



# GROWING IN FAITHFULNESS: LIVING OUT OUR BAPTISM

## Guide for Study and Reflection on *Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church*

by Thomas R Yoder Neufeld



**Mennonite  
World Conference**  
A Community of Anabaptist  
related Churches

**Congreso  
Mundial Menonita**  
Una Comunidad de  
Iglesias Anabautistas

**Conférence  
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Une Communauté  
d'Eglises Anabaptistes



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# **GROWING IN FAITHFULNESS: LIVING OUT OUR BAPTISM**

**Guide for Study and Reflection  
on  
*Baptism and Incorporation into  
the Body of Christ, the Church***

The Report of the Trilateral Conversations between  
Lutherans, Mennonites and Catholics 2012-2017

by Thomas R Yoder Neufeld  
on behalf of the Faith and Life Commission  
Mennonite World Conference

# PREFACE

This study guide is an aid for member churches of the Mennonite World Conference to receive and process the “*Report*” (*The Report of the Trilateral Conversations between Lutherans, Mennonites, and Catholics, 2012-2017*) on the trilateral conversations on baptism. It has been prepared on behalf of the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Faith and Life Commission (FLC) by Thomas Yoder Neufeld, Chair of the FLC, with the benefit of consultation with numerous persons in MWC, the FLC and participants in the Trilateral Conversations.

This guide is *not a replacement* for the rich and carefully worded *Report*. By distilling the content and adhering to the structure of the *Report* the guide provides an outline or road map. Readers of the guide are thus directed to the numbered paragraphs in the *Report* itself (e.g. [§ 120]). Quotation marks identify when specific words or phrases are taken from the *Report*.

The guide adheres to the structure of the *Report*:

- Chapter One focuses on the relationship of baptism to sin and grace [§§ 7-54]
- Chapter Two on communicating grace and faith in relation to baptism [§§ 55-83]
- Chapter Three on baptism and discipleship [§§ 84-112].
- The Conclusion identifies the convictions, gifts, challenges and considerations [§§ 113-164].

Throughout the guide readers will find questions for reflection on and testing of the *Report*. In keeping with the intentions of the participants in the Trilateral Conversations, the questions are intended to lead to a deepening of commitment to baptism and discipleship. Readers are, of course, not limited to these questions.

The *Report* sometimes uses “Anabaptist” to characterize the Mennonite positions. The guide too sometimes refers to “Anabaptist” or “Anabaptist-Mennonite” positions. It thereby recognizes that some member churches of the MWC do not identify as “Mennonite.”

We give thanks to and for the MWC delegates to the Trilateral Conversations: †Alfred Neufeld Friesen (Paraguay), co-chair; Larry Miller (France/USA), co-secretary; Fernando Enns (Germany); Rebecca Osiro (Kenya); and John D. Rempel (Canada). We give thanks also for the Catholic and Lutheran conversation partners who journeyed the path of unity in Christ together with them.

# INTRODUCTION

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<sup>1</sup> The full *Report* is available at [mwc-cmm.org/resources/baptism-and-incorporation-body-christ-church](http://mwc-cmm.org/resources/baptism-and-incorporation-body-christ-church)

<sup>2</sup> [mwc-cmm.org/resources/called-together-be-peacemakers](http://mwc-cmm.org/resources/called-together-be-peacemakers)

<sup>3</sup> [mwc-cmm.org/resources/healing-memories-reconciling-christ](http://mwc-cmm.org/resources/healing-memories-reconciling-christ)

<sup>4</sup> [lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2019/documents/190603-joint-declaration-on-the-doctrine-of-justification-20-anniversary-edition-en.pdf.pdf](http://lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/2019/documents/190603-joint-declaration-on-the-doctrine-of-justification-20-anniversary-edition-en.pdf.pdf)



The trilateral conversations offered Anabaptists/Mennonites an opportunity to listen and to be listened to by church communions from whom they have been estranged for centuries. Baptism has been a significant factor in that estrangement. Even the designation “Anabaptist” (literally “re-baptizer”) witnesses to this fractured history. Opponents of Anabaptists used the label to accuse them of “re-baptizing” those already baptized as infants, thereby rejecting God’s salvation of these children. Anabaptists saw themselves not as “re-baptizing” but as baptizing persons for the first time on their confession of faith. Misunderstanding, distrust and even persecution have marked the relationships between these communions and Anabaptists for centuries. This historic trilateral conversation on baptism and the resulting *Report*<sup>1</sup> thus witness to a genuine desire to overcome this estrangement by directly addressing a matter that goes to the heart of the identity and convictions of all three communions.

The trilateral conversations built on trust developed in two preceding dialogues Mennonites had with these two communions. The first, with Catholics (1998-2003), resulted in *Called to be Peacemakers*<sup>2</sup>. The second, with Lutherans (2005-2008), produced *Healing of Memories: Reconciling in Christ*<sup>3</sup>. That dialogue laid the groundwork for deeply moving moments of reconciliation, first in 2009 at the MWC Assembly in Asuncion, Paraguay, then at the Lutheran Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, in 2010. Moved by those dialogues and the celebration of reconciliation, a three-way conversation was proposed in 2011 to address baptism. Readers will find references throughout the *Report* to both *Called to be Peacemakers* and *Healing of Memories*, as well as to the 1999 Catholic-Lutheran *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*<sup>4</sup>.

The trilateral conversations on baptism were not an attempt to resolve deeply held differences. The purpose was, rather, to listen, to explain, to see oneself through the eyes of others, with openness to grow together into the unity of the Spirit in the body of Christ. All three delegations expressed the hope that each communion would be strengthened in faithfulness in their practice of baptism. At the same time, they wished to remain open to surprises the Spirit might bring to those desiring to walk together in the unity of the Spirit, including the possibility that differences need not only divide, but enhance and enrich.

In that spirit that the Faith and Life Commission invites our global Anabaptist family to carefully engage the findings and considerations in this *Report*.



# CHAPTER ONE

# BAPTISM

# WITH

# RESPECT

# TO SIN AND

# GRACE

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## To sum up the Catholic view:

- a. All persons are burdened with the effects of Adam's "original" sin and carry that guilt from birth.
- b. Baptism washes away that "original sin," providing salvation and new birth into the body of Christ.
- c. In keeping with God's saving initiative through baptism infants are brought into that realm of grace and benefit from the beginning of their lives from the grace offered in the sacraments of the church.
- d. God's gracious and loving initiative to save is so strong that it is not limited to those who through no fault of their own have not been baptized.

The symbol § indicates the paragraph number in [the Report of the Trilateral Conversations](#).

Whereas Anabaptists might begin a discussion of baptism in relation to discipleship and membership in the congregation, Catholics and Lutherans place sin and grace at the forefront of the consideration of baptism.

## 1. CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE ON SIN, GRACE AND BAPTISM [§§ 8-21]

For Catholics "original sin" is a key component of the relationship of sin and grace to baptism. Humanity is burdened from the outset by the sin of Adam (Romans 5:12). While Catholics acknowledge this to be "a mystery that we cannot fully understand" [§ 19], infants "inherit" the sinful and guilty state which estranges them from God [§ 19] which makes it impossible for humans to seek God on their own [§ 13]. Only Christ as "mediator" [§ 15] can remove that "original" sin and guilt and restore the divine-human relationship.

Baptism is an essential part of the "unconditional initiative of God in bringing about human salvation" [§ 13]. It removes the inherited state of sinfulness, rendering the one baptized, whether adult or infant, fit for heaven [§ 15]. In baptism the person is reborn into the body of Christ, and thus participates in the salvation God has granted. Pope John Paul II put it memorably: referring to infants, but relevant to all who are baptized, "they are truly baptized for the remission of sin, so that what they contracted in generation may be cleansed by regeneration" [§ 15, note 22].

While baptized persons remain vulnerable to committing sin ("concupiscence"), grace as experienced in baptism has freed them to decide against acting sinfully. When they do fail, the Church offers to them the "sacrament of reconciliation" or "confession" [§ 15]. Catholics stress that baptism is God's gracious initiative, seeking to awaken the response of a life lived in faithfulness to baptism [§ 16].

As to those who "without blame on their part" have not been baptized [§ 18], Catholics speak of the "baptism of desire" and the "baptism of martyrdom" [§ 17; see also § 159], where the desire for a relationship with the triune God brings about salvation. Catholics cite the Vatican's *Gaudium et spes*: "God brings about his salvific action through the sacraments; but God's salvific action is not confined by these special means entrusted to the Church. [...]he Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery" [§ 21].

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**To sum up the Lutheran perspective:**

- a. Humans begin life estranged from God.
- b. The purpose of life is to love God wholly. Humans cannot do so on their own.
- c. They therefor place their trust (faith) in God's promise given in the sacrament of baptism, a faith that is rekindled in life-long "remembering" of the promise.
- d. Baptism opens the door for the Spirit to do the work of transformation, enabling a life of faithfulness.

## **2. LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE ON SIN, GRACE AND BAPTISM** [§§ 22-29]

Lutherans agree with Catholics regarding the deadly effect of Adam's sin. But their focus falls more on the "human heart," that is, on the "inner" human nature of persons which is from the very outset "without fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence," that is, with the tendency to sinful behaviour (quoting the Lutheran *Augsburg Confession*) [§ 22]. It is not so much "sins" that need to be dealt with as the human incapacity to love God. Even good deeds can be self-directed rather than God-directed, and thus become sinful. "Only love for God and for God's sake makes our acting right" [§ 23]. Given the radical nature of sin, "the overcoming of sin requires the dying and rising of the person: this happens in baptism" [§ 25].

Only God can raise to new life. Only God can justify. Only God can "promise" salvation. The "word of promise" is given in the sacrament of baptism. This "requires faith," since believing the divine promise is what makes baptism effective as the communication of grace [§ 27]. Nevertheless, baptism is *God's* action, *God's* gracious initiative to justify and renew.

In the sacrament of baptism the Holy Spirit "uses the word of promise, spoken in proclamation or communicated through the sacrament, [and] begins to transform the person" [§ 25]. Just as Catholics speak of the ongoing "concupiscence" of those who have been baptized, Lutherans are aware that "transformation is never completed. [...W]e never get to the point of offering our person in fullness to God, and this precisely is sin" [§ 25]. Hence Luther's famous claim that we are simultaneously just and sinner. At the same time, the Spirit of Christ continues the transforming work of grace in the baptized, calling and enabling them to do good deeds. This process requires the life-long "remembering" of this divine promise.

Lutherans conclude with the assertion that since baptism is God's promise, it is valid even if a person does not trust in it [§ 29], drawing on 2 Timothy 2:13 for support: "If we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself." Baptism is God's act. Consequently, "there is no basic difference whether a person is baptized as infant or adult" [§ 29]. A non-Lutheran will sense an evident tension with the earlier assertion of the necessity of faith for baptism to be effective [§ 27].

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**To sum up the Mennonite perspective:**

- a. Humanity, along with all creation, is “infected by sin” and burdened with a “tendency to sin.”
- b. To “sin” nevertheless requires a conscious choice or decision.
- c. The idea of “structural sin” and pervasive violence helps to understand how choices function within a larger context that influences those choices.
- d. God’s grace makes it possible for humans to seek God, but also to make bad choices.
- e. The Spirit of God collaborates with humans in their coming to faith, in their conversion, in their experience of forgiveness, and in their decision to follow Jesus within the body of Christ.
- f. Baptism is a public sign of God’s work in the person’s life, of transformation and a pledge to faithfully participate in the life and mission of the church.

### 3. MENNONITE PERSPECTIVE ON SIN, GRACE AND BAPTISM [§§ 30-42]

From the beginning, Anabaptists shared with others the belief in the “fallen nature of humanity” [§ 30], and thus in “original sin.” Humanity is “infected” with sin. Without Christ humans are without hope [§ 30].

However, Anabaptists did not and do not share the deep pessimism of the Reformers regarding the “bondage of the will.” While there is an “inborn tendency” to sin, that is “original sin,” “[o]nly conscious acts have the quality of obedience or disobedience, faith or sin” [§ 34].

Mennonites thus speak of sin in three related ways: one, the “inborn tendency” to sin; two, sins that are deliberately committed as a result; three, “structural sin” that manifests itself, for example, in pervasive violence, which implicates persons in collective rebellion against the will of God for human life [§ 39].

Anabaptists ascribe the capacity to make choices, either good or sinful, to God’s “prevenient grace” bestowed on all humanity [§ 35]. But it is only through the resurrection of Christ and the reign of the Spirit that full humanity has been restored. Believers participate in that restoration, so that “although the inborn tendency to sin is never entirely overcome, they have been set free to obey God (see Romans 8:10-13)” [§ 36].

In the Anabaptist understanding, justification means both a change in the person’s “standing before God” and a “metamorphosis of the person in a moral sense,” (Romans 7 and 8; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18; 5:11-21, Ephesians 2:8-10) [§ 38]. Believers are forgiven *and* transformed into persons who can follow Jesus and obey his teachings. Anabaptists speak of this aspect of justification as “sanctification,” a conscious surrender to God’s promise and Jesus’ example [§ 38]. Believers do so not on their own strength, which too often leads to legalism, but by the Spirit at work within them [§ 38]. The recent focus on structural sin and systemic violence has moved the discussion to include, in addition to an individual’s sinful acts, both conscious and unconscious resistance to God’s will [§ 39].

The God-given ability to choose is evident in in the Anabaptist *Schleitheim Confession* of 1527: “Baptism shall be given to all those who have been *taught* repentance and the amendment of life, and who *believe* truly that their sins are taken away, and to all who *desire* to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ...” [§ 40]. When Anabaptists describe dying and rising with Christ, becoming part of the body of Christ, and receiving the Holy Spirit, they are



describing the believer’s “conversion” through the Spirit [§ 40]. Water baptism is not conversion per se but the “recapitulation” of that profound change. It is an “outward and public testimony of the inward baptism of the Spirit” [§ 40].

- a. Water baptism is God’s act in so far as it “represents” and “completes” the deliverance and transformation in the believer’s life through the Spirit [§§ 40, 48].
- b. Baptism is the *believer’s* act in that it is a “pledge,” “testimony,” or “witness” [§§ 40, 42, 48], a solemn promise to follow Christ as part of the body of Christ. “Baptism enacts a believer’s renunciation of evil, repentance, forgiveness, and death to sin through grace” [§ 40].
- c. Lastly, baptism is the act of a local, “visible” *congregation* representing Christ’s universal body as “the agent of the Spirit” [§§ 40, 48]. It tests the integrity of the believer’s confession and change of life, and it administers baptism as “the testimony of the Spirit” [§ 42].

There is no room in the Anabaptist framework for baptizing infants who are not yet able to experience or express the “inner processes” of repentance, faith, or promise of following Jesus [§ 48]. As to “how God’s grace embraces children” [§ 41], Anabaptists have generally held that until children are old enough to discern and to be held accountable, they “remain innocent” and are “heirs of salvation” [§ 41].

#### 4. COMMON PERSPECTIVES AND DIFFERENCES

- a. All three communions agree on “original sin” as setting the scene for human sinning and alienation from God. They also agree that the concept of “hereditary sin” was based on a mistranslation of Romans 5:12, and thus should be discarded [§§ 43-45]. Paul’s original Greek was translated in a way that implied that Adam passed on his own guilt to the human family, incurred at birth. There is agreement that Romans 5:12 is best translated as “just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned” [§ 43]. All agree that “sin is a power before us, behind us, and around us” [§ 44]. Recent understandings of structural or systemic evil point to individual sinful actions having a larger context of alienation from the will of God.
- b. While all agree that “sin can only be overcome by grace, by the divine initiative, by the Holy Spirit” [§ 46], *Catholics* stress “human cooperation” in salvation. *Lutherans* stress “human passivity,” since they hold that humans are

incapable of participating in their salvation. *Mennonites* leave room for the “human role” in coming to salvation [§ 46], since they believe that God’s grace enables human ability to choose and to act.

- c. All three communions agree that baptism plays a decisive role in communicating God’s saving grace [§ 47]. That is one reason *Catholics* and *Lutherans*, while baptizing both infants and adults, have historically stressed the importance of infant baptism. In baptism God communicates or bestows forgiving and saving grace on the child or adult. *Mennonites*, in contrast, view infants as innocent until able to choose. God’s grace enables persons to seek God’s forgiveness and pledge themselves to faithfulness in baptism. Baptism communicates grace in the sense of being a sign of what God’s grace has already done. While the Bible gives a clear command to baptize (e.g., Matthew 28:19-20), none of the communions confines salvation to the baptized. All acknowledge that God’s drive to save (1 Timothy 2:4) goes beyond human understanding [§ 49].
- d. All three communions agree on the connection between baptism, forgiveness of sin, and the transformation of the baptized person [§§ 50-54]. They all agree that the struggle with sin is an ongoing reality the baptized. All agree also, however, that baptism is intended to lead to a transformed life expressed in “good works” (Ephesians 2:8-10) [§ 54]. This is explored more fully in the third chapter focused on discipleship.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING

1. **MWC is a highly diverse global family of churches. Some believers have grown up in long-established church traditions. Other believers and churches are new to this communion of faith.**
  - Does the Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective presented in the Report reflect your own background and experience of how baptism is taught and practiced, or of how you have come to understand your own baptism?
2. **MWC is a highly diverse global family of churches. Some believers have grown up in long-established church traditions. Other believers and churches are new to this communion of faith.**
3. **What new light does the Report bring to your own understanding of baptism as it relates to sin and grace?**
  - Does it encourage you to deepen and strengthen your appreciation of your own baptism?
4. **What do you appreciate in the Catholic and Lutheran understandings of baptism in relation to sin and grace?**
  - Are there new insights that lead you to deeper understanding of and respect for how Catholic and Lutheran sisters and brothers view baptism, including that of infants, and why it is important to them?
  - Are there insights from which Anabaptists/Mennonites can learn?
5. **What do you find puzzling or even troubling in Catholic and Lutheran perspectives in light of your own convictions, beliefs, or reading of the Bible?**

# CHAPTER TWO

# BAPTISM:

# COMMUNICATING

# GRACE AND FAITH

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**All three delegations agree on the following [§§ 56-57, 62]:**

- a. All humans are sinners in need of redemption [§ 62].
- b. God’s initiative is primary in baptism.
- c. Community is centrally involved in both baptism and formation.
- d. Baptism is part of a life-long process of discipleship, which culminates in “the fullness of eternal life promised and accomplished by Jesus’ victory over sin and death” [§ 57].

The symbol § indicates the paragraph number in [the Report of the Trilateral Conversations](#).

Chapter Two builds on Chapter One. But the focus now shifts to the relationship between baptism and a “life-long process of being a Christian;” second, to how the three communions practice baptism, the role faith plays and to incorporation into the church; and third, to the shared concern that theology is not nearly always matched by practice [§ 55]. Importantly, differences that have often caused mutual condemnation are fully acknowledged with the intention to live into the unity of the body of Christ more fully.

## 1. THE PLACE OF BAPTISM IN THE LIFELONG PROCESS OF BEING A CHRISTIAN

When Catholics and Lutherans baptize adults, their convictions sound remarkably similar to those held by Anabaptists [§§ 57, 62]. It is at exactly at those points of agreement, however, that important differences emerge:

- a. *Mennonites* view baptism as an “outward sign” of an “inner process” [§ 48] that *precedes* the moment of baptism [§ 58]. Coming to faith, experiencing forgiveness, conversion and the desire to join the body of Christ in a local congregation are a “precondition” of water baptism [§ 62]. Anabaptists-Mennonites refer to this prior process as “the baptism of the Spirit” [§ 58]. While God acts before and in baptism, baptism is also an act by the one being baptized, who thereby gives a pledge in response to forgiveness and conversion. The congregation acts in that it tests the integrity of this pledge, a pledge of such gravity that it might cost the life of the baptized person, the “baptism of blood” [§ 58].

*Lutherans* view baptism as “essentially an act of God, performed through human actions and words” spoken by pastor and community [§ 59]. Faith, even in an infant, is trusting that “word of promise” made visible in baptism.

*Catholics* agree with Lutherans on baptism as God’s act, the sacrament through which the one being baptized responds to the gospel. They see much of what Mennonites view as discipleship and active participation in the life and mission of the church as a “principle effect” of baptism [§ 60].

In short, what Mennonites see as *precondition*, Catholics and Lutherans see as *effect*.

- b. *Mennonites* hold that baptism cannot be properly offered to those unable to experience conversion and to make a conscious decision themselves to confess their faith and commit to discipleship. That rules out infant baptism [§ 61].

*Catholics* and *Lutherans*, since they view baptism as first and foremost *God's* act to save and renew, hold that baptism of infants "is not only possible by required" by what the New Testament teaches about the "universal offer of grace to all, including infants" [§ 61; it is "needed for their salvation" (§ 49)]. Indeed, baptizing infants expresses clearly the "absolute gratuity" of grace [§ 61]. To "re"-baptize someone already having experienced the divine act of renewal as a child or infant is to deny *God's* gracious initiative [§ 61].

- c. *Lutherans*, *Catholics* and *Mennonites* agree that baptism is the first step in a life-long process of discipleship. The community of parents and church is thus critical for nurturing that embryonic faith. Despite their deep differences, the three communions see this emphasis on the connection of discipleship to baptism providing an opportunity to place the historic controversy between Anabaptists and Catholics and Lutherans in a "new framework" [§ 62].

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING

1. Does the Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding presented here match your own experience of baptism and what led to it, or how baptism is taught and practiced in your congregation?
2. Was your baptism preceded by your personal experience of forgiveness and conversion, and did you understand that baptism was your pledge to surrender to Christ in discipleship, regardless of cost?
3. Does the Anabaptist-Mennonite identification of "baptism of the Spirit" as the work of the Spirit leading to water baptism enrich your understanding of Spirit and water baptism?
4. How much has your baptism motivated and oriented your discipleship?
5. What might Anabaptists learn from Catholic and Lutheran understandings?
  - What do you think a "new framework" might look like?

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### Differences and similarities emerge

- a. *Catholics* celebrate baptism with numerous elements. Most important is the profession of faith and the baptism with water in the name of the Trinity.
- b. *Lutherans* include many of these elements, but have added Martin Luther's "*Flood Prayer*." Faith justifies, and fulfills that which baptism signifies.
- c. For *Mennonites* it is always "believers' baptism." Importantly, the local congregation is "the manifestation of the Church universal, the body of Christ."

## 2. THE CELEBRATION OF BAPTISM

All three communions fully agree that baptism goes back to Jesus' own clear instruction in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19). They also agree that very early in the history of the church the basic rite of baptism was celebrated in "relatively stable format" [§ 63]. Basic elements included proclamation of Word, renunciation of sin, public profession of faith, and water baptism in the name of the Trinity [§ 63]. Both differences and similarities emerge when the three communions describe how they celebrate baptism.

- a. *Catholics* celebrate baptism with numerous elements: sign of the cross on the forehead, proclamation of the Word eliciting the response of faith, exorcism, anointing with oil, invocation of the Spirit over the water, recitation of the creed, triple immersion or pouring with the trinitarian formula, anointing with oil, clothing with white garment to symbolize "putting on Christ," a candle signifying Christ as light of the world, the "*Ephphetha*" prayer for the opening of ear and mouth, the Lord's Prayer and a concluding blessing [§ 64]. Most important is the profession of faith and the baptism with water in the name of the Trinity [§ 65].

Baptism cannot be separated from the other two "sacraments of initiation," namely, confirmation and the Eucharist. When Catholics baptize infants, the sacrament of confirmation in later years acknowledges a process of growth in discipleship in which parents and godparents have had and continue to play a critical role [§ 65].

- b. *Lutherans* include many of these elements, but have added Martin Luther's "*Flood Prayer*," which makes a connection between baptism and both Noah's flood and the Exodus from Egypt. The Great Commission of Matthew 28 and Jesus' calling of children in Mark 10 are typically read. Central is the emphasis on God's agency. It is not water by itself, but the God's "word of promise" together with that water that creates the sacrament. Faith is trust in that promise. In Luther's words, "it is not baptism that justifies or benefits anyone, but it is faith in the word of promise to which baptism is added. This faith justifies, and fulfills that which baptism signifies" [§ 66].
- c. *Mennonites* have greater variety in the way they celebrate baptism. While modes of baptism vary, it is always "believers' baptism" [§ 67]. A request to be baptized, catechetical instruction, congregational testing and approval of the request *precede* baptism. Of critical importance is that the request emerge from personal confession of sin, personal experience of



grace and forgiveness, commitment to Christ and congregation, and an understanding that baptism is a response to God's gracious initiative to save.

Importantly, the local congregation is "the manifestation of the Church universal, the body of Christ" [§ 67]. It is before the congregation that the person being baptized professes faith; it is the congregation that carries the responsibility to test, evaluate, and affirm the fitness of the candidate. In a worship service in which the whole congregation participates, Scriptures are read (typical passages are Matthew 28, Romans 6, 1 Peter 3, 2 Corinthians 5), and a pastor or designated person baptizes with water in the name of the Trinity. The baptismal celebration concludes with the Lord's prayer, a blessing and often communion, serving as a welcome into the body of Christ [§ 67].

All three communions agree that *baptism cannot be repeated* [§ 68]. That agreement also exposes one of the deepest disagreements:

- a. *Catholics* believe that "it is Christ who baptizes; a human being cannot nullify the action of Christ by 're-baptizing' another." Such an act can have no theological "reality," standing "in opposition to the action of Christ" [§ 68].
- b. *Lutherans* view re-baptism as "distrust in God's promise, [...making] God a liar" [§ 68].
- c. Even though *Mennonites* have adopted "Anabaptism" (re-baptism) as a positive label, they too hold that baptism cannot be repeated. By implication, infant baptism is not recognized as baptism, since it is not preceded by personal profession of faith [§ 68].

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING

1. **How is baptism celebrated in your setting?**
  - Were you baptized by immersion?
  - By pouring or sprinkling?
  - Does the mode of baptism play a role in the symbolism you saw in your baptism?
2. **Would Mennonite celebrations of baptism be enriched by greater attention to the meaning of the components and elements of the rite of baptism?**
3. **All three communions agree that baptism cannot be repeated. That is a challenge: Anabaptists-Mennonites cannot accept the baptism of infants as true baptism, and Catholics and Lutherans cannot accept the baptism of those once baptized as infants as true baptism.**
  - Do you see a way in which the gulf separating them can be bridged?
4. **There have been occasions when Mennonites did not recognize each other's baptisms when the mode of baptism was not acceptable or when persons were thought not to have experienced personal conversion.**
  - Is that similar or different from not recognizing the baptism of infants?
  - Does the overcoming of such differences among Mennonites point to a way the gulf dividing them from Catholics and Lutherans might be addressed?

**The three communions also agree that there are three actors: God, the individual and the community.**

- a. *Lutherans*: The “efficacy” of baptism is premised on God’s promise, given through the sacrament of baptism, “performed through human actions and words” [§ 69].
- b. *Mennonites*: Baptism is not only a “sign” pointing to the work of Christ and “inviting” participation in the life of Christ. It is also the occasion for both the person baptized and the community to experience “effectual change”. This change must be “verified,” however, in the faith and life of both baptized and community [§§ 69, 70].
- c. *Catholics*: It is Christ who baptizes, performed by the “Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members.” Baptism “communicates” or bestows the grace of Christ [§§ 69, 70].

### 3. SACRAMENT AND/OR ORDINANCE

All three communions agree that “something happens” in baptism [§ 69]. That is easier for *Catholics* and *Lutherans* to claim. Given their understanding of baptism as “sacrament,” baptism is an act of God that offers grace, forgiveness and new birth. When *Mennonites* speak of baptism as an “ordinance” rather than “sacrament,” they too speak of “something happening.” The one being baptized gives public witness to what has happened through the grace of God and as now part of the body of Christ pledges faithfulness, empowered by the Spirit to life-long discipleship. Baptism is a “sign” of what has happened, is happening and what will happen.

*Mennonites* view baptism as a sign that is “expressive” of change that has taken place, is taking place, and will take place. *Catholics* and *Lutherans* stress “the instrumental nature of the sacrament” [§ 71, note 82]. While they agree that a “tremendous change of life” occurs in baptism, *Mennonites* would not agree that such change can happen for infants, nor would *Catholics* and *Lutherans* associate that change with the rebaptizing of those previously baptized, whether as an infant or as an adult.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING

1. What do you think “happened” at your baptism as an Anabaptist-Mennonite?
  - Or should something have “happened” that didn’t?
2. Mennonites prefer “ordinance” to “sacrament” when speaking of baptism.
  - Might it help the communions to move closer to each other if there were awareness that “sacramentum” originally meant “oath,” similar to the “pledge” Mennonites associate with baptism?
  - Do Mennonites stress the sacramentum (pledge) of the believer, whereas Lutherans and Catholics put the stress the sacramentum (promise) of God?
3. Catholics and Lutherans believe that in baptism God acts supernaturally to communicate grace and salvation.
  - In your experience, do Mennonites see baptism as a supernatural event?
  - Or is it a “natural” sign of the supernatural event of coming to faith and becoming part of the body of Christ?
4. Might a wedding be a useful analogy for what Mennonites believe “happens” in baptism?
  - Marriage is the making and blessing of vows, of promises, that change the status of those getting married – the two become “one flesh.” But the falling in love, the growing desire to share life, the testing of the decision, all precede the life-changing celebration.
  - And the wedding ceremony is only the beginning of the marriage, which is to last a lifetime. It requires daily living out, as well as moments of intentional remembering and even renewal.

**All three communions agree that baptism and faith are “intimately and inseparably related.”**

But the “inscrutable ways of the loving mercy of God” (Romans 11:33; 1 Timothy 2:4) reaches those who “through no fault of their own” have not been baptized.

#### 4. BAPTISM AND FAITH

All three communions agree that baptism and faith are “intimately and inseparably related” [§ 72]. For Catholics and Lutherans who believe infants “can and should” be baptized as it is “necessary for salvation” [§ 73], faith is important in the following ways:

- a. *Lutherans* quote Martin Luther: “Without faith baptism is of no use, although in itself it is an infinite treasure.” They read Mark 10:15, where Jesus says that children inherit the kingdom of God, as implying the even an infant has faith and trusts in God’s promise [§ 74]. It is embryonic faith, to be sure, that needs to be nurtured by the faith of parents and godparents, but it is faith. Is this a Lutheran way of seeing infant baptism as “believer’s baptism”?
- b. *Catholics* stress that baptism is a “sacrament of faith” [§ 74], in that the infant is born into a community of faith in which its own faith is nurtured and formed by the faith of parents and the Church.
- c. *Mennonites* hold to “believer’s baptism,” and thus make faith central. They hold that the one being baptized be able to profess their own faith and be able to realize the “basic meaning and implications” of their baptism. Any notion of faith that does not reflect that is “not acceptable” [§ 74].

Despite these “inherited differences” there is agreement on the importance of faith in relation to baptism, and on the church being the context in which that faith is shared, nurtured, and grows. There is also agreement that despite the import link between baptism and membership in the church, the “inscrutable ways of the loving mercy of God” (Romans 11:33; 1 Timothy 2:4) reaches those who “through no fault of their own” have not been baptized [§ 75].

#### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING

1. Does the stress on faith in the Lutheran and Catholic positions on baptism point to some agreement with Mennonites on the importance of faith?
  - What are the similarities?
  - What are the differences?
  - Can they be bridged?
2. A recurring point in the Report is the shared conviction that God’s saving grace extends beyond the confines of the community of the baptized (see also [§ 49]).
  - Does that reflect your view, or of your part of the Anabaptist-Mennonite family of churches?

## 5. BAPTISM AND COMMUNITY

Baptism “establishes a relationship of communion” with both God and the members of the body of Christ [§ 77]. The way baptism is understood to relate to the community of the church varies:

- a. *Mennonites* understand baptism to be inseparable from church membership [§ 77]. Baptism is the believer’s “incorporation” into a local community of believers, which has tested and affirmed the believer’s readiness for such a necessarily “free and voluntary” step of joining the church, and for participating in mutual accountability with other members of a congregation. At the same time, God’s grace is fully acknowledged as enabling such a “deeply personal” life-changing choice.
- b. *Lutherans* and *Catholics* agree on the link between baptism and becoming a member of the body of Christ. The newly baptized, whether adult or infant, now belong to the Church. The principal task of the community is to “offer formation,” which goes on throughout life. This is most obviously so in the case of infants, where personal response and commitment comes after baptism [§ 77].
- c. *Lutherans* and *Catholics* stress that this “sacramental bond of unity” extends even to those who have been baptized but who are divided from each other in the body of Christ [§§ 76, 77]. Indeed, it is baptism in the Triune God that is the basis for this trilateral dialogue as members together of the one body of Christ.

While all three communions stress that every person baptized is called “to committed participation in the life of the Church and that the faith of the individual is formed and matured within the Church as a communion of believers” [§ 78], they part ways on how that relates to baptism.

- a. *Mennonites* stress the voluntary nature of those who have devoted themselves to repentance and public profession of faith prior to being baptized [§ 78]. *Mennonites* understand “participation in the life of the church” as discipleship, nurture and accountability within a local congregation.
- b. *Catholics* and *Lutherans* stress the primacy of God’s grace given or bestowed in baptism, and thus the “appropriateness of baptizing infants” [§ 78] into the Christian community. Baptism is at the same time God’s “call” to a lifelong participation in the Church.

## 6. “AUTHENTIC APPROACHES?”

The three conversation partners now ask themselves (and us!) important questions. Can they recognize each other’s divergent ways of understanding as “authentic?” By “authentic” they mean an approach “based on mutually recognizable biblical concepts of grace, faith and church as they have been interpreted by each of the three communions” [§ 78]. The questions are best quoted directly, albeit broken up into separate paragraphs:

- a. “Might not *Lutherans* and *Catholics* acknowledge the decision of parents to foster a mature faith in their children prior to the request for baptism that has determined *Mennonite* practice [a likely reference to child dedication] as an authentic approach to Christian initiation?” [§ 78]
- b. “Might not *Mennonites* acknowledge that, given an assurance of familial and congregational commitment to provide formation in faith and discipleship, the choice of parents to request baptism for their young children, as practiced by *Lutherans* and *Catholics*, is an authentic approach to Christian initiation?” [§ 78]
- c. “Can we [*Mennonites*, *Lutherans*, and *Catholics*] acknowledge that the different concerns do not contradict each other, and are grounded in basic aspects of the Gospel?” [§ 78]

Importantly, these are questions rather than assertions. The term “acknowledge” here suggests not agreement so much as respect for the desire of those with whom we disagree to be faithful to Bible and gospel.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING

1. Here we see the conversation partners reaching for a way of walking together in the unity of the Spirit when they are unable to come to agreement. They ask respectful questions rather than simply stating positions. They “acknowledge” a shared desire to be faithful to Scripture and gospel, even if they can’t agree.
  - Does such an approach provide a promising way forward?
2. What are the risks and benefits? Could such an approach result, for example, in lessening the importance of the difference between infant baptism and baptism on confession of faith? Is that good or bad?
3. Given the different understandings of baptism, how are infant baptism and infant dedication similar or different?
4. Is disagreement on baptism an unsurmountable barrier to fellowship/communion?



## 7. TENSION BETWEEN OUR THEOLOGY AND PRAXIS

All three communions see repentance, faith, and committed discipleship—core concerns of Mennonites—as “necessarily” related to Christian life within the Church, in which baptism plays an essential role. A number of tensions or even inconsistencies in their respective traditions become evident at this point.

- a. *Catholics* might surprise *Mennonites* in making it clear that some Catholic theologians have come to see the *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (i.e., adult baptism) as the “normative” expression of initiation into the Church, the fullest expression of the meaning of baptism [§ 79]. It was only in 1969 that the Vatican first published a rite for the baptism of infants. Until then, while baptism of infants was the usual practice, infants were essentially addressed as adults. Catholic conversation partners make the point that “it is the rite for adults that is the model of the baptismal process” [§ 79, n97]. “[T]he baptized, under the irreplaceable assistance of the grace of the Holy Spirit, are meant freely to convert from sin, have faith in Jesus Christ and embrace full, conscious and faithful participation in the life of the Christian community” [§ 79]. Mennonites could not say it better. Is this a recognition of the “cogency” of the Mennonite practice of baptizing only those who are capable of freely embracing Christ, the Church, and discipleship?
- b. *Lutherans* and *Catholics* wonder whether *Mennonites* sufficiently recognize the New Testament teaching regarding baptism’s relation to salvation, the very reason why Catholics and Lutherans believe it is “incumbent” on the Church to baptize infants [§ 80]. While the “logic” of the Anabaptist stance denies that infant baptism is truly baptism, some *Mennonite* congregations have in practice recognized the faithful life of many who have been baptized as infants and have not “re-baptized” them [§ 80].
- c. The conversation partners from all three communions share the conviction that the Spirit is active in both baptized individuals and the communities supporting them. At the same time, they acknowledge that for a significant number of persons this is not born out in the way they live [§ 81]. Reasons for this might be materialism and consumerism, among other societal factors. All three communions admit also to “ineffective” formation, regardless of whether they baptize infants or upon confession of faith [§ 82].

Chapter Two ends by asking whether agreement on the importance of the link between baptism, faith, community, and discipleship might be an opening to an “acceptable diversity” of “compatible ways of looking at the same reality.” If so, might that be the “unexpected fruit” of ecumenical dialogue [§ 83]?

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING

**Mennonites have found it easy to observe the “disconnect” between theology and practice in communions that baptize infants, especially when virtually all infants in an area are baptized. That was a major reason why the Anabaptist movement began. Have Anabaptists been as quick to see their own “disconnect” between baptism and life lived?**

- 1. What has the experience been in long-standing and new Mennonite communities?**
- 2. Is there a typical age of baptism in Mennonite churches? When youth are baptized, have they always personally experienced the transformative process the Mennonites describe in this *Report*? Do they connect their baptism with a changed life?**
- 3. What about the growing number of baptized persons in Mennonite churches whose relationship to the church grows weak, or who leave the church altogether? If they come back, are they rebaptized? If not, why not?**
- 4. Are there differences regarding this “disconnect” in different parts of our global family of Anabaptist churches?**
- 5. Are the answers to these questions different when persons come to faith as adults as over against growing up in the church community?**
- 6. How has growing individualism and secularism affected the connection between baptism and commitment to and participation in the life of the church?**
- 7. Do you see ways of addressing this problem?**

# CHAPTER THREE LIVING OUT BAPTISM IN DISCIPLE- SHIP

All three communions agree “that every baptized person needs to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ as the way of living out his or her baptism. But this only takes place together with the other members of the Christian community and, moreover, impels disciples to witness their faith to the wider world outside the visible borders of the church” [§ 89]. “Living out baptism” thus has personal, ecclesial, and public dimensions.

The symbol § indicates the paragraph number in [the Report of the Trilateral Conversations](#).

The relationship of baptism to discipleship has already been mentioned in the first two chapters. Here it becomes the major focus. While the dialogue partners differ on whether a personal profession of faith is a “precondition” of baptism (Mennonites) or the divinely intended “effect” (Catholics and Lutherans), they agree that baptism is an “important moment” in life-long discipleship, and that God intends baptism “to enable and to unfold” such a life [§ 84].

## 1. BIBLICAL TEACHING REGARDING THE LINK BETWEEN BAPTISM AND DISCIPLESHIP

At the very outset of the Report the participants emphasize that they regard “the revealed Word of God as normative for the life and teaching of the Church” [§ 11]. The Report now provides a long list of key passages that provide a biblical basis for the link between baptism and the transformation of Christian life. The references for these passages appear below in the sequence presented in the Report. Read them and the accompanying comments in §§ 85-88.

### *Explicit link:*

- |      |                    |  |
|------|--------------------|--|
| i.   | Romans 6:3-4       | buried and raised with Christ to “newness of life” |
| ii.  | Romans 6:11        | dead to sin and “alive to God in Christ Jesus”     |
| iii. | Colossians 2:12-13 | buried and raised with Christ                      |
| iv.  | Galatians 3:27     | put on Christ                                      |
| v.   | 1 Peter 3:20-21    | baptism as appeal for a clear conscience           |

### *Non-explicit link:*

- |       |                       |  |
|-------|-----------------------|--|
| i.    | 1 Peter 1:3, 23       | “born anew”  |
| ii.   | 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 | “new creation”   |
| iii.  | Romans 8:14-17        | suffer with Christ so as to be glorified with him (Gal 3:26) |
| iv.   | Ephesians 5:1, 2      | imitate God and walk in love like Christ                     |
| v.    | Ephesians 5:8-10      | walk as children of light in order to please God             |
| vi.   | Philippians 1:27      | live in a way that is worthy of the gospel                   |
| vii.  | Philippians 2:5       | have the mind of Christ                                      |
| viii. | Philippians 1:21      | to live is Christ  |

ix.	Matthew 28:18-20	make disciples and baptize them
x.	1 Peter 2:21	the self-giving Christ is the example to follow
xi.	1 Corinthians 12:3	“Jesus is Lord!”
xii.	Ephesians 4:12-13	grow into maturity and unity
xiii.	Luke 17:5	“increase our faith!”
xiv.	John 15:4-5	abiding in the vine and bearing fruit
xv.	Romans 7:14-15, 22-25	the struggle with sin continues
xvi.	Galatians 5:17	Spirit and flesh at war in the lives of baptized believers

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING

1. Which of these biblical passages have played an important role in your own baptism, or in your understanding of the meaning of baptism and your pledge to follow Jesus?
2. Which of these texts are used in your congregational or denominational setting for teaching about baptism, or in celebrating baptism?
3. Which biblical texts would you want to add to this rich collection?

## 2. PERSONAL DIMENSION OF LIVING OUT BAPTISM IN CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

All agree that joyful gratitude for saving grace and communion with God received in baptism (Phil 4:4) is an important personal aspect of discipleship. They acknowledge the regenerating power of the Spirit in a person’s “life-long process of repentance, conversion, and transformation” [§ 90]. There are again, not surprisingly, distinctive ways of understanding this personal dimension.

### a. Catholics [§ 91]

Catholics don’t think of the personal Christian life or of discipleship as distinct from the community of faith. Baptism incorporates a person into the body of Christ, the Church. Baptism is the “gateway” or “doorway” into not only the Church but to the sacraments it celebrates. Baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist are the three “sacraments of initiation.”

Discipleship means, first, receiving those sacraments. Discipleship also includes the sacraments of confession and anointing of the sick, which address

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**Distinctive ways of understanding this personal dimension:**

- a. *Catholics*  
Baptism is the “gateway” or “doorway” into not only the Church but to the sacraments it celebrates.
- b. *Anabaptist-Mennonites*  
Living out baptism means surrender to Christ, to his way and his teaching, to the point of giving one’s life, the “baptism of blood.”
- c. *Lutherans*  
The exceedingly high standard of behaviour serves to confront the believer with the need to return again and again to the grace first offered in baptism.

the vulnerabilities of disciples to sin and brokenness. Living out baptism means “preparing oneself, with the help of God’s grace, to receive the sacraments in such a way that one is open to be transformed by their divinely promised effectiveness.”

Secondly, Catholics stress the importance of the “life-long endeavor” of “formation.” The baptized are disciplined, taught, and formed in and through liturgy, preaching, Eucharist, catechesis, Bible study, seminars, prayer groups, and pilgrimages. These enable believers to respond faithfully to the “universal call to holiness,” what Mennonites would call “sanctification.”

Thirdly, Catholics claim that “baptism associate[s] the baptized person with the *tria munera* or threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. Living out baptism means, therefore, witnessing to the word of God (prophet), offering one’s life as a spiritual sacrifice (priest), and promoting in society the reign of God (king).” This implicates the disciple in the mission of evangelism, both internally in building up the body of Christ and externally in both speaking to the “ills of society” and in “inviting others to faith in Jesus Christ.”

b. *Anabaptists/Mennonites* [§§ 92, 93]

Anabaptists understand living out baptism in discipleship as “learning from and walking in the way of Christ,” or “following Jesus” [§ 92]. While attention is often drawn to Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7 [and Luke 6]), the *Schleitheim Confession* of 1527 already made clear that this means to “walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ” with the “wish to be buried with Him in death,” making clear the connection between discipleship and baptism. Living out baptism means surrender to Christ, to his way and his teaching, to the point of giving one’s life, the “baptism of blood.” “The goal of post-baptismal discipleship, rooted in ethical and doctrinal teaching, is for believers to take the call of Christ so seriously that they would be willing to face torture and death” [§ 93].

Echoing the Catholic emphasis on formation, Mennonites speak of “preparation” already prior to baptism, so that candidates for baptism can be instructed in the meaning of salvation, conversion, the Biblical story, the Anabaptist tradition, and especially what being a follower of Jesus in the world. Candidates for baptism learn what it means both to receive and offer congregational counsel and correction, and to practice mutual care for each other. Such instruction is life-long,



communicated through worship, Lord’s Supper, and other forms of community life and celebration [§ 93].

c. *Lutherans [§ 94]*

The “promise of God’s grace alone” (*sola gratia*) shapes the Lutheran way of understanding what it means to live out baptism in discipleship. It means, first, life-long listening for God’s gracious word in sermon, study, and catechesis, and receiving grace repeatedly in the Lord’s Supper. Grace cannot be earned, but it is the “source of good works by which the believer responds to the love of God and serves God and the neighbor without the self-centered intention of earning grace and righteousness” [§ 94].

Notably, the Ten Commandments figure prominently in Lutheran catechisms, obedience to which is the “fruit of faith.” This exceedingly high standard of behaviour serves to confront the believer with the need to return again and again to the grace first offered in baptism.

Like Catholics and Mennonites, Lutherans speak explicitly about the priesthood of all who have been baptized, which means that the baptized engage in bringing the gospel to others, and in bringing the concerns of others to God in prayer. As for Catholics and Mennonites, living out one’s baptism may involve the sacrifice of both time and life.

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING

Among Anabaptists/Mennonites discipleship refers to faithful behaviour as baptized believers. For Catholics and Lutherans discipleship leans more toward “learning,” being disciplined, taught, or formed in what it means to live out baptism in one’s personal life.

1. Do you see aspects of Catholic “formation” or Lutheran “remembering the promise” Mennonites might learn from?
2. How much does Mennonite preparation in catechism and teaching, both before and after baptism, include learning about the patience, forgiveness, and suffering love required for living in the body of Christ?
3. Does the early Anabaptist emphasis on the “baptism of blood,” that is, the potential cost of one’s life for following Jesus, ring true for your setting and your experience of baptism? Do you observe such sacrifice among Christians elsewhere in the world?
4. Did your baptismal preparation include the sense that you were not only pledging yourself to discipleship and to the church, but also to participation in the mission of the church?
5. What do you think has been the biggest and potentially most costly challenge you said yes to at the time of your baptism?

All three communions view the body of Christ to be the place and context in which baptism is lived out. This happens through discipleship nurtured by rites (sacraments/ordinances), teaching and preaching, and by mutual accountability and correction the community provides [§ 95].

All three communions also admit humbly that there is often a lamentable “gap” between theology and practice [as explored already in §§ 79-82]. The “ecumenical imperative” of working towards reconciliation and unity of communions—the drive behind this trilateral dialogue—is an expression of this humility and repentance.

### 3. ECCLESIAL DIMENSIONS OF LIVING OUT BAPTISM

#### a. *Anabaptists/Mennonites*

For Anabaptists the “rule of Christ” in Matthew 18:15-20 has played a central role in the discipleship nurtured in the congregation of believers. When Mennonites insist on an “ecclesiology of the visible church” it is to that tangible community of mutual accountability they point. Particularly relevant in a time of migration, racism, and struggles over diversity, baptism initiates a believer into a “new people” that transcends nationalism, gender, and social status, among others. [§ 96].

In order to emphasize the importance of the communal nature of discipleship growing out of baptism, Mennonites make a stark claim:

[T]here is no private salvation; it happens in the fellowship of believers. The vertical and the horizontal dimensions of salvation do not exist independently from each other. There is no peace with God without peace with sisters and brothers, no fellowship with God without sharing of possessions, no divine forgiveness without willingness to forgive human offenders. [§ 97]

Whereas mutual accountability can at times seem punitive, and while it might find expression in exclusion, “[t]he purpose of accountability is to heal and restore through repentance and not punish or condemn” [§ 97].

#### b. *Lutherans*

Perhaps the most important “living out” of baptism is faith—trust in the One who offers the word of promise and gives himself in baptism. But to learn who that One is requires the nurture of godparents, catechetical instruction, and participation in worship. These serve to lead the child to being able to confirm their trust and commitment to living out that faith within the life of the church. The rite of confirmation, introduced in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, serves as that mile stone [§ 98].

Once confirmed, baptized persons are able to receive Holy Communion, and are also eligible to serve as godparents and in the *presbyterium* (as an “elder”) of congregation and synod. In order to fully participate in that “priesthood of all,” there should be “continuous formation,” so as to “become knowledgeable about right preaching and the administration of the sacraments, and about the right practice of *diakonia* and pastoral care in the church” [§ 99].

Lutherans recognize, as do Mennonites and Catholics, that to be confirmed to such a life can have “far-reaching consequences,” as it did, for example, for those who chose confirmation over membership in youth movements during the Hitler or East German communist eras [§ 100].

c. *Catholics*

Baptism takes place within the “catholic” (universal) community of the Church, founded by Christ. This community is led by the successors of the apostles Christ chose, who are in turn led by the successor to Peter, the pope. Baptized persons practice or live out baptism within that community in a variety of ways.

First, “[a]bsolutely essential for living out one’s baptism” is regular participation in the Eucharist, “the source and summit of the life of the church” [§ 101].

Second, giving further structure and vibrancy to Catholic life is liturgy more generally, including the liturgical year in which the communion of the saints is recalled for inspiration and direction.

Third, formation is critical for the living out of baptism, whether in the family as “domestic church” or in the “pouring out of the Spirit” in confirmation. This includes the official teaching of the bishops and participation in synods or gatherings for strengthening of faith. Catholics hold that there is in believers the “*sensus fidei or supernatural instinct*” [§ 101], a gift the Spirit gives believers in order to participate in the “discernment of the direction in which the Church is called to advance” [§ 101]. (Mennonites will recognize something akin to their idea of the “community discernment” or “hermeneutical community.”)

Lastly, discipleship means participation in the internal life of the church, but also in its outreach.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING

1. Mennonite reflections on “ecclesial dimensions” restrict themselves here mostly to the mutual accountability captured in Matthew 18:15-20. Does that resonate with your experience and conviction?
  - Are there “ecclesial dimensions” missing from the Mennonite presentation in the *Report*?
2. Does the insistence that for Mennonites there is no “private salvation” ring true in your experience? Do you agree?
3. Given what you see in the perspectives of the other two communions, are there aspects that could deepen and enrich Mennonite understanding?

**All three communions recognize the connection between baptism and Jesus' proclamation of the "kingdom" or "reign of God" (Luke 4).**

The public dimension of discipleship means

participating in the mission of reconciliation, justice, and peace inaugurated by Jesus, inviting our contemporaries to come to know Jesus Christ and experience the joy of faith in him and in his message. It means witnessing, by word and action, to the truth and goodness of the Gospel in the public square. [§ 102]

**There is increasing awareness in all three communions that this includes care of creation. It also includes awareness that public witness to and participation in God's kingdom might well be met by sometimes fierce resistance (Matt 5:10-12), which might well lead to the "baptism of blood," experienced by all three communions. We might thus speak of an "ecumenism of the martyrs" who serve as a summons to ever deeper unity within the suffering body of Christ [§ 102].**

Such agreement notwithstanding, there are distinct emphases **each communion** brings which have at times been major sources of controversy and division.

## 4. PUBLIC DIMENSIONS OF LIVING OUT BAPTISM

### a. Lutherans

Lutherans view the Christian life as lived out in "three estates of society: family, government, and church" [§ 104]. Luther famously defined the relationship between church and state in his doctrine of the "two kingdoms" or "two realms." He was motivated by the desire to free the church to fulfill its specific calling to serve the world, namely, through preaching the gospel. The state, also an "instrument of God's love and providential will, [...] is responsible for safeguarding order, peace and justice in society. The two realms are not opposed, but complement each other" [§ 105]. These have been balanced in various ways since the Reformation.

Lutherans recognize that a rigid application of this doctrine has led to "unconditional adoption" of political conditions and demands of the state, with sometimes terrible consequences, especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They point out, however, that even the *Augsburg Confession* places the call to obedience to magistrates and laws alongside Acts 5:29 (obeying God rather than human authorities when they are in conflict) in order to identify the limits of such obedience [§ 106].

Lutherans point out that the Lutheran World Federation was established in 1947 in the aftermath of WWII precisely to set a new tone as a global communion. The Federation sought to address the call to discipleship in the public sphere and to join the proclamation of the gospel with advocacy for justice and peace [§ 104].

### b. Catholics

Drawing on a growing body of social teachings since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including recent Vatican documents, Catholics stress the importance of the relationship between baptism and public engagement. Discipleship means solidarity with all of suffering humanity. "Basing these principles on the dignity of each person, [Catholics] emphasize the importance of fostering the common good and the universal destination of goods which have been bestowed upon all of humanity by the creator" [§ 107]. They point to Pope Francis' attempts to shift from being a powerful institution to become a "church of the poor." He speaks of the church as a "field hospital," caring for the poor and wounded [§ 107].

In addition to "solidarity," they speak of "subsidiarity." How solidarity is practiced is to be decided at ground level by disciples engaged in the various spheres of public life. This teaching has found expression

in countless individual acts, but also in groups and movements, schools, and hospitals. This does not obscure the frequent failure to live up to this rich tradition of social teachings.

c. *Anabaptists/Mennonites*

Mennonites stress the way in which the church is to be a “new community” that models God’s intended future in and for the world. The church is not an end in itself, but a divine creation to serve the *missio Dei*, the “mission of God” to renew the world. While membership in the church is “the gift of belonging given in baptism,” members become a part of this peacemaking mission of God [§ 108].

The historic stance of nonresistance and nonviolence is to be placed into this context. “It is part of the new way of ordering human relationships under the new covenant. [...]he missionary function of the church is to extend forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing beyond itself. [...] The pursuit of peace is an eschatological anticipation of the kingdom” [§ 108]. To quote from one of the Mennonite confessions,

peace with God includes a commitment to the way of reconciliation modeled by the Prince of Peace. [...] The people of God join in the struggle for justice, yet are prepared to suffer persecution, knowing that sin, guilt and death will not prevail. [§ 108]

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING

**Lutherans stress the doctrine of “two kingdoms” or “two realms” of church and civil authority as both blessing and historic challenge not to let the church slip into subservience to the state. Catholics stress the growing tradition of social teachings, pushing the Church toward the poor and the marginalized. Mennonites stress the call to reconciliation and peacemaking.**

1. **Is there a difference in the basis each of the communions has for its convictions and practices? Historic teaching, doctrines, Bible?**
2. **What have Mennonites learned from the other traditions for their own living out of baptism in the public sphere?**
  - **Which persons or movements have they learned from or been inspired by?**
  - **Where have they worked together with Catholics and Lutherans?**
3. **Are there ways in which Mennonites have fallen short in their presence and witness in the public sphere, as the Lutherans and Catholics readily confess about themselves?**

**Addressing these specific matters was not part of the mandate of this dialogue, but the *Report* asks whether there might be ways forward other than agreement on them:**

- a. Can churches seek ways to collaborate where they do find agreement?
- b. Can churches acknowledge that those they disagree with are nevertheless attempting to seriously live out their baptism?
- c. Is there openness to consider that some differences might be a God-given diversity, intended to enrich the body of Christ? [§ 112]

## 5. DIFFERING AND DIVERGING EMPHASES

While all three communions agree that baptism must find expression in faithful public engagement, they also agree on the importance of a conscience “formed in fidelity to the Gospel” [§ 109]. However, they do not always agree on what such “authentic discipleship” or “following Jesus” means practically. The “ecclesial discernment of our churches,” that is, the long traditions of interpreting the relationship of the church to the world, have resulted in “incompatible conclusions” [§ 111]. In addition, many members of all three communions do not live in accordance with the “ecclesial discernment” of their own traditions [§ 110].

Most glaring are disagreements on whether the church should adopt strict pacifism in all circumstances, or whether the church should sanction same-sex unions [§ 111]. To be sure, these disagreements, especially the latter, are perhaps greatest within communions rather than between them.

The conversation partners conclude this chapter with hope that the diverse ways of living out baptism, rooted in a shared faith in Christ, and aided by the Spirit, might lead to an “exchange of gifts.”

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING

1. Can you as an Anabaptist Mennonite say “Yes” to these questions?
2. As one committed to nonresistance and nonviolence as faithfulness to Christ can you see the taking up of arms or obedience to the demands of the state as part of God-given diversity, as an “authentic” form of discipleship?
3. Might you say yes to the questions the *Report* poses above, but still wish to keep open a loving and respectful dialogue on differences that need to be wrestled with?
  - Might that honour the differences within the communions on the matter of arms-bearing, for example, while practicing the unity of the Spirit?



# CONCLUSION

The *Report's* “Conclusion” is really a chapter that could have been given the title “Convictions, Gifts, Challenges, and Considerations.” Having listened carefully and respectfully to each other, Mennonite, Catholic, and Lutheran participants in these conversations restate their convictions and acknowledge both the gifts and the challenges they have each received from the others, concluding with matters they wish to put to their own churches “for consideration.”

“Only our churches themselves can determine whether and how their theology and practice of baptism may call for renewal and have an impact upon the ultimate goal of responding to the Lord’s will for unity (see John 17:21).” [§ 114]

Importantly, the conversation partners do not understand their task to “solve” or “settle” differences, nor to determine direction for the future. Instead, they are putting forward the fruit of their conversations for testing and evaluation by each of the communions. While the *Report* itself is quite succinct, here is a summary in point form for ease of oversight.

## 1. CONCLUDING MENNONITE REFLECTIONS

### a. Convictions Held

We believe that —

- i. the church is a “hermeneutical community,” receiving the wisdom of the Spirit, interpreting the Scripture together as those without political power [§ 116];
- ii. the church is a “web of relational communities,” congregations where mutual accountability and ministry happen and baptism is lived out [§ 117];
- iii. baptism on confession of faith is the biblical and apostolic norm [§ 118];
- iv. the Sermon on the Mount gives guidance for private, ecclesial, and public living out of baptism;
- v. Jesus inaugurated the Kingdom of God which makes such discipleship possible with the sustaining power of the Spirit. Nonviolent peacemaking is seen by most Mennonites as “essential to grasping and living this new reality” [§ 119].

The symbol § indicates the paragraph number in the [Report of the Trilateral Conversations](#).

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING

1. Do these statements capture your sense of what Anabaptists/Mennonites believe with respect to baptism and its implications?
2. Do they reflect Anabaptist convictions of what happens in baptism?
3. Does singling out the Sermon on the Mount reflect theology and ethics in your church setting?
4. Does highlighting nonviolent peacemaking as “essential” risk marginalizing evangelism and church planting?
5. What does your church consider “essential” to living out baptism? Are “Anabaptist” emphases among these essentials?

### b. Gifts Received

- i. Gratitude that dialogue has been possible and fruitful through the gifts of trust and patience [§ 120].
- ii. Realization that many historic prejudices were never or are no longer true [§ 121].
- iii. Realization that we share a Trinitarian and Christocentric faith and the centrality of discipleship [§ 121].
- iv. From Catholics the indispensability of the recipient’s faith for the fruitful reception of a sacrament, and that the saving power of the Spirit is not limited to baptism [§ 122].
- v. From Lutherans to see discipleship as grateful response to grace [§ 122].
- vi. Shared emphasis with Catholics and Lutherans on the primacy of the Bible [§ 122].
- vii. Deep understanding among Catholics and Lutherans of the relationship of tradition to Scripture [§ 122].
- viii. Shared hope regarding the nurture and instruction of children expressed in Mennonite child dedication and instruction in church and home, and in Catholic and Lutheran baptism of infants and their ongoing nurture and formation [§ 123].

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING

1. For which “gifts” are you especially grateful?
2. What have you learned in studying this *Report* that you would want to add to this list of gifts?

c. Challenges Accepted

Anabaptists/Mennonites accept the challenge to —

- i. see commitment to unity as integral to church and mission, rather than as a threat to faithfulness [§ 124];
- ii. recognize the pain of infant-baptizing churches when Mennonites baptize those already baptized as infants, which they take as invalidating that baptism [§ 124];
- iii. learn what a faithful practice of “reconciled diversity” means in practice, that is, holding “divergent realities” in unity, such as deeply held but divergent views of baptism [§ 125];
- iv. acknowledge that baptism of infants is not tied to the rise of the state church, and that baptism upon confession of faith remained “dominant” long after the establishment of a Christian social order, often practiced alongside infant baptism [§ 126];
- v. strengthen our understanding of the relationship of conversion and baptism [§ 127];
- vi. not allow the Anabaptist emphasis on human participation in conversion and baptism “overshadow” the divine initiative of grace [§ 128];
- vii. give greater and deeper attention to preparation of persons for baptism and to make “remembrance” of baptism central to life-long discipleship [§ 129];
- viii. formulate a fuller theology of the child, which would enrich child and parent dedication and subsequent nurture [§ 130].

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING**

1. Which on this list of “accepted challenges” is most important in your experience?
2. Which challenges would you be most cautious to “accept?”
3. Might one challenge be for Anabaptists/Mennonites, who have placed great emphasis on the local congregation, to see themselves and others more fully as parts of a highly diverse universal body of Christ?
4. Might another challenge be to acknowledge that Anabaptist-Mennonite convictions regarding baptism have often been betrayed by Mennonites themselves in various ways—not recognizing other modes of baptism, treating it as a rite of passage for young people, etc.?
5. What challenge would you want to add to this list?

d. For Consideration

For most of the churches in the MWC, this may be the most challenging section of the *Report*. The Mennonite representatives to the dialogue begin with a number of affirmations:

- i. Affirmation of “historic belief” that baptism of believers is the New Testament norm [§ 131].
- ii. Respect for the theology that links infant baptism “integrally” to personal confirmation of faith and continuing life of discipleship [§ 131].
- iii. Affirmation of the oneness of “the body of Christ in Trinitarian faith lived out through trust in and obedience to Jesus Christ,” a oneness greater than disagreements over baptism [§ 132].
- iv. Based on the affirmations above, Mennonite representatives invite our churches to “consider” the following points.  
(They are succinctly stated and given here exactly as they are in the *Report* [§ 133], except that they are numbered rather than bulleted for ease of reference.)

Churches are asked to consider —

1. *receiving members from infant baptism churches on the basis of their confession of faith and commitment to discipleship without repeating the water rite. If the candidate requests rebaptism a process of discernment prior to her/his reception should include conversation between the candidate, the church of origin, and the receiving church in respect for one another and unity in the body of Christ;*
2. *oring the nurturing that candidates received toward Christ in their church of origin (where that is the case);*
3. *asking all members, including those now being received, 1) to affirm our theological-ecclesiological interpretation and practice of baptism and 2) to respect those churches which practice baptism into a life of faith and discipleship differently as brothers and sisters in the one body of Christ;*
4. *enriching (or developing) practices of thanksgiving and blessing of newborn children and their parents as well as committing local congregations to nurture and care for them;*

5. *providing occasions for all members to “remember their baptism” and renew their baptismal commitments in both congregational and interchurch settings;*
6. *calling for collective and individual soul searching as to why it has been so difficult for us to hold together the quest for purity and the quest for unity, among ourselves and with other churches.*

Mennonite reflections conclude with the prayer that all three communions might experience greater integrity and faithfulness in living the “whole gospel in a broken world” [§ 133].

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING

1. **What is your experience with accepting persons into a Mennonite congregation without baptizing them if they have already been baptized as infants?**
  - Does your Anabaptist-Mennonite congregation or denomination allow that?
  - If so, on what basis? If not, for what reasons?
2. **Does the fact that Anabaptists view baptism not as a sacrament but as an ordinance that expresses what is already real play a role in decisions congregations make re baptism?**
3. **Do you think it is a good idea to talk to the “church of origin” of someone requesting baptism upon confession of faith when they were baptized as infants?**
  - What might make this difficult, perhaps even impossible, in some cases?
4. **Catholics and Lutherans consider the response of faith to God's grace given in baptism expressed in a life of faithful discipleship a “necessity” [§ 62]. Might they recognize the baptism on personal confession of faith of one already baptized as an infant as itself “necessitated” by the actual experience of the believer?**
  - Does the role of confirmation in their traditions provide an opening for this? Might that be part of the “new framework?”
5. **How are infant baptism and child dedication similar or unlike each other?**
  - Anabaptists/ Mennonites emphasize the believer's personal choice and decision in coming to baptism. They see their dedication of children largely as the dedication of their parents and congregation. There is overlap with Lutheran and Catholic emphasis on the role of parents and community in nurturing the child, but they view the child when baptized as already part of the Church, and not, as in Anabaptist churches, being nurtured toward such a choice.
6. **How are you helped, or how could you be helped to “remember your baptism” in such a way that it strengthens you for a lifetime of discipleship?**
7. **The last item on the list of proposed considerations raises an important challenge for Anabaptists. Separation for the sake of faithfulness has marked our relations with other communions but also with each other.**
  - Have we betrayed Jesus' prayer for unity?
  - Can we make unity a core aspect of our discipleship, and see baptism as a foundational moment for such a commitment?

## 2. CONCLUDING LUTHERAN REFLECTIONS

- a. Convictions Held
  - i. Lutherans reiterate their belief that baptism is the “great promise of God, given once and for the whole life, to receive a human being into communion with the Triune God” [§ 134].
  - ii. Faith in that promise is itself an enlightening of the Spirit, who calls the believer into faithfulness. Those who have been so enlightened and renewed “desire the good” and “delight in the law.” Thus the believer does the good “spontaneously,” acting out of the “new powers and gifts” of the Spirit [§§ 135, 136]
- b. Gifts Received
  - i. From Mennonites the gift received is reconciliation. The most dramatic expression of this was that after nearly five centuries of broken relations, expressed in the condemnations of Anabaptists in the Augsburg Confession and sometimes lethal persecution in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Mennonites and Lutherans were able to reconcile through confession and forgiveness, culminating at the Lutheran Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, in 2010. These trilateral conversations are a continuation of this new path of “brotherly and sisterly relations and cooperation,” or “keeping an eye on one another” [§ 137].
  - ii. From Catholics the gift received is the experience of having been able to commemorate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation together with Lutherans, a “highly complex reality” also brought gifts to the whole church. Doubtless the 50 years of ecumenical dialogue between the two churches (see especially the 1999 *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*) paved the way for this gift [§ 138].
  - iii. With respect to baptism specifically, Lutherans have come to value the Mennonite emphasis on the congregation as a communal space for living out baptism, as well as the tie Mennonites make between baptism and peacemaking. Lutherans have come to value the Catholic highlighting of the family’s role in baptism and the faith of the church into which the person is baptized, as well as the presence of the universal church in each baptism [§ 139].



c. Challenges Accepted

Lutherans are challenged to —

- i. develop a theology of the child, especially the state of unbaptized children regarding salvation [§ 140];
- ii. address the reality that many do not take their own baptism seriously. For that reason, “whoever baptizes infants has the obligation to do mission, catechesis and make all attempts so that the baptized appreciate their baptism and rejoice in it in faith” [§ 141];
- iii. seek ways to commemorate baptism so that members are aware both of the gift and challenge of baptism [§ 142];
- iv. address the common absence of awareness of the dimension of the universal church [§ 143].

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING**

1. The Lutheran comments on “gifts received” show this dialogue on baptism to be the direct result of gifts received from Mennonites and Catholics. Can this dialogue serve to make Anabaptists hungrier to experience unity with other members of the body of Christ?
2. Would you as an Anabaptist have liked to see some item “for consideration” put to their communion by the Lutheran delegation regarding the baptism of adults already baptized? What might they have been?

**3. CONCLUDING CATHOLIC REFLECTIONS**

a. Convictions Held

- i. The church is founded by Christ as “the universal sacrament of salvation,” a “sign and effective instrument to bring about communion with God and among human beings” [§ 144].
- ii. The Church is the “pilgrim people of God.”
- iii. “The Holy Spirit is the principle of unity of the Church.”
- iv. Baptism is the beginning of Christian life, the “doorway” to the other six sacraments

Baptism frees from sin, gives one new birth as a child of God, incorporates into the body of Christ the Church, calls and equips one to strive for holiness, and impels one to participate in service both within the confines of the Christian community and in the church’s evangelization and service to the world. [§ 144]

- v. Baptism is related to the world-wide community of the Church, the local community of the Church, and to the “smallest expression of the Church,” the family as “domestic church” [§ 145].
  - vi. Infant baptism is predicated only upon the “confidence in parents” to provide for formation [§ 145].
  - vii. Alongside the importance of baptism for salvation, and Christ being the one and only saviour (Acts 4:12), there is “firm belief in the unconditional love of God” and God’s “universal will of salvation” (1 Tim 2:4), and thus hope for the unbaptized “in the paschal mystery” of God’s grace in Christ [§ 146].
- b. Gifts Received
- i. Hope for Christian unity [§ 147].
  - ii. Mennonite willingness to consider the reasons for Catholic practice of baptizing infants with possible revisiting of past evaluations of that practice [§ 148].
  - iii. Mennonite courage to remember the past in a way that is open to healing of memory and reconciliation [§ 148].
  - iv. Lutherans taking the power of sin seriously [§ 149].
  - v. Worship with Mennonites and Lutherans, especially prayer and the experience of the presence of the Spirit [§ 150].
  - vi. Sharing of commitment to peace, mission, and community life [§ 151].
  - vii. Importance of Bible for Lutherans and Mennonites [§ 152].
  - viii. Common challenges greater than “traditional frontiers and barriers” [§ 153].
- c. Challenges Accepted
- i. In light of the usefulness of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* for this dialogue on baptism, more church communions should be invited to associate with that document [§ 154].
  - ii. Need for greater help for Catholics to appreciate the value of their baptism, and what it means to live it [§§ 155, 157].
  - iii. Value of devising “a common ritual for the welcoming into our Church believers who have been baptized in other communities” [§ 156].
  - iv. Need for more effective linkage between baptism and mission [§ 158].

d. For Consideration

Catholics offer for consideration potential future dialogues on —

- i. the relationship between baptism and profession of the creed;
- ii. means of fostering fuller commitment so as to resist fracturing within communions;
- iii. links between baptism, baptism of the Holy Spirit, “baptism of desire”, and “baptism of blood” (martyrdom) [see also § 17] to broaden understanding of baptism and its relation to participation in the life and death of Christ in various contexts and roles of life;
- iv. further study of theology and practice of confirmation [§ 159].

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING

1. What can you as an Anabaptist affirm in the Catholic rehearsal of core convictions?
2. Can Mennonites identify with respect to their own communion with the Catholic concern about those who do not value their baptism?
3. Could a “common ritual” include those who were once baptized as infants and were then baptized on confession of their own faith?
  - What would that demand from both Catholics and Lutherans in relation to Mennonite practice?
4. Catholics call for a greater link between baptism and mission. What would that mean in your part of the global Mennonite family?
  - What is the mission? And does the mission bring conflict precisely over those already baptized as infants?
5. Anabaptists speak of the baptism of water, spirit, and blood. Catholics speak of baptism of water, baptism of the Holy Spirit, baptism of desire, and the baptism of blood. Is there a promise for mutual understanding in this depth of symbolism?
6. Might further conversation around infant baptism and child dedication be accompanied by conversation regarding the relationship between baptism upon profession of faith and confirmation?
7. Given their sacramental understanding of baptism, might Catholics (and Lutherans) think about whether baptizing infants imposes membership in the Church on them, leaving them no choice in the matter?

**The conversations raised several related matters that might be fruitful topics for future trilateral conversations:**

- a. How does “authentic living out of baptism” relate to war and sexuality? How do churches search for consensus and unity midst deep disagreement?
- b. How does one reconcile the confession that Jesus is the one and only saviour with the reality of countless persons either rejecting or not knowing the Gospel in light of God’s desire that all might be saved? How does affect our various approaches to evangelism and mission?
- c. The last suggestion is ecclesiological: might the recent work of the Catholic/Lutheran commission on the Eucharist be enriched by drawing on Anabaptist understandings? [§ 162]

**4. IN THANKSGIVING FOR OUR ONE BAPTISM**

The *Report* concludes with drawing attention to the centrality of unity in the prayer of Jesus in John 17 and to the unity text in Ephesians 4:4-7 that speaks of “one baptism.” Dialogue partners speak in this *Report* not of agreement so much as of having rediscovered each other as sisters and brothers in Christ. This bond, forged over past dialogues, made it possible to take up the difficult and divisive topic of baptism [§ 160].

These conversations over five years focused on “foundational matters” related to theology and practice of baptism, attempting to overcome stereotypes and misunderstandings of each other. While still differing in significant ways, participants

learned that when considering baptism as it relates to the justification and sanctification of the sinner, as it entails entrance into the faith and life of the Christian community, and as it calls for a daily cooperation with the grace of the Holy Spirit so as to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, we have many convictions in common. [§ 161].

They wonder whether some differences are “acceptable variations of perspective,” or “complementary, even mutually enriching” [§ 161].

Given the value of having three communions meet in conversation, the participants propose reading and discussing the *Report* together with members of all three communions where possible [§ 164].

They also suggest a process that would result in a “prayer service” to celebrate the “one baptism” (Ephesians 4) we share, as well as to renew together our baptismal commitment to life-long discipleship. This could aid in bringing Christians together in reconciliation and shared commitment to follow Jesus daily [§ 164].

The *Report* ends where it began [see **Preface**] with a restatement of purpose and hope: to help each other grow in faithfulness to Jesus Christ, specifically in how we understand, celebrate, and live out our baptism [§ 164].

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND TESTING**

1. **What is your overall response to the *Report*? Could it lead, as the participants in this dialogue hope and pray, to the deepening of Mennonite theology and practice of baptism? Will it lead to greater unity in the global multi-denominational body of Christ?**
2. **What would you have wanted to say if you had been part of the trilateral conversations?**
3. **Does this *Report*, and the conversations it capsulizes, help each of our communions grow in faithfulness, in living out our baptism in discipleship? What have Mennonites been able to learn and contribute to the body of Christ walking in unity?**

**Following *Jesus*, living out *unity*, building *peace***  
**Seguir a *Jesús*, vivir la *unidad*, construir la *paz***  
**Suivre *Jésus*, vivre l'*unité*, construire la *paix***