

# **ONE LORD - ONE FAITH - ONE CHURCH A LONGING FOR ONE BAPTISM**

**The report from the bilateral conversations between The Church of Norway and The Baptist Union of Norway 1984-1989**

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## **PREFACE**

The fragmentation of the Church is and remains a contestation for faith. "Is Christ divided" Paul the apostle asks the Church in Corinth. The answer is evident: Christ cannot be divided. Consequently, anyone who confesses the one Christ will ultimately be troubled by the fact that the Church of Jesus Christ is divided.

The Baptist Union of Norway and the Church of Norway have through the course of several years been fortunate to be on friendly terms, disagreements notwithstanding. Nevertheless, or perhaps as a result, we were challenged with an exiting task when The Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations encouraged us to come together in bilateral conversations.

The committee, appointed at the end of 1983, convened for the first time February 8. 1984 and concluded the conversations on the 7. of December 1989 after having met on sixteen occasions. Representing the Church of Norway in the conversations were Sigurd Osberg (chair-person), Agnete Fischer, Hans Arne Akerø, Ernst Baasland (until 28.01.87) and Hans Kvalbein (from 24.11.87). The Baptist Union of Norway was represented by Peder A. Eidberg (chair person), Nils J. Engelsen, Tor E. Mikalsen and Billy Taranger. Turid Karlsen Seim and Halvor Nordhaug, theological councillors to the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, took part as observers. Asbjørn Bakkevoll of the Union of Norwegian Baptist Youth (NBUF) was the secretary and NBUF functioned as the administration of the committee.

When a committee works together over a long period of time, the participants get acquainted to such a degree that they reach a point of mutual respect and greater desire to listen to each other's point of view. It is our experience that the committee has had such a function.

Participating in national bilateral conversations has been particularly rewarding following the publication of the Lima document BEM and as international conversations have proceeded simultaneously.

The responsibility for the baptised has been the object of renewed emphasis in the Church of Norway, which has resulted in the establishment of Hjemmenes Dåpsring. In the Scandinavian Baptist movement questions concerning baptism, Church affiliation and the criteria for membership have influenced theological thinking about baptism. This has been particularly pressing where the Baptist Unions have had to relate to large national churches.

In this situation the committee found it to be of great importance not simply to repeat and emphasise earlier statements, but rather to proceed further and to better the communication

between our two churches. The committee has therefore chosen to submit its statement as a consensus document. An inherent danger in choosing to submit a statement together is the possibility that not much can be said. The experience of the committee is nevertheless that with regard to important issues the two parties have arrived at a greater understanding of one another's point of view. The result has been a more differentiated description of the old positions. We believe this will prove fruitful for further dialogue. The principle of consensus has of course been modified by each party having the opportunity to voice their particular point of view.

While we wish to express gratitude to The Church of Norway through the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations and the Baptist Union of Norway for the commission, we also express the hope that dialogue will continue. Disagreement on major points still exists. We hope nonetheless that this document will contribute to bringing our churches closer to each other.

Stabekk/Høvik, December 7, 1989

Peder A. Eidberg/Sigurd Osberg

## **PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION**

The fact that a second edition of this report is needed, demands the expression of satisfaction. The report was received with great interest among leaders in our Churches and has been the subject of a thorough treatment in different academic fora. It has also received attention internationally. Despite the interest the report has sparked, the degree to which the report has reached the local congregations or parishes and is used in local ecumenical work is much too small. Hence it is our hope that the new edition will help create a new interest for ecumenical contacts and further work and thought about the questions raised. The document can be used in local ecumenical conversations, in Bible study groups in local parishes, and as study material for priests, pastors and other Church workers.

It is good and meaningful to visualise the basic unity that exists between Lutherans and Baptists in Norway. At the same time we seek to understand what divides us and continue to work seriously with these questions.

Tønsberg/Stabekk, primo April 1994

Sigurd Osberg/Peder A. Eidberg

## **THE BIBLE AS THE BASIS FOR CONFESSIONAL CONVERSATIONS**

Our churches have found it important to show that life and teaching is according to scripture. But the interpretation of Scripture has often taken place within closed confessional and dogmatic circles. Hence the interpretation of Scripture has only served to confirm the distance between the churches.

In our century international Biblical scholarship has been allowed to move more freely across confessional borders. Biblical research now shares in the common understanding of scripture as historical documents. The original meaning of the texts in their historical setting is important, rather than their later dogmatic and ecclesial use.

In this way an amazing degree of unity concerning the understanding of the text has been achieved. Where serious disagreement exists between scholars, it can just as well exist between scholars of the same denomination, as between researchers from different denominations. We nevertheless still have different presuppositions in our reading of scripture. We will here try to present the characteristic differences between the Lutheran and the Baptist views of Scripture.

## **SCRIPTURE AS THE ONLY AUTHORITY**

Lutherans and Baptists stand together in claiming Scripture as the absolute and only authority for the life and teaching of the church. In Lutheran theology *sola scriptura*, scripture alone, is a basic principle in theology. Baptists similarly emphasise that the Bible is the only guide for Christian life and teaching. Here, both denominations share in a common Protestant inheritance against the formation of ecclesial traditions as well as traditional Church authority. Submission to ecclesial ministerial hierarchy with for example the Pope, a metropolitan or an archbishop at the top is refused, and one cannot accept that the tradition of the church should be "received and honoured with as much piety and respect" as scripture.

Both Baptists and Lutherans interpret the Bible from the perspective of Christ as the centre of scripture and its "hermeneutical key". This means that the Old and the New Testaments should be understood in light of, and in agreement with, the gospel's central message of salvation.

When scripture is evaluated in this perspective, it becomes clear that much of the Old Testament is of intermediate character, and that certain aspects of the New Testament are limited by the historical situation in which they were written. With regard to concrete issues, Lutherans and Baptists will nevertheless employ these criteria differently. The question of the organisation and ordinances of the church, for instance, is an *adiaphoron* for Lutherans, as long as these serve the Church's basic task: to proclaim the law and the gospel and to administer the sacraments. Differently, Baptists perceive of the biblical "models" of church as more binding, although they are not understood to be absolute.

In the Lutheran tradition, the distinction between law and gospel is an important principle for the interpretation of Scripture. Scripture is to be interpreted in accordance with the Salvation history it testifies to. An interpretation of the biblical message in terms of "law" is consequently to be avoided. Baptists, however, are more reserved towards the Lutheran distinction between law and gospel. In practice, the distinction can serve to reach similar results to what Baptists discover on the basis of the Christological centre of Scripture, but the principle has also served to relativise the admonitions and guidelines of Scripture. The Bible is in principle a direct authority to Baptists, and one should have good reasons for not adhering to something which is spoken of in Scripture.

## **HISTORICAL-CRITICAL RESEARCH AND THE ISSUE OF THE INFALLIBILITY OF SCRIPTURE**

Modern historical research has raised a number of questions concerning the interpretation of Scripture and our understanding of Bible as the word of God. The accuracy of detailed historical and geographical descriptions has been questioned, and one has asked whether the different writings represent differing and internally incompatible theological views. With regard to this issue, very different views are represented among both Lutherans and Baptist. Many radical critical theses have sprung out of German Lutheran academic theology, but these have also met rejection from other Lutheran theologians. American Baptists have voiced some of the strongest resistance against any weakening of the doctrine of the infallibility of Scripture. It is nevertheless difficult to find clear denominational boundaries with regard to this issue.

Although internationally Lutherans probably hold less *biblicistic* views than the Baptists, it is correct to note that both confessions here face a common problem which has been a source of inner conflict for each denomination, rather than one that causes tension between them.

In order to grasp the content of a given text, a historical critical analysis is necessary. Although God and God's salvation are constants, human beings are limited by history and subject to change. Hence, also the language and experience of reality changes. Without historical critical studies it is impossible to transfer the unchangeable message and content of revelation into new languages and different cultural realities. In this way the effective authority of Scripture, its radiance and power becomes visible. God has bound His Spirit to human words, and theoretical constructs in the form of theories of inspiration cannot in themselves liberate the dynamics of Scripture.

The historical critical analysis of scripture, can, however, not stand alone. When seeking a biblical understanding of reality as a challenge for today's world, the message of Scripture must ultimately be answered by faith.

## **THE PLACE OF CONFESSIONS AND TRADITIONS IN RELATION TO SCRIPTURE**

Although the Bible is the highest authority for both Baptists and Lutherans, both denominations have inherited confessions and/or traditions which form their identity. In the Lutheran tradition the confessional writings are of central importance. Baptists have no binding confessional writings, but have developed a confessional identity on the basis of certain views on how Scripture is to be understood. While confessions and traditions must be subject to critical scrutiny in light of Scripture, the theological inheritance and ecclesial traditions also contain values which are important to keep and share especially in ecumenical conversations.

The particularity of Lutheran churches is to a large degree expressed in their confessional writings and the place of importance they hold. These are the three common symbols of the ancient church in addition to the Lutheran confessional writings: Luther's Catechism and Confessio Augustana.

The Lutheran confessional writings are not considered equal to Scripture. They are historically given summaries of the central message of Scripture marked by a current polemical situation. In the Lutheran churches the confessional writings have an actual juridical function in the sense that the ministers of the church are required to teach according to Scripture as it is understood in the writings. In measuring the status of the confessional writings, however, it is important to maintain that they are a derived norm, *norma normata*, in relation to the one greater norm, *norma normans*: Holy Scripture.

The most influential of the Lutheran churches have been state churches. This historical fact explains why the confession is central in the Lutheran churches. The historical situations have demanded that confessional obligation be expressed publicly in a formal way, a demand the free churches have not been subject to to the same degree. In the free churches the close relation between the believing community and its ministers functions as a controlling factor with regard to deviation from doctrine, and corresponds to the function of the confessional writings in the larger churches.

Baptists have no binding confessional writings apart from the Bible. Congregations and unions have nevertheless developed several confessions of faith. These are understood, however, to be dependent on a given historical situation, and exhibit how one in that situation chose to formulate one's faith. Such confessions have never been binding for those who in a different historical situation have chosen to express themselves differently.

Baptists have also freely accepted the content of the symbols of the ancient church. Because of the resistance against binding confessions, however, these have never gained a permanent place in the liturgy or worship service.

Generally Baptists perceive of binding confessions as threats to the authority of Scripture. The sum of one generation's understanding of scripture cannot be elevated into an unchangeable confession which defines the content of scripture for all generations. Confessional writing can consequently in principle never be granted any greater authority than other Church traditions.

## **WHAT THEN IS MAN?**

## **THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF LUTHERANS AND BAPTISTS**

### **THE THEOLOGICAL BASIS**

## **"So God created man"**

Baptists and Lutherans have the same point of departure and orientation when addressing the question of who and what humankind is. Humanity must be understood on the basis of biblical revelation. This does not exclude retrieving knowledge about aspects of humanity from history, science and experience. Answers to the basic questions concerning the identity of human kind, however, is provided by the Bible. Human kind is created by God. Consequently it cannot be defined in terms of its own existence. This means that the individual human being receives his or her identity from God, not from him- or herself. The place and role of the human being in the world may only be described correctly in relation to God the creator.

1. God alone is the one who is: the one who exists before and independently of all that which is created, and who relates to all of creation in a personal manner.
2. The world came into being because God wanted it to.
3. We see traces of God's intelligence and will in all creation.
4. God loves creation.
5. God has a purpose with creation, and God's love upholds creation.

The creation narrative of the Bible speaks in images about the relation of creation to God. It is the task of the natural sciences to describe how creation actually took place. Creation faith does not conflict with the sciences when the two keep within their own frames of reference. The natural sciences, therefore, can neither confirm nor deny creation faith and God's relation to creation. The place and the role of humanity is in Christian faith to be understood on the basis of biblical revelation.

## **HUMANITY AND CREATION**

### **"In the image of God he created him"**

The human being is a creature among other creatures. This implies that the human being in form and capacity is like other creatures. But the human individual is in its being different from all other life. The human being has the ability to acknowledge God as creator and the source of all things, as well as it self as a being created for community with God and community with other human beings, and as responsible for the administration of the created earth and it's resources.

Genesis 1:27 explains that humanity is created in God's image. Being created in God's image implies that human kind received dominion over everything living, all power and authority. Human kind was created with this in mind. The image of God is thus what sets humanity apart from the animals, and involves the responsibility of all life and for the fellow human. It also involves responsibility for the earth and it's resources (Psalm 8).

### **"male and female he created them"**

Humanity is male and female. At the creation of woman, God says: "it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18). As the man exists in relation to God and the animals, he now also exists in a relation to woman who is his equal. This means that humankind is neither just male nor just female, but both: male and female. Man and woman as individuals are complete persons.

Man and woman as individuals are whole, complete human beings. Man and woman are, then, complete human beings each in his or her own right. But human life on earth presupposes the communion between the two genders, the living together in equality and mutuality. As man and woman (male and female) they also take care of reproduction. They are together responsible for their descendants, as well as the earth and its resources.

## **THE FALL**

**"she took of its fruit... and she also gave some to her husband"**

Humankind, created by God for the communion with God, rebels against its creator. The rebellion is beyond imagination and cannot be explained rationally. The narrative about the fall depicts this rebellion figuratively and vividly. Human kind lets itself be tempted and disbelieves God's word. Obedience is replaced by disobedience and rebellion.

The narrative gives insight into the a psychology of sin. Temptation comes from the outside. Where, in the mind of the human individual temptation seems to come from the inside, from the heart, it even then, in reality, comes from without. The human being is always the one who is seduced and betrayed. The human being is a not the origin of sin, and is not identical to Satan, God's opponent.

The story gives us a finely balanced insight into the immediate consequences of the fall. God's voice (qol) in the evening breeze (ruach) causes the human being to flee from God. The human being, created for open trust in God, now fears God. The human being hides from God. But God calls the human being out from its hiding place, demanding that they account for and take the responsibility for their action. There is no place to hide from God.

When God demands that the human being account for its action, the individual tries to escape from the consequences of its behaviour. The man holds God responsible and accuses the woman. Sin is in this narrative depicted as conflict. The immediate relation/communion between God and humankind is broken. Sin reveals its nature as egocentricity.

## **CONSEQUENCES OF THE FALL**

### **"The Lord God sent them forth from the Garden of Eden."**

The result of the fall is that human kind becomes like God in knowing good and evil. If this refers to ethical "good and evil", the breaking of God's commandment brings human kind away from unreflected innocence and towards conscious rebellion. The human being must bear responsibility and carry the consequences.

As a sinner the human individual is banned from "paradise", away from God's immediate presence. The human being loses its true environment. But the individual cannot flee from God. The human being will always be responsible to God. God has delivered humankind up to sin and punishment, but has never barred humanity from God's influence.

God is the totally sovereign, and love is revealed as God's dominating attitude toward the world. Without God humanity has become alone in the world. Restlessly, the human being always seeks something to hold on to. Creation becomes the substitute for God. Human kind becomes, as a result, a slave to its own desires.

## **HUMANITY AFTER THE FALL**

### **"East of the Garden of Eden"**

When Baptists and Lutherans are to explain the status of human kind after the fall, their emphases differ. Both parties understand sin as universal. Sin rules as fate without exception in everyone who is conceived and born (Romans 5 12f). Sin is in reality irrational. The fall narrative shows that temptation comes from the outside as deceit. It lures humankind into believing it can become like God. The transgression brings humankind into the realm of sin and death, not just the one human being, but all following generations. The reality of death proves this to be the case.

According to Baptists, all human beings are subject to sin. The universal sinfulness is according to Paul visible in the realm of death which is the fate that everyone must suffer. Hence all human beings are subject to sin and death regardless of the actions of the individual, as it is expressed by Paul in Romans 5:12. There is no one who is like Adam was before the fall. The power of sin and the realm of death are inescapable.

Baptists distinguish between sin and transgression. Although sin is that state in which each individual human being finds itself from birth, it is through trespassing as a conscious rebellion

towards God and God's commandment, that sin becomes a personal act and leaves the individual responsible. In order to bring this distinction to the fore, Baptists also distinguish between sin and guilt. Sin, which reigns over everyone rules as fate from Adam, until a person comes of age and sins through transgression by breaking the commandment. Guilt and responsibility is now added to sin. Before one comes of age, the power of sin is effective as fate. But just as those who are not yet of age take part in Adams fall without involving their own attitude or actions, they are also raised by God's grace in Christ (Romans 5:15).

Lutheran theology, like Baptist theology, may distinguish between sin and transgression. One is the sinful state of existence (*status corruptionis*) that reigns over humanity, the other is the individual sinful action.

Lutheran theology holds that because sin is not just the individual sinful action, but also the more encompassing sinful condition, it will have consequences for the individual human being. The sinful condition concerns and is related to every human being born into humanity after Adam. Also *Status Corruptionis* influences the individual being's relation to God. This sinful condition differs from the condition "of paradise", being without sin in the world (Romans 5). Even the sinful condition results in the guilt of the individual. The individual cannot be thought of apart from humanity.

Lutheran theology will therefore have to insist that even the sinful fate which encompasses humanity without exception is "my sin" and "my guilt" which consequently must be confessed on the same level as my individual sinful action. I cannot stand apart from my sinful nature and hold that it is not mine, even when this condition is formed and created apart from my conscious control.

## **FAITH**

### **FAITH IN BAPTIST AND LUTHERAN TRADITION**

Faith is a very central term in both Lutheran and Baptist tradition. In proclamation and teaching both parties have emphasised the significance of faith in the life of the Christian. Faith is perceived to be a presupposition for taking part in salvation which is mediated through baptism. Lutherans and Baptists nevertheless understand the term faith on the basis of different major positions interests. For Lutherans it has always been important to emphasise that salvation takes place on the basis of "faith alone", so that no human action can add to this. Baptists have emphasised faith in connection with baptism, so that baptism takes place "upon the confession of faith". Faith is pointed to as the individual's positive affirmation of salvation.

This emphasis on the differing aspects of faith has also led to a reciprocal theological critique between the churches. Lutherans have accused Baptists of not making a clear distinction between the act of God and human action, so that faith has not sufficiently been pointed to as the work or act of God. Baptists have accused Lutherans of dissolving the intimate connection between faith and baptism so as to weaken faith as the human response to God's act.

In this debate, both parties asked themselves whether one is dealing with two different terms, or two different meanings of the term faith. In our conversations we consequently looked closer at how the term faith is employed in Scripture. At the same time we attempted to identify the interests of our respective tradition through the analysis of Scripture. Faith is certainly a central biblical term. But faith is spoken of in different contexts and contains different aspects and emphases. It is therefore difficult to summarise this into what could be called "faith as a biblical term". We will therefore limit ourselves to the aspects which deal with faith as God's act, faith as a human response, and faith in relation to baptism.

### **FAITH AS A HUMAN EXPRESSION**

The God who is spoken of in all of Scripture is neither an abstract principle nor an equal partner to whom we choose to relate. God is the creating, acting, living God who unceasingly approaches human kind. God seeks a dialogue with us and provokes a response from us. The positive response to God's initiative is called faith. To believe is to turn away from oneself and give a personal affirmation to God's initiative and act of salvation. Faith touches upon the whole being of the individual, its will, action, mind, and feeling. All levels of the person's being is influenced; the conscious and the unconscious, the visible and the invisible.

Scripture only contains one explicit definition of faith ("faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Hebrews 11:1). The reluctance to define faith on the part of Scripture is hardly a coincidence. "Faith as such" is not the main aspect of the biblical tradition, but rather how faith is expressed in different specific incidents in people's lives.

Hence, the definition of faith in Hebrews is followed by a presentation of individuals in the Old Testament who were "well attested by their faith" (v. 39a). If it is true that the internal aspect of faith is defined in the first verse of this chapter of the letter to the Hebrews, the visible external aspect of faith is depicted as a plurality of human responses and actions.

The miracle stories of the Gospels, where Jesus exclusively attaches Salvation to faith, illustrate the various and concrete appearances of faith. Faith is depicted as ingenuity (Mark 2:4), as quick-witted (Matt 15:25ff), as obedience (John 4: 50) and gratitude (Luke 17:15ff). Faith can be a unprepared and incomplete (Mark 5:25f) or mature and prepared (Mark 9:22f). To summarise, one can say that faith is the expression of trust in God's creative power as we encounter it in the person of Jesus.

Faith after the resurrection must be understood in the same way. Now this trust in God's creative power is connected to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:24; 10:40). The proclamation of this event is necessary in order to create faith in the heart and a confession of the lips that Jesus is Lord (Romans 10: 9). Faith is therefore not an act of trust as such, but a trusting a confession to God's act of salvation through Jesus Christ. Faith in the Christian sense of the word always has this content and meaning.

Expressions of faith are variously depicted in Scripture and may be said to parallel different Christian traditions in their differing confessional piety and manners in which faith is expressed. From an ecumenical perspective it is of great importance not to attach the concept of faith to one single pattern of behaviour or experience. Further, in light of the different experiences human life includes, such as illnesses, physical handicap, ageing, etc., there is a liberating power in the way Scripture depicts the expression of faith as both varied and concrete.

The life of faith extends far beyond what we can see and know. Not even the believer him/herself can fathom the depths of faith (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 3:3). But this does not mean that faith is without concrete forms of expression (2 Cor 13: 5; James 2:18). Faith is not something we possess inside, as a seed which develops by itself. Rather, it is a relation to Jesus Christ. In this relation faith is never complete, but is always in the making. Scripture depicts it as a process and a struggle, an ever new movement (Mark 8: 24; Phil 3:12; 2 Cor 4: 7ff). Faith is therefore always a task for the Christian.

## **FAITH AS GOD'S ACT**

Despite all its concrete human forms of expression, it is not possible to understand faith fundamentally as a result of human choice. Faith is a gift from God (Luke 17:5; Eph 2:8). The expression or confession of faith can only take place through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3). Faith is always preceded by God's call and election (Rom 8:28-30). Faith achieves that which no human being, only God, can perform (Mark 11:23). The life of faith is nourished by grace in the same way the first Christian community held on to "the apostle's teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2: 42).

When the apostle Paul reflects on the creation of faith in the life of the individual, he sees faith

not just as an expression of, or positive reaction to God's call, but carries the question concerning the origin of faith all the way to "the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God," and to the acknowledgement of "how unsearchable his judgement and inscrutable his ways" are (Romans 11:33). Both the beginning and the continuation of life in faith are possible only through the help of God (Phil 1:6). The believer will therefore always, despite of all the choices he/she does to live as a Christian, be grateful and in wonder about the fact that God has kept him/her in the Christian faith. The believer will therefore trust "that he who began a good work ... will bring it to completion" (Phil 1:6).

Hence, it is clear that faith, paradoxically, is on the one hand an act of God, and on the other hand is expressed wholly and completely as an act of the individual. Neither Baptists nor Lutherans wish to deny any of these two aspects of faith. We wish to speak of faith as a human act which can be experienced, without denying the act of God as that which is fundamental in the existence and self-understanding of the Christian. We wish to speak of faith as God's act also, without denying faith as a power which can be experienced in the life of Christians.

## **FAITH AND BAPTISM**

Both Lutherans and Baptists wish to keep the close connection between faith and baptism as it is expressed in the gospel of Mark: "whoever believes and is baptised will be saved" (Mark 16:16). We also share the conviction that baptism as an act stands at the beginning of Christian life and is basic for at the self-understanding of the Christian.

We nevertheless see the connection between faith and baptism differently. To Baptists the faith of the baptismal candidate is a prerequisite for baptism. Baptism is integrated into the experience of salvation, and comes naturally as a consequence of the confessing faith of the baptised and is not an act in isolation from it.

In the Lutheran understanding, the wish or request for baptism is sufficient as a prerequisite for baptism. It is presupposed that the person who makes the request has a simple understanding of the main content of the Christian faith. The person can either be the adult candidate who him/herself desires to be baptised, or the parents and/or godparents who request baptism on behalf of a child. Faith then in actuality builds upon the act of God in baptism, where new life is created.

In short: Baptists baptise upon (on the basis of) the confession of faith of the individual.

Lutherans baptise into the faith of the individual. For both parties it is important to emphasise that baptism takes place in faith, in the community of the church, and incorporates the baptised person into this community of faith.

## **INFANTS AND FAITH**

Baptists have always decisively rejected the possibility that infants can believe. To hold that infants have faith would be to leave faith undefined and abstract, without the content of faith in Christ. This has specifically been the main complaint against Lutheran baptismal practice.

When infant baptism is defended by claiming that the child has or receives faith, this is perceived of as a threat to the character of faith as always being a consenting affirmation to Jesus Christ.

Lutherans have been more indecisive when addressing the issue of whether it is meaningful to speak of the faith of infants. Many Lutherans have claimed - and claim - that the validity of infant baptism is dependent on the actual faith of the child. This attitude of faith has been seen in the child which is passively being carried to be baptised in a state of trustful openness to the act of God. The main emphasis has nevertheless been on God's act of creating faith in the infant through baptism. The child receives faith with the Holy Spirit. Others have emphasised the faith of the parents, the godparents, and the church in bringing the child to baptism, as faith on behalf of the child and a prerequisite for infant baptism.

In our conversations the Lutheran party came to question whether it is meaningful to speak of the faith of the infant. Surely, the life of faith contains more than what actually can be registered, and every age has its own life of faith. Recent psychological research also speaks of the infant possessing a basic trust directed towards the parents. This basic trust, however, is not immediately identical to faith as trust in the Christ of revelation, but is the general prerequisite of the physical and psychological growth of the child.

Hence, the Lutheran party finds it difficult, and is uncertain whether, to make the presumption of the faith of the infant a major argument for the baptismal practice of the Lutheran Church, irrespective of whether the argument is made on an empirical basis, or is built on a dogmatic postulation that God gives the infant faith through baptism.

Therefore, the request of the parents and godparents for baptism on behalf of the child is more decisive, and with it the pledge of the parents and godparents, together with the congregation, that the infant be raised in Christian faith and renunciation. On the basis of this understanding, it is the presupposition of infant baptism that baptismal instruction can take place on behalf of the baptised and that the infant has the possibility to grow up in a community of faith. It is within the community of faith that the baptised infant receives faith so that he/she can join this community. In the baptismal practice of the Lutheran church it is emphasised that faith is built only upon the new life that is received in baptism.

## **BAPTISM**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is formulated in relation to the so called BEM-document which has a separate section on baptism. In the BEM-document a common understanding of baptism is expressed through 23 points. In supplementary comments to these points, the divergence between the churches are noted, with suggestions for further development towards reciprocal recognition and unity.

Our portrayal is related to the 23 points of the BEM-document, which here are either referred to or cited. Our portrayal does not reflect on the formulations or single aspects of the Lima document. When the content of the Lima document is referred to, the committee is only responsible for the reference made, and not for the formulations in the original text. When the BEM is cited in quotation marks, the text cited will be commented on. In places, our formulation adapts the BEM text without employing quotation marks. In these cases, when the text is not followed by a comment (C), the committee agrees with the text referred to. The comments (C) pick up on specific interests of the Lutheran or Baptist traditions.

Baptists find the structure of the section on baptism in the Lima document problematic. This is because the issue of believers versus infant baptism is placed in chapter four, as a mere practical question. The Baptist grounds for rejecting infant baptism are, however, mainly theological. Further agreement on the issue of baptism can, from the Baptist point of view, only be reached through a basic theological dialogue. The structure of the BEM-document is on the other hand advantageous with regard to Lutheran/Baptist conversations, because it makes it possible to discover in how much we agree theologically before the issue infant versus believers baptism divides us. Point 8 of the Lima document is a good place to begin an ecumenical debate which is often stalled, as it states: "Baptism is both God's gift and our human response to that gift."

### **I. THE INSTITUTION OF BAPTISM**

1. Christian baptism is instituted by the resurrected Lord Jesus, and is rooted in the earthly ministry of Jesus, in his death, and in his resurrection. In the whole of the New Testament

baptism is presupposed as an entry into the church and the Christian life. Whoever becomes a Christian, is baptised. Our churches therefore are committed to Christ's commandment to baptise, as well as to the common practice of the churches which makes baptism the indispensable rite of initiation into Christian life.

C. Matthew 28:19 (and Mark 16:16) contains the word of the institution of baptism in both Lutheran and Baptist traditions. In addition, Baptists understand the baptism of Jesus as a word of the institution, and the original image of Christian baptism. Both references are clearly justified. It is, however, the collective testimony of all of scripture to baptism as an act willed by God and instituted by Christ, which is decisive to both denominations, rather than single passages of Scripture.

## **II. THE MEANING OF BAPTISM**

2. "Baptism is the sign of new life through Jesus Christ. It unites the one baptised with Christ and with his people." The New Testament contains various images which express the riches of Christ and the gifts of his salvation, as these are made visible through baptism.

C. Both Lutherans and Baptists can agree to both sentences. In Lutheran tradition, however, the term sign is too weak to express the nature and gift of baptism. The traditional word sacrament is preferred, because it expresses that baptism is one of the means by which God acts for the salvation of the believer. Through God's own word, God uses the water of baptism to unite the baptised with Jesus Christ. Faith relates to the word of God spoken at baptism. This word is connected to the water of baptism through the commandment of Christ. The water of baptism is thus not simply a sign, but an efficacious agent used by God.

In Baptist tradition, one has been reluctant to call baptism a sacrament, because this reflects a view of baptism as an effective act independent of the response of the individual - be it an *opere operato*- understanding, or more generally a theology of baptism which presupposes an effect over against infants. To Baptists baptism can only then be called a sacrament, when an individual is baptised upon his/her personal confession of faith, and thus is able to give a positive response to the proclamation of the word. As an alternative to the word sacrament Baptists have used the term symbol of relation which contains a deeper meaning than the term symbol which simply portrays salvation in a mere spiritual way. The symbol of relation is real in the sense that God in fact meets the individual in baptism, and gives him/her part in the gift of salvation.

### **A. Participation in Christ's death and resurrection.**

3. In baptism, we are baptised into the death and resurrection of Jesus. The "old Adam" is crucified with Christ, and the individual is liberated from the power of sin. Those baptised are raised here and now to a new life in the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. With this they are called to a new mode of living: to let the "old being" die every day, and let the "new being" live and serve God and the fellow human being. In this we are also given a hope: death is not the end, but in the power of the resurrection of Jesus, the believers shall one day take part in the resurrection to eternal life.

### **B. Conversion, Pardoning and Cleansing.**

4. Baptism implies conversion and a new life. It is not simply an external cleansing, but involves the conversion of the heart and initiates a life in faith and obedience under the guidance of the spirit.

C. Both conversion and faith belong together in baptism. When Luke portrays conversion and baptism together as the positive response to the proclamation of the word (Acts 2:38), and Paul places faith and baptism together (Gal 3:26ff; Col 2:12), these must be perceived as parallel expressions of the same holistic understanding of the appropriation of salvation.

### **C. The Gift of the Spirit.**

5. "The Holy spirit is at work in the lives of people before, in and after their baptism." God bestows upon all baptised persons the Spirit which is the Spirit of adoption. The gift of the Spirit can also be called an anointing, a seal, or an instalment of the inheritance they have as children of God. The Spirit nurtures the life of faith which is given to all who are baptised. C. On the basis of Acts 2:28, both Lutheran and Baptist traditions would emphasise baptism as an act which communicates the Spirit, although the Spirit has already before baptism been at work in the individual through the proclamation of the Word, and has called him/her to faith.

### **D. Incorporation into the Body of Christ.**

6. Baptism is the entrance to the Christian community in the universal Church of Jesus. In the great commission, Jesus designates baptism and teaching as means to win new disciples. Baptism installs us as members into his body (1 Cor 12:13), and makes us one people across all social barriers (Gal 3:26-28). The one Christian baptism is therefore according to the New Testament an important expression of the unity of the church. A central goal for ecumenical conversations is for the different denominations to regain the unity of baptism without having to compromise in the differing understandings of the biblical message.

C. In Lutheran tradition it is no problem acknowledging the baptism of other denominations whether it took place as adult or infant baptism, through sprinkling or through immersion.

Baptists have traditionally found it problematic to acknowledge infant baptism as a valid Christian form of baptism (see comments to points 11 to 13 below). Individuals who have been baptised as infants are as a rule required to be baptised according to Baptist tradition if they wish to have full membership in a Baptist congregation. In some countries Baptists will invite believers who understand their infant baptism as a valid baptism into the body of Christ, and hence would perceive of another baptism as re-baptism, to participate in church life through full membership. In other countries persons who have been baptised as infants are accepted as members when their membership is transferred from a congregation which is acknowledged as a Christian congregation or church. In these cases the believers are accepted as members on the basis of earlier membership in a Christian congregation, and the issue of their baptism is not reflected on. Examples of this practice is found in England as well as in Scandinavia. The question is also debated among Norwegian Baptists. When believers are accepted as members without meeting the demand that they submit to a baptism according to Baptist principles, they will nevertheless have to accept that the congregation they have joined only has one view of baptism and practices baptism accordingly. For Baptists, to introduce infant baptism as an alternative baptismal practice is therefore no option. Baptists would feel compelled to baptise an individual who holds a merely formal membership in a church after having been baptised as an infant, and who has encountered a Baptist Church under the circumstances of conversion.

### **E. The sign of the Kingdom of God**

7. Baptism is a sign of the Kingdom of God, because it grants participation in the church as the people of the kingdom. The Church lives by the promise of Jesus that the Kingdom of God is God's undeserved gift of grace to poor and sinful in human beings. Baptism places our lives within the hope of the kingdom which Jesus will establish at his coming.

## **III. BAPTISM AND FAITH**

8. "Baptism is both God's gift and our human response to that gift. It looks toward a growth into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4: 13). The necessity of faith for the reception of the salvation embodied and set forth in baptism is acknowledged by all churches.

Personal commitment is necessary for responsible membership in the body of Christ."

C. See comments under pt. 12.

9. Baptism is the introduction to a life in growth and struggle in the power of the Spirit.

10. Baptism is a call to service in the Church and in the world.

#### **IV. BAPTISTMAL PRACTICE**

##### **A. The baptism of believers and infants**

11. "While the possibility that infant baptism was also practised in the apostolic age cannot be excluded, baptism upon personal profession of faith is the most clearly attested pattern in the New Testament documents." At the present there are churches that practice infant baptism and churches that practise baptism only of persons who are able to make a personal confession of faith (believers baptism).

12. "Both the baptism of believers and the baptism of infants take place in the church as the community of faith. When one who can answer for himself or herself is baptised, a personal confession of faith will be an integral part of the baptismal service. When an infant is baptised, the personal response will be offered at a later moment in life. In both cases, the baptised person will have to grow in the understanding of faith."

C. Here there is a distinct difference between Lutherans and Baptists in their understanding of baptism, although one should not overlook the aspects which connect the two traditions.

The Lutheran churches have always practised infant baptism in a context where children are growing up in a Christian family and Church setting. This practice has never been understood to be a contradiction to, or as less valid than, adult baptism or believers baptism, because it is presupposed that the children receive faith in baptism and that faith of the child will have the possibility to grow in the context of a Christian upbringing and teaching. The meaning of faith for the sacrament of baptism is emphasised in Luther's catechism.

##### **"Concerning baptism:**

Question 2. What gifts or benefits does baptism bestow?

It effects forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and grants eternal salvation to all who believe, as the Word and promise of God declare (Mark 16:16).

Question 3: How can water produce such great effects?

It is not the water that produces these effects, but the Word of God connected with the water, and our faith which relies on the Word of God connected with the water." ...

This does not mean that the validity of baptism is dependent on the faith of the baptised. As an act of God it is valid and shall not be repeated, even if the baptised only feigned that he/she believed when he/she was baptised, or later falls away from faith. But even if the baptism is valid, it will only effect salvation when it is received in faith. In this way even the Lutheran tradition claims a "believers baptism": without faith, baptism is of no use for the baptised. Faith is nevertheless no constitutive part of the sacrament of baptism in Lutheran tradition. Therefore the term "believers baptism" is avoided and the terms infant baptism or adult baptism are preferred as descriptive of two valid and equal forms of the one Christian baptism.

The practice of infant baptism is not based on the presupposition that the child believes. That the child receives faith in baptism is neither a dogmatic postulation nor a statement based on experience, but a thought which helps keep baptism and faith together. The exact stage in the

development of a child when faith becomes empirically tangible is difficult to pinpoint. In Lutheran thought, this is not decisive, however, because actual faith can never be proven with certainty. Even an adult who confesses faith before baptism, can feign faith. Infant baptism is practised because Christ initiated baptism as the great gift which opens for a community with him and with the Church, and because Jesus included children in the community around him. Therefore Lutherans do not dare to deny children the gift of baptism. Instead they hope, believe and pray that God gives the children faith in baptism, and presuppose that the children who are baptised, receive a Christian upbringing which will result in faith which is conscious and mature. In his large catechism Luther explains it thus: "Everything depends on the Word and commandment of God. ... For my faith does not constitute Baptism but receives it. ... We bring the child with the purpose and hope that he may believe, and we pray that God may grant him faith."

In their understanding of baptism Baptists emphasise a pattern which is basic in the New Testament: 1) the gospel is proclaimed; 2) the proclaimed Word is received through faith which is given by God (= conversion); 3) the believer is baptised to Christ and is added to the church. In addition, the church very early introduced teaching in the form of a catechumenate prior to baptism. When salvation is connected with baptism in the New Testament, this whole process is included. By emphasising this pattern each individual is placed in a situation of missions which is characteristic for the New Testament and which still is foundational because it reflects each individual's situation before God.

Baptist tradition will like Lutheran tradition emphasise the connection between baptism and the Word and faith. But the word is understood as the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ, and faith is an act of God in the person who hears, so that he or she receives the word in trust and obedience to God. When an individual opens itself to the gospel, faith is born in that person. Therefore it is not correct to say that the individual receives faith in baptism. Baptism does not lead to faith, but faith leads to baptism, as Scripture clearly shows. No one can receive baptism without first having received the word through faith, because baptism includes both of these.

Considering the way the Word and faith is understood in the New Testament it is no coincidence that infant baptism is not described there. Baptists have not found infant baptism documented anywhere in the New Testament. Hence, the opening sentence of point 11 in BEM (quoted above) is understood to be too optimistic in favour of infant baptism.

As infants are not able to react to the proclamation of the Word or come to a personal faith in God, Baptists reject the validity of infant baptism. If in baptism we can speak only of God's sovereign act of Salvation, baptism as such would be unnecessary, because God already acted sovereignty in Jesus Christ. Baptism is first and foremost possible when God turns to the human being for consent to his sovereign work of salvation. God's grace in Jesus Christ has a universal side to it, which tends to and preserves those who are too small to hear the gospel and give his or her response in baptism (Rom. 5: 12-21).

Baptists prefer not to use the term "adult baptism", since there is no talk of a specific age or degree of maturity which is to be reached before baptism can take place. Baptism can take place when the individual can respond personally to the message of the Gospel. In effect, this means at the age in which confirmation takes place in the churches where infant baptism is practised, or whenever later in life conversion takes place. In some Baptist unions, however, individuals are baptised at a much younger age.

Baptists cannot identify with a use of the term "believers baptism" where it is taken to mean

that a certain measure of faith is required in order for baptism to be valid. God speaks to the individual in the proclamation of the word, and all God requires from the human being is that it responds positively to the Gospel in baptism. This, therefore is essentially what is understood to be baptism upon the confession of faith. On the basis of these presuppositions, baptism is clearly also for Baptists an act which only can take place once. Even if someone in baptism should have feigned faith, the person is not to be re-baptised. This however, is understood to be a hypothetical problem and should not be used in such a way as to diminish the emphasis on faith in the theology of baptism.

Faith is for Baptists decisive for baptism in the same way as faith is decisive for the effect of baptism in Lutheran thought. But if the assent as a whole must come after baptism, this cannot be considered valid practise. The central point of baptism is that in baptism the individual person receives through faith God's act of Salvation which takes place completely independent of human co-operation. This is how Baptists also understand the opening sentence of point eight in BEM's section on baptism: "Baptism is both God's gift and our human answer to this gift."

13. "Baptism is an unrepeatable act. Any practice which might be interpreted as 're- baptism' must be avoided."

C. Baptists have fundamental theological difficulties with infant baptism. As an act of initiation it can without reservations be understood as a pleasant and important celebration in the life of the family and of the Church. As a baptism, however, the act is perceived to be "empty" because the individual's assent to, and understanding of, the Gospel is not present. In infant baptism, everything which deals with faith, conversion and teaching must occur after the event has taken place. Baptists emphasise that the individual must him- or herself take the final decision whether to be baptised or not. Neither the parents nor any other person can make that decision on behalf of the individual. Baptists therefore do not consider it to be "re-baptism" when a person who was baptised as an infant, is baptised upon the confession of faith as an adult. This is especially so when the adult is converted, comes to faith, is baptised and added to a Baptist congregation. On the basis of their own understanding of baptism, Baptists renounce "re- baptism" in the same way as any other church. On the basis of these considerations Baptists find it to problematic when BEM's formulation makes it the responsibility of others to determine whether or not Baptists practice "re-baptism" (...any practice which might be interpreted as "re-baptism" must be avoided).

Lutherans perceive the Baptist view of infant baptism to be the greatest obstacle to bringing the two churches closer through ecumenical dialogue. This was already so in the time of the reformation and is formulated in article 9 of the Confessio Augustana: "They condemn the Anabaptists, who reject the baptism of children, and say that children are saved without Baptism." The expression "condemn" is by Lutherans today not perceived to be a condemnation of the Churches or persons that reject infant baptism, but rather a renunciation of their teaching.

When Baptists demand a new baptism of persons baptised as infants, it means that Baptists do not recognise infant baptism as a valid baptism. To Lutherans, however, baptism is the basic sacrament whether it is performed on infants or adults. In this act the individual becomes a child of God, receives the Holy Spirit and is received in to Church the church of God on earth. A new act of baptism must therefore be perceived as a re-baptism, where the infant baptism is rejected as a valid sacrament.

## **B) Baptism-Chrismation-Confirmation**

14. In some churches the gift of the Spirit is associated with a certain rite. This can either be the

anointing with oil/the laying on of hands connected with the act of baptism, or it can be confirmation.

C. This is not the case either in Lutheran or Baptist tradition. Confirmation is not a sacrament in the Lutheran tradition, but an act of intercession which concludes a period of Christian education. Baptists do not practise confirmation because an introduction into the basics of the Christian faith is a presupposition for baptism itself. In Norway, however, Baptists have for practical reasons introduced a period of Christian education aimed at the same age group as those who prepare for confirmation in the Lutheran church. This is, however, not called confirmation because of the association of this term with infant baptism. Baptists do practice a presentation and blessing of children, which is an act of benediction at infancy. In connection with Jesus' blessing of the children, it is emphasised that the Kingdom of God belongs to the children and that they are included in Christ's universal act of salvation. Parents and congregation are reminded of their privilege and responsibility in giving the child a Christian upbringing

### **C) Towards a mutual recognition of baptism**

15. Churches are increasingly recognising one another's baptism.

C. See the commentary for point 6.

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

C. That the majority Churches run the risk of baptising children of parents who clearly have rejected the message of the Church and who bring their children up without Christian nurture, has strengthened Baptists rejection of infant baptism. A stronger emphasis on the bond between baptism and personal assent would meet Baptist's search for a more constructive base in the evaluation of infant baptism. Paradoxically Lutheran and Baptist theologies of baptism are very similar, so similar that it would probably be possible to agree on a common liturgy of baptism for adults. Further, Lutheran reflections on the time of children's admission to the Lord's Supper reveals many parallels to Baptist thinking concerning the appropriate time of baptism. The encouragement that Baptists should in theological terms reflect more seriously on the situation of the child, is appreciated by Baptists themselves. The presentation and blessing of the child in infancy is an expression of this.

## **V. The Celebration of baptism**

17. "Baptism is administered with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

18. "In the celebration of baptism the symbolic dimension of water should be taken seriously and not minimised. The act of immersion can vividly express the reality that in baptism the Christian participates in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ."

C. Baptism by sprinkling is the most common form in the Lutheran tradition. Baptism by immersion was also known and appreciated by Luther himself, as it is expressed in his large catechism: "This act or observance consists in being dipped into the water, which covers us completely, and being drawn out again. These two parts, being dipped under the water and emerging from it, indicate the power and effect of baptism, which is simply the slaying of the

old Adam and the resurrection of the new man...."

As an expression of the fact that the church of Norway also accepts baptism by immersion, a change in the Altar book so as to also include baptism by immersion should be considered, in order to give those who are baptised as adults the possibility to choose this form of baptism. It should be emphasised that both baptism by sprinkling and baptism by immersion are valid in Lutheran thought, and that the church should not put pressure on anyone to choose one form of baptism over the other.

Baptists find that the richness of symbols present in baptism by immersion, as well as its precedence in the Bible, makes it the most natural form of baptism. The validity of the baptism is not, however, dependent upon the amount of water used. Baptism by sprinkling upon the personal confession of faith is therefore considered to be a fully acceptable form of baptism, although this is considered to be an irregular form of baptism.

19. Different rituals performed in connection with the act of baptism, such as the anointing with oil, the laying on of hands, the sign of the cross or chrismation, can be meaningful as expressions of the gift and meaning of baptism.

20. The liturgies of baptism are varied, but should include the reading of Scripture, the invocation of the Holy Spirit, renunciation and confession, the use of water and a declaration that the persons baptised have acquired a new identity and a new calling to live as Christians.

21. The content of baptism according to Scripture should be explained in connection with the act of baptism. Here we find it useful to quote all of commentary b) of the BEM document: "In many large European and North American majority churches infant baptism is often practised in an apparently indiscriminate way. This contributes to the reluctance of the churches which practise believers baptism to acknowledge the validity of infant baptism; this fact should lead to more critical reflection on the meaning of baptism within those majority Churches themselves."

22. "Baptism is normally administered by an ordained minister, though in certain circumstances others are allowed to baptise."

C. Baptists have no binding practise of ordination, and in principle any Baptist is allowed to baptise. In as far as this is possible, however, baptism is performed by pastor educated and ordained for this ministry.

23. Baptism is intimately connected with the corporate life of the church, and should be administered during a public worship service.

## **Summary**

To the contentment of the committee a large extent of agreement concerning the understanding of baptism was found to exist between the two churches. Both Lutherans and Baptists view baptism as the basic unavoidable introduction to Christ. As an act baptism is initiated by Christ. Baptism gives us part in the death and resurrection of Jesus. It imparts the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit into a new life in faith and obedience. Baptism is also the gate into the community of the Church, where the one baptism is an expression of the unity of God's people on earth.

It is therefore painful for us to observe that different understandings of the role of faith in connection with baptism still divides our churches. The division is made visible by the fact that Baptists view infant baptism as invalid, and hence treat persons baptised as infants as if they were not baptised when they are to be received into a Baptist church.

Despite this division in practice and understanding of baptism, the committee found it valuable that through working with biblical texts greater knowledge and understanding of each other's

point of view has been achieved.

## **EXCURSUS: TEXTS ON BAPTISM**

The committee considered different biblical texts on baptism and their Lutheran and Baptist interpretation, in order to discover to which degree the interpretations differ. The conclusions are given below. Despite our differences in practice and understanding of baptism, there is a large extent of agreement in the understanding of Scripture, although our different traditions are evident in the interpretation in some passages of scripture.

### **Conclusions**

#### **1) Matthew 28: 18-20**

The main clause of the Great commission concerns making disciples of all nations. In the sub-clause, this commission is further explained as baptism and teaching. These are not, however, given in the order of priority. Baptism must be connected to proclamation and teaching. Baptism and teaching are constitutive of Christian life, and can consequently not be separated. A disciple is one who is baptised and taught to keep Christ's commandments.

#### **2) Mark 16:16**

The text makes clear that faith and baptism are connected. The central term of the text is faith, because the point of departure is the proclamation of the Gospel. Baptism is mentioned together with faith as foundational for Christian initiation. Hence the text emphasises the central meaning of baptism in the reception of the Gospel.

#### **3) John 3:5**

John 3:5 is to be understood in light of the discussion between the synagogue and the Christian church. The Spirit constitutes the decisive break between the Synagogue and the church, and Baptism gives part in the Spirit. In the context, this is subsequently connected with faith.

#### **4) Acts 2:38f.**

The central element of this text is that the Holy Spirit is bestowed and that it creates a new people of God. This gift of the Spirit exceeds the content of the baptism of John, already known to the people. Hence, baptism in the name of Jesus Christ imparts the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Baptism is an integral part of the individual's entrance into the Christian faith.

Baptists here emphasise the conversion of the individual at baptism, while Lutherans stress the collective aspect of the text.

#### **5) Acts 10: 1-11, 48; 16:14-15; 16:30-34; 18:8; 1 Cor 1:16 (Persons baptised with their household)**

There is general agreement that the texts say nothing of the baptism of children. Still, Lutheran theology maintains that the collective aspect of the texts opens for the possibility of infant baptism. Baptists reject such a possibility. From a Baptist point of view these texts constitute part of the theology of baptism in the acts of the Apostles. This theology is dependent on the situation of missions where one appeals to adult individuals to receive the Gospel, and the formulation of the texts excludes that baptism of infants took place.

#### **6) Romans 6:1ff**

Romans 6:1ff as a baptismal text is central to both Lutherans and Baptists in Christian education and proclamation. The text shows that baptism gives part in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism is not just God's gift and act, but also the human answer in

the form of service for God and lifelong growth in Christ.

Baptists accentuate the fact that the baptised him or herself must give his or her assent to the content of baptism when baptism takes place, while Lutherans believe that the personal agreement can take place at a later date. Immersion is the form of baptism which better expresses this text symbolically.

### **7) Col 2:11f**

This explains the significance of the death of Jesus by referring to circumcision, which in the context is connected to baptism. There is disagreement among Lutherans and Baptists whether the Jewish rite of circumcision has any impact on the understanding of baptism.

Since both circumcision and baptism are rites of initiation, churches who baptise infants have viewed circumcision as a parallel to baptism. Therefore the infant must and should be accepted into the people of God. Baptists reject this point of view, because baptism has a different and greater meaning than circumcision, which Paul rejects vehemently as a concrete rite. Hence it cannot be replaced by a parallel rite.

### **8) Titus 3:5**

The text expresses the essential content of baptism as an act of initiation. Baptism is God's act of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit. We are not saved by good works but into good works.

### **9) 1 Peter 3:20**

The text contains both text-critical and exegetical problems, but its main emphasis is on God's act of salvation in Jesus Christ, which the baptised receives and gives his/her assent to. This consent is not a ritual cleansing, but a inner renewal of the whole human being. The text has traditionally been central in Baptist thought, because we here find it unequivocally expressed that personal assent is an integral part of baptism. The text does however not give reason to reduce baptism to a mere act of obedience. On the basis of this text, Lutheran tradition emphasises that baptism actually does impart salvation.

### **10) Mark 10:13-16 (Jesus blesses the children)**

In the text the child is used to depict how the Kingdom of God is to be received. The text does not speak directly of infant baptism or the presentation and blessing of infants as an act of the church, but nevertheless clearly expresses that children belong in the congregation. In a comprehensive Lutheran theology of baptism the text is used to stress that the child is included in the Kingdom of God by maintaining that the child can come to Jesus, and this happens in baptism.

Baptists use this text when the child is presented before the church as the people of God and blessed. In the context of Jesus' act of blessing, it is stressed that the Kingdom of God belongs to the children.

### **11) The Baptism of Jesus**

For Baptists, the baptism of Jesus constitutes the justification for Christian baptism. By submitting to baptism by John, Jesus laid the grounds for an equivalent Christian practice, and showed by his example that this was the correct initiation into a life in faith and obedience. Lutherans have traditionally avoided speaking of Jesus' baptism as an example for Christian baptism, and rather emphasised Jesus' baptism as a one time event, a separate initiation into his particular messianic vocation. In the exegetical debate of the present day, however, the

evaluation of this question no longer comply with confessional boundaries.

## **THE CHURCH**

The identity of the church according to divine will, as well as how we are to comply with that divine will, has been a central question since the day of the apostles.

Ecumenically, ecclesiology has been a difficult and partly problematic area, be it in theological thinking and debate or in ecumenical practice.

This chapter presents our shared understanding of the church, although sometimes with different emphase. The chapter is subdivided under the headings "the church as the work of God," "the church as the communion of saints," and finally, "the church as the eschatological people of God." We believe ourselves to have reached a greater level of agreement in our understanding of the church than the historical positions of our denominations thought possible. Since Norway has one majority state church and a number of small free churches, we describe, in a final paragraph, aspects of these church ordinances.

## **THE CHURCH AS THE WORK OF GOD**

The Christian church is no human invention. Anytime and anywhere the church appears in history, it does so as the work of God by the Holy Spirit. God has placed the church in the world so that people may come to faith in Jesus Christ and so that they may be kept in this faith. The most common word for the Christian church in the New Testament is ecclesia. In secular Greek ecclesia denotes "a gathering of people duly summoned" as for example in a popular assembly (Acts 19:39). In the Septuagint the term receives a religious meaning as a translation of the Hebrew qahal Yahweh, i.e. the congregation/community of the Lord. After Jesus appeared as the Messiah of the community of God and as the saviour of the world, the qahal Yahweh is continued in those who did not reject him, but received his call, became disciples and became a part of his ecclesia. The boundaries of the Jewish national religion were broken, and the Holy Spirit gained a new people through the proclamation of the word and the personal reception of this Word. The church is therefore the Christian congregation, people who are summoned together around the word, baptism and the Lord's Supper. Where people do not comply with this summons to come together, there is no true Christian congregation. The congregation is the "assembly of believers."

Historically, the church originated in Jesus' messianic life and work, and the circle of disciples which he gathered around himself. Jesus sent his disciples out to proclaim the message of the Kingdom of God (Mark 3:14; Luk 9:2; 10:1). They were to proclaim the immanence of the Kingdom in and with the person of Jesus Christ, just as John the Baptist and Jesus himself had done before them. Jesus is himself the sign of the coming Kingdom of God. The sending of the disciples prepared for but did not create the Christian church. The Christian church came into being after the resurrection. "The word of faith", the proclamation of which is the prerequisite for the creation of the church, includes the confession to Jesus as the Lord who is raised from the dead (Romans 10:5-10).

The first Christian Pentecost shows how the circle of disciples became a Christian congregation with the proclamation of the Word, holy acts and community life. This happens through the work of the Holy spirit. New members are received into the congregation through baptism. Both Acts and the epistles show how the new testament church with time developed a variation of structures and organisational forms. It is not possible on the basis of the NT to maintain that there is only one true structural model for the church which is to be considered biblical and a measure for a true Christian church.

The growth and expansion of the church is the realisation of the great commission which the Church received from the resurrected Lord. Where the church manifests itself though proclamation of the Word, baptism, the Lord's Supper and community life, it must be local in

order for it to be a missionary church, and it must be based in the revelation of the Bible for it to fulfil the will and intent of God. The church is universal, but always appears in the form of a local congregation. "The Christian community in a particular place represents the whole body, and is just as visible and temporal as the Christian person." (K.L. Schmidt)

## **THE COMMUNITY OF SAINTS**

### **The congregation of believers**

In the new testament Christians are called "saints" (Acts 9:13, 32; Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2, etc.) Hence, the apostolic confession of faith calls the church the "community of saints". This does not mean that the church and the Christians are holy in themselves, but only because they place their trust in Jesus Christ and thereby are sanctified. The Christian church, the congregation, is a community of persons who believe in Jesus Christ. (Acts 5:14; 1 Cor 1:21; 3; 7; Eph. 1:1, etc.)

Although the congregation can be addressed in terms of the geographical place where it is found, the church is not the same as the population within a certain geographical area, nor is it identical with a certain human race or nationality. Criteria used in identifying a certain ethnic group or race may not be used as criteria for identifying the church. The Christian church is in itself inter- and super- national (Mat 28:19; Acts 2:5).

The signs of the church is that people receive the Gospel of Jesus in faith, confess the faith, and gather around the Word of God and the sacraments. Because the church is the congregation of believers gathered around the Word, baptism and the Lord's Supper, it is concrete and visible. It is God who through the Holy Spirit calls people to faith. When people follow that calling and gather around the Word of God, baptism and Holy Communion, the church is manifest.

### **The priesthood of all believers**

Both Baptists and Lutherans in their ecclesiology view the church, the community, as the congregation of believers. This congregation is the work of God, not human beings. The church is God's chosen people which has come into being through the Holy Spirit. The church is not an assembly of like-minded people who have come together upon their own initiative.

The church is the assembly of believers as such. The church is the people of God, in which each member has the same rights and duties. Through baptism, the individual believer has received part in Jesus death and resurrection. The baptised is united with Christ and his people. (Cf. BEM, Baptism, II, 2-3)

For Baptists and Lutherans this means that no particular clerical order with particular rights exists, which may be received independently of the congregation. If baptism is "a sign and a seal of our common discipleship", and a "basic bond of unity", it means that all believers are "called to confess and serve one Lord in each place and in all the world." (BEM, Baptism, II, 6) Hence, all believers do in principle have the same right to proclaim the Word and to administer baptism and the Lord's Supper. The church is the new people of God made up of priests. (1. Peter 2:5)

The Priesthood of all believers is a concept which must not be interpreted individualistically to mean that each believer has the right to make his/her own decisions independent of the community of believers. The whole community constitutes the people of God, and thus is the holy priesthood. That all have the same rights, does not give anyone the liberty of refusing to adhere to the decisions of the whole community (1 Cor 5:4; Matt 18:17).

The commission of the church and the ministries of the community

In principle every believer has the same right and duty to proclaim the word and administer baptism and the Lord's Supper. However, since the church is the body of Christ where the individual members are equal but have different tasks, it is the gift of some members of the church to have proclamation, the administration of sacraments, deaconship, teaching and other

ministries as their particular responsibility (1 Cor 12). Those who are set apart for these ministries are simply obligated to put in order and protect that which is the responsibility of the whole church. They are themselves members of the church and practise the functions of the church. These ministries also contain the function of guidance and prophetic speech over against the church (Acts 20:28; 2 Cor 5:20; Eph 4:11). In their obligations over against the church, they are continually called to renewal of the spiritual gifts and authority which they have received through the calling of the church (Acts 6:3-6; 2 Cor 8:19; 2 Tim 1:6). These particular ministries are not contradictory to the concept of the priesthood of all believers. It is the church which calls some individuals to these ministries. No one has an inherent right to a ministry in the church. No one can claim a priority before others on the basis of personal qualifications. The congregation, the church, has the right to call those individuals it considers suitable for these ministries.

Due to its right to call individuals for certain ministries, the church also has the duty to guide and supervise the individuals it calls. If the church delegates the responsibility of supervision and guidance to specific officials of the church, this does not mean the church renounces its obligation.

## **THE ESCHATOLOGICAL PEOPLE OF GOD**

The church as a sociological and eschatological entity

Because the church is an assembly of believers who are gathered around the Word of God and the sacraments, it is visible. It must nevertheless be maintained that the church is not to be understood in terms of an institution where all aspects of the church is identical with that which is visible and discernible. Although people are attended to by and employ the external mediums of grace - proclamation, baptism and the Lord's Supper - it is not possible to dismiss the content of grace: salvation in Jesus Christ.

Therefore Baptists and Lutherans hold that while the church is a visible and manifest entity in the world, it is not possible for human beings to discern which persons in this church are true believers. God alone can distinguish between the true members of the churches and the hypocrites.

Hence, the true church is to be understood as the eschatological people of God. Only at the time of the parousia, the true people of God will be made known (Matt 3:12; Rom 2:16).

### **The consummation of the church**

Only at the time of Christ's coming in judgement it will be revealed who belongs to the true church. Before the final judgement, the church is a church struggling and suffering in the world. This church has no other power than that which is found in the faith in him to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given. The fact that the external and visible church has been, is, and may still become a part of secular power structures, may serve to conceal this truth, but does not alter it.

When judgement has been held, and "at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow" (Phil 2:10), it will be revealed that the suffering church has become "the triumphant church". Then it will be made clear that "hope does not disappoint us" (Romans 5:5). The church which in this world placed its hope in the resurrected Christ, will experience that "God will be everything to every one" (1 Cor 15:28).

### **State-church, church of the people, free church**

The model of the church as a state-church (established or national church) as it exists in Europe and particularly in the Scandinavian countries, has a historical background. The prerequisite for the model, is first, that the majority of the inhabitants, the people, present their children for

baptism, secondly, that the Christian community, like the family and the congregation, are perceived to be a religious subject, and thirdly the church order itself.

The Norwegian reality is such, and this is confirmed by our history, that it is an evident problem that one confession is dominant in society. In light of the factual religious pluralism of Norway, it must become increasingly difficult for the state as a representative of the people as a whole to favour one religion or confession as the state religion. From the point of view of the state-church, it cannot be denied that the state-church system can undermine the church's own authority.

The model of the church as a church of the people (majority church, *Volkskirche*) exists both in the form of the state church and as a free church. As a free church of the people it is perceived by many to be the heir of the state church. In Norway such a church would include the majority of the population and be based on infant baptism as the criteria for membership. Its administration would be independent of the state, but maintain a relationship to the state by laws and agreements. There is within the Church of Norway presently a development towards greater independence from the state.

The free church model. The first Christian church was independent of the state. The free church is mainly identified by its congregation of confessing believers. The church is made up of believers who recognise and confess Jesus as Lord, and who attend to the life and testimony of the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Since the reformation, the free churches have perceived of themselves to be the continuation of the new testament church, independent of the state. The state church model has been denounced as unbiblical and as being instrumental in the discrimination against religious and civil rights. A free church may practise infant baptism or baptism upon the personal confession of faith. It may be episcopal, congregational or presbyterian. The free church model does not contain confessional limitations. Baptists hold a moderate congregationalism, where the local congregation is committed to the union with other Baptist congregations regionally and nationally. The independence of the free church from the state does not free it from its biblical mandate to pray for and co-operate with the state as a God-given institution as long as the authorities do not try to seize "the things that are God's" (Mark 12:13-17). The individual Christian also has civil responsibilities of social, economical and political nature.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The bilateral conversations have brought the committee members closer to each other. We are conscious of the fact that we have achieved a greater mutual understanding of the theological basis and life of our respective churches. We also believe that we in certain areas of discussion have overcome misunderstandings and clarified our views. This makes the continuation of a fruitful dialogue possible.

The large extent of agreement in some of the main points of discussions has encouraged us. This was particularly so with regard to the questions of faith and the church. We do, however, observe disagreement between the parties in important theological issues. We have wanted to avoid concealing this disagreement, as disagreements which are discerned and named opens for the possibility to continue working with these issues.

Our dialogue concerning the Bible as a basis for bilateral conversations revealed an "astonishing degree of unity concerning the interpretation of the texts", although we still observe differences in theological presuppositions and conclusions. For example, Lutherans claim that questions concerning church order is *adiaphora*, a perspective Baptists do not share. Further, the Lutheran division between law and gospel leads to different conclusions than those of Baptists. In the interpretation of texts which deal with baptism, Lutherans and Baptists emphasise different aspects of the texts. Both churches, however, understand a scientific, historical-critical analysis of Scripture, together with the interest of faith, as vital and necessary. We have recognised that "both churches have inherited confessions and/or traditions which to a

large degree form their identity". We disagree however as to which degree this inheritance is to be taken into account in the interpretation of Scripture. On the basis of the authority of Scripture, Baptists have refused to grant the confessional writings a formal status, like the one the Lutheran confessional writings hold.

The dialogue on the question of anthropology (What then is man? The anthropology of Lutherans and Baptists) produced the greatest level of disagreement in the conversations. Even here, however, we found that the level of agreement was greater than expected. We found the main difference in the understanding of the sinful status of the individual. On the one hand, Lutherans consider the human being to be sinful and guilty from birth. Baptists, on the other hand, claim that the child which is not yet mature, is marked by sin, but is covered by the universal salvation of Christ until the proclamation of the Gospel can make it responsible before God. Only when a person is able to receive the Gospel and is made aware of personal guilt, the assent of faith (in baptism) is decisive for the individual's eternal fate. These dissensions form the background of our different assessments of infant baptism.

With regard to the understanding of faith, we agree that it is "both completely and wholly an act of God and at the same time wholly and completely act of the individual". Our paths part, however, when we consider the connection between faith and baptism. For Baptists, the faith of the baptismal candidate is a necessary presupposition for baptism. For Lutherans, faith cannot be made a prerequisite for baptism. With regard to the issue of whether infants actually believe, the Lutheran party, through the conversations, "came to question whether it is meaningful to speak of the faith of the infant." "Hence, the Lutheran party finds it difficult, and is uncertain whether, to make the presumption of the faith of the infant a major argument for the baptismal practice of the Lutheran Church."

The dissension we observed with regard to anthropology and the relation of faith to baptism, necessarily became evident in the dialogue on baptism. Baptists, on the one hand, can not acknowledge infant baptism, because the baptised lacks faith. Lutherans, on the other hand, concede that while the word "condemn" in article 9 of the Confession Augustana is not taken to mean "a condemnation of the Churches or persons that reject infant baptism," it does involve "a renunciation of their teaching."

We have nevertheless found that we largely agree on the relation of faith to baptism, as well as the content of baptism as a whole (cf. the conclusions of the chapter on baptism). When Lutherans maintain that the aim of baptism is a "faith which is conscious and mature", we must conclude that the fruit of baptism is by both conceived of in similar terms. Hence, at the baptism of adults in the Lutheran church, Baptist objections to Lutheran baptismal practice are removed. In this case, the manner in which baptism takes place (I.e. by sprinkling) is not decisive. For Baptists, an important complaint is nevertheless that the majority of those baptised into the state church as infants never develop a faith which is conscious and mature.

In our understanding of the church, we have detected a high level of agreement between the parties. The church is perceived to be the work of God through the Holy Spirit manifest in the community of believers. Both parties emphasise the priesthood of all believers as the point of departure for the understanding of different ministries of the church. The church is the eschatological people of God, which at the return of Christ no longer will be a suffering, but a "triumphant church." Dissension exists, however, between Baptists and Lutherans in their view of the institution of the state church. According to Baptists it is theologically "impossible".

**The committee also reflected on the way forward in the reciprocal contact between the two churches. We recommend that the following points be considered**

- 1) This document should be distributed and studied in the respective churches and their congregations.
- 2) The committee should meet after some time to discuss the reception and responses of the two churches. In addition, the Council on Ecumenical and International relations and the Baptist

Union of Norway should consider organising a seminar where selected issues may be discussed further.

3) The theological dialogue between our churches should continue in some fashion. Possibly this may take place in new committees which reflect on separate issues. The talks have revealed that there is a need for further discussion internally in the respective churches.

4) Local congregations are encouraged to increase contact and co-operation in areas where this is possible and seems natural, for example through annual ecumenical worship services, exchange of preachers, music groups etc., and through a common effort to meet the ethical challenges of our time.

5) Admission to and lending of churches should be extended and simplified.

6) Local lectures and reciprocal information about our churches should be prepared. Study groups should be formed where the discussion of current theological and practical issues related to the church may take place.