At the 450th anniversary of the *Augsburg Confession*, Mennonites made Lutherans aware that their confession contained five condemnations of Anabaptist convictions and also of Anabaptists themselves, and that such condemnations had serious consequences in the sixteenth century and after that: marginalization, expulsion, and persecution. The dialogues following that anniversary confronted Lutherans with a dark part of their history. For the Lutheran members of the study commission and all who were engaged in that process, this was a painful and shameful learning process. It was very helpful and a condition that the process led to a good end, that Mennonites in those conversations were very patient, putting no pressure on the Lutherans, not expecting a particular reaction, even being self-critical, open to what the Holy Spirit wanted to tell both communions. This attitude allowed Lutherans to experience the Mennonite commitment to peace and reconciliation. So Lutherans were free to find their own way to relate to this painful history, and when they decided to confess publicly the sins of the Lutherans and ask for forgiveness, the Mennonites took these plans up in a very thoughtful brotherly and sisterly way. The overwhelming reaction to LWF's announcement of a public action at the Assembly of the Mennonite World Conference in Paraguay was an unexpected, deeply moving gift to the Lutherans, and even more the courage, the strength, the generosity to grant forgiveness, and to be open for reconciliation at the

117. Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 556 (Formula of Concord. Solid Declaration, art. II: Free Will).

Lutheran Assembly in Stuttgart in 2010. Lutherans are delighted that the process of being in dialogue, keeping an eye on one another, following the path of reconciliation, and healing memories continues. Even if we cannot change history, we can reduce the burdens of history that we have to carry, thus opening the ways to a future of brotherly and sisterly relations and cooperation.

138. The gift that Lutherans received from the Catholics in recent years is their widespread readiness to join the Lutherans in commemorating the Reformation. Lutheran/Catholic ecumenism took up the challenge of a joint commemoration. This required a learning process on both sides, for example in the Lutheran/Roman Catholic Commission on Unity. The mere fact that many Catholics gave up saying "There is nothing to be celebrated in 2017" is a great gift for Lutherans. They realized that the Reformation is a highly complex reality that includes aspects to be lamented, but also aspects that are gifts for the whole church. The Catholic/Lutheran dialogues have revealed so much common ground between Lutherans and Catholics that there are many reasons also for celebrating the Reformation. It is a remarkable sign that in 2017 we looked back at 500 years of the Reformation, but also at 50 years of ecumenical dialogue between the two churches that were in conflict for such a long time. That Catholics—also the leadership of the Catholic Church—were ready to begin a journey from conflict to communion and to continue on it, was an astonishing gift for Lutherans, unthinkable even a few decades ago. This process came to its strongest visible expression in the ecumenical prayer service in the Cathedral of Lund on October 31, 2016, jointly led by the Lutheran leaders and Pope Francis. That the Pope would lead a common prayer in commemoration of the Reformation that began with the expression of joy and thankfulness for what the Church (in the singular) had received through the Reformation was a gift. Pope Francis prayed: "O Holy Spirit: help us to rejoice in the gifts that have come to the Church through the Reformation, prepare us to repent for the dividing walls that we, and our forebears, have built, and equip us for common witness and service in the world." What a gift!

139. One major gift that the Lutherans received in the trilateral dialogue on baptism is the following experience. Even though our three communities have been divided over the understanding and practice of baptism, explaining to one another the respective insights, experiences, concerns that lie behind the other's practice of baptism, opened the eyes of the Lutherans to the spiritual and ecclesial realities of the others, and they have realized many features and aspects in the other churches that are valuable and familiar to them. Lutherans have come to appreciate that in a time of growing individualism Mennonite congregations offer a communal space for the growth in faith of those who are baptized. They

have also been impressed and challenged by the way Mennonites live out baptism through the commitment to nonviolence and peacemaking in society. Catholics challenged Lutherans through the emphasis on the family's role in baptism and on the faith of the church in which a person is baptized, and through the awareness of the presence of the universal church in each baptism. Experiencing those commonalities and these strengths of the others brought the participants of the dialogue much closer together.

Challenges Accepted

140. Lutherans are challenged to develop a theology of the child, especially addressing the soteriological status of unbaptized children and to reflect on how to relate to article IX of the Latin version of the *Augsburg Confession* and its condemnation of those who assert "that children are saved without baptism."[118]

141. Lutherans emphasize that promise and faith, the act of baptism and faith in it belong together in order to achieve salvation; nevertheless, they experience quite often that baptized people do not take their baptism seriously. Looking at our own churches with the eyes of Mennonites makes this even more painful. Therefore the conclusion should be drawn that, whoever baptizes infants has the obligation to do mission, catechesis and make all attempts so that the baptized appreciate their baptism and rejoice in it in faith.

142. That baptism as the basis and point of reference for the whole Christian life is often forgotten in the everyday journey of the believer. Thus all possible attempts should be made to make people aware of baptism as a gift and challenge for everybody's Christian life, for example through services for the commemoration of baptism.

143. Baptism is the introduction into the Body of Christ that transcends the borders of nations and confessions of faith. Looking at our baptism with the eyes of Catholics, Lutherans might become aware that the dimension of the universal church is often absent from their minds. In order to strengthen the awareness of this dimension that belongs to each baptism, one could think of special baptismal services in which representatives of other churches participate and give a testimony for the baptized. In so doing, they witness to the presence of the universal church.

118. Kolb and Wengert, *The Book of Concord*, 43.

Concluding Catholic Reflections

Convictions Held

144. Catholics believe that Christ founded his Church as the "universal sacrament of salvation"[119] that is, as a sign and effective instrument to bring about communion with God and among human beings. The Church is the pilgrim people of God, journeying through history to the promised kingdom which Jesus inaugurated in his incarnation, mission, death, and resurrection. The Holy Spirit is the principle of unity of the Church, giving her life and empowering her for this journey. Baptism, along with the other sacraments, fits into this ecclesiological framework. It is the beginning of Christian life, the doorway to the reception of the other six sacraments which assist Catholics throughout life in their path of discipleship. Baptism frees from sin, gives one new birth as a child of God, incorporates into the body of Christ the Church, calls and equips one to strive for holiness, and impels one to participate in service both within the confines of the Christian community and in the Church's evangelization and service to the world.

145. Baptism is related to the catholicity of the Church, as this quality is understood in its various meanings. Through Baptism, a Catholic feels and is part of a worldwide community, so that the initiatives (such as the proclamation of a "holy year" dedicated to reflecting upon God's mercy) or teachings (such as those calling on all who request baptism to commit themselves to a life of sanctity or emphasize the centrality of the Word of God for the life of the Church) touch Catholics throughout the entire world. But baptism is also part of the life of the local communities, be they dioceses under the guidance of the bishop, who each year on Holy Thursday consecrates the oil of chrism that is used in every celebration of baptism, or be they parishes, where baptism is often celebrated within the context of the Sunday liturgy. Even that smallest expression of the Church—the family, which is considered "the domestic Church"—has an important role in the celebration of baptism. The Catholic practice of baptizing infants, which is one of the most ancient traditions of the Church, is predicated upon and officially encouraged only on the basis of confidence in parents to provide for the Christian formation of their children.

146. Catholic tradition includes a firm belief in the unconditional love of God and confidence in the Father's universal will of salvation (see 1 Tim. 2:4). Affirming that Jesus is the one and only savior (see Acts 4:12), Catholics believe that the action of Holy Spirit (Spirit of Christ) is not limited to the Church or to Christianity, to the point of having hope for

119. *Lumen gentium*, § 48; *Gaudium et spes*, § 45.

the salvation of those who remain unbaptized. This led the bishops at Vatican II to state in *Gaudium et spes*: "For since Christ died for all, and since all are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery."[120]

Gifts Received

147. We have received a sense of hope for Christian unity in light of the witness of faith that has been expressed by our dialogue partners during these conversations.

148. We have been inspired by the willingness of Mennonites to consider the reasons which we give in favor of our practice of baptizing small children and possibly to revisit their past evaluations of our practice and their courage in remembering the past in such a way as to seek a healing of memories and reconciliation.

149. We appreciate the depth of theological reflection about the seriousness and power of sin, which we have listened to in the presentation and discussion of contributions by our Lutheran partners.

150. We have appreciated the experience of worship with both of our partners, the dimensions of flexibility and spontaneity in prayer, and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

151. We have valued the sharing of beautiful perspectives about and commitment to peace, to Christian mission, and to community life.

152. We have appreciated the role of the Bible in the thought and practice of our Lutheran and Mennonite partners.

153. We note that some of the common challenges which we face today seem more urgent than the traditional frontiers and barriers that divide us.

Challenges Accepted

154. In light of the fact that the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* proved to be a valuable resource during our conversations about baptism, indicating that it can be useful in dialogue about more topics than just that of justification by faith, the Catholic church ought to continue to explore ways of inviting even more churches to associate with that agreement.

155. We need to devise strategies and pastoral programs that will help Catholics to more deeply appreciate the value of baptism, recognizing that there is a problem in the current lack of such appreciation.

120. *Gaudium et spes,* § 22.

156. It would be good to devise a common ritual for the welcoming into our Church believers who have been baptized in other communities.

157. There is a clear gap between our theology of baptism which relates it inseparably to discipleship of Christ and involvement in the life of the community, on the one hand, and the fact that such commitment on the part of many baptized Catholics is lukewarm or lacking, on the other. Pastoral strategies and faith formation are called for to address this gap between our professed baptismal theology and our pastoral experience, especially to ensure that parents who request the baptism of their children understand the responsibility they are assuming to provide the means for the child to arrive at a personal and committed faith.

158. We need to stress more effectively the link between baptism and mission.

For Consideration

159. Future dialogues might take up and/or continue to explore:

a. the relation between baptism and profession of faith as expressed in the creed, as professed by all, including children, in the assembly on Sundays;

b. the discernment and pastoral assistance of those already baptized who seek fuller commitment (such as formation, liturgical instruction, pastoral accompaniment through difficult situations, training in missions) to counter the challenge of further fracturing or division within our own communities;

c. the practical and theological links between baptism, baptism in the Holy Spirit, baptism of desire, and baptism of blood could help us to challenge a too simplistic vision of baptism; if baptism is a participation in the life and death of Christ, it needs to be realized according to various vocations and situations;

d. further study of the theology and practice of confirmation as it relates to baptism (not just as a profession of faith)—especially in relation to the Lutheran understanding and practice of confirmation.

In Thanksgiving for Our One Baptism

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all." (Eph. 4:4-7)

160. In recent decades, Lutherans, Mennonites, and Catholics have made new efforts to walk together toward greater unity. As Pope Francis pointed out in a Vespers celebration concluding the Octave of Prayer for

Christian Unity, "Unity grows along the way; it never stands still. Unity happens when we walk together."[121] The two bilateral dialogues in which the Mennonite World Conference engaged—one with Catholics (1998-2003), resulting in the report *Called to be Peacemakers*, and the other with Lutherans (2005-2008), resulting in the report *Healing of Memories,* led to a powerful service of reconciliation in 2010. Both dialogues entailed an honest assessment of the painful memories of our past histories. In doing so, we rediscovered one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, which gave rise to the desire to explore one of the more important features in the life of each of our churches—the theology and practice of baptism. To borrow an expression from a recent bilateral report produced for the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation, our three communities have been moving from "Conflict to Communion." Steps toward reconciliation of our historical experiences have engendered the desire to take up the theological and pastoral issues surrounding baptism, which have been a source of conflict between us in the past.

161. The reason for now entering into serious discussion about theological and pastoral questions can be found in our conviction that Jesus Christ calls us to be one and we are unfaithful to him if we acquiesce to our current state of division. Our aim has been to continue on the path of increased mutual understanding and cooperation by focusing on foundational matters concerning the understanding and practice of baptism. Without avoiding areas of disagreement, we have learned that when considering baptism as it relates to the justification and sanctification of the sinner, as it entails entrance into the faith and life of the Christian community, and as it calls for a daily cooperation with the grace of the Holy Spirit so as to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we have many convictions in common. In particular, we have striven to overcome misunderstandings and stereotypes in order to have a more adequate grasp of how each of our churches seeks to support theologically its understanding and practice of baptism. We have discovered that some of the differences are not contradictory but rather acceptable variations of perspective and that some of the differences in practice or in the living out of baptism may be complementary, even mutually enriching. We have observed developments in the doctrine and practice of baptism over the course of the centuries within all of our traditions that have allowed each of our three traditions to see the others in a more positive light.

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121. Homily for Vespers concluding the week of prayer for Christian Unity, Jan. 25, 2015; text available at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015 /documents/papa-francesco 20150125_vespri-conversione-san-paolo.html [accessed Dec. 1, 2018].

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162. In the course of our conversations relating baptism to the overcoming of sin, to life within the Christian community, and to the living out of faith, several topics emerged which could provide motivation and material for fruitful dialogue in the future. A first topic concerns the challenge of arriving at agreement about what can be considered as an authentic living out of baptism, on a number of specific questions. How and why is it that churches and committed Christians can come to contradictory conclusions about issues such as just war or human sexuality? What are the means available to the Church to arrive at consensus on ethical issues in today's world, when many values about which Christians had been in agreement in the past now are being reconsidered, leading to contradictory conclusions? How do the churches arrive at consensus about living according to the gospel? Is agreement on following Christ of such importance that it is an essential element of the unity which is sought by the churches engaged in the ecumenical movement? Do contradictory moral convictions make unity impossible? A second matter related to baptism, which perhaps acquires special relevance in today's world of global interconnectedness, would be to consider together how we reconcile the message of the New Testament that Jesus is the one and only savior of humanity with the fact that billions of human beings in the past, at present, and in the foreseeable future have not accepted and most likely may never accept the good news of the gospel? Can our churches arrive at some common perspectives on the unique saving mission of Jesus and its implications for our approach to evangelization and our respect for those who do not yet accept Christ? Finally, another trilateral conversation between our churches might revisit the recent Lutheran-Catholic international commission's work on how recognition of baptism relates to the possibility of sharing the Eucharist, so as to explore whether the Anabaptist tradition could provide further insight on this important topic. Each of these issues relates in some way to ecclesiology. Perhaps our three churches may want to consider sponsoring a further trilateral conversation to address them, so as not only to help us grow toward fuller unity but also to enrich reflection and practice within each of our communities.

163. We believe that, having involved three churches instead of following the more common bilateral format, our conversations have enjoyed a unique, dynamic quality which has been particularly enriching. We would suggest that this dynamic interchange of insights be shared by the readers of this report, by finding means to read and discuss it within a group setting that includes members of all three communities. Convinced by the words of the apostle Paul in the letter to the Ephesians, we propose to our sponsoring churches that they consider setting in motion some process that could produce a prayer service in which

members of all three of our communities could thank God for the gift of their "one baptism," celebrate the fact that we are all baptized into that "one body" in the name of the one Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and renew together their baptismal commitment to live in lifelong discipleship. Such a joint celebration bringing together Christians—whether they had been baptized as infants, young persons, or adults—could be a powerful step in fostering greater reconciliation among us, as we renew together our common commitment to follow Jesus Christ daily.

164. The principle aim of our five years of dialogue with one another has been to help each other grow in faithfulness to Jesus Christ. More specifically, it has been to grow in faithfulness in the way in which we understand, celebrate, and live out our baptism. Our shared prayer and reflection on the Scriptures, during each of our annual sessions, had this as its purpose. We make it our prayer again as we bring these years of dialogue to a close.

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Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church: A Lutheran Reflection

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In 2010, at the Lutheran World Federation's (LWF) Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, the churches of the LWF asked the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) for forgiveness over the way in which their Lutheran ancestors had treated the Mennonites' Anabaptist forebears. This "one, small step" bore fruit almost immediately with the establishment of a trilateral dialogue with Mennonites and Roman Catholics, who had earlier concluded similar talks between the MWC and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) over responsibility for persecution. Though not quite the same as landing on the moon, the results of those trilateral meetings mark an important step forward in Christian rapprochement and indicate where important theological work still needs to be done. As a member of the original LWF/MWC conversations and the follow-up committee for the LWF, I am pleased to offer some reflections on this new report.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

In a rather unassuming sentence in the preface of the report, we read: "It should be noted that a trilateral dialogue is rare." Readers should highlight this sentence precisely because it represents a pioneering way forward in ecumenical conversations. Multilateral conversations often are stymied over the sheer breadth of theological and practical differences; bilateral dialogues may help individual churches but are not guaranteed to have broader significance. To be sure, there are exceptions, such as the multilateral production of *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* from the international Commission on Faith and Order or the much wider impact of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* initially made between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Nevertheless, to have three important voices within the "church catholic" sitting down together to discuss one of the most important church-dividing issues, baptism, may bode well for

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future conversations—not simply among Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Mennonites but among other groups as well. The discipline needed to produce meaningful statements, which characterizes *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church*, points the way forward in other venues as well.

A second general trait of this dialogue, also referred to in the preface, is its reliance on two previous bilateral dialogues between the PCPCU and the MWC (*Called Together to Be Peacemakers*) and between the LWF and the MWC (*Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ*). Of course, other dialogues within the ecumenical movement often refer to previous studies for support. In this case, however, the previous dialogues, by focusing on a kind of "lifting of the condemnations" among the parties, cleared the way for meaningful dialogue on the divisions that remain. Without the former work the present work would have little meaning. For example, given that the central Lutheran confessional document, the *Augsburg Confession*, stated (in the Latin version of article IX): "[Our teachers] condemn the Anabaptists who disapprove of the baptism of children. . . ," no meaningful conversations on baptism could take place without first dealing with the nature of that condemnation and its use by Lutherans in persecuting Anabaptists, the Mennonites' spiritual forebears. These "preliminary" conversations turned out to provide the embryo out of which the present dialogue could grow. Moreover, both bilateral dialogues called for the very conversation that then took place.

Listening to the Roman Catholic and Mennonite Contributions

One of the chief sins in ecumenical conversations occurs when a participant in a dialogue tries to tell the other side what they believe or think. Contrariwise, the chief virtue in ecumenical work is the ability to listen to what others say about their own communion. In light of this general principle, the following comments elucidate some crucial contributions in method and substance by Mennonites and Roman Catholics to this dialogue, as heard through the ears of a Lutheran theologian.

The Roman Catholic Appropriation of Its Tradition

The Roman Catholic explanation of the relation of baptism to sin and grace (§8-21) demonstrates how an integrated approach to their tradition aids ecumenical discussions. Thus, in addition to rehearsing the valuable decrees at the Council of Trent, the Catholic position also reflects current reassessments offered by Pope John Paul II (§9 and §20, quoting *Redemptor hominis*, and §15, n. 22 on Rom. 5:12), by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

(§9, emphasizing the Christological contextualizing of original sin), and by Pope Francis (§16, on the reassessment of Luther). Even more importantly, *Baptism and Incorporation* uses the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (JDDJ), first introduced in a description of the Council of Trent (§15, n. 24). These references are not superfluous but represent an important advancement in Roman Catholic ecumenical theology, expanding the original impetus toward dialogue championed in Vatican II's *Unitatis Redintegratio*. Only when one attempts to place conciliar decrees or papal declarations outside the realm of interpretation and reinterpretation is the ecumenicity of the Catholic tradition placed in jeopardy. Such a rarified approach to the tradition is absent here.

The Mennonite Openness to "Pan-Baptism"

The absence of words like "pedo-baptism" or "believer's baptism" in *Baptism and Incorporation* marks a welcome change in descriptions of churches that baptize people of all ages and those that insist on the priority of a confession of faith by the baptized. Neither Roman Catholics nor Lutherans have ever denied the baptism of adult believers, so that the label "pedo-baptism" only distorts their views. Moreover, both churches have, as the Mennonites have learned (§122), an important place for the role of faith and Christian living in their theologies of baptism, so that the term "believer's baptism" describes all three communions. Perhaps even more remarkable, however, is the Mennonite appeal to their own churches (§133) for "receiving members from infant baptism churches . . . without repeating the water rite" and for "asking all members . . . to respect those churches which practice baptism . . . differently as brothers and sister in the one body of Christ." This implies recognition of the dialogue partners as *baptized* members of Christ's body, a crucial step forward in conversations with Mennonites. Many Mennonite congregations have practiced this kind of baptismal hospitality for some time; its inclusion here allows for new avenues of conversation and cooperation among the churches and invites members of the MWC to accept more fully the ecumenical invitation found already in the Faith and Order document, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.

An Overview of *Baptism and Incorporation*

While §4 states the goal of the trilateral conversations as "focusing on foundational matters concerning the understanding and practice of baptism," it also identifies one of the chief "contrasts" among the churches: "the Lutheran and Catholic practice of admitting also infants to baptism." This implies that both theology and practice will play an important part in this report but, specifically on the question of infant

baptism, "the theological rationale" will rightly lead. This prevented the talks from devolving into a discussion of biblical passages for and against the baptism of infants (e.g., does the word "household" in Acts include children?) and allowed the underlying theological principles held by the three communions to take center stage.[1] These concerns allowed the participants to identify three major areas for conversation (§5), which then defined the outline for the report: "1) the relation of baptism to sin and salvation; 2) the celebration of baptism and its relation to faith and to membership in the Christian community; and 3) the living out of baptism in Christian discipleship."

Chapter One: Baptism with Respect to Sin and Grace

§7, the common introduction to this chapter, contains some important steps forward, where the insistence on the goodness of creation is juxtaposed over against the origins of sin, in which "the original design of a loving relationship between God and human beings was overturned." This crucial aspect of human history—often downplayed in certain theological quarters—implies that all dialogue partners accept one important building block for understanding Lutheran and Roman Catholic approaches to baptism as a remedy for sin. At the same time, by tying the discussion of redemption to the incarnation and to grace, the report provides an important basis for appreciating a sacramental theology grounded in God's grace.[2]

The Roman Catholic discussion (§8-21) demonstrates that communion's dynamic approach to the church's tradition that bodes well for future ecumenical discussions. By placing their discussion within the context of incarnation and Christology, the Catholics, using the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (§389), express in §9 one of the central concerns of the Lutheran confessions: "we cannot tamper with the revelation of original sin without undermining the mystery of Christ."[3]

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1 See the brief discussion in §6. This indicates one area for further conversation, in which biblical interpretation becomes a crucial component. The importance of finding common ground between Lutherans and Roman Catholics on biblical interpretation was a crucial step in coming to agreement in the JDDJ.

2 The use of 1 Tim. 2:4 here is particularly poignant for this Melanchthon scholar, since it formed the basis of Philip Melanchthon's understanding of such topics as predestination and election, an understanding reflected in Lutherans' later comments from the *Formula of Concord* (the Epitome, art. XI, §10, no. 9, in *The Book of Concord* [BC], ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000], 518).

3 See the Augsburg Confession [CA], art. XX, §9, in BC 54 (emphasis added): "In the first place, our works cannot reconcile us with God or obtain grace. Instead this happens through faith alone when a person believes that our sins are forgiven *for Christ's sake, who alone is the mediator to reconcile the Father.* Now all who imagine that they can accomplish this by works

The use first of Chrysostom and then Augustine (bishops important to the Eastern and Western expressions of the Christian faith) point to the importance of catholicity in ecumenical discussions. Even more important is the special role afforded the provincial Council of Orange, which the document described using what Philip Melanchthon termed a *particula exclusiva* (§13): "the unconditional initiative of God in bringing about human salvation."

Differences between Lutherans and Roman Catholics on original sin first appear in the Catholic section when describing how baptism removes sin completely so that only concupiscence remains, which "is not sin in the proper sense" (§15, describing the Tridentine decrees). At this point, the report cites not only Trent's decrees but also the JDDJ, §30. It is regrettable that it did not also cite the "Annex" to the JDDJ, par. 2A and 2B, where a more nuanced approach to concupiscence and an acceptance of the Lutheran insistence that we are "at the same time righteous and sinner" (*simul iustus et peccator*) are expressed. Once again, 1 Tim. 2.4 plays an especially important role in underscoring that not just sin but grace, too, is universal.

The Lutheran section begins, as it should, with an important distinction: that original sin is not a moral construct but a theological one, where the wholeness of the person before God means that sin affects not only the will but all aspects of human existence. The solution to this dilemma must be seen from God's perspective, who uses the law to reveal the depths of the human situation (curved in upon itself [*homo incurvatus in se ipsum*]) and the impossibility that moral acts can remedy this sin and actually contribute to the underlying problem: trust in one's self and not God. God at the same time declares the person forgiven through the gospel. This twofold action of God against sin and unbelief (mistrust of God) directly impacts the Lutheran understanding of baptism, as expressed in §25: "Because of the radical character of sin, the overcoming of sin requires the dying and rising of the person; this happens in baptism." But because sin does not magically go away from a person but remains, Luther insists that we return daily to baptism and its promises. This is the heart of the Lutheran insistence that we are at the same time a justified person and a sinner (*simul iustus et peccator*).

§26 blends Luther's theology (reflected in the Lutheran confessions), which used words sometimes translated "sanctification" to denote the entire work of the Holy Spirit in the believer, and later Lutheran categories, which narrowed sanctification to the Spirit's work "after" justification. This unfortunately results in making the Christian the subject

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and can merit grace *despise Christ* and seek their own way to God contrary to the gospel." See also Martin Luther, *Smalcald Articles*, part II, art. i, §1-5, in BC 300-301.

of the theological sentence (e.g., "the faithful are able" or "Christians can actually do"), when in fact it is always God who works in the Christian, as in the Pauline "It is no longer I who live" (Gal. 2:20) or "For we are what God has made us" (Eph. 2:10).

In a similar way, §27 waters down Luther's truly paradoxical understanding of the sacraments (especially baptism) and the relation of faith and God's promise. At the same time, the Lutheran section skips the opportunity to use the Apology, article thirteen, to discuss the meaning of the term sacrament. The unclearness regarding authorities continues in §28, where the Lutheran participants forgo the opportunity to use Luther in the far more authoritative *Large Catechism* to point out how Lutherans insist that baptism and its promises are central to the entire Christian life. §29, which emphasizes the importance of God's self-giving in baptism, could well have been linked to the incarnation (as in the Roman Catholic section), in order to emphasize how Christ continues to come down to us "in the flesh" through the means of grace (Word and Sacraments), as Luther emphasizes in the *Large Catechism*.

The Mennonite/Anabaptist discussion of original sin (§30-34) may come as a pleasant surprise for many outside those churches, who often caricature Anabaptists as insisting that infants and children are not sinners in the strict sense and thus only need baptism as adults. While denying the charge of Pelagianism, the Mennonite collocutors insist that God's image (§35) "though broken remained in each human being" as a hedge against fatalism. This allows them to view salvation as a restoration of God's image. Similar to Roman Catholic language about concupiscence, they speak (§36) of an "inborn tendency to sin" and emphasize that "the Christian has been set free to obey God." This means that for Anabaptists, "by grace, transformation is possible" (§37). Thus, justification (§38) involves both a change in "a person's standing before God in a forensic sense" but also "a metamorphosis of the person in a moral sense." Because of an insistence on the continuation of God's image after sin, baptism has two components: God's action of redemption and (§40) "the action of the one who is baptized." This means that baptism is less a means of grace than an outward sign of inward transformation: "an outward and public testimony to the inward baptism of the Spirit." Similarly (§41), children are included in Christ's atoning work without baptism. And yet (§42), when discussing the saving necessity of baptism, the Mennonite tradition is more nuanced: "In the presence of grace and faith, inward and outward reality cannot be separated. Thus, water baptism is both the testimony of the believer that God's grace has come to her and the testimony of the Spirit through the church to the candidate that she belongs to Christ and his body."

The section of chapter one labeled "Common Perspectives and Differences," reveals several important steps forward in this trilateral conversation. First (§43-46), the collocutors set aside the notion of hereditary sin as derived from Romans 5:12 once and for all, demonstrating (on the Roman Catholic side) the centrality of the Second Vatican Council and its decree, *Dei Verbum*, to allow for careful interpretation of the Greek text. Second, whatever appearance of uncertainty in the Mennonite discussion of the role of the human being in baptism, the centrality of God's grace comes to expression (§46): "sin can only be overcome by grace, by the divine initiative, by the Holy Spirit. On their own, human beings do not have the ability to leave behind the hopelessness of life under the power of sin." The remaining differences (especially on the question of human cooperation) are settled with a reference to the JDDJ. On the question of the means of grace (§47) important differences on the Mennonite side remain over the internal action of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, "they emphasize that the Holy Spirit uses the external proclamation of the Word of God and the celebration of baptism. . . ." On the question of the baptism of infants, the Trilateral Report indicates less progress. However, even here Lutherans and Roman Catholics state that they do not limit salvation to the baptized and "entrust the unbaptized to the mercy of God." The Mennonites would seem to be left with a curious tension in that while admitting that "baptism actualizes the salvation intended by God," they insist that God uses other ways to bring infants to salvation. In one area (§50-54), Mennonites and Catholics agree that a deep change occurs through regeneration so that only a tendency to sin remains. Lutherans, however, emphasize not sinful actions but instead insist that for the justified sin remains in the heart. Again, the JDDJ provides helpful language to navigate this important theological difference by insisting on a "lifelong struggle with sin," while adding that it also implies a "lifelong striving for holiness."

Chapter Two: Baptism: Communicating Grace and Faith

In this chapter, the collocutors no longer divide their discussion according to individual communions, as in the previous chapter, but rather discuss several neuralgic points in common, as they relate to the celebration of baptism. This approach, which looks at both the lifelong process of Christian life and the practice of baptism, may be more fruitful in the long run but could only succeed because of the discussion in chapter one.

All three communions agree (§56) that baptism is not an isolated event but the basis of the entire life of a Christian. They also recognize (§57) the primacy "of God's grace in this process." This means that baptism "begins

a lifelong process of daily appropriation" of baptismal grace through repentance, living a holy life, and participating the Church's life. For a Lutheran, this echoes Luther's *Small Catechism*, where Luther moves from the drowning and rising of baptism and its connection to Jesus' death and resurrection to daily repentance and new life.

Despite obvious differences over the baptism of infants (§61), all three churches (§62) "embrace the teaching of the New Testament that human beings are sinners" in need of redemption. "Through grace by faith in the saving action of Jesus Christ," human beings move from sinfulness to being "children of the Father." In this connection "all three communities forcefully affirm the gratuity and primacy of God's grace" and "the necessity of a human response of faith, made possible by grace, to this divine initiative." The difference over infant baptism is summarized in two sentences: "Mennonites are convinced that, according to Scripture, a personal response is a precondition for the reception of baptism." Lutherans and Catholics "believe that the practice of infant baptism is in no way excluded by the words of Scripture and even that the absolute gratuity of God's saving action in Christ and the Spirit is more clearly expressed by baptism of those who are too young to speak for themselves." The collocutors claim that by agreeing that "Christian discipleship is a lifelong process" in which baptism is "one of the important events" the traditional controversy is at least placed in a new framework. Here one wonders whether a more explicit examination of differences in biblical interpretation—mentioned by all sides—might not have helped in understanding this "new framework" and might have brought the conversation even further along.

Turning to the specific celebrations of baptism (§63-67), perhaps one of the most helpful aspects of this report is the description of the rites each communion uses. It is unfortunate, however, that space did not permit describing (in the case of Lutherans) the wide variety of practices and the changes over the years. Here, the document incorrectly implies that Luther's *Flood Prayer* was added "over time," when in fact it was immediately included in both the first and second editions of the *Taufbüchlein* from the 1520s. Moreover, not just the renunciation of evil but specific exorcisms were part of Luther's original versions and were included in the *Small Catechism*. By 1580, and under the influence of a certain Reformed theology of baptism, some Lutheran churches had eliminated the exorcisms and, as a result, some versions of the *Book of Concord* also did not include the baptismal service in their printings of the *Small Catechism*. Under the influence of pietism and the Enlightenment, other aspects of the liturgy also fell away, only to be reinserted in some Lutheran liturgies under the influence of the wider Christian liturgical movement in the twentieth century and of the Luther Renaissance of the

same period. The citation of Luther's comments from his 1520 tract, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, may give the mistaken impression that he and other Lutherans did not associate baptism with justification, when in fact there are other places where Luther stresses the connection between the promises in and with the water and the declaration of God's promise to which faith clings. It would have been better to explain that for Lutherans justification was always understood relationally not ontologically, that is, as a proclamation of God's unconditional mercy in Christ, which also occurs in baptism. Faith then hears and believes that very promise "for me" (*pro me*), which is first applied personally in baptism.

§68 deals with the problem of "rebaptism." Although the Lutheran insistence that "to 'rebaptize' would amount to distrust in God's promise," it may have been helpful in this context also to cite Luther's comment in the *Large Catechism* that no matter how many times water is applied to a person, there is in truth only one baptism. This may have reduced the harshness of the claim about distrust. Nevertheless, a true "breakthrough" occurs when the texts states, "This dialogue has helped Mennonites understand the profound reality that is at stake for Catholics and Lutherans when Mennonites and other credo-baptists baptize someone already baptized by the other churches." The next step would be to see if Mennonites are willing to agree that the Catholics and Lutherans who remain in those communities are also *baptized* Christians.

§69-71 address the question of the effect of baptism. All churches agree that "something happens" and that there are three actors in baptism (God, the individual, and the community). Lutherans emphasize the role of God's promise. Mennonites also insist that "the individual and the community of faith undergo effectual change" but "only if and when it is verified in the faith and life of the individual … and of the … community." It is this caveat about verification that prevents full agreement concerning the "objective" occurrence in baptism. It is curious that a quotation from the Catholic/Mennonite conversation (*Called Together to Be Peacemakers*) includes no response from the Lutheran side. What is clear is that Lutherans and Catholics emphasize the "instrumental nature" of the sacrament baptism (§71), whereas Mennonites insist that the ordinance of baptism "expresses the change which occurs in the person who has come to repentance." Nevertheless, all three agree that a change does take place through the entry of a person into the church, the body of Christ.

The question of faith's relation to baptism rests on varied interpretations of Mark 16:16. Once again, biblical interpretation of this text, which is not found in the earliest manuscripts of Mark, is missing from the discussion. Both Lutherans and Roman Catholics understand that nothing excludes infants, baptized within the faith of the church and

the power of the Holy Spirit, from having at very least an inchoate faith, the beginning of new life. In this regard, the Mennonites insist (as they had in earlier conversations with Roman Catholics) that "the practice of making a profession of faith on behalf of a person being baptized who does not at the moment of baptism realize the basic meaning and implications of his or her baptism, is not acceptable." Despite this fundamental difference, all three communions understand the individual's faith as a participation in the faith of the whole Church.

Baptism also relates to the church. For Mennonites, baptism following confession of faith allows baptism to be voluntary and thus safeguards the freedom of individual consciences. Nevertheless (§76), this insistence is not meant "to obscure the primacy of the divine activity in the work of salvation" nor the centrality of communion in the Church. Lutherans and especially Roman Catholics emphasize baptized believers' communion with God and with one another, so much so that baptism becomes a bond of unity for all divided Christian communities. Thus (§77), Lutherans and Catholics express this connection in their joint statement, *Church and Justification* (citing §68): "Baptism is calling and election by God and makes us God's possession: thus also creating the community of those who are called and chosen. . . ." This highlights one of the chief dividing issues (§78): "The concern of Lutherans and Catholics about the primacy of God's grace and the call to a lifelong response and participation in the life of the Christian community has prompted them to affirm not only the possibility but the appropriateness of baptizing infants." This leads the document to pose two questions to the churches. "Might not Lutherans and Catholics acknowledge the decision of parents to foster a mature faith in their children prior to the request for baptism?" on the one side, and "Might not Mennonites acknowledge that, given an assurance of familial and congregational commitment to provide formation in faith and discipleship, the choice of parents to request baptism for their young children . . . is an authentic approach to Christian initiation?" These crucial questions indicate an important step forward in the conversation, in which the three churches, without abandoning their own theological and ecclesial principles but sharing certain fundamental commitments, might finally acknowledge the motivations and practices of the other churches.

What to do about these tensions and divergences is the theme of the last portion of chapter two (§79-83). On the basis of an agreed upon importance of repentance, faith, and discipleship, the collocutors pointed to the increasing importance among Roman Catholics (§79) of the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* and (§80) "the cogency of the Mennonite practice of baptizing only those capable of making a personal profession of faith." Questions arise whether this cogency also coheres with New Testament teaching about the relation of baptism and salvation and the

authenticity of the baptism "a vast number of Christians have received as infants. . . ." As a result, some Mennonite congregations do not always baptize individuals who were baptized as infants elsewhere. Moreover, not just those communions practicing infant baptism but Mennonites, too, have experience with baptized people who no longer practice the faith.

This section also discusses the practical problem facing Lutherans and Catholics around the sincerity of the parents' request to have their child baptized and the community's reliability in assisting the parents and sponsors. This is particularly a problem where (§81) "baptism of infants is part of the cultural tradition." But (§82) this problem of linking baptism and Christian living is a significant problem for all three communions. The chapter ends with a plea (§83), asking "whether our differences in the practice of baptism could be an acceptable diversity that does not, in and of itself, constitute an insuperable obstacle to greater unity. . . ."

Chapter Three: Living out Baptism in Discipleship

This chapter begins (§84) by announcing a "substantial agreement" in that "all three of our communions wholeheartedly agree that baptism is intended not as an isolated, self-enclosed event, but as an important moment that is to be lived out throughout the course of one's life." This chapter hints at a change in methodology, in which the biblical witness to such discipleship (§85-88) now plays a central role. This even includes (§88) a reading of Romans 7 viewed as describing the Christian experience (and *not*, as imagined by the so-called "new perspective on Paul," Paul's reminiscence of his life apart from faith in Christ)—an interpretation consonant with Augustine, Luther, and Philip Melanchthon, and the biblical arguments supporting the *JDDJ*. In sum, all three communions insist that (§89) "the life-long living out of the gift of faith which is celebrated in baptism has not only personal but also ecclesial and public dimensions." These three categories shape the remainder of the chapter.

On the personal front (§90-94), the three churches insist upon the continued regeneration and the power of the Holy Spirit for the baptized. Roman Catholics emphasize already here the ecclesial side of such growth in faith, especially marked by participation in the other sacraments of the church. Mennonites, too, stress the importance of "walking in newness of life" not only individually but also in relation to Christian brothers and sisters. Discipleship for them involves both doctrine and ethics and is a call to discipleship even in the face of persecution. Lutherans also do not separate the individual from the communal but stress that since baptism is the promise of God's grace alone, living out one's baptism means living into the Word and sacraments. Whereas already at the time of the Reformation Lutherans were accused of neglecting good works, it would

be more accurate to say that the baptized now follow God's law as a fruit of faith not as coercion. Commands become gracious invitations to live in faith.

Already the ecclesial nature of personal discipleship came up in the previous section. But the specific discussion of the ecclesial dimensions (§95-101) also indicates underlying agreements, as believers find solace in the Word and sacraments/ordinances and in the community of love. §95: "Active and committed participation in the life of the community is the *ambience* in which discipleship can grow and flourish." For Anabaptists and Mennonites (§97) this means "there is no private salvation; it happens in the fellowship of believers." For Lutherans, this includes the centrality of catechesis and confirmation (which became an important part of Lutheran communities already in the sixteenth century and not, as the document states, in the eighteenth). For as enculturated as confirmation can become, Lutherans point to two twentieth-century examples where confirmation marked a decisive break with the contemporary political situation (*Hitler-Jugend* and the German Democratic Republic's *Jugendweihe*). Roman Catholics, too, emphasize participation in the worldwide church with Peter's successor as its head. Here the Eucharist, the role of liturgy and the liturgical calendar, and local formation reinforce this sense of belonging. Especially as a result of the Vatican II council, Roman Catholic ecclesiology has reemphasized the *sensus fidei* and the role of all the faithful in the church. Lutherans traditionally emphasized the priesthood of all believers and the three estates of society in which the baptized are called. The aftermath of World War II shaped Lutheran witness toward advocacy and diaconal work on the world stage. In §105-106 there is a helpful summary of the Lutheran teaching about the "two realms" (better labeled as God's two hands) and its limitations. Roman Catholics look especially to *Gaudium et spes* (Vatican II's decree on the church in the modern world) for a clear expression of its commitment to the poor. Their understanding of "subsidiarity" allows Roman Catholics to foster local participation and solidarity with the poor and oppressed. In the words of Pope Francis, the church is less an institution of power and more a "field hospital" in its care for God's wounded creation. Mennonites, too, have emphasized the important social role the church plays, especially in peacemaking.

This does not mean that the three churches agree fully on all aspects of authentic discipleship (§109-112). Part of the difference stems from differing views of the individual conscience and its relation to the wider church, especially in matters of social and political importance. This is particularly problematic on such issues as serving in the armed forces (and providing ministers as chaplains) and whether the Christian community must embrace pacifism completely. At the same time, the document insists

that some positions are complementary without pointing to specific examples.

Regarding the public dimensions (§102-108), the document summarizes the overarching agreement in these terms (§102): "baptism impels one to participate in the mission of reconciliation, justice, and peace inaugurated by Jesus, inviting our contemporaries to come to know Jesus Christ and experience the joy of faith in him and his message." This includes humanitarian work, work in the world, and the protection of God's creation, but also a kind of "ecumenism of the martyrs," where persecution of Christians for their faith and works unites all three still divided churches.

Conclusion

The rather lengthy conclusion (§113-159), prefaced by a common introduction (§113-115), includes parallel comments from each church divided into "Convictions Held," "Gifts Received," "Challenges Accepted," and "For Consideration." A summary of these comments will demonstrate some of the insights and challenges this document is offering the churches. They help validate the importance of this dialogue.

The Mennonite convictions describe relational communities that interpret God's Word in relation to one another, practicing baptism on confession of faith as a biblical norm and using the Sermon on the Mount as a guide. Among the gifts received were a lifting of misunderstandings about the other communions, the centrality of faith and discipleship in those communions, and (§123) "the larger process of initiation into Christ" that is important for them. Among the accepted challenges Mennonites are prepared to acknowledge that Mennonite practice of baptizing believers from other communions may seem to invalidate their baptisms as infants, that infant baptism was not a result of the rise of the "state church," and that sinful tendencies continue in the baptized and divine initiative is part of every aspect of salvation. In the final section "For Consideration" (§133), the Mennonite collocutors urge their own churches to consider receiving members from other church without repeating the "water rite" and to respect churches whose baptismal practices differ from theirs as brothers and sisters in the one body of Christ. Providing occasions for members to ''remember their baptism'' would allow Mennonites to reimagine baptism as a lifelong experience rather than a one-time event. The quest to reconcile purity and unity should be a concern of all three communions.

Lutheran convictions center upon God's promise and work in Baptism through the Word, define faith as (§135) "a situation of eye-opening" (cf. Luke 24), and understand human cooperation as a further work of the

Holy Spirit in the reborn believer. They mention among the gifts received these: the process of reconciliation with Mennonites begun at the 450th anniversary of the *Augsburg Confession* in 1980, and the joint commemoration of the Reformation in 2017 with Roman Catholics. They also have received the Mennonite emphasis on community and the Catholic stress on the family's role in baptism. Lutherans are challenged to reflect on the salvation of unbaptized children in the light of article nine of the *Augsburg Confession* (Latin version), to consider the disconnect between baptism of infants and faith; to institute regular commemorations of baptism (already a practice among Lutherans in North America); and to consider the universal nature of the church for the baptized.

The Roman Catholics hold the conviction that baptism is the "universal sacrament of salvation" (§144, citing *Lumen Gentium*), that it relates to the catholicity of the church, and thus that baptizing infants, "one of the most ancient traditions of the church," implies confidence in parents providing a Christian upbringing. At the same time, they firmly believe in "the unconditional love of God" (§146) and thus in the hope of salvation for the unbaptized. Among the gifts, Catholic collocutors mention their experience of unity, the willingness of Mennonites to consider the reasons for baptizing small children, the importance for Lutherans of the power of sin in the believer, and the common challenges that seem more urgent in today's world than barriers from the past. The challenges for Catholics include inviting more churches to share in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, increasing pastoral programs for appreciation of baptism, and closing the gap between the theology of baptism and discipleship and the lack of commitment by believers. They urge consideration of the link between baptism and the creedal profession of faith; the need for pastoral assistance for the baptized in their daily life; exploration of link between baptism and such terms as baptism in the Holy Spirit, baptism of desire, or baptism of blood; and exploring the links between baptism and confirmation (especially as practiced among Lutherans).

A common concluding section (§160-164: "In Thanksgiving for Our One Baptism") is more a recitation of the scope of the discussions and possible future dialogue on ethical topics, the saving mission of Jesus for the whole world, and Eucharistic sharing. In that regard, perhaps the suggestion of a joint prayer service giving thanks for our "one baptism" into "one body" (cf. Ephesians 4:5) is a step in the right direction.

Concluding Reflections

Having already pointed out the benefits that this dialogue offers, it is important to consider what improvement might be made for future

conversations. The most obvious lacuna is unclarity about the methods being used. For as central as the biblical witness is to all three communions, it was not at all clear that they approached the Scripture in the same way. Moreover, some sections skipped over any discussion of the Scripture passages being used (especially Mark 16:16, where the textual authority is unclear at best). The breakthrough found in the *Joint Declaration* rested upon careful, common biblical work. One finds little indication of that work here, with the exception of the relation of Romans 5:12 to original sin and the introductory material in chapter three.

The historical record is also important (indeed, authoritative) for all three communions and yet again its use was not very clearly laid out—if at all. The surprising reference to Constantinian Christianity and the "state church" (an anachronism in any case) in later remarks by Mennonites begs the question about how they came to this remarkable conclusion that decouples infant baptism from the shift to the Roman Empire's acceptance of the church. (Incidentally, this decoupling would also have profound repercussions for Mennonite ecclesiology.) The Roman Catholic sections also assume the authority of popes and councils but neglect to introduce their role in forming the church's doctrine. This might have helped to clarify curious comments in the conclusion about Scripture's use among Mennonites and Lutherans.

The sixteenth-century forebears of these three communions often used the ancient church's heresies to label their opponents' positions. Ecumenical conversations today give the participants leave to label themselves: "When we hold position X, we are in danger of…." These conversations could have been enhanced through such honesty, although it is often implied. For example, by tying original sin to a lack of knowledge, one's position could revert to a form of Gnosticism, where specific *gnosis* can enlighten the mind and grant salvation. By emphasizing that original sin is a (mere) hindrance, the specter of a kind of Pelagian approach to salvation remains. Insistence on God's grace alone and the will's bondage could foster a kind of fatalism (often labeled in the Reformation Manicheanism). These are implicit dangers that may even have explicitly arisen at various times in the history of our churches.[4]

The problem of authority is perhaps most obviously a problem for the Lutheran contributions. Unlike *Healing Memories*, which concentrated on the *Augsburg Confession*, here we find confessionally authoritative documents mixed with statements by Martin Luther but without any attempt to clarify why such comments might be authoritative. The role of

4. Already the articles of condemnation at Trent actually express not only rejection of certain Protestant or Evangelical (Lutheran) positions but also of scholastic positions influential within the medieval church.

Luther's works has become more of a problem with the rise of the "Luther Renaissance" in the late nineteenth century, which tended to downplay the authority of the Lutheran Confessions. As much as Luther is an authority for Lutherans, the authors of the *Formula of Concord* insisted that he, too, stands under the Word of God.[5] In several instances, the Lutheran collocutors could have cited Luther's works within the *Book of Concord*. In other cases, they use Luther's writings without respecting their historical context, which could lead to the impression that Luther *qua* Luther has some kind of disembodied authority. Lutherans need to consider this question, already addressed to some degree in *Healing Memories*.

Beyond these methodological questions of authority, there are also two central terms, used throughout the document, that demand far more precise definition.[6] The first is grace. Here some historical background may help. When Erasmus of Rotterdam, the premier Greek scholar and Renaissance thinker north of the Alps, published his Greek New Testament in 1516, he included a separate book of annotations, where he raised questions about the standard Latin translation. One particularly important annotation involved the translation of the Greek word *charis* as *gratia*. By Erasmus's day, the word *gratia* had become thoroughly embedded in late-medieval, scholastic theology and had taken on several meanings, the most important of which was the *gratia gratum faciens*, the grace that makes one acceptable [to God]. This ontological definition, by which the soul of the penitent was infused with a habit, or disposition, of grace, had nothing to do with the way *charis* was used in the New Testament text. Erasmus proposed that it should better be translated *favor Dei*, God's favor. After some initial debate, both Martin Luther and his colleague Philip Melanchthon (himself a renown Greek scholar) took up this suggestion, often speaking of grace as God's favor or God's mercy but not as anything infused into the soul. This definition of grace remains central to Lutheran theology down to this day.

A careful analysis of this document reveals, in this Lutheran's opinion, a confusion of grace as a power or force with the notion of grace as God's mercy. When Lutherans especially insist upon baptism as a "means of grace," they intend to say that it embodies God's promise of mercy to the person. We continue to baptize young children precisely because baptism conveys God's mercy personally. It also implies that this promise of mercy never fails a person—even though they may neglect or even forget it. Here

5. "He [Luther] expressly made the distinction that God's Word alone ought to be and remain the only guiding principle [in judging his works]. . . ."—*Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord*, "Binding Summary," §8, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 528.

6. For the historical material that follows, see Heiko A. Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*, 3rd ed. (Durham, N.C.: Labyrinth, 1983), especially the glossary on pp. 459-476.

Martin Luther's description in the *Large Catechism* (included in the *Book of Concord*) of such falling away is particularly helpful.[7]

A second term deserving far more careful definition and discussion is faith. Here not only Lutherans but already Christian theologians in the early church (to say nothing of the Middle Ages) distinguished between *fides quae* and *fides qua*, that is, the faith which the person (or the church) believes and confesses about God and the faith by which the person believes in God. Medieval theologians, using Aristotelian distinctions between matter and form, also distinguished between *fides informata* and *fides formata*, where the former was the unformed "matter" of faith (the basics of the church's faith to which a person in a state of sin could know and intellectually assent) and the latter was faith "formed" by love, that is by the infused habit of love. When contemporaries of Martin Luther heard him claim salvation by faith alone, they often attacked him by assuming that he was talking about unformed faith. This led the reformers to distinguish between historical faith and assurance or trust (*fiducia*).[8]

When Lutherans link faith and baptism, they are speaking of trust in God's promise of mercy and not simply in a confession of the church's faith using the Apostles' Creed. Thus, when Lutherans claim that young children have faith, they are not talking about an intellectual process but precisely the kind of assurance that arises from God's unconditional promises. This also means that the sign of faith is not so much outward confession of faith as the actual comfort that God's promises afford the dying sinner. Once true faith is decoupled from the will's action, not only does grace (God's promise of mercy) take on a central role but also the images for believing—while still very much part and parcel of the human creature—must change from the language of decision to the language of love. Trust for a parent arises in an infant out of the mother's or father's faithfulness and trustworthiness—long before children can express what they are experiencing. *That* is a far more fruitful way to approach what occurs in baptism, where the "mothering God" (to use a phrase from Julian of Norwich) embraces the child or adult and surrounds the person with the faithful promise of divine mercy.

Besides more attention to method and more precise definition of terms, there is one other thing lacking in this report, something that the Lutheran collocutors could well have offered from their theological tradition. That is the theology of the cross. One of the truly astounding aspects of Luther's theology—first widely published in his *Explanations to the 95 Theses* in 1518

7. *The Large Catechism*, "Baptism," §77-82, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Kolb and Wengert, 466.

8. See, for example, article twenty of the *Augsburg Confession*, §23-26, in *The Book of Concord*, ed. Kolb and Wengert, 56-57.

and often used in his explanations of baptism and the Lord's Supper—is his theology of the cross.[9] Not a theory about the atonement, Luther's theology of the cross insists upon the revelation of God under the appearance of the opposite—God in the last place we would reasonably look. That perfectly describes baptism—not as a "water rite" or as a teaching or practice of the church, but as foolishness (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25). God comes using means that are patently foolish to human reason, overturning our trust in ourselves with a promise arising out of Christ's death and resurrection and applied to a dying sinner. The very weakness of baptizing such unworthy people (including young children) lies at the heart of baptism's true power. This aspect of Christian theology (that one finds not simply in Luther but also in Bernard, Augustine, Johannes Tauler, and a host of others) might help clarify Lutheran insistence on grace and faith in baptism and on the deep connection to Christ's death and resurrection—"the foolishness that we preach."

9. For an introduction to its practical implications, see Timothy J. Wengert, "'Peace, Peace . . . Cross, Cross': Reflections on How Martin Luther Relates the Theology of the Cross to Suffering," *Theology Today* 59 (2002), 190-205, and the literature cited there.

Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church: **A Catholic Reflection**

PETER CASARELLA*

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THIS REPORT

A brief overview of the conversations leading up to the present trialogue will summarize the history antecedent to the recent conversations and provide the backdrop for where it may go in the future. As the present report's contributors indicate, "trilateral dialogue is rare" (5). That said, it is not without precedent. The current "trialogue"—an equally rare term that nonetheless dates from the sixteenth century—was preceded by the Lutheran-Reformed-Roman Catholic trilateral discussions on "The Theology of Marriage and the Problem of Mixed Marriages (1976)."[1] Like its predecessor, the Lutheran-Mennonite-Roman Catholic trialogue on baptism grew out of prior dialogues and was the result of a collective desire for reconciliation and better understanding of the other.

The origin of the present trialogue on baptism from a Catholic perspective may be traced to the greater openness of the post-conciliar Church to ecumenical discussion, in the light of which one should read Catholic active support, albeit as a non-member, for the World Council of Churches' promulgation in 1982 of the so-called Lima Document on "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry," which affirmed the common baptism

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1. See "The Theology of Marriage and the Problem of Mixed Marriages (1976)," in *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, eds. Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer (New York: Paulist Press & Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1984), 277-306. *The Oxford English Dictionary* dates the earliest usage of this term, trialogue, to 1532. See *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "trialogue."

between (Trinitarian) Christian churches and thereby identified common ground for ecumenical discussion. Even before this document however, the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches had already begun working toward increased reciprocal understanding on the topic of baptism. There was, for example, the 1972 dialogue between the two churches in the Philippines which affirmed prior to the Lima Document their common baptism as a site for further ecumenical discussion. Taking care to note that "indiscriminate conditional baptism cannot be approved," the participants sought to emphasize that baptism "cannot be repeated . . . unless there is prudent doubt of the fact or of the validity of a baptism already administered."[2] Already in 1972, then, a central issue of the present trialogue—namely, the potential recognition of the validity of each other's baptism and baptismal rites as valid so as to avoid "indiscriminate" second baptisms (or what is frequently referred to colloquially as re-baptisms), which would violate the singularity of the sacrament—was established as a talking point. This dialogue was an early piece of an ongoing effort between the post-conciliar Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches to reconcile their differences, both historical and theological, unto greater understanding and ecumenical unity.

General common ground was also expressed between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches in the JDDJ. While this document focuses on justification, the authors broach the question of baptism in §4.4, "The Justified as Sinner." There baptism is affirmed as that sacrament that unites the Christian to Christ in the Holy Spirit through the forgiveness of sins, though it is noted that there is a "difference in understanding sin in the justified."[3] Baptism is here viewed in the light of justification alone: "We confess together that in baptism the Holy Spirit unites one with Christ, justifies, and truly renews the person. But the justified must all through life constantly look to God's unconditional justifying grace."[4] This affirmation was itself preceded by the 1993 dialogue between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches on justification and, *mutatis mutandis*, original sin, that resulted in the publication of *Church and Justification, Lutheran-Roman Catholic International Dialogue*, which is also cited in the present report at important junctures.[5]

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2. "Formal Signing of the Agreement on Baptism Between the Lutheran Church in the Philippines and the Roman Catholic Church in the Philippines," *Philippine Studies* 20, n. 1 (1972), 149.

3. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church*, Vatican website, April 19, 2019, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html, sec. 29. See also sections 28-30.

4. JDDJ, 28.

5. See "Church and Justification, Lutheran-Roman Catholic International Dialogue, (1993), §68" in *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical*

On the side of Lutheran and Mennonite dialogue, the reconciliation of historical differences as a condition for successful theological dialogue was a determinative factor. Without such encounters it is difficult to see how the present trialogue would have materialized. Dialogue between Lutherans and Mennonites had to overcome, in addition to theological differences, historical grievances that arose on the basis of those differences. More specifically, there had to be a degree of closure with respect to the early Lutheran persecution(s) of Mennonites. The sixteenth-century Anabaptist tradition, in which the contemporary Mennonite tradition has its roots, did not recognize Lutheran baptism of children or pedobaptism as valid, so that Lutherans entering the Anabaptist tradition were, from the perspective of the Lutherans, baptized a second time ("rebaptized") upon entry. This practice was theologically problematic from the Lutheran perspective.

The result was the promulgation of the condemnation of the Anabaptists in the *Augsburg Confession*, which led to the persecution of members of the Anabaptist tradition. The *Augsburg Confession* remains a central, normative document for The Lutheran World Federation to this day, making the condemnation something of an open wound between the two traditions. There was, however, an acknowledgement by the contemporary Lutheran tradition of the historical ills directed against Anabaptists (see the "Statement on the *Confessio Augustana* (1980)"), and the discussions surrounding this statement provided an impetus for proactive and positive discussion between contemporary Lutherans and Mennonites on the issue of baptism. Such dialogue took place over a span of more than three decades—first in France (1981-1984), then in Germany (1989-1992), and more recently in the United States (2001-2004)—and resulted in the publication of *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ. Report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission*.[6] While both parties "acknowledge[d] an asymmetry in our approach regarding the question of baptism of newcomers who join our churches from the other tradition," and that they "have not yet found a way to bridge the divide between the two churches regarding their teaching and practice on

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Conversations at World Level 1982-1998, ed. Jeffrey Gros FSC, Harding Meyer, William G. Rusch, Faith and Order Paper 187 (Geneva: WCC Publications / Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000); text available at https://archive.org/details/wccfops2.194/page/484, as cited in *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church: Lutheran-Mennonite-Roman Catholic Trilateral Conversations, 2012-2017*, 89.

6. *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ. Report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation & Strasbourg: Mennonite World Conference, 2010).—https://mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/oea-lutheran-mennonites-web-en.pdf. Accessed April 12, 2019. For an overview of the historical context of this dialogue, see *Healing Memories*, Part I, which includes excerpts of both the condemnations as well as the "Statement on the Confessio Augustana."

baptism," both nevertheless agreed "that baptism cannot be seen as an isolated event . . . [and] must be understood within a larger framework that explores how the practice of baptism is related to a larger set of theological doctrines."[7] This movement toward reconciliation between the Lutheran and Mennonite traditions, as well as that between the Lutheran and Roman Catholic traditions, gave two of the three connections of the present trialogue.

The third piece of the puzzle would come in 1998, when dialogue between the Mennonite World Conference and the Roman Catholic Church began. The result of that dialogue was the publication of *Called Together to Be Peacemakers: Report on the International Dialogue between The Catholic Church and the Mennonite World Conference, 1998-2003*.[8] The authors of the present trilateral report refer to this document both in the preface and throughout the document. A key issue in their dialogue on the topic of baptism is that of pedobaptism, which is a common practice in the Catholic Church and unrecognized in the Mennonite tradition. The issue of pedobaptism played an important role in the early dialogues between the Lutheran and Anabaptist or Mennonite churches with respect to the issue of so-called re-baptism. Trilateral discussion on the topic of baptism between the Mennonite, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic churches, then, would prove a most fruitful ground for ecumenical "dialogue." A trilateral approach is all the more timely (162).

Both Lutherans and Roman Catholics practice child baptism, which is unrecognized by the Mennonite Church, and both the Mennonite and Lutheran churches share theological reservations towards the Roman Catholic church with respect to original sin and the nature of the Church, upon which topics the sacrament or ordinance of baptism touches directly.[9] In the present trilateral report the authors make this clear by regularly quoting from both *Healing Memories* (Lutheran-Mennonite) as well as *Called Together to Be Peacemakers* (Roman Catholic-Mennonite). These two documents are thus the most proximate origins of the new trialogue.

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7. Ibid., 89. The authors of the present report cite one portion of the above cited passage; see *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church*, 8. Accessed April 12, 2019.

8. *Called Together to Be Peacemakers: Report on the International Dialogue between The Catholic Church and the Mennonite World Conference, 1998-2003*. Text available in Jeffrey Gros, Thomas F. Best, Lorelei F. Fuchs (eds), *Growth in Agreement III*, Faith and Order Paper 207 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2007), 206-67.—https://mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/report_cathomenno_final_eng.pdf; and http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/mennonite-conference-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20110324_mennonite_en.html, as cited in *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ*, 8. Accessed April 12, 2019.

9. See ibid., 8-10.

While the present report largely keeps to these earlier discussions between Lutherans, Mennonites, and Roman Catholics, I will end this section by noting other ecumenical discussions—more specifically, dialogues—on the topic of baptism between members of the respective traditions that took place either after or contemporaneous with the publication of *Called Together to Be Peacemakers* (2007) and *Healing Memories* (2010). There was, for example, the publication of *These Living Waters: Common Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Baptism: A Report of the Catholic-Reformed Dialogue in United States, 2003-*2007, in which the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops engaged with representatives of the various Reformed Christian churches throughout the country.[10] The goal there was greater clarity on the part of both parties of the other's theological and ritual understanding of the sacrament of baptism and its practical implications. Similarly, beginning in 2000, there was dialogue between the Church of Scotland, a church of the Reformed tradition, and the Roman Catholic Church on the topic of baptism, which led to the publication of "Baptism: Catholic and Reformed, A Study Document from The Joint Commission on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland."[11] It is worth noting that the participants in this bilateral accord emphasized the *sanctifying* nature of baptism or the effect on character that baptism confers, which supplements what they viewed as the singular attention to baptism under the aspect of *justification* alone in the 1999 *Joint Declaration*.

Grace and Justification

We turn now to the trilateral report itself. It is divided into three parts: 1) Baptism with Respect to Sin and Grace; 2) Baptism: Communicating Grace and Faith; and 3) Living Out Baptism in Discipleship. The remainder of this commentary loosely follows that order but also aims to highlight issues and questions that cut across the three chapters. The first issue to be addressed occurs in the first chapter, namely, "What can Catholics learn from and contribute to the discussion of the grace of justification in the trilateral report?"

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10. *These Living Waters: Common Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Baptism: A Report of the Catholic Reformed Dialogue in United States, 2003-2007*.—http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/ecumenical/reformed/upload/These-Living-Waters.pdf. Accessed on April 15, 2019.

11. See *Baptism Catholic and Reformed: A Study Document from the Joint Commission on Doctrine of the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Church*, 11. As to the aspect of character, see: "Thus, it is understood that: 'Incorporated into Christ by Baptism, the person baptized is configured to Christ. Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark (*character*) of his belonging to Christ. . . . Given once for all, baptism cannot be repeated.' (*Catechism of the Catholic Church 1272-1274*)."—Ibid., 9.

The first section exemplifies the ecumenical bonus that accrues with the trilateral approach. In the bilateral dialogues, two sides craft a differentiated consensus based upon the dialogical phenomenon of reciprocal learning. The introduction of a third party means that each of the three teams has to ponder a discrete standpoint of that community's faith in the light of two divergent positions as well as attend to the process as a whole. In a larger multilateral gathering, accountability to each of the participating teams falls easily to the wayside and the integrating process takes over. In the trilateral process each party has three distinct forms of accountability. The results thus reflect a nine-way mode of reflection that then is contingent upon a process that does not ignore the specificity of the bilateral conversations or the abiding need for integration for the purposes of a final report. In looking at the difference between trilateral dialogues and the larger multilateral ones, you might conclude that both are necessary but insight is sometimes generated when less is actually more.

The first section begins (and ends) with a critical reminder that grace is needed to overcome the Christian's inevitable estrangement from God. In terms of the Catholic tradition, the argument follows a trajectory enshrined by the Council of Orange that continues up to the decree on justification of the Council of Trent. The JDDJ is clearly the endpoint of this tradition and is, in fact, cited to that effect.[12] The grace that is communicated in the sacrament of baptism is not an abstract entity or formal reality. Grace is part and parcel of the Good News that Jesus is the Savior.[13] The historical material prepared by scholars of the Bible and the pre-Tridentine tradition working prior to and during the preparation of the JDDJ, underscores the Christological point (9), and the concluding Catholic reflections focus on the Holy Spirit as the principle of unity in the Church (144). A Church that goes forth in missionary discipleship needs to recognize that the former is the indispensable condition for the possibility of the latter and that the latter is the necessary consequence of the former.

Considerable attention is paid to the vexing issues of original and hereditary sin (30-31, 43-5). A restoration of the authentic Pauline tradition was accepted by all three sides:

> The concept of hereditary sin was based primarily on the inaccurate Vulgate translation of Romans 5:12: "As through one man sin has come into this world . . . in whom all have sinned (*in quo omnes peccaverunt*)." The Latin phrase "in quo" is not correct. The Greek

12. JDDJ, 19, as cited in 46.

13. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 389 (citing 1 Cor. 2:16), as cited in 9.

> original, ἐφ' ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον, should be rendered "because" and not "in whom," such that in English this verse would read: "just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned."[14]

A condition of sinfulness enters the world on account of Adam's fall. Physical transmission of that sin from one to many was never a focus of the original teachings of Christianity. What matters in and for the *kerygma* of the Church is the fact that the fullness of grace that is encountered in the person of Christ is even more universal than the widespread calamity of sin. Here the report follows Romans 5 to reach a new but differentiated consensus.

What about the relationship to this question to baptism? The Catholic position on the communication of grace through the sacrament in and with the Church was articulated in the face of two different kinds of concerns: the Anabaptist denial of the necessity of infant baptism and the Lutheran conviction that original sin still remains in the infant even after baptism. A narrow interpretation of the mediation of grace by the Church in pedobaptism would alienate the Mennonites. A dogmatic insistence on the term "concupiscence" as a perduring reality after baptism distinct from original sin puts Catholics at loggerheads with Lutherans. Catholics recognize the necessity of faith for baptism in and beyond the *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults* (RCIA). Catholics, in particular, will also note that the report speaks of the "baptizing community" and the need for the assistance of "the community of believers."[15] In the case of the infant, the report, however, avoids the Cajetanian language of "proxy" faith of the parents and sponsors and opts instead for a new attention on God's universal saving will (1 Tim. 2:4) that is also manifested by what Catholics often call a baptism of desire.[16] The idea of proxy faith was challenged by Zwingli's wholescale repudiation of original sin, highlighting the novelty of the newly forged and differentiated consensus of this document. In short, the report affirms that the activity of God is "an 'objective' occurrence" that takes place in baptism through the mediation of the faith of both the individual and the community of faith.[17] Concupiscence is reformulated not as a tendency to sin (Trent) but as the factual cases of sins committed as well as sins of omission that take place after the liberation of the baptized Christian from the dominion of sin. This

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14. *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ*, 43. The report wisely records Pope John Paul II's acceptance of this revision.—Ibid., 15, fn. 22.

15. Ibid., 69 (citing *Called to be Peacemakers*), 74.

16. Ibid., 42. Cf. Henri Rondet, *Original Sin: The Patristic and Theological Background* (Staten Island, N.Y.: Alba House, 1972), 182.

17. *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ*, 69.

standpoint allows the Mennonite to look in a kindlier fashion upon the pedobaptist tradition and affirm its grace-filled character without adopting any argument in favor of its necessity. Lutherans and Catholics can mutually affirm the Augustinian understanding of baptism as a visible word communicating grace.[18] To reach that affirmation, whether the sin that remains is concupiscent or original is not as important as the decisive and necessary role that this sacrament plays from infancy onwards in a life oriented towards salvation by God. Equally important in this trilateral consensus is the recognition that the freedom of a Christian is not tied to a separate human faculty that works in opposition to other capacities but involves will, intellect, heart, mind, and body working in tandem. The report did not aim to rewrite the book on theological anthropology but displayed noteworthy savvy in the judicious deployment of nuanced terms and concepts in this area.

The first section concludes with a fitting commendation of Ephesians 2:8-10: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." The Catholic interpretation of this verse could still bring in the merit of a good work without retreating from the consensus attained so long as the gift of salvation and priority of divine workmanship were developed in the manner of this passage. St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, maintains in his mature teaching on merit that in the interior act known as cooperative grace the operative grace of God "moves" the will, especially but not exclusively in the case of the conversion of the will away from evil.[19] The trilateral dialogue rightly avoided a detailed exposition of the relationships between free will, cooperation, and merit. That challenging discussion is better left to a future encounter. For now, we can say that the doctrine of merit as a gift that re-affirms the integrity of the human response to God's offer of salvation goes beyond the scope of this report but does not seem to be contradicted by it.[20]

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18 More work still needs to be done in the future on the role of the minister in the communication of grace and the intention of the whole baptizing community as well as the sponsors to baptize in the faith of the Church.

19. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I-IIae, q. 111, a. 2. Cf. Joseph R. Wawrykow, *God's Grace and Human Action: 'Merit' In the Theology of Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1995), 173-177.

20. For a partial treatment of how merit in the Catholic tradition can be seen in the light of the JDDJ, see Peter Casarella, "Justification by Faith in Nicholas of Cusa," in *Nicholas of Cusa and Times of Transition*, ed. Thomas M. Izbicki, Jason Aleksander, and Donald F. Duclow (Leiden: Brill, 2019), especially the treatment of the history that pre-dates Nicholas of Cusa in pp. 178-89.

Baptism within a Lifelong Process and the Challenge of Formation in the Faith

There is a strand to the report that is more exhortatory than doctrinal. Better yet, it exhorts to a more authentic living out of the doctrines professed by all three communities. Here we will address the question of sanctification in the report, but especially as it relates to the crisis of faith formation that has visited each of the three communities. The urgency of the latter underlies, in many ways, the rhetorical thrust of the report as a whole.

The language of "sanctification" is studiously avoided in the constructive sections of the second part of the report since the report focuses on how the three communions regard the wider effects of justifying grace in the Christian life.[21] This makes perfect sense as a means to achieve consensus. The positive contribution of the Catholic team is manifold but is especially clear with regard to the non-voluntaristic but still exemplary bond of unity among the faithful that the sacrament performs.[22] Vatican II suggested that this insight into the sacramentality of the Church could help to support the wider Christian unity. Furthermore, the sacramental bond that flows from baptism is described in the Council's *Decree on Ecumenism* as "only a beginning, a point of departure."[23] The complete formation and integration into the believing and celebrating community of the newly baptized Christian is explicitly recognized to be a lifelong process. The Catholic drafters of this report were wise to channel both of these important insights.

On the question of formation, the consensus regarding its urgency appears to have been reached without significant discord.[24] But the Catholic emphasis on the presence of unity in the very being of the Church creates an even greater need for self-examination on our part. "In some parts of the world, baptism of infants is part of a cultural tradition (81)." This sounds like a challenge to the global South, and the drafters in all three communions could have been more careful to show how more affluent Euroamerican communities are just as prone to acquiesce to a merely cultural Christianity. In any case, the report makes it clear that Catholics cannot baptize for the sake of fulfilling a human need to belong to a group or celebrate a new milestone in familial and social life. All three

21. The word is used eight times in the report as a whole. It occurs once in the second part, namely, in a citation on the effect of the liturgy on the human person drawn from Vatican II's *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (69).

22. *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ*, 76, citing *Unitatis Redintegratio* 22.

23. *Unitatis Redintegratio* 22.

24. See, for example, 76, 78, 80-83, 110, 155: "there is a problem"; and 158: "baptism and mission."

communions baptize with the Trinitarian formula and therefore need to take more seriously the Trinitarian missionary mandate given by Christ himself.[25] What is stated succinctly in ¶155—"We need to devise strategies and pastoral programs that will help Catholics to more deeply appreciate the value of baptism, recognizing that there is a problem in the current lack of such appreciation"—should probably appear in bold as an epigram to the leaflet version of this document that will be placed in Catholic parishes. The problem here is more of reception than anything else. One has to be grateful that the challenge regarding the ongoing formation of the faithful of all ages appears with such clarity and hope that pastoral agents with an ecumenical consciousness are available to take the baton and run with it.

Discipleship and the New Creation in Christ

The report places equal emphasis on personal and public discipleship, but in each of these two foci there are questions still to be answered as well as questions that were neither posed nor answered. Highlighting the complementarity of personal and public discipleship serves Catholics well and is no less important for Christian unity. In the United States, for example, harmful bifurcations arise when traditionalists focus too exclusively on private morality and progressives only on the social dimensions of the Gospel.

The language of common morality or the natural moral law is not used in the document and seems to be avoided in most of the recent ecumenical statements, at least in the limited experience of this reviewer. So a word is in order about the challenges that this language would have posed had it been used and the challenges that arise when it is omitted. Given the prior consensus on the universality of sin, an unnuanced appeal to the self-evident, universal, and rational dictates of conscience would have been problematic.[26] Even though the Catholic faithful cannot be taken for granted in observing all the positions of the Church in the public realm, sometimes the challenges that Christians face in bearing witness to the truth go deeper than our confessional differences.[27] The media and popular culture as well as existing legislation approved by governmental bodies can sometimes serve only as a counter-witness.[28] This report makes an excellent contribution to how the ecclesial language of discipleship as crafted by Lutherans, Mennonites, and Catholics can and should be taken

25. *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ,* 158.

26. International Theological Commission, *In Search of a Universal Ethic: A New Look at the Natural Law* (2009).

27. *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ,* 153.

28. Ibid., 110.

beyond the cultic realm and preached in the naked public square. The participants seemed to have no hesitancy in affirming that overarching point. Without diminishing the ecclesial origins and coloring that still need to be preserved for the sake of efficacy (think of Mennonite pacifism, Reinhold Niebuhr's witness on behalf of labor rights activists, and César Chavez's Mexican Catholic piety), one could still try to forge a mode of discourse of the common good that begins to transcend these limited perspectives.[29] This challenge is formidable and mentioned here merely as a goal for further reflection, not as a repudiation of the excellent fruits of this substantive chapter. The chapter charts a path forward and signals some of the impasses that might still remain. A still more positive statement is needed and could be explored in a future dialogue. For example, the freedom of the Christian community to preach both the Gospel of Life together with the humane treatment of the undocumented immigrant becomes impeded when religious liberty itself is imperiled.

A significant achievement of the document is the use of the language of belonging, a theme already found in Pope Francis's exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*.[30] Through baptism we belong to the body of Christ.[31] This belonging is accordingly a marker of identity that reinforces the unity of the Church and runs deeper than national identity.[32] When the youth lose this sense of belonging, both their ecclesial identity and their connection to the common good becomes more tenuous. One is a citizen for the portion of time allotted by the state. This ends in death. Through baptism one is invited to partake of the body of Christ into eternity. The report carefully avoids a wholescale rejection of faithful citizenship, but the notion of belonging is nonetheless striking in its flexible adaptation to the public witness of a Christian in an age sadly rampant with xenophobia. Moreover, there are repeated references in the report to the timeliness of belonging to Christ through baptism in blood and even to the new recognition by our communities of an ecumenism of martyrs.[33]

The document addresses many current social questions including war and peace and disagreements among Christians on same-sex unions, but the omission of ecology is a missed opportunity. "Called to be Peacemakers" from 1999 already highlighted the ways in which

29. See, for example, Massimo Borghesi, *The Mind of Pope Francis: Jorge Mario Bergoglio's Intellectual Journey* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2018), 122-130.

30. Cf. Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel*, 63, 98, 105, 268.

31. See, in the Catholic section, 101: "belonging to the communion of sense" through the liturgical year and, in the Mennonite section, 108: "the gift of belonging given in baptism in the name of God the creator of all, Christ the reconciler of all, and the Holy Spirit the healer of all." See also 50, N. 62 on belonging to Christ.

32. *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ*, 96, 126, 143.

33. Ibid., 37, 102.

Mennonites and Catholics could think and work together in the pursuit of a more harmonious society.[34] But a Mennonite paragraph also states: "Water baptism is the recapitulation and completion of Spirit baptism (48)." Throughout the document there is an insistence on the mutual recognition of a baptism following the Trinitarian formula performed outside of one's own community and the need for all three communities to re-commit to the relationship between baptism and discipleship. But these groundbreaking reflections are still unnecessarily anthropocentric. Pope John Paul II saw in the Christian East a link between liturgy and ecology.[35] A disciple who pours the water of baptism over another disciple is committing to the freedom of that Christian to seek union with God but not at the expense of the destruction of the material realm of our common home. As Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Si'*:

> Water poured over the body of a child in Baptism is a sign of new life. Encountering God does not mean fleeing from this world or turning our back on nature. This is especially clear in the spirituality of the Christian East: "Beauty, which in the East is one of the best loved names expressing the divine harmony and the model of humanity transfigured, appears everywhere: in the shape of a church, in the sounds, in the colors, in the lights, in the scents."[36]

The omission of a section on the materiality of the sacrament and the ethical stance that accompanies the sacrament is thus noteworthy.[37] A future discussion of a liturgical theology of creation, especially if that could be arranged with input from Eastern Christian partners, would be very welcome.

Lex orandi, Lex credendi

One interesting feature that nonetheless runs throughout the document was the importance of the liturgy. Each year the group would analyze the baptismal rites of one of the communions of faith. This stimulating intellectual and practical exercise extended the reflection on the praxis of the faith beyond the mere acceptance or rejection of the baptism of infants. It allowed for a "thicker description" of what baptism meant and how it was symbolically communicated in each of the communions. It also brought to the fore the already mentioned problem of disparities between

34. "Called to be Peacemakers," 151, 162-185.

35. *Orientale Lumen,* 757.

36. *Laudato Si',* 235, citing *Orientale Lumen* 11.

37. Richard N. Fragomeni, "Liturgy at the Heart of Creation: Towards an Ecological Consciousness in Prayer," in *The Ecological Challenge: Ethical, Liturgical, and Spiritual Responses*, ed. Richard N. Fragomeni and John T. Pawlikowski (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1994), 67-82.

theory and practice that often bedevil ecumenical statements. Other ecumenical groups that do not allow themselves to be challenged by the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi* would do well to study this document.

In the same vein, the document concludes with the recommendation of a prayer service that is accompanied by the formation of discussion groups.[38] Gratitude to God for the gift of our "one baptism" and the belongingness in "one body" is *ipso facto* a celebration of the importance of having faith in the one true God and a celebration of our common belief as Christians in the vitality of the Trinitarian nature of the creeds that we profess. The report rightly notes that the mere recitation of the creed is not enough. Study sessions, youth rallies, ecumenical prayer services, and the like are all needed to bring us back to common roots. In this sense, the principle of *lex orandi, lex credendi* has a strong moral and pastoral dimension that this report brings to the fore. The call for the prayer service should not go unheeded.

The question of future topics will depend upon whether this particular trilateral remains in place. I have already indicated a few suggestions for future work that could be pursued in different kinds of venues. Two proposals for future discussions arise in the document and merit firm support and further refinement. One is the discussion with the Mennonites of the Lutheran-Catholic commission's report on how the recognition of baptism relates to the possibility of sharing the Eucharist.[39] The second has to do with confirmation.[40] The theological issues here are complex, but the need to address the topic of confirmation is clear on the basis of what this report says about discipleship, life in the Spirit, and the falling away of the young people from their ecclesial communities. We would be remiss as responsible Christians to see the flight of our youth away from the pews as a passing fad. A solid trilateral report on the crisis in the sense of vocation and mission among the youth would renew Christian unity, the entire Catholic Church, and help to foster ecumenical witnessing in our troubled world.

38. *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ,* 156, 162-163.

39. *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ,* 162.

40. Ibid., 95, 98-100, 159.

Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church: A Mennonite Reflection

IRMA FAST DUECK*

It was with deep gratitude that I reviewed the final report from the Lutheran-Mennonite-Roman Catholic trilateral conversations on baptism. The conversations must have been challenging and stimulating, and I am grateful for the candor and care by which the outcomes were presented in the ensuing study document. There were many things I appreciated about the process itself. I appreciated how earlier dialogues, especially *Call Together to be Peacemakers* and *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ*, were constituent and formative in shaping this conversation on baptism. Having participated in earlier Mennonite-Catholic dialogues, I have often wondered how the conversations and insights gleaned—and more importantly, the relationships, formed—from those exchanges might move forward in the future. I valued the authoritative place of "tradition" in shaping the baptismal imagination of all three groups, especially from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective where the formative power of tradition is not always recognized. At the same time, I was struck by the dynamic and growing understanding of tradition; simply put, we are not the same now as we once were. And even though the baptismal practices of Lutherans, Roman Catholics, and Mennonites reflect distinct ecclesiological traditions and practices, I appreciated the use of Scripture in holding all three groups together within an ecumenical Christian body.

Coming from an Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, I am particularly aware of the challenge of representing Anabaptist-Mennonites, especially with regards to the contemporary practice of baptism, where some have been more influenced by contemporary evangelicalism than by the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition per se. However, I was grateful that the diversity within each communion did not sabotage the ability to engage each other in a trilateral conversation.

Perhaps most inspiring and encouraging were the final reflections included in the conclusion of the document—"Convictions Held," "Gifts Received," and "Challenges Accepted." These final reflections and

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observations serve to solidify the bonds that have been developing through ecumenical dialogues over these past years. They bear witness to a deepening practice of Christian friendship, a friendship based not only on shared convictions but also on trust, honest engagement, a respectful recognition of differences, and, perhaps most significantly, on an openness to be changed as a result of having entered into relationships with each other.

Symbols, Rituals, and Embodied Baptismal Theologies

In 2013, the Congress of Societas Liturgica, an ecumenical association promoting ecumenical dialogue on worship, liturgical renewal, and unity, gathered in Würzburg, Germany, to engage research on liturgical reform. The Congress appropriately began with an ecumenical service of worship in the magnificent Würzburg Cathedral. As participants processed in, many in full regalia—clergy in cassocks and collars; sisters in habits; bishops with mitres; and, of course, many of us garbed in uninteresting "ordinary" dress—each paused to touch the holy water at the baptismal font in the narthex. The act was a reminder of our baptism and faith, as participants moved from the secular and entered into sacred space of worship.

It was an act that I had participated in many times as a liturgical tourist in different denominational traditions. It is a practice that I have even encouraged Mennonites to consider adapting in their own communities. Yet for some reason, at this solemn ecumenical moment, I experienced a distinctly visceral bodily resistance to touching this shared water which bound us. The strength of the emotion caught me by surprise and I immediately felt a pang of shame. I have always considered myself a strong supporter of ecumenicity with a deep commitment to reconciliation. For many years I have participated in Mennonite-Catholic dialogues. I have attended Anglican and Lutheran churches when Mennonite congregations were not near by. Virtually all of my theological academic training has occurred in ecumenical settings. Why the resistance now? Perhaps because we were in Germany, the territory of my Anabaptist beginnings, a mere 350 kilometers from Zürich where the first Anabaptist baptisms occurred—baptisms which, ironically, resulted for many in yet another re-baptism by drowning into martyrdom. Perhaps this deep residual suspicion is the source of the sectarian impulses and prejudices that somehow continue to lie within me. Perhaps because baptism, at its core, is embodied theology—a theology grasped more through the body than the mind. Simply put, in baptism there is always more going on than meets the eye.

The symbolic and ritualized nature of baptism makes conversations around the ecumenical meanings of baptism even more complex. Baptism communicates primarily through its use of symbol and ritual, and Anabaptist-Mennonites are relative neophytes to the hermeneutics of the interpretation of symbols. Nevertheless, the language of symbol and religious ritual is complex for all people of faith, including Roman Catholics, for whom symbolic language is in many ways their "mother tongue." While practices of baptism draw on patterns and rituals that are most likely familiar and repetitive, the practice of baptism is at the same time polyphonic and capable of speaking in several voices at once. The three distinct chapters of "Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church" attest to this polyphonous nature—baptism is about a theology of salvation *and* it is about the Church *and* it is about the path of discipleship. At the same time, the mystery and meanings of baptism can never be fully comprehended because the language of symbol is a language comprehended as much by the body as by the intellect. In the words of the Catholic theologian Nathan Mitchell,

> Liturgical acts first address the *body*, the sensorium, not the neocortex. *Caro cardo salutis*, wrote Tertullian; "the flesh is the hinge of salvation." Thus, we baptize bodies, not brains; we immerse shivering skin in water; smear chrism on flesh aquiver with desire and emotion; and finally lead hungry neophytes to food and drink at the Lord's table.[1]

The ritual and symbol of baptism becomes a vehicle to meanings greater than their own immediate reality, capable of conveying the realities of a spiritual world that extends beyond the material world and yet uses material existence to convey these meanings. Meanings are wildly woven and layered together through a symbol. In the words of liturgical theologian Aiden Kavanagh, "symbols, being roomy, allow many different people to put them on, so to speak, in different ways. . . . Symbols coax one into a swamp of meaning and requires one to frolic in it."[2]

This is all to say, to participate in baptism is to participate in something that can never be fully understood. Perhaps this is one of the first gifts of baptism that all three traditions in the trilateral conversation share—baptism operates at the boundaries of our understanding, inviting a posture of humility and holy awe for Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Anabaptist-Mennonites alike, both as we engage our own traditions and,

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1, Nathan D. Mitchell, *Meeting Mystery: Liturgy Worship and Sacraments* (New York: Orbis, 2006), 27.

2, Aiden Kavanagh, *Elements of Rite: A Handbook of Liturgical Style* (New York: Pueblo, 1966), 5.

even more, when we engage each other's baptismal practices. In baptism, there is a mystery. For some, baptism is a mystery that needs to be broken apart to figure out how it works and then put back together again. To do so, however, is to miss the gift baptism offers as a reminder to Christians that we do not know, nor will we ever fully understand, God's working in our lives, through the church, and in the world. As such, any trilateral conversation on baptism is theological dialogue on holy ground.

I highlight the hermeneutical challenge of understanding the symbolic and ritualized nature of baptism not only to underline the complexity of comprehending the deep mystery that resides within the practice of baptism in all three traditions, but also to indicate future directions for deepening our understandings of baptismal practice. The risk in a trilateral ecumenical dialogue such as this is to present baptism in a systematized and idealized form within each of the three traditions, where baptism is described in its perfection rather than as a practice embodied in communities situated in concrete time and place. This may reflect a broader issue engaging ecclesiology more generally. In the words of Catholic theologian Nicholas Healy,

> In general, ecclesiology in our period has become highly systematic and theoretical, focused more upon discerning the right things to think about the church rather than oriented to the living, rather messy, confused and confusing body that the church actually is.[3]

I was grateful that the writers acknowledged the tensions between theology and practice throughout the document. Far from detracting from the insights gleaned from the trilateral conversations, they indicate a potential path forward. How can bridges be built not only between the three traditions but also between baptismal theology and the lived experiences of those within our communities? Since baptism is a *practice* of the church it makes good sense to engage together in the ways it is embodied and *practiced* within living Roman Catholic, Lutheran, and Anabaptist-Mennonite communities. My encounter with the waters of baptismal remembrance in *Würzburg* served as a reminder of how significant our lived experiences with baptism are in understanding baptism's meanings.

This brings me to a second point about the lived reality of baptism in our communities. The goal of the document, as stated at the beginning, is to "contribute to better mutual understanding and greater faithfulness to Jesus Christ" (§7). At the beginning of the document and throughout the text, the authors frequently recognize and name misunderstandings and

3. Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 3.

misjudgments between the three traditions. This process of naming misinterpretations is critical in understanding baptism within the respective traditions; but perhaps even more significantly, it is a critical step in understanding each other as people of faith. Potential next stages might involve more intentional engagement with the lived experiences with baptism of those within our respective faith traditions.

However, there is yet another potential level of engagement with the misconstruction of baptism—namely, to inquire into how our respective practices of baptism may have possibly malformed us. It could be hypothesized that it is precisely these places of "mal-formation" that have resulted in the most significant misunderstandings of each other. In a recent book titled *The Dangers of Christian Practice,* historian and theologian Lauren Winner highlights the possibility that Christian participation in liturgical practices has resulted, at times, in what she calls "characteristic damage." Winner urges Christians "to give accounts of, rather than evade, the damages Christian practice sustains by sin."[4] For example, with regards to baptism, Winner points to christening parties in the early 1900s where baptism became a primarily familial event, excluding the church. [5] The focus was on the home and on socially strategic guest lists in which baptism was used to create and sustain social location. Baptismal practices such as these resulted in the tendency of many churches to "evacuate" the ecclesial in favor of the familial. [6] Examples of various forms of damage from within my own Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition also abound, such as when pastors refused to marry unbaptized people, coercing individuals into the rite of baptism in order for the marriage to take place. Or when the mode of baptism (e.g., sprinkling, pouring, immersion) was used to exclude believers from full participation in the life of the church. Winner is not suggesting believers abandon liturgical practices, but rather that we acknowledge the misuse of the practices such as baptism in order to invite more honest participation in those practices and in the divine gifts through which God continues to work. Again, this is suggested not as an alternative to the good work of the trilateral dialogue, but rather in the spirit of confession and reconciliation. An honest engagement with the theology connected to these lived realities may deepen both our self-understanding and our relationships with each other.

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4 Lauren Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2018), 1.

5 Ibid., 122.

6 Ibid., 127.

Baptism as a Way of Life

The second and third chapters of *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ* were both significant in emphasizing baptism as more than a moment, an action, or self-enclosed event (§56). There has been a propensity in the history of Christianity to become preoccupied with the act of baptism itself. What form should the washing take—pouring? sprinkling? full immersion? What, exactly, is God doing in the baptism? What about human agency? Who is eligible for baptism—children of baptized Christians? professing adults? those who have been catechized? When baptism is viewed primarily as an event or occasion, there is a tendency to become preoccupied with these issues, which have frequently divided Christians. This is not to suggest that these matters are unimportant; but a preoccupation with the action of baptism risks detracting attention from the richer, fuller meanings of baptism, as elucidated throughout the *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church*. To put it simply, to be preoccupied with baptism as an act or event risks missing the proverbial forest for the trees.

The trilateral conversation on baptism clearly recognized baptism as a way of life that is, at the same time, deeply personal *and* intensely ecclesiological *and* profoundly ethical, with significant implications for discipleship. A significant challenge for all three traditions in the contemporary practice of baptism is to expand the meaning of baptism beyond the personal and private. When my university students reflect on their baptisms, their imagination is frequently limited to baptism as something "*I* do"—*I* learn, *I* decide, *I* get baptized, *I* join the church. In the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, accompanying this personal emphasis on the decision of baptism has been a history of qualifications needed to be eligible to participate. That practice has sometimes brought us dangerously close to conceiving of salvation as our own responsibility—that is, something *I* do, *I* achieve, *I* make myself eligible—which is a danger early Anabaptist forebearers never imagined as they were reacting to the practices of baptism at the time of the Reformations.

Additionally, members of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition sometimes view the church as a barrier to baptism. As a professor at Canadian Mennonite University, I am continually bewildered by the many students who have publicly expressed commitments to the Christian faith and whose lives exhibit a deep desire to follow Jesus through a life of discipleship, and yet choose not to be baptized or join the church. While the reasons for not being baptized are as diverse as young adults are these days, the most common reasons seem to be connected to the church – young adults desire baptism but do not necessarily want to become a member of the church. In fact, this may be the first time in the history of Christianity where there are significant numbers of self-

identifying Christians who have chosen not to participate in the baptismal rite of initiation into the Christian faith and into the Christian church.

A few years ago, I, together with two researchers, Peter Epp and Joseph Kiranto, engaged in a research study with a small group of Manitoba Mennonite young adults around questions of baptism and church membership. We interviewed unbaptized Anabaptist-Mennonite young adults who self-identified as Christian and who were involved with the church on some level. Virtually all the participants had positive formative experiences within Mennonite faith communities. But we were surprised at how many young adults spoke positively about the church and recognized its importance, yet were hesitant to make commitment to the church through baptism. Simply put, they perceived the church as a barrier to baptism.[7]

Some churches have reacted to this resistance of connecting baptism and church membership by separating the two in the hope of making the decision for baptism easier. Unfortunately, the risk of separating baptism and life in the church risks "watering down" the rich meaning of baptism *and* the church, the Body of Christ; it is a bit like trying to get baptized without getting really wet.

In the words of theologian Samuel Wells, "Baptism is being made part of a body with others, not simply being united to God in Christ."[8] The trilateral conversation on baptism testified that baptism needs the church, and the church needs baptism. It resisted the temptation to view baptism as a self-enclosed event and instead repeatedly indicated that baptism is really a way of life—a way of being Christian together. It is for this reason that participation in the church is not an "afterthought" of baptism but rather a path for living into our baptism.

Which brings me to the final chapter of *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church*. The final chapter, "Living Out Baptism in Discipleship," was perhaps the most intriguing of the three chapters as significant commonalties of perspectives emerged among the three traditions around the conviction that baptism elucidated the path of discipleship. When divergences around the meaning of Christian authenticity in the practice of discipleship emerged, the authors recognized complementarity. Theologians such as Rowan Williams have argued convincingly that the sacraments of the church contain within

7. See Peter J. H. Epp, "'It's Like Dating Around:' Mennonite Young Adults, Baptism & Church," *Vision: A Journal for Church and Theology*, 19:1 (Spring 2018), 15-24.—https://press.palni.org/ojs/index.php/vision/article/view/29/7 (accessed Dec. 7, 2020).

8. Samuel Wells, I*ncarnational Ministry: Being with the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2017), 20.

them the very contours of the life of discipleship.[9] To claim that baptism contains within it the contours of the Christian life may suggest a more sacramental understanding of baptism than some Anabaptists have traditionally been comfortable with. Yet this too was a gift received from the trilateral conversations. In response to the personal dimensions of living out baptism the Catholics claim, "Sacraments are precious means that Christ has entrusted to the Church to assist her members in living out their baptism" (§60). The Lutheran perspective also highlights the gift of God's grace through the sacraments, which is the source of a life of discipleship (§61-62).

Whether considered an ordinance or sacrament, baptism is a gift given to the church by God through Jesus Christ. This sacramental notion of baptism as gift is a helpful corrective to Anabaptist-Mennonite tendencies to focus primarily on human agency and response both in the practice of baptism and in the practice of discipleship. Ordinances/sacraments are human actions through which God acts—God acts in baptism. God continues to act through the life of discipleship. To root discipleship in the sacrament of baptism binds discipleship in the action and self-giving of God.

The public dimensions of the life of discipleship highlighted the tension that the three traditions have historically held between the life of faith and life in the world. In the baptismal tradition of the church, baptism has traditionally always included a renunciation of the devil/evil as part of the baptismal promises made. As such, baptism has always involved a saying "no" (a renunciation, a "dying") and a saying "yes" (an allegiance, a "living into"). A liturgical theologian, Alexander Schmemann, traces the roots of this renunciation to the early third-century church as it found its way in a hostile context. Schmemann writes:

> When [the pre-baptismal] rite of renunciation came into existence, its meaning was self-evident to the catechumen as well as to the entire Christian community. They lived within a pagan world whose life was permeated with the *pompa diaboli*, i.e. the worship of idols, participation in the cult of the Emperor, adoration of matter, etc. He not only knew what he was renouncing; he was also fully aware to what a "narrow way," to what a difficult life—truly "non-

9. See Rowan Williams, "Sacramental Living," St. Peter's Public Lectures, Trinity College/University of Melbourne, May 14 and 16, 2002.—https://www.trinity.unimelb.edu.au/getmedia/b1ef15dc-6fdc-4212-81ed-c699ca1dd1f9/TrinityPaper32.aspx (accessed Dec. 7, 2020).

> conformist" and radically opposed to the "way of life" of the people around him—this renunciation obliged him.[10]

This renunciation of Satan was not intended to be a repudiation of some kind of mythological being per se, but a rejection of a way of life, a way of being, that was rooted in self-deception and human arrogance. Or, in the words of Schmemann, a rejection of a way of life rooted in "pride which has truly taken human life from God and made it into darkness, death and hell."[11]

While the practice of the renunciation of the devil at baptism continued through the medieval church into both the Catholic and many Protestant traditions, the practice has almost been lost in most Anabaptist-Mennonite settings, though it is now re-emerging in more recent baptismal liturgies. The gift of the practice of renunciation within many baptismal traditions highlights the distinctive *political* nature of all baptism, as those baptized are submerged in the social-political reality of God, the new creation, a new heaven, and a new earth. While the meaning of what it means to live authentically within this "political" baptismal imagination has been shaped by the experiences and traditions of the three conversation partners in the trilateral discussions, it remains that the baptismal imagination is rooted in the life, gift, and love of God in whom all Christians find their hope.

Baptism and the Unity of the Church

Baptism is one of the most primal and primitive of Christian actions. In many ways, it is an unpretentious act that simply involves a washing in the name of the Trinity. And yet clearly it has been a defining act. How do you know if someone is a Christian? They are baptized. And yet, as *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church* attests, the history of the church is full of disputes around this practice of washing. The simple action of washing has separated and divided us, even to the point of turning us into enemies. From the beginning, it was baptism that served to define the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition against the baseline of Roman Catholic and Protestant traditions, though clearly there were also other differences even greater than the Anabaptist practice of baptism. Rather than unite us, our practices of baptism have divided us.

"By one Spirit we were baptized into one body," concludes *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church* (§74). The passage from 1 Corinthians, as well as other scriptures included in the document such as

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10. Alexander Schmemann, *Of Water & The Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism* (Yonkers, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 28.

11. Ibid., 30.

the accounts of the baptism of Jesus in the Gospels, the washing of early Christians converts found in the Book of Acts, and Paul's other baptismal descriptions, attest to the reality that baptism was more than a cultural rite of passage. These baptismal scriptural accounts became the charter for Christian baptism in the church, and they continue to shape our understanding. However, perhaps more significant than serving as the origins for our understanding of baptism, those same biblical baptismal accounts also link the church to the early divisions that separated people on the basis of cultural identities and ideologies, of race and birthright, thereby calling the very practice of baptism into question. As an act of resistance, the ritual of baptism redefined Christian identity not on the basis of differences, but on the basis of the Trinity in whose name the practice takes place. For this reason, it is fitting that trilateral conversation among Catholics, Lutherans, and Mennonites began with the practice of baptism, reminding us that our unity with each other through baptism is given to us as gift, through Jesus Christ.

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