

Baptist-Lutheran Dialogue  
A Message to Our Churches  
Geneva, Switzerland, 1990

## Introduction

Baptists and Lutherans worldwide have, as a result of the work of the Baptist-Lutheran Joint Commission, caught up with their common history. That history stretches back to the relationships between Lutherans and Anabaptists at the time of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Reformation. While present-day Baptist churches are not directly descended from the Anabaptists, this document indicates a sense of kinship. One historical reason for our international conversations has been the Lutheran condemnations of Anabaptists in 16<sup>th</sup>-century confessional documents.

The conversations of the present joint commission, 1986–89, have their immediate roots in correspondence between the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) which began in 1975. On the basis of contacts between officials of the two international bodies, and noting that regional/national dialogues had been taking place, it was decided that plans for more widely based conversations should be laid. The plans were twice postponed, but finally began to be implemented in 1984.

The first meeting of the joint commission was held in Rummelsberg, Federal Republic of Germany, in 1986. Subsequent meetings were held in Wildbad, Federal Republic of Germany (1987), Dresden, German Democratic Republic (1988), and Smidstrup Strand, Denmark (1989). In each meeting place we reserved time to meet, to exchange views and to discuss matters of common interest with local Baptist and Lutheran church leaders.

As stated by the parent bodies, the aim of the four-year round of conversations has been “to clarify differences, convergences and agreements in thought and practice between our churches... findings should outline our present view of former condemnations, suggest ways of overcoming present difficulties and recommend ways to improve mutual knowledge, respect and cooperation between our churches”.

As the present document indicates, members of the joint commission adopted a plan for their meetings which corresponded to a suggestion from the BWA that discussion topics include “faith, grace, baptism, ecclesiology and ministry”. The multilateral Lima paper of Faith and Order, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, has been a significant point of reference during our work. We have also found common Bible study of pericopes pertinent to our discussions to deepen and enrich our mutual understanding of God’s word, and also to help us break through barriers of terminology and customary habits of expression.

What we have written is the fruit of our discussions and of much preparatory work between sessions. It must now stand on its own as our report to the BWA and the LWF who appointed us. We have not been able to solve the problem of baptism, the problem which has come to symbolize the theological differences between us. That solution awaits future leading of God’s Spirit. But we have been able to say much together about matters at the heart of our common Christian faith.

It is a limitation of ecumenical documents that by them we cannot communicate successfully what these four years have meant to us as participants. We have been privileged to grow together in bonds of Christian understanding and affection, to recognize in one another members of the faithful people of Christ. We have prayed together, meditated together on the holy scriptures, sung God’s praises with one voice. We have shared our visions of the church’s

mission and our calling as Christian sisters and brothers. We have sought to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).

Our prayer is that our report may be the catalyst to bring together Baptists and Lutherans in various parts of the world who through their own common study might have similar experiences of unity in the one Spirit.

Thorwald Lorenzen  
*Baptist chair*

Marc Lienhard  
*Lutheran chair*

## **I. Authority for preaching and teaching in the Baptist and Lutheran traditions**

### 1. THE NATURE OF AUTHORITY

1. Authority for preaching and teaching in both our communions resides ultimately in God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, and who is present with us in the saving and liberating power of the Spirit. This authority is grounded in the good news of God’s love and grace; therefore it is authoritative, but not authoritarian. For both communions Christ himself is the embodiment of authority for preaching and teaching.

### 2. SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

#### *Scripture alone (sola scriptura)*

2. Authority is necessarily linked to the Bible, because the biblical testimonies witness to God’s saving and liberating activity in the history of humanity.

3. The scriptures belong to the Tradition of the Christian church. Within that Tradition the scriptures function to protect the gospel of Jesus as the Christ against influences foreign to the gospel and the Bible.

4. In the development of the biblical canon (the determination of which writings are included in the holy scriptures) the church sees the work of God’s Spirit. By recognizing the canon, the church confesses that the scriptures, i.e. the biblical part of the Tradition, are the measure of the rest of Tradition. The scriptures alone can ascertain that the Tradition remains true to the gospel. They alone can assure that the Tradition continues to tell the story of Jesus as Redeemer and Liberator. This is the meaning of the Reformation emphasis on sola scriptura which both Lutherans and Baptists affirm. This formula is open for misunderstanding, however, and therefore calls for interpretation.

#### *Christ alone (solus Christus)*

5. As Baptists and Lutherans we look with gratitude and reverence to the great cloud of witnesses that has gone before us. By preserving the integrity of the gospel through the turbulences of history, and by passing the gospel on to us, they have become to us fathers and mothers in the faith. We owe much to Tradition and therefore do not want to depreciate it.

6. We recognize, however, that not all traditions are in harmony with the ground and content of our faith, Jesus Christ. Our common Reformation heritage points to the fact that in addition to legitimate developments of the reality to which the Bible witnesses, teachings and practices have also evolved which we cannot understand as consonant with the biblical witness.

Our churches therefore recognize and accept the gift “to distinguish between spirits” (1 Cor. 12:10) and “test the spirits to see whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1).

7. The Spirit of God and the scriptures point therefore to Jesus Christ as the content of our faith. In Jesus Christ the scriptures and Tradition have their centre and their norm.

8. Sola scriptura is not directed against Tradition as such, but against a tradition that departs from the biblical witness to Jesus Christ, or attempts to identify the living reality of the gospel with dogmatic formulations. Sola scriptura points us to Jesus Christ, as he is proclaimed in the scriptures, as the ground, content and norm of faith.

9. Jesus Christ is God’s gift of salvation for humanity and all of creation. In and through Christ we are reconciled with God, our sins are forgiven, and we are liberated to become instruments of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18–20).

10. While Baptists and Lutherans agree on the authority of scripture for revealing the love of God in Jesus Christ, they may differ in the way they use scripture as norm for Christian life and practice. Baptists tends to seek explicit warrants in scripture for their faith, practice and doctrines, while Lutheran practice and tradition allow for greater freedom in matters which are not explicitly commanded in scripture. Both Baptists and Lutherans strive to live and work in harmony with the gospel as it is revealed in the scriptures.

#### *The interpretation of scripture*

11. As Lutheran and Baptist Christians we confidently point all persons to the scriptures with the conviction that there they can find the way of salvation, and be strengthened for their Christian life.

12. Some parts of the Bible are difficult to understand because they were written long ago in historical and cultural settings which are different from ours. Different readings in the received manuscripts of the biblical writings raise questions about the original texts. Biblical research and interpretation are therefore helpful in discovering the depth and riches of the biblical message. The authentic message of the Bible, however, is clear to everyone who wants to hear.

13. Since the Bible witnesses to historical events, and since we confess that in Jesus Christ God has become a human person, and that in the Holy Spirit God has become part of our human historical life, we must read and interpret the biblical writings not only in light of their historical context, but also in light of our own experience and historical circumstances, in order to allow the divine message to become a living reality ever again.

14. When we relate the divine message to the human context, we must be aware that we are always prone to use the Bible to validate our preconceived doctrines and practices. In confessing with the church through the ages that the message of the Bible stands over against us in grace and in judgment, we seek to protect the divine message from human distortions.

15. We believe that the scriptures have only been rightly understood when they lead us to Christ and instruct us for the obedience of faith in everyday Christian life.

#### *The function of theology*

16. Faith may go astray: we are aware of the constant temptation to compromise the lordship of Jesus Christ by protecting what has become important to us in our life and in our church. Our theological task is to discern what doctrines and practices are legitimate expressions of the Christ-centred biblical message and which are distortions. At the same time we must

constantly resist the temptation to identify the living reality of the gospel with human formulations and structures.

17. Beyond this critical task, theologians have the constructive task of shaping fresh theological expressions which seek to refocus the gospel that we have received to meet the challenges of the present and the demands of the future, thus serving the tasks of preaching and teaching. Together we recognize the specific challenge of our time to provide an authoritative theological basis for our churches' involvement in the struggle for peace, justice and the integrity of creation.

18. Theology aims at enabling the church effectively to fulfill its function to proclaim and manifest the gospel in word and deed.

### *The role of creeds and confessions*

19. Both our churches have written creeds and confessions,<sup>1</sup> but these have no independent authority alongside the Bible. They help churches and church members properly to interpret and understand the scriptures. They are "signposts" to point us towards the centre of the biblical message, where we find the basis and content of our faith, Jesus Christ. They are "guard rails" to keep us on the main road of Christian convictions. They are "road maps" that help us to reach the goals of our faith. They also function to help the churches preserve continuity within the discontinuity of time. Although creeds and confessions have their own historical *Sitz im Leben*, they serve to express the churches' identities, to explain the faith to others, and to fend off illegitimate traditions and practices.

20. A difference between Baptists and Lutherans can be found in the relative importance which they ascribe to such confessions. The Lutheran confessions were statements that articulated the reforms which their writers and endorsers wanted to bring about in the medieval church. Consequently these confessions were intensely formative of Lutheranism, and remain an inextricable part of Lutheran identity and theology. Lutheran pastors promise at their ordination to preach and teach in conformity with some or all of the Lutheran confessions.

21. Although Baptists have regional confessions written at different times and for different purposes, they have no confessional documents that apply worldwide. The authority of these confessions is limited. Baptists generally refer directly to the authority of the scriptures.

### 3. FAITH AND PRACTICE

22. The Holy Spirit, working through the gospel of Jesus Christ, creates the community of faith, the church. Both Baptists and Lutherans affirm that all Christians live in direct relationship with God through Christ in the Spirit. They are called to be part of the community of the redeemed, and as true priests and prophets to lead lives that are characterized by discipleship and witness to the world. In their fellowship with one another believers are called to seek the will of God and then to order their church life in a way which best witnesses to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

23. Both Lutherans and Baptists affirm a "special" ministry, also called by God and marked by ordination, within the "general" ministry of witness and discipleship which is incumbent on all members. With reference to the ordained ministry Lutherans have stressed its

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<sup>1</sup> The major Lutheran confessions are accessible in Theodore G. Tappert, ed., *Book of Concord*, Philadelphia, Muhlenberg, 1959. For Baptist confessions see W. L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Valley Forge, PA, Judson, rev. ed. 1969; G. Keith Parker, *Baptists in Europe: History and Confessions of Faith*, Nashville, Broadman, 1982.

role within the church, while Baptists have tended to emphasize the evangelistic and missionary thrust of the ministry.

24. In principle, the Lutheran confessions (CA 7) do not prescribe any particular church structure, whether congregational, presbyterial or episcopal, but they insist that whatever structures are utilized they must allow the gospel to have free course and not hinder it. Thus the office of the ordained ministry is held to be given by God for the sake of the gospel, that is, to ensure both the free course and the purity of the gospel as word and sacrament. Therefore the ordained ministry's authority for public preaching and teaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments is lodged not in the church structure but in the gospel; the structure mediates that authority, which is to say that the structure is always subservient to the gospel.

25. Baptist practice is diverse. Although theological training is often seen as a condition for ordination, and preaching and the administration of baptism and the Lord's supper are normally carried out by ordained ministers, there is a great openness to and respect for laypersons who preach and serve in the churches alongside the ordained ministers. For Baptists, authority to designate men and women to lead in worship, preach and administer baptism and the Lord's supper is vested in the local congregation. The authority of the ordained ministry is grounded in God who calls men and women to the gospel ministry; this call is confirmed by the church.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

26. From our discussions it has become clear that Baptists and Lutherans agree that all authority resides ultimately in God's revelation in Jesus Christ. We regard the scriptures as the distinctive witness to Jesus Christ by which all other expressions of the Tradition are judged. We affirm historical and contemporary efforts of Christians to formulate the faith for their time in creeds, confessions and theological statements.

#### *Recommendations*

27. On the basis of our substantial agreement in matters of authority for preaching and teaching, we recommend:

- that our churches be encouraged to participate in interdenominational pastors' meetings, pulpit exchanges, and joint worship and evangelistic services;
- that our churches encourage their theological faculties, theological students and Christian educators to rediscover our common historical roots in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, to investigate the histories of relationships between Baptists and Lutherans wherever they have occurred, and thus to become aware that there is much more that unites than divides us;
- that our respective communions be encouraged to continue further study and conversations about our similarities and differences in doctrine and practice and thereby develop bridges of understanding for the future.

## **II. Faith-baptism-discipleship**

### I. THE STATE OF THE QUESTION

28. In discussing faith-baptism-discipleship our Baptist-Lutheran conversation touched upon its most crucial and controversial subject, the problem of the baptism of infants. Though

unresolved questions remain, the many aspects of the issue which Baptists and Lutherans share in common should be accorded proper emphasis. These joint affirmations cover not only faith and discipleship; we found them in baptism too, so long as the particular issue of infant baptism was bracketed out.

29. We emphasize together the intimate relationship among faith, baptism and discipleship. Baptism must be understood within such a broad life context, not in isolation as a separate entity. It was, therefore, of utmost importance for us to discuss faith and baptism in relation to Christian discipleship. This underlines our conviction that faith in Jesus Christ and baptism are essentially linked to our mission and service in the world and to our hope in the coming Lord. Whatever is said about faith, baptism and discipleship must be in accord with the biblical testimony, according to which they all have their place in God's saving activity. By grace God calls men and women to become disciples of Jesus Christ; God forgives their sin, renews their lives, endows them with the Holy Spirit, makes them members of the body of Christ. The initiative always comes from God. The human response is a reaction made possible by the Holy Spirit.

30. On the one hand, both Baptists and Lutherans are inheritors of long and living traditions which influence our convictions, arguments, practices and perspectives. On the other hand, both face together new and ever-changing situations which call for a renewed theological perspective on faith-baptism-discipleship. Among Lutherans one sees both a growing reluctance to practice an indiscriminate baptism of infants and an increasing number of adult baptisms. Among Baptists one notes a continuing debate both about the extent of God's activity in baptism, and about the transferal of membership from other churches. But the traditional point of disagreement between Lutherans and Baptists still remains. Though Lutherans increasingly are baptizing adults, they maintain the basic practice of baptizing infants. Baptists, on the other hand, practise believer's baptism only.

31. Lutherans and Baptists have basically the same understanding of faith and discipleship. Our discussions showed that inherited reservations and fears on either side do not affect the substance of the issues, but rather signal dangers of one-sided emphases arising as the traditions have developed.

32. We both regard faith as the appropriate answer to God's gracious invitation. It is both a life-renewing event and a lifelong process. It is total and confident commitment to God, practised in discipleship. There are some differences of emphasis. While Lutherans have emphasized that the response of faith is not our doing nor is faith our possession, Baptists have emphasized the present reality and personal experience of faith. From Lutherans, Baptists may learn to regard faith as God's gift; from Baptists, Lutherans may learn that this gift calls for human response and enables a transformed life. We both regard discipleship—following Jesus wherever he calls us, even if it is to bear his cross—as a lifelong process, encompassing our entire existence: in fellowship with the people of God, in doing God's will, in prayer and worship and in service and mission to the world.

33. The chief issue between Lutherans and Baptists is how faith relates to baptism. For Baptists, personal and conscious faith prior to baptism is indispensable. For Lutherans, on the other hand, baptism may antedate a personal, self-conscious response of faith provided that the person is surrounded and upheld by the faith of the church and the family. Our conversations concentrated on this difference, but could not bridge the gap. The various reasons are given in the second part of this chapter.

34. Although there is much in the theology of baptism which Lutherans and Baptists hold in common, Baptists in general cannot regard the baptism of infants and the baptism of adults as two different forms of one baptism. They are regarded as the results of two different theological positions. In general, Baptists are unable to acknowledge infant baptism as baptism. That believing adults should be baptized is disputed by neither side. Baptist inability to acknowledge the baptism of infants as Christian baptism causes Lutherans to question whether Baptists understand baptism as a means of grace.

## 2. THE UNDERSTANDING OF BAPTISM

### *Biblical*

35. Baptists and Lutherans both build their theological understanding of baptism on the New Testament. No single passage of the New Testament includes all the aspects of a systematic doctrine of baptism. However, it is clear that baptism is grounded on Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18–20). It is related to the gift of the Holy Spirit, received by faith and lived in Christian discipleship (Acts 2:38). By baptism “we were buried... with him... into 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. 6:4). Other themes giving content to Christian baptism include new life (Eph. 2:5f.), new birth (John 3:5; Titus 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:3f., 2:1f.), conversion and forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38), incorporation into the body of Christ (Acts 2:41; 1 Cor. 12:13), salvation (Eph. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:20f.), justification (1 Cor. 6:11; Titus 3:7), sanctification (1 Cor. 6:11), washing away of sins (Acts 22:16, 1 Cor. 6:11, Heb. 10:22, 1 Pet. 3:21), becoming heirs of the kingdom of God and of eternal life (John 3:5; Titus 3:5–7, 1 Pet. 1:3f.), putting on Christ (Gal. 3:27; Col. 3:9f.), a new humanity without any barriers of division (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:27f.; Col. 3:9–11), new obedience to Christ (Rom. 6:6ff.; Col. 3:5ff.; 1 Pet. 2:1ff.), Christian unity (Eph. 4:4–6). This survey of New Testament aspects and references demonstrates the intimate connection of baptism with faith and discipleship. We find the emphasis on the initial experience of conversion as well as on the ongoing process of living in Christ and on the activity of the Holy Spirit.

36. Though the relationship between God’s act and the human response cannot be sorted out in a neatly schematic manner, it is clear that everywhere the New Testament begins with God’s initiative in sending the Son, in giving divine grace, in forgiving sin, in renewing lives. A biblical theology of baptism must never separate baptism from God’s initiative nor from the variegated relationships of the context of faith and discipleship. Baptism has its place within that framework; it cannot be regarded as a mere expression of human obedience, nor as a ceremony which is effective in and of itself. Rather baptism is a divine ordinance by which God accepts us into the kingdom and sets us within God’s people. It gives public expression to God’s covenant and commissions us to service in the world.

37. Lutherans and Baptists agree that there is no reference to the baptism of infants in the New Testament, though some Lutherans see in the accounts of the baptism of the Philippian jailer and “all his family” (Acts 16:33) and of “the household of Stephanas” (1 Cor. 1:16) implicit references. It is indisputable, however, that the theological affirmations about baptism in the New Testament assume the baptism of believing adults. Therefore, Baptists baptize believers only. Lutherans, on the other hand, argue that a theological understanding of baptism which is thoroughly biblical is not contradicted by the baptism of infants.

38. Both Lutherans and Baptists accept that the missionary situation in which the biblical statements about the relationship of faith and baptism are made requires that a confession of faith

in response to the proclamation of the gospel precede baptism. Though faith matures and grows following baptism (it is not gift in the static sense), faith must be in evidence when someone requests baptism. Baptists regard this New Testament situation as normative, thus finding it impossible to baptize infants. Lutherans, however, have maintained that once the question of children being born into Christian families had to be faced by the growing church, that church rightly modified its view that a personal confession of faith had to precede baptism. Lutherans have, therefore, been open both to the fundamental New Testament sequence (proclamation, conversion/faith, baptism) and to the baptism of infants. Moreover, Lutherans have not wanted to equate the gift of faith with the personal confession of it, and have, therefore, not thought of the biblical sequence as a series of separate steps.

### *Theological*

39. Lutherans stress that baptism is a form of God's word—a visible word, the expression of the priority of divine grace. It is God who through baptism incorporates the person baptized into the kingdom and thus into the community of the church. In baptism, therefore, God gives the gift of salvation, a gracious gift which only faith can receive. Baptism and faith belong together for without faith God's baptismal gift is of no use. But lack of faith cannot nullify God's action; as God's gracious action baptism remains valid even without faith. That is why baptism must not be repeated. Non-believers who have been baptized are to be called to recognize what God has accomplished in them, and to respond in faith. The priority of God's gracious action is unmistakable in the baptism of infants: infant baptism becomes a special testimony that baptism is a gift, something to be received. Lutherans think it is not without significance that Jesus called children prototypes of God's kingdom (Matt. 19:14).

40. Baptists do not recognize a biblical foundation for such an interpretation of baptism as a visible word of prevenient grace. They do not attribute to baptism the place the gospel occupies, the gospel which is proclaimed and testified to. Baptists must regard the Lutheran understanding as altering the character and place of baptism in the biblical order of salvation. Baptism is not the first step. For Baptists, the Lutheran view isolates and over-estimates baptism, giving it an independent theological weight and function. They fear this could lead to attributing to baptism the place reserved for Christ and his cross.

### *Anthropological*

41. Anthropology also plays a role in the differing Lutheran and Baptist positions, particularly the issue of freedom of choice. It is, of course, difficult to make a clean distinction between the theological and anthropological aspects of that issue, but freedom of choice is not a theological issue alone. Baptists emphasize a person's innate freedom to choose baptism. That decision must not be made for a person either by parents or by the church, especially not before a person is able to make his or her own decisions. Of course, Baptists are aware that no one is absolutely free of environmental and social pressures, but they maintain that it belongs to the individual rights of a human being to decide whether or not to become a member of a church. Baptists know too that people do not have an inherent capacity to decide to become members of the kingdom of God, that such decisions are the result of the work of the Holy Spirit. But Baptists nevertheless maintain that God created us as human beings who can and should respond personally. Though there is a danger of overstating the subjective and active aspects of the responding person, Baptists regard it important not to surrender these aspects altogether.

42. While Lutherans can make many of the same affirmations about human nature, they would nevertheless contend that infant baptism does not rob one of personal decision. God who offers salvation in baptism calls for the response of faith. That response can be refused. So the personal character of faith is maintained even when it is the primary role of faith to receive the baptismal grace already bestowed. Lutherans cannot accept that infant baptism violates human rights; in this instance Lutherans locate the issue of human rights in the dialectical relationship between the gift of grace and the response of faith. The relationship must be dialectical because while grace and faith are distinct they are necessarily inter-related.

43. Positions taken by Baptists and Lutherans can be discussed further in terms of the place of baptism in one's life. We both agree that baptism and faith are components of the lifelong process of discipleship.

44. Lutherans develop this further by speaking of living out of one's baptism for the rest of one's life. They see baptism as initiation into a lifelong process; what was once given must be actualized again and again: "...a Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, once begun and ever continued" (Luther, Large Catechism, IV, 65). This process will reach its completion only at the end of time in the new creation. Baptism is a paradigm of the Christian life, assuring us that, by God's grace, "in the midst of death we are surrounded by life".

45. While Baptists also speak of baptism as initiation into a lifelong process, they stress conversion-faith-baptism as a spiritual event (rebirth) which must not be confused with a natural event (birth). Therefore, they fear that infant baptism becomes, though unintentionally, a cultural-religious *rite de passage* connected with natural birth.

46. Lutherans too differentiate natural and spiritual events. When parents and godparents disregard the insoluble connection between baptism and faith, Lutherans know that infant baptism can be misunderstood as a *rite de passage*. For that reason there is a growing hesitancy among Lutherans to baptize infants indiscriminately, and a growing insistence on the importance of the environment of faith in family and church. But Lutherans must ask Baptists whether a practice of baptism at other points in life (e.g. between childhood and adolescence) cannot also be misunderstood as a *rite de passage*.

#### *Ecclesiological and sociological*

47. Finally, differences between Lutherans and Baptists regarding baptism may be expressed in ecclesiological and soteriological terms, especially in regard to the role of the family. This becomes evident in the following three problems. First: Lutherans proceed from the birth of a child into a Christian family. This situation replaced the New Testament missionary situation. That change, in turn, calls for a change in the order of steps in becoming a Christian. Baptists, on the other hand, do not exclude Christian families from the general missionary situation. Second, Baptists reserve the concept "family of God" for the church only, distinguishing it from the natural family. Of course, Lutherans are also aware of the difference between spiritual and natural kinship, and that the division may run right through a family. They nonetheless regard the Christian family as part of the family of God. Thus, Lutherans hold that Christian parents and the church, supporting the parents, provide a faith context for baptizing their children. Third, theologically, what is the position of children in a Christian family and environment? Lutherans ask whether Baptists underestimate or even disregard the position of children. Baptists answer that they are concerned for the education of their children in a Christian spirit, but that instead of infant baptism they practise prayers of intercession and blessing. Most Baptists would regard the baptism of infants as an act of blessing, nothing more.

### 3. CONCLUSION

48. The rather lengthy sections of part two of this chapter on faith-baptism-discipleship are an attempt to clarify and shed light on the major disagreement between Baptists and Lutherans regarding baptismal theology and practice. Section two would be misinterpreted, however, were it to leave the impression that our conversations were deadlocked in theological controversy. On the contrary, the overwhelming impression of both partners has been that we share so much in common that we gladly recommend greater efforts towards a common Christian witness to the world. Our wish is that the warm spirit of fellowship and love which we ourselves have come to experience could characterize Baptist-Lutheran relationships everywhere. On the basis of our mutual understanding of faith and discipleship, we see a firm basis for increasing cooperation. Our meetings showed that we have much to learn from each other. Our differences constitute a mutual challenge to search for greater clarity in our praxis, convictions and traditions. Our conversations took place in an atmosphere of mutual trust and concern strong enough to guard us from mere self-justification. We see this as a sign of hope. Even where we have been unable to share each other's convictions, we have gained respect for each other's consciences.

#### *Recommendations*

49. We have struggled at length with the issues of faith-baptism-discipleship, and have come to respect deeply the integrity of one another's tradition. We have also come to regret the pain our baptismal practices cause one another. We therefore recommend:

- That Baptists and Lutherans in neighbouring parishes/congregations meet to study their baptismal theology and practices in order to come to greater understanding and appreciation of their respective traditions. This would enhance their Christian fellowship, heighten their awareness of the riches of the body of Christ and strengthen them in their common mission in the world.
- That both Baptists and Lutherans reject a recent practice by some independent evangelists of encouraging successive baptisms of the same person upon successive conversion experiences.
- That Lutherans develop and practise a firm baptismal discipline in a secular society in which the community of faith presupposed by infant baptism cannot simply be assumed.
- That Baptists recognize the validity of the baptism of Lutherans who have been baptized as confessing believers, and later apply for membership in a Baptist church.
- That the most controversial question in this context (i.e. the evaluation of infant baptism by Baptists), which could not be solved in our dialogue, be treated in a spirit of mutual respect, whenever such a case of conflict occurs in church practice. Both Lutherans and Baptists should be aware of each other's grief: on the Lutheran side, when a Lutheran convert is "re-baptized" by Baptists because for Lutherans that places the integrity of the one baptism in jeopardy; on the Baptist side, when Lutherans call the Baptist practice "rebaptism", and when Baptists see their missionary witness deflected by unbelievers who plead infant baptism—a special problem in folk and state churches. Both Lutherans and Baptists should place their common Christian witness to the world first and not let their differences on baptism become a stumbling block.
- That Baptists further study and evaluate different practices currently used by various Baptist churches: some Baptists do not accept Lutherans who were not baptized as

confessing believers as church members, because these Baptists do not acknowledge infant baptism; other accept them as full church members upon their confession of faith, without acknowledging their infant baptism, however; others respect a person's affirmation of his/her own infant baptism without agreeing to the doctrine of infant baptism; others accept them as members, acknowledging also their infant baptism as "valid, though unclear" baptism; still others try to find an intermediate solution by granting associate, guest or fraternal membership, providing an opportunity for common worship and service, but so marking the difference in baptismal doctrine. Lutherans would be grateful if a solution could be found whereby the membership practice does not question the integrity of their baptism.

— That Lutherans continue their efforts to overcome the problem of indiscriminate baptism which is particularly acute in folk church situations, and to clarify what that practice implies for church membership.

— That our inability to find a solution to the issue of infant baptism challenge us to study further and at greater depth the theological basis for infant baptism and the implications of the present socio-cultural context of that practice. We recommend that such a study be done jointly.

### **III. The church**

#### **1. THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHURCH**

##### *Our common biblical heritage*

50. In their ecclesiology both Baptists and Lutherans rely on the emphasis of the Reformation that the Bible is the source and judge of what the church is and ought to be. Both have attempted to unfold the riches of the New Testament teaching on the church as much as possible.

51. The early church is the continuation of the group of disciples around Jesus, called anew after this resurrection and enabled through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Most of its self-designations, however, point to continuity with the Old Testament "people of God", the people of God's covenant and promise (1 Pet. 2:10; Rom. 9:25f.), thus being the true children of Abraham and the true Israel (Rom. 2:28f.; Gal. 6:16). This means that the ecclesiology of the early church is theocentric and formulated in awareness of the church's place in salvation history. The church is made up of "those who... call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:2; Acts 9:21); it is the "royal priesthood" and "holy nation" (1 Peter. 2:9; Rev. 1:6); it is the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world" (Matt. 5:13f.).

52. The special relation of the church to Jesus Christ is expressed in several ways. Jesus chose his disciples that they should be with him and that he might send them, endowed with authority from him (Mark 3:14f.; John 15:16). He "loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her..." (Eph. 5:25f.). He is the Lord of the church, calling it to obedience. He is the "shepherd of the sheep" (John 10;2ff.). The church is dependent on him, just as the branches depend on the vine (John 15:1ff.). It is his table around which the church assembles (1 Cor. 11:17ff.). The church lives "in Christ", "in the Lord" (Phil. 1:1; 4:4). In particular the term "body of Christ" underlines both the unity of all the different members in Christ and the lordship of Christ, the head of the body (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 1:22f.; Col.

1:18). Discipleship also includes following Jesus' footsteps and his example in bearing the cross, in suffering for his name's sake, and in serving (Mark 8:34f.; 10:43–45; 1 Cor. 4:9ff.).

53. The church is a creation of the Holy Spirit, poured out upon God's people at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit conveys the new life and the power manifested in Christ's resurrection from the dead (Acts 2:32f.). Church members thus become "living stones", built up as a "spiritual house" and temple, whose character is holiness (1 Pet. 2:5ff.; Col. 1:22).

54. The New Testament church exhibits several characteristics. It is universal, encompassing all nations, without any barriers of division between "Jew nor Greek, . . . slave nor free, . . . male nor female" (Gal. 3:28). The church is "one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 4:3ff.). Its very unity is a sign to the unbelieving world so that it may believe (John 17:21). Likewise the love within and of the church is a sign of invitation to all people (John 13:34f.). The church is missionary, called by Christ to participate in his service to the world. It is a society in contrast to the practices of worldly rulers, "not exercising dominion", but rendering humble service to one another (Matt. 20:25–28). The church is a fellowship of love, compassion and forgiveness, living from Christ's own mercy (Matt. 19). It is engaged in the ministry in glory, but has the "treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 3:8f.; 4:7), often in the form of a paradox: "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich" (2 Cor. 6:10).

55. The New Testament church is a pilgrim people, moving towards the day of the Lord Jesus Christ, when "he who began a good work . . . will bring it to completion" (Phil. 1:6). The eschatological perspective enables the church to persist in the "work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope" (1 Thess. 1:3). The church is the pilgrim people of God, having the promise of the great "sabbath of God" (Heb. 4), expecting "always [to] be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17). Therefore, the church must not become proud (1 Cor. 4:7); rather, with Paul it is summoned to "know him [Christ] and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings", and "straining forward to what lies ahead" (Phil. 3:10–14).

56. Although both Lutherans and Baptists accept the authority of the biblical message and seek in their traditions to remain faithful to it, different emphases have emerged in their understanding and experience of being the church.

### *Lutheran understanding*

57. *The marks of the church*: Following the Lutheran Reformers, Lutherans accept the ecumenical understanding of the church expressed in the Nicene Creed. The four attributes of oneness, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity are taken for granted. What is distinctive within the Lutheran tradition is the identification of the marks of the church primarily with the word and sacraments. Without these means there would be no believers and consequently no church. "The church is the assembly of saints in which the gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly. For the true unity of the church it is enough to agree concerning the teaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. It is not necessary that human traditions or rites and ceremonies, instituted by men, should be alike everywhere. It is as Paul says, 'One faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all . . .'" (CA 7). That is why Lutherans look upon these visible, effective means as essential to the nature of the church. When Luther expanded his catalogue of the marks of the church, he included also manifestations of faith: prayer, praise, thanksgiving and the suffering implied in discipleship.

58. The Lutheran Reformers insisted on making the manifestations of the gospel (i.e. word and sacraments) rather than the manifestations of faith the essential marks of the church, because of their essential insight that salvation is a free gift of God and cannot be achieved

through human activity, and because the means of grace are visible and concrete. Characteristically, then, Lutherans gave priority to what is given by God and only secondarily mention the fruits of faith that are manifest in the assembly of believers. They have also insisted that in this world the church is never exclusively a church of believers. In its midst are also nominal Christian (hypocrites). Only at the time of the last judgment will they be separated from each other.

59. *Diversity of practice*: A church cannot be identified as Lutheran only on the basis of style, practice or custom. Lutheran unity does not depend on conformity in such matters. Out of the common heritage of medieval catholicism, Lutheran practice has been shaped by 16<sup>th</sup>-century reforms and later by the influences of pietism and the Enlightenment. As Lutheran churches spread from Europe to other continents, they transplanted some of the flavour of the home church while adopting new practices to meet the challenges and opportunities of their new context. Nonetheless, a fundamental emphasis on word and sacrament shapes Lutheran church life wherever Lutherans are found.

60. *Worship*: The prominence of word and sacraments is evident first in worship. Lutherans regard people assembled for worship as the heart of what the church is. The sacraments are regarded as equal in importance and efficacy with the proclaimed word in communicating the gospel. Bread and wine and water connected with the word become the vehicles of Christ's forgiving and liberating presence in the believer. In many Lutheran churches continuity with the ancient and medieval European church is evident in the use of visual arts, liturgical vestments and music, and a high degree of ritual in worship. While Lutherans are increasingly open to variety in worship forms in response to the mission imperative to reach out to people from other cultural heritages, they are also influenced by recent liturgical renewal movements towards greater appreciation of classical liturgical forms.

61. Still the preaching of the word is the most regular feature of Lutheran worship. Lutherans understand preaching as encounter with the living voice of God through the gospel (*viva vox evangelii*). Lutheran preaching is characteristically exegetical in nature, expounding a biblical text, often taken from a schedule of texts assigned for the Sundays of the church year (lectionary). Laypersons may sometimes preach in Lutheran churches, but as a rule those who preach or administer the sacraments do so under regular call as ordained ministers or under the supervision of an ordained minister.

62. *Catechesis*: The centrality of the word is evident also in the emphasis on catechesis in Lutheran churches. From the time of Luther, study of the catechism in the home was encouraged as well as instruction by one's pastor. Still today Lutheran churches require a period of serious study of scripture and the catechism of persons preparing for confirmation. As a remembrance of baptism confirmation marks a major transition in the life of a believer, though it has often acquired cultural overtones as well. Christian education for adults is a common element in the life of Lutheran parishes and institutions.

63. *Polity*: In Lutheran churches authority is exercised through the ministry of word and sacraments. A Lutheran congregation does not regard itself as autonomous since it derives its life and being from these means of grace, which are entrusted to regularly called and ordained pastors. The authority of the pastor for leadership in the parish, however, is shared with the congregational council. Both congregations and pastors share doctrinal and administrative authority with synods or other supra-congregational structures. By such interdependent arrangements of checks and balances, churches of the Lutheran tradition seek to avoid the extremes of congregationalism on the one hand, and of clerical hierarchy on the other. Almost all

Lutheran churches enjoy communion with one another and participate in ecumenical organizations at the local, national and international levels.

64. Lutheran churches do exist as folk churches but they also exist where strict separation of church and state obtains, and where Lutherans are one of many denominations.

65. The great contribution and strength of the Lutheran confessional heritage is the emphasis on gift. Yet in focusing too narrowly on proclaimed word and sacraments, Lutherans run the risk of forgetting that these precious gifts are not ends in themselves, but means to the end of creating and sustaining faith. The word must not only be preached, but believed, professed and lived. A constant Lutheran temptation is to stress justification by grace through faith as the essence of the gospel without following through to sanctification, thus cheapening the very saving grace we extol. This in turn has the consequences, on the one hand, of intellectualizing theology by removing it from the practice of discipleship and, on the other hand, of encouraging an attitude of quietism with respect to justice, peace and the care of the creation. Furthermore, the stress on the pure proclamation of the gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments tends to nurture a certain clericalism which is antithetical to the exercise of the gifts of every Christian. Thus, there is often among Lutherans a weakness in the expression of fellowship and in the missionary vision.

#### *Baptist understanding*

66. *The marks of the church*: Baptists generally affirm the traditional characteristics of the church, that it is one, holy, universal and missionary/apostolic. Their theological approach to ecclesiology is, however, more easily discernable in their intention to follow the Bible as closely as possible; it is their intention to be “church according to the New Testament”. In particular the first chapters of Acts, the Pauline image of the “body of Christ”, the description in Ephesians 4 and regulations for church life as found in Matthew 18 and in the pastoral epistles have shaped Baptist ecclesiology. In interpreting such passages the Baptist emphasis has been on the living character of the church, as distinct from a mere outward form of Christianity. From their beginnings Baptists have been engaged in the quest for the “true church”.

67. Due to the heritage of congregationalism, Baptists stress that the church is made up of people; Baptists intend to be the “people of God”. Neither must church organization deteriorate into institutionalism nor church life to routine. Personal elements are regarded as primary, in particular personal faith and commitment. Baptists like the term “free church”, indicating free decision as well as freedom from non-church influences.

68. Historically it should be noted that Baptists have attempted to be heirs of the “radical reformation”; they like to quote Luther’s preface to the “Deutsche Messe” (1526) where he speaks of those “who want to be Christians in earnest”. Furthermore, Baptist ecclesiology partly developed in reaction to that of the established churches; hence its anti-hierarchical and anti-sacramental aspects; hence also the emphasis on the local church with close personal relationships over against folk-church anonymity. The Baptist movement took shape during the ascendancy of democracy; several aspects of that are reflected in Baptist church life, for example the strong championing of religious liberty.

69. Baptist ecclesiology has taken over much from the Reformed tradition: from Zwinglianism some of its emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit, from Calvinism its emphasis on sanctification and practical Christian activity. Therefore, the communion table is not so much the centre of Baptist worship as the pulpit is; biblical instruction is regarded as important. The

emphasis on personal activity was combined with that of pietism, revival movements, and missionary and diaconic work.

70. Baptist ecclesiology might be described by the words of Galatians 4:19: that “Christ be formed in you”. This implies concrete Christian discipleship, the character of a living organism, and the visible form of the church in terms both of the experience of the assembling congregation and of being a sign to the world. The church exists to make Jesus Christ manifest: it is not to put forward itself, of course, but his grace and gifts.

71. *Church practice*: Baptist church practice is rooted in the basic conviction that the church is the body of Christ and God’s instrument for the salvation of the world.

72. Through personal faith which is publicly confessed in believers’ baptism persons become members of the body of Christ and as such also members of the local church (local church in Baptist usage corresponds to local congregation in Lutheran usage). The experience of Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and the public confession of this faith in baptism is fundamental to the Baptist understanding of being the church.

73. Life in the local church is marked by a spirit of intentional community. This becomes evident in regular worship services, Bible study, prayer meetings, personal and family relationships, and the care for the sick and needy. Emphasis is also placed upon personal commitment and a credible Christian life-style. Church members are encouraged to meet regularly for worship, the preaching of the word, instruction and the Lord’s supper. In all of these there is a strong emphasis on the Bible as the basis of Baptist life and worship.

74. Although Baptists emphasize the priesthood of all believers and the equality of all members, there are organizational structures to serve the life and ministry of the church. Central is the ministry of the whole congregation. The church meeting (congregational assembly) serves to structure this ministry. The church elects deacons and sometimes elders for the spiritual and administrative leadership of the church. The pastors, also elected and appointed by the church, serve to enable the church to fulfill its ministry. All members are expected and encouraged to discern their personal gifts and talents, and with them to participate actively in the ministry of the church.

75. Important is the conviction that the church does not exist for itself; therefore Baptists regard evangelism, mission and social ministries as essential tasks of the church. To follow Jesus Christ also means to take up the cross. Like other Christians Baptists have experienced the reality of this biblical truth and have thereby been reminded to accept it as one of the characteristics of the church.

76. For Baptists, all authority is vested in the local church, though local churches may delegate authority to such other organizational structures as unions of churches in order to achieve a more efficient way to exercise their ministry.

77. Although the church becomes manifest in the local community, most Baptists are aware of the wider Baptist constituency and of the universal Christian church. They cooperate therefore in regional, national and international structures to coordinate their work and make their ministry efficient. Their participation in various ecumenical projects and organizations is also an expression of understanding themselves as part of the universal body of Christ.

78. Baptists have placed great emphasis on the separation of church and state and on religious liberty because they are convinced that the gospel must be received and lived in freedom from political, social, national, legal and religious coercion or bondage.

79. Looking back on our doctrinal statements about the church, Baptists share with Lutherans the awareness that the church, whose identity is in Jesus Christ and in him alone, is

always also a frail, sinful and human community. In light of Christ we become aware of our shortcomings, and we need to bring to our common attention the following: the emphasis on our church affairs makes us sometimes reluctant to engage in the struggle for justice and peace in the world. Sometimes we too easily identify our faith in Christ with our socio-economic and cultural concerns and interests. Often we are so caught up with our own church life that we show insufficient interest in our ecumenical responsibilities. Baptists should be aware that their emphasis on piety easily leads to moralism. Baptists should realize that they are inconsistent when they emphasize the priesthood of all believers and the equality of all members and yet are reluctant to encourage the full ministry and ordination of women.

## 2. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

80. We are grateful to God that the gospel of Jesus Christ has freed us from our estrangement and self-interest, and has made us open to worship God, to love our fellow human beings and to accept responsibility for the environment in which we live. In sharing his life with us in Christ and in the Spirit, God has called us as individuals and as churches to become “fellow workers” (1 Cor. 3:9). Through the ages we hear the invitation and challenge of our Lord: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

81. As Lutherans and Baptists we joyfully acknowledge the call to be the people of God and, as such, to participate in God’s mission to call people to faith in Jesus Christ, to be agents of his power to heal human life wherever it is broken or breaking, and to shoulder responsibility as stewards of his creation. God who loves the world (John 3:16) and has reconciled it with himself through Christ, calls us to the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18–20). This ministry of reconciliation becomes concrete in the many different ways in which we want to give expression to God’s passion for our world, and as such we aim to be witnesses to the “reign of God”.

82. In our evangelistic ministries of proclamation we tell the story of Jesus as the story of God’s unconditional love. We believe that the gospel is God’s power unto salvation, that through faith in Jesus Christ people find forgiveness for their sin, hope in times of despair, meaning when meaninglessness seems to engulf them. We are grateful to God for the many signs in the lives of people that demonstrate the power of the gospel today.

83. With our missionary ministries we join with Christian brothers and sisters everywhere in the common task of witnessing to the gospel in word and deed. As people who know that the God whom we have experienced as Redeemer, is also the Creator and Sustainer of the world, and as recipients of his healing and reconciling love, we cannot but share with others the love that we have experienced ourselves. In doing so, we want to respect people’s cultural heritages. We realize that coercion and proselytism contradict the gospel. At the same time we affirm that missionary passion belongs to the nature of the gospel. In confessing the church as “apostolic”, we acknowledge that we belong to the company of those who are “sent” to witness to the good news declared in Jesus Christ. Like the apostle Paul we feel a divine necessity (1 Cor. 9:16) and obligation (Rom. 1:14) to be witnesses to the gospel “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

84. Part of our participation in God’s mission is our concern for and support of the present ecumenical process towards justice, peace and integrity of creation. We are sadly aware of the many ways in which the dignity of the human person, human society and the environment are threatened by the selfishness, materialism, militarism and the self-interest of nations. The arms race and the ecological crisis threaten the survival of the human race. Racism, apartheid,

sexism, human ideologies, torture and unemployment deny the dignity and equality of human beings. Poverty, hunger and sickness force millions to exist in inhuman conditions. Refugees, asylum-seekers and the unemployed have become the outcasts of modern human society. Child prostitution, child labour and the dissolution of the family sap the energy and creativity of the next generation. Complacency, negligence, individual and collective selfishness have resulted in grievous damage to nature, thus undermining the very basis of life on our planet. In this situation, as part of our response to God, we as individuals and as churches are to be agents of peace and reconciliation, we are to heal those who are broken in body and spirit, we are to invest our time, money and energy to bring justice to the oppressed, to bring food and medical care to those who are hungry and sick. Accordingly, we are committed to the implementation of human rights. Equally we are committed to the care of nature because nature partakes with us in creation and redemption (Rom. 8:19–22). Therefore, we call upon our churches to see the struggle for the implementation of human rights, the pursuit of peace and the care of the earth as intrinsic to our faith in Jesus Christ.

85. We have understood our conversations as a response to our Lord's desire that in the process toward unity we may better reflect the very being of God, and thus become a more credible witness to a world that has a great need to hear words and see deeds of reconciliation, healing and forgiveness (John 17:20f; Eph. 4:4–6).

### 3. THE LORD'S SUPPER

86. Together Baptists and Lutherans confess that the Lord's supper was instituted by Jesus Christ as the meal of the new covenant between God and his people and as a meal of communion (*koinonia*) among believers.

87. In conformity with its institution by Jesus Christ, the celebration of the Lord's supper brings the congregation together to eat and drink the bread and the cup, to listen to the word of promise and to pray. By this prayer we give thanks to God for his work accomplished in creation, redemption and sanctification. We remember the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ and ask for the coming of the Holy Spirit. We celebrate Christ's presence and look towards the time when communion with him shall be fulfilled in his kingdom. We are equipped and sent into this world as witnesses and instruments of the coming kingdom of Christ.

88. Together we confess the presence of Jesus Christ in the midst of the worshipping congregation celebrating the Lord's Supper. There are, however, differences in the understanding of the mode of his presence. In Lutheran perspective the Lord imparts himself in his body and blood with bread and wine through the word of promise and the work of the Holy Spirit. In this way he wills to give himself to us. This receiving of Christ does not depend on the faith of the individual person, although only believers can receive Christ for their salvation. Baptists relate the presence of Christ to the celebration of the Lord's supper as a whole: breaking the bread and drinking the cup, the worshipping community remembers the crucified and risen Lord sharing his life with us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

89. What does the Lord give to his people? He gives himself. In communion with him we receive forgiveness of sins, freedom for a sanctified life and service in the world, a renewed fellowship among sisters and brothers, and hope in the life to come. This is our common belief, although in the past Lutherans put more emphasis on the forgiveness of sins and certitude of salvation, whereas Baptists have emphasized (according to 1 Cor. 11) reconciliation among the church members and the spiritual strengthening for a life in sanctification and witness.

90. At the celebration of the Lord's supper Christ is the host. All who confess him as Lord and Saviour are invited. For Lutherans and Baptists participation in the Lord's supper confirms and confesses ever anew that through faith and baptism we have been incorporated into the body of Christ and are his people.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

91. On the basis of mutual understandings achieved with respect to the church and its mission, we recommend:

- that we mutually recognize each other as communions within the church of Christ;
- that we encourage our churches to participate in the ongoing struggle for the implementation of human rights, for the establishing of justice and peace and for the preservation of creation;
- that we encourage the efforts of our churches to win the world to an authentic commitment to Christ; as all genuine Christian witness is participation in the mission of the one Christ, we urge increased coordination in the missionary activities of our churches.

92. On the basis of our discussion of the Lord's supper we recommend that the already existing practice of mutual hospitality at the communion table be endorsed and encouraged.

#### **IV. Lutheran condemnations of the Anabaptists in the 16th century and the relationship of Lutherans and Baptists today**

##### 1. The Lutheran Confessions

93. Lutheran confessional writings of the 16th century contain condemnations of Anabaptists and their teaching.

94. *Augsburg Confession, 1530 (CA)*: Anabaptists and their teachings are specifically mentioned and rejected in five of the articles. Article 5: "Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that the Holy Spirit comes to us through our own preparations, thoughts and works without the external word of the gospel" (German text). Article 9: "... the Anabaptists who teach that infant baptism is not right are rejected" (German text). The Latin text adds: "and [who] declare that children are saved without baptism". Article 12: "Our churches condemn the Anabaptists who deny that those who have once been justified can lose the Holy Spirit..." (Latin text). Article 16: "Condemned here are the Anabaptists who teach that none of the things indicated above (i.e. occupy civil offices, serve as princes and judges, render decisions and pass sentence according to imperial and other existing laws, punish evildoers with the sword, take required oaths... ) is Christian" (German text). Article 17: "Rejected... are the Anabaptists who teach that the devil and condemned men will not suffer eternal pain and torment" (German text).

95. *Formula of Concord, 1580, Epitome, chapter 12*: The section "Errors of the Anabaptists" criticizes the Anabaptist methodology in its presumed denial of the doctrine of original sin as well as Anabaptist refusal to baptize infants. Also criticized is the view that "a congregation is not truly Christian if sinners are still found in it". The section repeats the condemnations of CA 16.

96. The Lutheran Reformers rarely distinguished between the various streams of the "left wing" of the Reformation, but tended to lump even conflicting groups together under the Anabaptist label (e.g. violent Enthusiasts and pacifist biblical Anabaptists).

## 2. THE IMPACT OF THE CONDEMNATIONS

97. The condemnations of the CA and FC were aimed at teachings and teachers who stood in opposition to the Lutheran understanding of the gospel. In fact, however, they had an impact far beyond the arena of theological debate, and played a role in furthering a mentality which had serious social and legal consequences for Anabaptists including the confiscation of property, torture, expulsion and execution. The persecution of Anabaptists in the 16th century reflects a lack of commitment to religious liberty, a principle affirmed today by both Lutherans and Baptists.

98. While the relationship between the modern Baptist movement which began in the 17th century and the Anabaptists of the 16th century is disputed, many Baptists today increasingly make a connection and see the roots of their identity and self-understanding in the 16th-century Anabaptists. Whichever position is taken, it is demonstrably true that Baptists have themselves also suffered discrimination and legal problems as a result of the Lutheran condemnations.

## 3. THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS AND LUTHERANS TODAY

99. Contemporary Lutherans today consider themselves to stand in continuity with the confessional writings of the 16th century. Being confessional, however, does not require theologians simply to reiterate every affirmation of the confessions. The spirit of the confessions themselves compels the person of faith to reject or modify any human formulation of faith which is found to be in conflict with the gospel as it applies to the world today. For example, the doctrine of the “just war” referred to in article 16 of the Augsburg confession must be reinterpreted in our time in response to the changing nature of war itself. Similarly, article 9 of the Augsburg confession, which has been used to support the notion at all infants must be baptized or that infant baptism is the only legitimate form of baptism, must be reinterpreted to meet the situation of a secularized society. In this context, many faithful Lutherans hold that it is not appropriate to baptize infants from families where there is no Christian commitment.

100. In the relationship of Lutherans and Baptists today only the teaching about baptism in the Augsburg confession, paragraph 9, remains controversial. The other condemnations do not apply to Baptists today, and even in the 16th century they were often based on an undifferentiated view of the various streams of the “left wing” of the Reformation. Today we recognize that it is not helpful to address differences with condemnations. The remaining differences in the understanding of baptism should be further discussed with reference to our common commitment to the authority of the scriptures and the lordship of Christ, and in the awareness of travelling together towards our coming Lord in common witness and service.

101. Lutherans today recognize and deplore the role their doctrinal condemnations played in the persecution of Anabaptists. They regard what happened then as a warning to abstain from discrimination against those of different beliefs and ways of thinking.

## 4. THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS AND BAPTISTS TODAY

102. In predominantly Lutheran countries, Baptists sometimes still experience discrimination by Lutheran institutions (e.g. schools) and publications.

103. Lutherans recognize and deplore that the condemnations against the Anabaptists have contributed to discrimination against today’s Baptists, and they beg forgiveness. The situation requires continuing vigilance to prevent such violations of fundamental Christian fellowship.

104. Baptists recognize and deplore an attitude of superiority which overlooks the spiritual treasure God has produced within the Lutheran churches. There have been unfair and distorted depictions of other churches. And for this they beg forgiveness.

#### 5. DIVERGENCES AND CONVERGENCES BETWEEN BAPTISTS AND LUTHERANS TODAY

105. Previous chapters have shown that differences remain between Baptists and Lutherans today. But the convergences between Baptists and Lutherans are greater than these differences. They reveal us both to be pilgrim people in and for the world, moving towards God's future with a common commitment to one Lord Jesus Christ. We are, therefore, committed to address our differences from within a fellowship of churches.

106. Together we accept the appropriateness of a "No" between sisters and brothers to doctrinal expressions we cannot accept, but we seek to affirm that the body of Christ has many members, and that neither Baptists nor Lutherans can presume to exclude the other from that body. We therefore commit ourselves to labour together as children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ.

#### *Recommendations*

107. On the basis of our acknowledgement of the pain caused by the Lutheran condemnations of the Anabaptists in the 16th century, we recommend:

- that Lutherans and Baptists take up what was said in paragraphs 103–104, and use it in an appropriate form in their communities in worship services celebrated jointly whenever possible;
- that further editions of the Lutheran confessions contain a statement indicating that the condemnations no longer apply in our interdenominational relations (cf. §§97, 99, 100, 103); the consequences of this should be made clear especially in ministerial training, in the context of ordination and in other instances of the official use of the confessions;
- that acknowledged differences in doctrine and practice be treated with a friendly "No" and be made the occasion of deeper mutual study; the language we use should reflect our mutual Christian commitment avoiding any condemnation of persons, even where doctrinal positions cause objection.