BAPTISTS AND
REFORMED
IN DIALOGUE

STUDIES FROM
THE WORLD ALLIANCE
OF REFORMED CHURCHES

DOCUMENTS FROM THE
CONVERSATIONS SPONSORED BY
THE BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE OF
REFORMED CHURCHES AND
THE BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE
BAPTISTS
AND
REFORMED
IN DIALOGUE
BAPTISTS AND REFORMED IN DIALOGUE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Report of the Evaluation Group</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Actions taken by the Executive Committee of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the General Council of the Baptist World Alliance</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Letter to the Member Churches</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. How to proceed - Some suggestions</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix: A Mennonite Perspective (Larry Miller)</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preface

This booklet brings together the results of ten years work by a group of Reformed and Baptist theologians together with comments on that work and suggestions for its furtherance. As the co-chairmen of the evaluation group appointed by the two World Alliances to consider the results of the Reformed/Baptist Conversations of 1973/77, we are grateful for the initiative of the Protestant Office for Ecumenism in Switzerland and in particular for the work of Mr. Heinz Rüegger in making possible the publication of the account which follows.

At the evaluation meeting in December 1982 we were very conscious that such theological conversations only find their true value through being shared with those in the churches who are constantly engaged in applying the gospel to their own lives and in making it known to their families, friends, neighbours and communities. We expressed regret at that time that the earlier report of the conversations had not had a more widespread dissemination among members of the churches so as to gather in a response not only from interchurch relations committees but also from local congregations.

It is our hope that this booklet may facilitate widespread use of the results of the work we were enabled to do. This could be our contribution to the many expressions of gratitude for the life of Dr. Rudolf Thaut, the original Baptist co-chairman of the conversations who died in 1982.

MARTIN H. CRESSEY,
Reformed co-chairman

GÜNTER WAGNER,
Baptist co-chairman
I. Introduction

Ten years ago the Baptist World Alliance and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches decided to arrange a series of official bilateral discussions. In view of the considerable degree of concord between them - although there are differences which should not be ignored - the major concern was to indicate more clearly the agreements and disagreements between the Baptist and Reformed traditions, and to ask how the two confessional families could grow together in deeper fellowship, in order to fulfil the common task of mission given to them by the one Lord of the Church. So a Reformed/Baptist commission was established for conversations. In 1977 this commission presented a report on the outcome of its efforts, which was sent to all the member churches of both World Alliances with a request for their reactions. The responses which came from the churches were evaluated at a final meeting in December 1982.

Baptists and Reformed meet each other as representatives of churches which belong to the same Protestant stream within Christianity as a whole. Both have their roots – each in their own way – in the movement of reform which tried to bring about a renewal of the church on the continent of Europe and in Britain during the 16th and 17th centuries. By going back strictly to Scripture, the fathers of both the Reformed and the Baptist traditions intended to subordinate the churches afresh to the unique Lordship of Jesus Christ and to free them from all human bondage which impeded the liberty to which they were called by the gospel. However, they were not able to come to an agreement concerning such questions as church order, the relation between church and state, baptism and church membership; thus, they broke into two separated ecclesiastical communities. This is one of the tragic aspects of our common heritage which can neither be ignored nor reversed but which calls all the more for reconsideration and correction. Exactly this was the basic concern of the Reformed/Baptist talks during the last ten years.
Already in the 1520’s, when by the efforts of Zwingli the movement of reform was started off in Zürich, there were different opinions within the closest circle of Zwingli’s friends as to how far the reform should go on the basis of their common starting point. These differences resulted in the foundation of the first Free Church practicing the baptism of believers only. The spiritual heirs of this secession, which happened right at the beginning of the emerging Reformed tradition, are to be found among today’s Mennonites. Despite all the similarities between Baptists and Mennonites, particularly in their difference from the Reformed, it is important to notice that the Baptist and Mennonite traditions developed independently of one another, each having its own special character. The Baptists have their roots not in the Zürich of Zwingli but in the movement of reform within the Church of England more precisely in the Puritan/Congregational separatism which developed alongside it at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century. The beginning of the Baptist movement is usually traced from the first baptisms of believers carried out by John Smyth among the English exiles in Amsterdam in the years 1608-09. Alongside, but independent from these Baptists who in their theology were Arminians, there developed from the 1630’s English Baptist congregations of a strongly Calvinist character. The link between these latter congregations and the Calvinist Presbyterians, who had gained a lasting influence particularly in Scotland, is clearly indicated by the fact that in 1677 Calvinist Baptists adopted the Westminster Confession instead of producing a confession of their own, and only altered it according to their own views in a few places, primarily where it deals with the questions of baptism and of church order. A similar point can be made about Johann Gerhard Oncken, the founder of the Baptist movement on the continent of Europe, who affirmed to the officials of Hamburg that the confession of faith of the German Baptists agreed in all points with the Scottish and Dutch Presbyterians except on baptism and church order.

This relationship and theological closeness between Baptists and Reformed makes their present day relationship both easier and more difficult: easier because they recognize their agreement on many central points; more difficult because with so many similarities, they are all
the more painfully aware of the unresolved differences which divide them. As we all know, conflicts within the same family often turn out to be more difficult than those between people who are strangers to one another.

As the centuries have passed, Reformed and Baptists have greatly increased in numbers and have spread all over the world. In different historical, cultural and social contexts both traditions have taken on various forms of church life. It is no wonder then that the relationships between Reformed and Baptists are also very different in various contexts. The coexistence of Baptists and Reformed has a quite different character in Switzerland, where a very small Baptist minority often stands over against a Reformed State Church which nominally includes almost half the population, from that which it has in Italy, where Baptists and Waldensians move close to one another in face of an overwhelming Roman Catholic majority. Different again is the situation in the southern part of the United States, where Baptists are numerically more strongly represented than Reformed, or in North India, where Reformed and Baptists together with other confessions have united in the Church of North India. It is obvious that the Baptist/Reformed dialogue will take on its own particular accent in each context according to the special opportunities and problems in the relationship of the two traditions in that given place. The commission established by the two World Alliances was well aware that it could not achieve the work which has to be done in conversations in a specific context. Its intention was a much more modest one: the aim was to work out at an international level a first clarification of basic theological agreements and differences which could, as it were, serve as a basis and a guide-line for further talks on a regional and local level. It is, then, in this sense that the following report on the result of the conversations should be understood.

The Reformed/Baptist conversations of the past ten years can moreover only rightly be understood when they are seen in the framework of the whole range of ecumenical efforts of these last years. Questions which in the history of theology belong to the classical points of controversy between Reformed and Baptists, such as those concerning
the understanding of baptism, are today the subject of ecumenical conversations between churches of most diverse confessional character. One need only allude to the work covering about two decades which reached a preliminary conclusion with the publication in 1982 or the Lima texts by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, texts which represent convergences on "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry".

Against the background of these multilateral ecumenical efforts, it is the aim of the bilateral Reformed/Baptist conversations to deal specially with those questions which have a particular significance with regard to the relations between Reformed and Baptists. The conversations carried on since 1973 were not an end in themselves; they aimed to set in motion a conversation and an encounter which would encourage Baptists and Reformed in different situations to take in hand the furtherance and concrete shaping of this dialogue with regard to their own particular situation. The present publication is intended as guidance and help to this end. The question of how the insights, motivations and suggestions contained in the following pages can be fruitfully received will be dealt with more thoroughly in the last part of this booklet.
Baptistry in Riva San Vitale (Switzerland) showing the transition from the practice of believers’ baptism (original octagonal basin in the floor) to that of infant baptism (baptismal font erected above the original basin).
II. Report of the Theological Conversations

SPONSORED BY THE WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES AND THE BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE, 1973-1977

PREFACE

On the completion of the four-year programme assigned to us by the Baptist World Alliance and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, we want first of all to express our great gratitude: our thanks are due to our colleagues in the two Alliances for trusting us to do this work together and to one another for a fellowship in Christ steadily deepened over these years; but above all we must thank God anew for the gospel on which we all rest our hopes and which we seek to follow in meeting the needs of the world and the church today.

We have been heartened to find (as was already noted by those who set up this programme) that we are at one in so many basic aspects of Christian belief and of response to the gospel in witness and service. We offer in our report not only an account of mutually helpful information but also our awareness of mutual correction in understanding of one another and of our Lord's purpose. We have also been able to suggest ways in which our Alliances and their member churches could come closer together and could overcome some of the differences which have hitherto kept us apart.

We commend this report to the two Alliances with the request that they will send it to their constituencies and that the churches in turn will use it as a basis for magazine articles, leaflets and discussion notes adapted to their particular situations, so that the local churches, whose importance we emphasize again and again, may share in the process of growth in understanding and ability to serve our Lord together. A first advance in such common service could well be the joint preparation
of such study material by the Baptist and Reformed churches of a particular country or area.

The two Alliances, with proper financial stewardship, appointed this group from among residents in one geographical area, namely Europe. We are grateful that one of us is a North American and that several of us have many contacts with those of other continents. But we want to emphasize the need for the churches in other parts of the world to have full opportunity to identify for themselves the questions which arise for them, in their own situations, from the topics we have discussed. We shall listen eagerly for such voices from the world-wide fellowship to which we belong.

Signed on behalf of the joint study group by the co-chairmen

MARTIN H. CRESSEY RUDOLF THAUT

Participants:

REFORMED

Prof. Martin H. Cressey – Cambridge, England
Rev. Dr. Karel Blei – Haarlem, Netherlands
Prof. Sandor Czegledy – Debrecen, Hungary
Rev. Richmond Smith – Geneva, Switzerland
Rev. Dr. C. Ronald Goulding – Washington, DC, USA

BAPTIST

Rev. Dr. Rudolf Thaut – Federal Republic of Germany
Prof. Jannes Reiling – Bilthoven, Netherlands
Prof. Penrose St. Amant, – Rüschlikon, Switzerland
Prof. Günter Wagner – Rüschlikon, Switzerland
INTRODUCTION

Between 1969 and 1973 a variety of contacts at various levels between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Baptist World Alliance led to a mutually agreed proposal that the two world families of churches should engage in theological conversations. At an official planning consultation held in Rüschlikon, Switzerland, February 3, 1973, a documented plan of work was approved by representatives appointed by the WARC and the BWA.

The motivation of the conversations was agreed:

"Both Baptist and Reformed traditions recognize a common root in their history, which runs back through the Reformation period, the early Fathers of the church, to the New Testament. It is interesting to observe that historically the theology of Calvin and Zwingli has had a very great influence on the development of Baptist thinking since the Reformation. It can also be noted that both traditions share a common emphasis on the normative source of Holy Scripture, the central place of the Word of God, the witness to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, the sovereignty of grace. Further, both traditions have a common concern to live out today a witness and service in the obedience of the faith. At the same time obvious theological and historical differences come to mind. Because of the deepgoing divergence in theology and practice between Baptist and Reformed traditions and because of our close kinship it would seem very important that we explore together the nature of our disagreement and how best we may overcome our differences."

"Further relevant aspects may be noted as the widespread concern in many Reformed churches about the doctrine and practice of baptism (infant baptism, believers' baptism); the emergence of church union consultations and indeed one union now consummated in North India in which Baptist churches are fully involved; and further to all this there is the basic importance of investigating a theological problem which is central to the ecclesiological question, confronting the whole ecumenical movement, on the nature and understanding of the church. Both traditions are fully aware that this bilateral conversation should be
properly carried out in the awareness of our responsibility within the one Family of the People of God."

Possible subjects were recommended:

"a) The identification of possible areas of agreement:

The centrality of Scripture as witnessing to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord, the trinitarian basis of theology, the emphasis on the Headship of Christ in the church. The interrelationship of justification and sanctification; the meaning and implications of conversion; Christian witness in church, state and culture. Again the responsibility of the Christian church in the field of social ethics and the witness of the Christian at every level, in his life, in the world, etc."

"b) Specific Topics:

1. *Baptism and its context*
   Gospel
   Christology, person and work of Christ
   Atonement
   Holy Spirit
   Conversion and faith
   Church membership

2. *The doctrine and structures of the church*
   Community
   Ministries
   Order
   Church and State."

(Reformed/Baptist Planning Consultation, February 3, 1973)
At a subsequent planning session, held in Rüschlikon, June 20, 1974, it was reported that the recommendations of the 1973 meeting had been approved by the Executive Committees of the WARC and the BWA. Agreement was also reached that the conversations proper should begin in December 1974. Concerning the structure of the discussion, it was felt that the group appointed for the conversations should as a whole have the freedom to determine the particular subjects and the approach within the terms of their mandate.

This controlled the general nature of the papers presented at the first full session, December 14-18, 1974, held in the Baptist Theological Seminary, Rüschlikon, Switzerland: *The Distinctive Elements of the Baptist and Reformed Heritages Today*, authors respectively, Dr. Ernest Payne (Baptist), England, and Dr. Sandor Czegledy (Reformed), Hungary; *The Baptist and Reformed Perspectives in Understanding the Gospel*, authors respectively, Dr. Günter Wagner (Baptist), Switzerland, and Dr. Karel Blei (Reformed), Netherlands. Detailed discussion of these papers provided both direction and specificity for the ensuing three years of work: "Our discussions have been most stimulating and illuminating when we have seen these traditional 'loci' of theological reflection in the context of wider questions about the world and God's purpose in it through our Lord Jesus Christ that confront all the churches in our time" (Interim report, 1974).

The same meeting articulated clearly the agreed aim of the projected discussions: "We have noted in our mandate that the Executive Committees of the BWA and WARC recognize it as 'very important that we explore together the nature of our disagreement and how best we may overcome our differences.' The mandate speaks also of baptism as presenting 'a theological problem which is central to the ecclesiological question, confronting the whole ecumenical movement, on the nature and understanding of the church.' A programme of the above nature and methodology will have the threefold aim (a) to provide our member churches with information on our present theological positions, (b) to do this in a way which helps to overcome the differences which still exist along with so much that we have in common, and (c) to treat our
particular convictions about baptism in a way which illuminates their relations to, and consequential nature within, a total understanding of theology and of the church’s task today."

The second session, September 7-11, 1975, Cartigny, Switzerland, had as its theme and work plan the following scheme: *The Christian Understanding of God’s Purpose for the World in our Lord Jesus Christ: Doctrine of God and Man.*

**General issues:**

Context (i): The Sovereignty of God, the Lordship of Christ, Creation and Redemption, Covenant, Relation between community and individual, Personal responsibility before God.

Context (ii): The way in which divergent views on these matters are derived from the same Scriptures, the way in which views on these matters both determine and are influenced by basic understandings of man and history.

**Particular issues:** The relation of baptism to covenant: the 'newness' of the new covenant as expressed in baptism and the Lord's Supper.

**Theme papers:**

(i) *The understanding of covenant in the Old and New Testaments* (Paper by Dr. Jannes Reiling, reaction by Dr. Sandor Czegledy).


The third session, March 26-30, 1976, Rüschlikon, centred on two distinct presentations:

A. *The Church in the world but not of it*

(The church as a holy community in relation to justification; world affirming and world denying forms of Christian thought and life; the
The church in its local fellowship; the church in its universal dimension and mission. Paper by the Rev. Prof. Martin H. Cressey, reaction by Dr. Penrose St. Amant).

B. *A detailed survey and analysis of recent statements on baptism and church membership* from a selection of Baptist and Reformed sources, prepared jointly by Dr. Karel Blei and Dr. Günter Wagner.

The fourth session, December 10-14, 1976, Rüchlikon, dealt with Baptist and Reformed thinking in the light of their understanding of the work and gift of the Holy Spirit.

Specific theses were presented on the following issues:

A. *The church: with special emphasis on the local and universal church,*
Dr. Karel Blei and Dr. Jannes Reiling;

B. *The ministry: with special emphasis on charism and office,* the Rev. Prof. Martin H. Cressey and Dr. Rudolf Thaut;

C. *Baptism: with special emphasis on Spirit and baptism in the complex of initiation,* Dr. Sandor Czegledy and Dr. Günter Wagner.

At this fourth session, the various reports of previous sessions were further examined and within the scope of the original mandate the ensuing final report was worked out and agreed for submission to the WARC and the BWA.

Readers of the report will be aware of the developing processes of the discussion which inevitably emerged from a debate centred in a relatively small intimate group and spread over a four-year timespan. In the final editorial work on the report as a whole it was agreed that such obvious signs of theological growth should be allowed to stand. In this way the report has to be read not as it were in 'the flat' but with the dimension of 'depth,' taking note of those elements of seeming repetition which are never in themselves mere repetition but signposts marking our common pilgrimage in learning together.
THE CENTRALITY OF SCRIPTURE

Both the Reformed and the Baptist traditions share a common emphasis on Holy Scripture as the normative source for faith and practice. We have therefore attempted to subject our respective convictions and tenets to the biblical scrutiny in order to test their foundations in Scripture. In the course of our discussions, however, we have noticed again and again that biblical interpretation is more than just finding out "what the Bible says" and that we have to take into account various factors on the part of the interpreters.

The biblical revelation as the normative source (norma normans)

We have registered considerable agreement on what has been pointed out in one of the theme papers; that the Scriptures are always read through "spectacles," and that every theological opinion has not only "theological grounds", but also different (psychological, sociological, cultural, etc.) "causes," of which we have to be (and are more and more) aware. There was also agreement on the necessity to discriminate between what is read into the Scripture and what is objectively given in it. "The text has its own weight." Yet on this last point there is some difference of emphasis within each of our traditions. Some underline the difficulty of making that distinction, more than its necessity. Is not everyone ready to find his own opinion in the Scripture? Therefore, it is said, we must keep in close contact with Christians of other traditions; it is in the living interplay with them that we are mutually corrected. Others underline the necessity (despite the difficulty) of going back to the normative significance of the Scripture, the Scripture as itself "norma normans".

The interpretation of the Bible and of history in grappling with today's problems

In all ecumenical conversations the problem of biblical interpretation and of the lessons of history arises. Ours is no exception to this rule and much time has been spent on the subject. There is much common understanding in biblical and historical scholarship across the lines of
traditions and denominations. But the great question is always how the results of biblical and historical scholarship can be put to a good use in the situation of today. The problem of hermeneutics is universal and not even a specific Christian one. Yet for the Christian church which lives on the Word it is a very crucial issue.

The discussion of the concept of covenant led to the following consideration: in order to determine the relevance of a concept like 'covenant' for today we should begin to investigate what meaning it had for Israel in understanding its own place in the purpose of God and then address the same question to the history of Christian thought and practice. We should then proceed and see what help and guidance this would give us in grappling with the problems of our own day with regard to God's purpose for the world and the role of the church in that purpose.

A similar process was followed in our preliminary discussion of baptism. After some consideration of specific New Testament passages, e.g., Col. 2:11, Romans 4:11, 6:1-6, we discussed the meaning and practice of baptism in the concrete pastoral and missionary situations of our churches today. We found many common problems confronting our churches. All of them are set in an environment where they must present the gospel to secularized men and women or to those of other faiths. No longer can any church assume an identity between itself and its surrounding society.

We recognized further that this changed situation produces many perplexing pastoral issues in dealing with those who have some superficial link with the church or have been separated from a church with which they were related in childhood. The movement of individuals from one Christian group to another also poses questions which cannot easily be answered from our traditional theological positions.

These practical considerations enabled us to reconsider the classical Baptist and Reformed approaches to (A) ecclesiology, (B) baptism, and (C) to reflect upon the relationships between mission, church and baptism.
RECONSIDERATION OF CLASSICAL REFORMED AND BAPTIST APPROACHES

A. Mutual questioning of our ecclesiology

Our probing of ecclesiological questions included such issues as: people of God (cf. I Peter); the new covenant; the status of children in the church; the "holiness" of children according to I Cor. 7:14 ff.; the understanding of the church as mission; the boundaries of the church.

1. THE PEOPLE OF GOD

It cannot be overlooked that "people of God" is one of the names or images characterizing the church in the New Testament. It underlines the continuity of God's purpose in the discontinuity of history and thus raises the question not only of the connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament but also of the relationship between church and Israel. Where the designation occurs in I Peter, a diaspora situation and the mission of the church to proclaim the acts of God, who has brought his people to a new birth through the resurrection of Christ (I Peter 1:1, 2:9, 1:3), are envisaged. While the concept "people of God" as such does not contribute to the solution of the question "Volkskirche" versus "believers" or "gathered" church, it underlines the fact that also the believer under the new covenant belongs to a community of faith which is more than the sum-total of individual believers.

2. THE NEW COVENANT

We agree in seeing the "newness" of the new covenant in Jesus Christ himself, in the eschatological significance of his person and work and in the eschatological gift of the Spirit (cf. Heb. 3:10, I Cor. 11:23-25, Acts 2:33-39). This "newness" in Christ is expressed in forgiveness, "Law written in the heart" (Jer. 31:33) and is a kaine ktisis (new creature/creation, II Cor. 5:17).
We were not agreed whether *kaine ktisis* means primarily the "new individuals" or the "new mankind." Our different understandings of a text like this result in the Reformed emphasis on the community aspect of the church and the Baptist emphasis on "personalism."

3. THE STATUS OF CHILDREN OF BELIEVING PARENTS

While the Reformed tradition, with its practice of infant baptism, includes children as members of the church, Baptists emphasize that a person is not "born into a church," i.e. cannot be brought into membership by the role of the parents; rather he/she becomes a member by personally appropriating the gift of God's grace in faith.

We have gained greater understanding and appreciation of our different positions: Reformed Christians face the fact that the best care of the church and the family for the child by no means guarantees the growth of the child into a committed Christian. Baptists need to consider more seriously the blessings of a Christian family for a child and the child's faith before baptism as well as the continued challenge to and growth in faith after baptism. Both traditions have to face the problems arising for Christian nurture from a general weakening of family-life in many parts of the world.

4. THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY OF SALVATION (HEILSGEMEINDE) AND AS MISSION

Both Baptists and Reformed regard the church as community of salvation *and* as mission.

The Reformed tradition emphasizes the aspect of community of salvation and thus the thought of the church as also a mixed body (*corpus permixtum*, cf. Mt. 13:24-30, 47-50). It understands mission as an activity pervading all realms of life and society by the gospel.

The Baptist tradition emphasizes the aspect of mission (cf. "every Baptist a missionary" - Johann Gerhard Oncken) and the thought of the church as "gathered believers" committed to the task of
proclaiming the gospel to each individual (cf. Mt. 28:16-20). We also need to explore the relationship within each tradition between the concepts of church, of mission, and of baptism.

We are agreed that these emphases are not mutually exclusive but need to be seen as complementary and that we need mutual correction.

B. Mutual questioning of our baptismal teachings: baptism, grace and faith

Baptists and Reformed are in agreement as to the universal scope of the purpose of God and his gifts, the priority of God's grace and the nature of faith as a gift of his Spirit.

However, while we agree that grace is prevenient, we differ in our understanding of its consequences for the practice of baptism: Baptists see the manifestation of prevenient grace in the cross and resurrection of Christ while the rite of baptism belongs to the process of the appropriation of God's gift through faith.

The Reformed tradition emphasizes prevenient grace as manifested in infant baptism. Of course, this infant baptism implies the challenge to Christian education (Eph. 6:4) and Christian living (Rom. 6). The acceptance of this challenge to Christian living in many Reformed churches is expressed in a special act of confession of faith and confirmation.

We realize that the relationship of baptism and faith is a question of great importance for our dialogue. We agree that baptism and faith are related, but disagree as to the prerequisite of personal faith on the part of the baptized at the moment of baptism. Reformed churches see infant baptism as a sacramental expression of the grace of God, and therefore, if rightly practised, as a firm foundation for a growth to personal faith.

Baptists underline that the offer of God's grace in the gospel requires the response of personal faith and its confession in baptism.
(Act 2:37 ff.), and are thus constrained by their understanding of the New Testament to set the challenge of the gospel before those who are able in response to seek baptism of their own volition, though this decision of faith may be greatly helped by Christian nurture of children within the family of the church. From these positions we can arrive at a mutual respect for the intentions of our varied practices, even though we cannot yet reach a common mind as to the right way of fulfilling our discipleship together in today’s situation of mission. We shall need to explore further the implications of such mutual respect for church fellowship and cooperation.

C. The relationships between mission, church and baptism

God’s purpose for the world in Jesus Christ is his eternal will for the salvation of mankind. Therefore, from the perspective of Christian faith, it is possible to see this purpose at work in all the history and witness of the Old Testament. However difficult it is to determine the relation to Christ of specific aspects of the covenants, law or the priestly and prophetic ministries, we are agreed in tracing a continuing succession of faith from Abraham to Christ.

We see a preparation for Christ in all aspects of the vocation of Israel as the nation of priests, the people of God. When Christ came, he too in his teaching and ministry related God’s purposes to every aspect of human life.

The New Testament writers are able to apply to the new community gathered from all nations’ titles originally given to Israel as the covenant nation. Nevertheless, the New Testament emphasized the "newness" of what God has done in Christ and faith as the mode of reception for this new act of grace.

In the light of this New Testament witness we are agreed that the life of the church and its practice and ordinances should be directed to the bringing of men and women to the response of faith, as a mature and fully human reception of God’s grace.
MISSION, CHURCH AND BAPTISM

I. The church in the world today

Throughout the centuries the church has had the obligation to fulfil its mission under Christ. We agree that the situation we face in the world today provides a new context for agreement concerning this mission. Large numbers of our contemporaries in every country, and on all continents, are alienated from Christian faith or have not been adequately confronted with its claims, or, more likely, are indifferent to it.

In this specific missionary situation we find different – sometimes extreme – approaches to, and visions of, mission. There are those who conceive of mission almost exclusively in terms of saving individual souls and of church growth, with little interest in seeking to pervade all realms of life and society with the gospel. There are also those who understand mission almost exclusively in terms of social involvement. There are, thirdly, those whom the relativism of our time has affected so deeply that, though they have not rejected the Christian faith totally, they see their task only in terms of maintaining ethical values within a general religious context, at the expense of the uniqueness of the gospel.

But the churches today are struggling to find together a concept of mission which includes the individual, churchly and societal dimensions and proclaims the gospel in its uniqueness in a way properly responsive to the experience and convictions of our fellow men and women.

One of our chief difficulties is that it has become harder to distinguish between "believers" and "unbelievers." There are indeed those who declare their unbelief. There are also people who have not yet come to a point of full commitment in faith and yet may be called believers because of their relation to Jesus Christ through their traditional knowledge of him and the thought-patterns of their society. Such situations give us all, Reformed and Baptists, a special pastoral task.
II. Mission and baptism

Both our Reformed and Baptist traditions show a variety of attitudes and approaches to the problems referred to in the last two paragraphs. It has become clear in our conversations that we must seek ways for our churches to work together in the common mission of Christ. That is why we have placed our study of baptism in the wider context of the work of Christ and the mission and nature of the church. It is in the light of conclusions about the wider context that we can best approach our distinctive baptismal doctrines and practices; for we are agreed that they must not be treated in isolation and that our distinctive attitudes and approaches are not derived only from them.

III. Christ and his church

Christ is the head of the church, his body. The concept of the body of Christ implies an understanding of the church as the community of those who are included in Christ, i.e., those whose existence is determined by what has happened in and to the body of Jesus in the event of his cross and resurrection. It expresses the intimate unity of Christ and his church without obscuring the distinction of the church from Christ, and its subordination under him (cf. One Lord One Baptism, Faith and Order, 1960, p. 25). It is Christ who in his mercy takes the initiative, an initiative, however, which calls for the human response of faith. An objectivism which does not pay due attention to this human response is as objectionable as a subjectivism for which it is the only important factor.

Neither individually nor together are the existing denominations simply identical with the body of Christ. Nevertheless, there is a connection: it is in the empirical church bodies that the body of Christ becomes manifest.

IV. Baptism: act of God and act of man

God's gift of grace in Jesus Christ evokes the human response of faith. In baptism the merciful God and the believing and confessing man meet. God acts in baptism by laying hold of man, and man acts by
responding to the claims and promises of God's grace: in baptism man suffers death with Christ and is raised to a new life under the power of the living God, who liberates from sin and constantly renews by the Spirit. In this sense we agree that baptism is a powerful sign and an effective means of grace: in baptism administered with water, God himself, by his Spirit, is acting. As we look at baptism as being both act of God and act of man, we affirm the unity of the rite and the spiritual reality which it signifies.

V. Church and baptism

As the body of Christ, the church embodies the community of salvation-in-Christ (cf. Acts 2:47). Baptism is the sacrament of incorporation into Christ and therefore into his body, the church. It is more than admission into the membership of a concrete church organization. On the other hand, this incorporation into Christ cannot take place without admission into such a membership. In baptism man is united with both Christ and his body. Hence, rather than emphasizing in a negative, exclusive sense the proposition "extra ecclesiam nulla salus" (outside the church no salvation), we should affirm the positive content: "in the church salvation!" We can set no limits to the power of Christ: he is leading men to salvation in his own way. Yet this does not at all entitle us to hold baptism in contempt. It is not that Christ is bound to baptism as a means of grace, but we in our faith are. The Word became flesh (John 1:14); it is to proclaim and underline this fact, and as a consequence of it, arising from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus our Lord, that the church celebrates baptism as an outward, visible action. "God became man in Christ. God's revelation took place in history in a particular yet universally relevant event. The outward sign reflects this particularity" (Faith and Order, Louvain, 1971, p. 42).

VI. Baptism and faith

As to the dilemma of believers' baptism versus infant baptism, the Scriptures do not address themselves directly to that question. Furthermore, they are not a "code of law" but a book of proclamation. In
fact and directly the New Testament only speaks about those who come to baptism out of their own volition, confessing their personal faith (e.g., Acts 2:38, 41; 8:38). This is to be seen in the light of the missionary situation in which men hear the gospel for the first time and assent to it.

Those who reject infant baptism feel compelled to do so out of the conviction that the act of God in baptism is such (cf. IV) that it must be met, at the time of baptism, by an undoubtedly personal response of faith from the one baptized (cf. Rom. 10:9 ff.).

On the other hand, the New Testament makes it equally clear that the believing individual is not detached from the environment of faith. The "household" references (e.g., Acts 10:46, cf. v. 2; 16:15, 33; 18:8; I Cor. 1:16) neither prove nor disprove that children were involved in the so-called "household baptisms"; however, like other texts, they do show that an individual believer is always part of a believing community, and is supported in faith by fellow believers (cf. Mk. 2:5; I Peter 2:9).

It is this consideration that brings defenders of infant baptism to their point: they are convinced that the act of God in baptism (cf. IV) finds its response of faith not only from the one baptized but also from the community of faith, which includes a child's family; it is in this community, the church, that a child develops as a person to the point where, later in time, he or she personally appropriates the response of faith.

Modern patterns of life have weakened and often destroyed traditional family ties, with the result that sometimes the community of faith as a context of infant baptism is missing, thus making it in many cases problematic. The number of children brought to baptism has decreased, especially in urbanized areas. However, infant baptism, if rightly practised, does not intend to "sanctify" or "crown" natural ties, rather it puts them into another perspective, upon another basis. Where parents sincerely and faithfully wish their children to be baptized, a new sense of family solidarity and responsibility is established and grows.

The churches which are convinced that they are entitled only to practice believers' baptism should keep in mind that their practice
should not result from a disregard for the priority of God's grace and of
the receptive, and not creative, character of human faith, which has to
be expressed and confessed, not once for all, but again and again. The
churches which are convinced that they are entitled to practice infant
baptism should keep in mind that their practice should not result from
a disregard of the call for personal faith, which call is involved in God's
prevenient grace.

**VII. Baptismal practice in the future**

We find ourselves led, by our agreements so far, to confront
the difficult question whether Christians of Reformed and Baptist
convictions who are members in good standing of their churches could
recognize one another as both occupying the position of those who
have received and responded to the grace of God in baptism as this
grace is understood in the New Testament. Such a mutual recognition
could only arise from:

(i) an agreed understanding that a complex of elements, including
baptism with water in the name of the Trinity, public profession
of faith and admission to the Lord's Supper, are all parts of the
reception of and response to this grace of God;

(ii) the acceptance (still problematic) that this complex of elements
could find place in the life of any individual _either_ contemporaneously
in the act of believer's baptism, where profession of faith, water
baptism and communion come together in time, or over a period of
time, short or long, in which (infant) baptism, profession of faith (at
"confirmation" as it is often called), and admission to communion
follow one another as separable stages in a process.

We do not yet know how to answer fully this question that we are
led to face. Furthermore, such a mutual recognition would still leave
unresolved many questions, such as: whether the division in the stages in
time is, or is not, entirely in harmony with the New Testament; whether
infant baptism in itself admits to membership in Christ; whether delay
of baptism for the child of a Christian parent is in some way a failure to
minister God's grace as he intends it for children of Christian families,
and so on. Despite this agenda of questions, we consider that our own
dialogue and the changing situation in some of our churches are leading
us forward in a positive manner.

In this context Baptists consider it as a hopeful development that
in several Reformed churches a so-called "double practice" of baptism
(according to which believers' baptism is as legitimate as infant baptism)
is being discussed or (e.g., in the French Reformed Church) even has
been introduced.

Where in consequence of this "double practice" parents do not
ask for the baptism of their newborn child, an act of thanksgiving and
intercession on behalf of this child and its parents has a place in the
context of Christian worship. It is important that such an act should not
be so ordered as to give the impression of being a substitute for baptism.
Where in a church of "double practice" infant baptism is chosen, the
question arises why baptized children should not be admitted to the
Lord's Supper, and this is actually the tendency in several Reformed
churches. In the case of this admittance, however, the meaning and
functions of "confirmation" need reconsideration, within the unity of
the several stages of "initiation."

In the same context Reformed consider it as an important fact that
many Baptist churches admit other Christians, baptized as infants, to
the Lord's Supper on the basis of their personal faith in Christ and
when they are in good standing with their own churches, a practice
which is a de facto recognition of their Christian status. Cooperation
in mission frequently involves a similar de facto recognition. Likewise,
Reformed see it as a hopeful development that a few Baptist Unions
have expressed and even consummated membership in a larger church
fellowship which has adopted the "double practice" of infant and
believers' baptism for a united church without imposing it upon the
local congregation (e.g., Church of North India).

We see the question posed at the beginning of this section and the
changing situations described in it as part of the continual challenge
confronting our Reformed and Baptist traditions, which we believe,
under God, demands of us that we seek ways of overcoming those
differences which are still church-divisive between us. In the following concluding sections in thesis form we make our suggestions for this search and emphasize certain areas of concern in which further theological work is required.

THESES

THE HOLY, SPIRIT, BAPTISM AND MEMBERSHIP IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. Both in the Reformed and in the Baptist tradition, there has been emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing men and women to salvation and on baptism as the sign of this regenerating activity of God himself. Many questions have arisen concerning the work of the Spirit and the sign of baptism and their interrelation. Some, in both traditions, would say that baptism has, in the words of R.E. Neighbour, "utility simply as a beautiful and expressive symbol of certain basal facts in the redemptive mission of our Lord Jesus Christ" (quoted by Dr. Beasley-Murray in Baptism Today and Tomorrow, 1966, p. 14). Others speak rather of baptism as sign and seal or effective sign.

2. In our discussions we have made progress in relating these two viewpoints by considering that a sign exists for the purpose of communication. We therefore asked ourselves to whom the sign of baptism is addressed. Our answer is twofold. On the one hand, it is addressed to man with good news from God, of incorporation into Christ and the benefits of his death and resurrection. On the other hand, it is addressed from man to God with a confession of faith, by the church in all cases and also by the baptizand in the case of believer's baptism. It is precisely this dual sign-character of baptism which leads us to affirm its character as action of God by his Holy Spirit: for it is only by the Spirit that Jesus can be confessed as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3) and it is only by the Spirit that man is enabled to perceive the meaning of Jesus Christ for him (Jn. 16:13-14). This, we believe, is the
reason why in the New Testament baptism is not presented as a "bare" or "mere" sign, a beautiful and expressive symbol and no more, but is intimately associated with such realities as the forgiveness of sins, union with Christ, and the reception of the Spirit (cf. Acts 2:38; 19:2; 22:16; Col. 2:12; Rom. 6:1-11). The sign is not to be separated from the thing signified.

3. **Hence, Christian baptism is to be understood in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit.** In baptism, administered with water, the Holy Spirit himself is acting, who, as the supreme agent of the baptismal event, imparts to man the benefits of Christ's atonement. Baptism is a door to the treasure house of all the gifts of the Spirit prepared for God's people. But the act of entering through this door is also made possible by the Spirit who gives faith and unites with Christ. If a man does not possess the spirit of Christ he does not belong to him. Hence baptism in the name of Christ cannot be other than baptism through the Spirit.

4. **Baptism is a powerful sign of God's saving grace and, by virtue of the action of the Holy Spirit in it, an effective instrument of grace, actually imparting what it promises:** the forgiveness of sins, union with Christ in his death and resurrection, regeneration, elevation to the status of sonship, membership in the church, the body of Christ, new life in the Spirit, the earnest of the resurrection of the body. The New Testament looks upon the operation of the Spirit in baptism as the application of the fullness of saving grace.

5. **Because of the Spirit's action, baptism is effective through personal response.** While affirming the priority of the Holy Spirit as the ultimate agent of baptism, we also affirm man's response, that is, his faith, his confession, his obedience, which, too, are works of the Spirit. We refrain from defining the interaction between the Spirit and man's spirit in terms that go beyond Romans 8:16 ("the Spirit of God joins with our spirit in testifying that we are God's children," N.E.B.), but we affirm that it is precisely because it is the Holy Spirit that is at work in baptism, that man's decision, his faith and confession, his submission
to God's claim upon his whole being is indispensable. Baptism is not an automatic vehicle of salvation nor does the Holy Spirit act as a physical force. "An objectivism which does not pay due attention to this human response is as objectionable as a subjectivism for which it is the only important factor" (see p. 11 above).

6. Our conversations about the work of the Holy Spirit in baptism have impressed us anew with the need for mutually understanding our specific traditions and for refraining from imputing unspiritual motives to each other. The Reformed praise of God's prevenient grace is quite other than a concern for perpetuating the crumbling "Volkskirche" structures, while the Baptist insistence on personal decision is quite other than mere individualism, or the zeal of the servants in the parable to separate, before the harvest, the wheat from the tares. The Reformed emphasis on the priority of God's grace in baptism and the Baptist accent on man's active participation in the baptismal event are, in a sense, complementary and as such contribute to ecumenical rapprochement.

7. Our conversations have made us realize again that the ecclesiological and sociological context of baptismal practice must always be carefully considered. Where Christianity is a tiny minority, Christian identity is easier to define, and the dividing line between the church and the world, believers and unbelievers, is sharply drawn. Hence initiation into the Christian community is less complex in that situation than it is where traditions carry the rich heritage and also the ballast of two millennia, or where the process of secularization poses a challenge not only to the Reformed practice of baptism but also to the realization of the Baptist concept of a "gathered community" of believers. Baptismal practice is also affected by the fact that family life today has in many places been deeply changed by modern individualism and technological civilization.

8. While we affirm the New Testament view of baptism as a once-for-all incorporation into the church, the body of Christ, we propose to view baptism in the context of the Spirit's total action upon the total life of the individual and the Christian community. Baptism, at whatever age administered, requires Christian nurture in the spiritual fellowship of
the Christian family and of the congregation. This Christian nurture is as much the work of the Spirit as is baptism. To the question how the work of the Spirit in baptism is related to the work of the Spirit in Christian nurture our respective answers are different.

The Baptists hold that the work of the Spirit in Christian nurture begins before baptism and that baptism should only take place when the Spirit has engendered the beginnings of an answer of faith, however immature that answer may be.

The Reformed recognize this as an appropriate order of events in the case of adult converts, but also believe that the Spirit's work of nurture can appropriately take place after his work in baptism for those who are brought to receive baptism within the community of faith.

It thus becomes clear that the remaining disagreement between Baptists and Reformed should be discussed not primarily in terms of the meaning of baptism and its relation to the work of the Spirit, but rather around the question of how and where it may, in faithfulness to the Scriptural witness, be affirmed that the Holy Spirit is at work.

9. In this same context of the Spirit's total work, while the Baptists also envisage the Christian community of faith, including the family of the baptizand, as the appropriate climate for the growth of faith, the Reformed churches attach special importance to the new covenant which, they hold, encompasses believers as well as their children. With regard to baptism, there is no vicarious faith, and yet the faith of the church, which precedes that of the individual, is the soil in which the faith of the individual is rooted, because the work of the Holy Spirit pervades the whole life of the church. We propose to regard the children of believers - Baptist and Reformed - as being involved in a process of preparation for the full privileges and responsibilities of membership in the church of Christ: they are already within the operational sphere of the Holy Spirit. This statement is in no way intended to obscure the general offer of the gospel but rather to emphasize the blessings of a Christian family.
10. Those who hold that this process of preparation is consummated in a composite rite of confession, baptism with water, admission to the Lord's Supper at one specific point of time and those who embody the significant elements of this process by way of a temporal differentiation between its successive acts and phases may jointly recognize that, in either case, the Spirit willing, the result is actual membership in the church of Christ in the full New Testament sense of the word "member" (cf. p. 13 above).

11. We are thankful to God for this mutual recognition of each other's good standing as Christians and for the fact that many Baptist and Reformed churches practise mutual admission to the communion of the Lord's Supper. On the basis of such mutual recognition, including in many cases open communion, Baptists and Reformed are being led to take much more seriously each other's convictions concerning baptism. We have already noted on the one hand the discussion or introduction of a so-called "double practice" in several Reformed churches (see p. 13 above). On the Baptist side, while recognition and admission to communion is generally grounded not on the fact of (infant) baptism but on the profession of faith of the Reformed believer, we note statements by some Baptist theologians, arguing that baptism is not an appropriate way of receiving into membership of a Baptist church those Christians who have already made a public confession of faith in Christ and have entered into the privileges and responsibilities of membership in some other Christian community.

12. Our conversations have not produced any arguments or excuses for indiscriminate baptism or for the relaxation of baptismal discipline. Reformed churches in particular should do their utmost to extricate baptism from the maze of unbiblical notions, misconceptions and false expectations which, in our secularized societies, often tend to distort and obscure the meaning of the sacrament. The majestic meaning of baptism - dying and rising with Christ, transference and assignment to his Lordship, the duty of discipleship, and commitment to service - should be brought with uncompromising clarity before the candidates for baptism or the parents. It must also be made clear that the baptism of infants without careful Christian nurture in the family and in the
Christian community is not only meaningless but also against the will of God. At the same time, the Reformed churches should make pastoral provision for the growing frequency of adult baptism - the natural practice in a missionary situation.

In matters of baptism, as in all the other tasks of Christian life, both Baptists and Reformed must seek to obey the guidance of the Holy Spirit who, in the midst of the upheavals of this era, may employ the means of grace in new and unaccustomed ways. With this thought in mind we now turn to consider the ministry of the church of Jesus Christ and the ministries in the church, local and universal.

THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE MINISTRIES IN THE CHURCH

1. Along with many other churches Reformed and Baptists agree that "the church as the communion of the Holy Spirit is called to proclaim and prefigure the Kingdom of God by announcing the gospel to the world and by being built up as the body of Christ." This requires "a variety of activities, both permanent and provisional, spontaneous and institutional. To fulfil these needs the Holy Spirit gives diverse and complementary gifts to the church. These gifts are given by God to individuals for the common good of his people and their service ..." (Faith and Order Paper No 73, World Council of Churches, One Baptism, One Eucharist And a Mutually Recognized Ministry, p. 32, paras. 11 and 12).

The particular ministry of preaching the Word and administering the sacraments is thus seen in relation to the apostolate, the furtherance of which is committed by Jesus Christ our Lord to the people of God as a whole.

2. Agreement between Reformed and Baptists likewise exists on the point that already in the New Testament out of the multiplicity of gifts and ministries particular ministries become prominent, whose function
it is to gather the Christian fellowship together through the preaching and teaching of the Word, to build up the church, to lead and train for service. Also related to this function is the presidency at the celebration of the Lord's Supper and at the observance of baptism (administration of the sacraments).

According to biblical interpretation today, no one structure of the ministry of the church can claim to be the one New Testament pattern of ministry. But from the New Testament the general principles may be derived for the ordering of the life of the people of God according to the gospel for the furthering of the service of the Christian community in the world.

Both Baptists and Reformed are averse to the sacramental concept of a ministerial priesthood and rather put the emphasis on the functional nature of the pastoral office and of the particular ministries. Together they reject the doctrine that a particular understanding of spiritual office and succession in office, bound with the historic form of the episcopate, belongs to the being of the church and is therefore essential to it.

3. In both Reformed and Baptist traditions the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments belong usually to the ministry of the pastor. Neither family of churches however ties these acts of service exclusively to the ordained ministry.

In the majority of Reformed churches, when an exception is admitted to the usage stated in the first sentence of paragraph 3, such a decision is juridically affirmed in the relevant council or court of the church in which the ministers and elders participate. Among Baptists and Congregationalists what is required is delegation by the local congregation since the congregation has and exercises in principle responsibility for all ministries. Usually it entrusts its pastor with the discharge of these particular tasks, but they are also frequently entrusted to lay people.

4. The function of presiding over the affairs of the congregation is in Reformed churches usually linked with the office of the pastor. Among Baptists it may be entrusted to the pastor, and there are places
where this system is customary. But in principle among both Reformed and Baptists the various ministries on which responsibility rests for the building up of the congregation are so distinct that they can be entrusted to different persons, according to the gifts of the Spirit.

A distribution of ministries is not only grounded in the pragmatic concern for the division of labour (Acts 6:1 ff.) but above all in the understanding of the nature of the whole church as the body of Christ, in which the work of the Holy Spirit and the service of the church cannot be separated one from the other. All ministries in the church are charismatic in nature, and all spiritual gifts are given for the common good (I Cor. 12: 7), "to equip God's people for work in his service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12, N.E.B.).

5. While the doctrine concerning episcopal succession is rejected by Reformed and Baptists, there exists among both Baptists and Reformed in particular areas a type of ministry which superintends a number of individual congregations; among Baptists this ministry is never designated by the title "bishop," nor does it have juridical authority.

For both Reformed and Baptists, encounter with episcopally ordered churches can usefully raise the question as to the beneficial role of the 'pastor pastorum' (pastor of the pastors) in the life of the church for the encouragement of the ministry.

THE CHURCH – LOCAL AND UNIVERSAL

1. The one church belongs to the one Lord. It is built, assembled and sustained by him. The "ekklesia" is the one holy universal Christian church. It is not an idea which floats invisibly over earthly reality; for the Word which sustains it became flesh (John 1:14).

2. The church is first and foremost an event, rather than an institution; the church "exists" in that it continually "happens," namely where the Lord effectively exercises his rule and where it is recognized and accepted; i.e., where the Word is proclaimed and believed, where the sacraments are administered and received, where the communion with
the Lord and with each other is celebrated and upheld, and where the church in the name and in the power of the Lord goes out in witness and service. The purpose of the institutional elements of the life of the church is to give form and continuity to the events of the Spirit.

3. **The one holy universal Christian church becomes concrete in the local congregation.** The local congregation is not a sub-department of the one church of Christ, but manifests and represents it. This is generally recognized today, as e.g. by the Roman Catholic Church at its Second Vatican Council: "The church of Christ is truly present in all local gatherings of believers" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, No 26). The local congregation cannot be bypassed by those who want to belong to the church of Christ, for this is where the church "happens." In the New Testament "ekklesia" frequently is the designation of the local congregation and as such it occurs in the plural as well (e.g., Acts 16:5; Rom. 16:4, 16; I Cor. 7:18; Rev. 1:4).

4. **At the same time the local congregation is necessarily related to other local congregations.** In itself, it is not the universal church of Christ. The local congregation which isolates itself from its sister congregations impairs the character of the true church, and becomes sectarian. The local congregation cannot monopolize the Lord for itself. Such isolation, moreover, would cloud its vision with regard to the world as the one great field of mission. This call for mission unites the local churches and makes them interdependent. The New Testament makes clear how congregations were in contact with each other. The collection, for instance, which Paul organized for the church of Jerusalem, expressed the common ties which united the churches in Macedonia with the one in Jerusalem (I Cor. 16:1-4; II Cor. 8:1-9; Gal. 2:9 ff.).

5. **Thus the wider church relationships** (area, national, regional, worldwide) **have ecclesiological significance.** Church "happens" not only where Christians gather as a congregation, but also where congregations meet as such or through their appointed representatives. There also the one Lord builds his one church. It is obvious that, if the local congregation needs an institutional form, this also goes for the wider gatherings of congregations. Just as the local congregation is not simply a sub-department, the wider church relationships are not simply a sum of
their parts. The local congregation may be the specific manifestation of the one holy universal Christian church, but it is not the only one. Local church life should be receptive not only of encouragement through the wider church relationships but also of criticism from their side, as in their turn local churches can bring encouragement and criticism to the wider church relationships.

6. Baptists have always emphasized the church as the local congregation. The Reformed, without disregarding the special significance of the local congregation, attribute to the "wider councils" (presbytery, synod) which represent the church on the regional and national levels, their own specific value. If the latter is stressed too much, there is the danger of centralism: general rules and arrangements might dominate local church life and stifle it. Encounter with Baptists can help them to recognize this danger and to avoid it.

7. The Baptists too know the wider relationships on various levels: the national union/convention, the world alliance, for the purpose of common service and witness. Common service and witness as such have ecclesiological significance, and yet Baptists tend to attach to the wider relationships only pragmatic importance. They fear ecclesial superstructures above the local level. This could cause a failure in the understanding and appreciation of the fullness of the body of Christ in the world and thus result in missionary colonialism and ghetto-like existence; there is the danger of isolation and thus of spiritual poverty and myopia: the danger of exchanging the Holy Spirit for a club-mentality. Encounter with the Reformed can help them to recognize this danger and to avoid it.

We do not wish to end on a note of such mutual warnings of danger! We rejoice together in our membership of the one church of Jesus Christ and we close our report and our fourth and final meeting with praise and thanks to him for bringing us together and for showing us more of his gospel and his grace.
III. Report of the Evaluation Group

PREFACE

In the John Knox International Reformed Centre in Geneva this week, December 6-10, 1982, eight Reformed and Baptist theologians have held a meeting. Such an event only has importance because all over the world church members and Christian parents face the difficulty of introducing their neighbours and their children to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In the Reformed and Baptist churches this introduction to the gospel has always involved baptism and church membership, but it is no longer easy to convey the meaning of these in today’s world.

Over four years, from 1973 to 1977, a Reformed and Baptist group prepared a report for the Baptist World Alliance and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches on the developing common understanding between them of the churches’ task in mission and of the meaning of baptism and of belonging to the church. During this week those who met at the John Knox Centre reviewed this report in the light of comments from member bodies of the two Alliances. They have sent their comments to the executive committees of the Alliances, dealing with the topics of mission, the church and baptism. They have also submitted recommendations for further conversations and study and the Draft of a letter which the Alliances might send out so as directly to win the attention of church members and Christian parents. It is the hope of the group that member churches of the two Alliances will themselves strengthen existing cooperation and look for ways of preventing the differences between Baptists and Reformed from keeping them apart. Thus they will be better able to offer a common contribution to the witness and service of the whole church of Jesus Christ.

Most of those who were in Geneva for this meeting had participated in the earlier conversations. They remembered with gratitude the work of Dr. Rudolf Thaut, the Baptist co-chairman of those conversations, who died in 1982.
INTRODUCTION

From 1973 to 1977 representatives of the BWA and the WARC met for a series of theological conversations on several topics already mutually agreed. Specific subjects were: Centrality of Scripture; Reconsideration of Classical Reformed and Baptist Approaches; Mission, Church and Baptism; The Holy Spirit, Baptism and membership in the Church of Christ; The Ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ and the Ministries in the Church; The Church - Local and Universal. At the conclusion of the conversations an agreed final report was submitted to the BWA and to the WARC with the request that the findings of the report be sent to their respective constituencies for reaction and comment.

A group of theologians from the BWA and the WARC, most of whom had participated throughout the original conversations, met in Geneva, December 6-10, 1982, to evaluate the responses.

Before dealing with several substantive theological and practical issues which have emerged we wish first to comment on the process of discussion and reception on the part of the churches involved. We record with a sense of gratitude and encouragement that the majority of responses have shown a basic approval of the direction, methodology and content of the work. There are however various critical questions which remain and these are developed later in this report.

We are grateful that the report was made available in English, French and German and widely distributed. We had requested that the local
churches, wherever possible, might translate the document into other languages. In some cases this was done, e.g., in Czechoslovakia. Several theological articles appeared in English, French, German and Spanish. And there was and still is evidence of general interest in the continuing demand for further copies of the report, including bulk orders. And yet we must ask ourselves, why did we not receive a greater number of official reactions? The number of responses received was 22 in all from both Baptist and Reformed sources.

It is not difficult to point to certain contributing factors. The theological pluralism of our age does not make it easy for churches to pronounce authoritatively on doctrinal issues. The fact that only two replies came from Asia and Africa and none from Latin America indicates a genuine deficiency in our plan of operation. We can only assume that the European composition of the group and its consequent agenda had an inevitably limited appeal. We are also aware that the task of making a careful study of a theological report can impose impossible demands on smaller churches, often in minority situations with limitations on both personnel and time.

On the credit side, we must note that the original report found a positive echo in a variety of situations, e.g., in teaching programmes in theological seminaries, in pastoral conferences, and in discussions which centred on the doctrine of baptism in various bilateral conversations and in preparatory work for certain Faith and Order studies.

Because of the nature of the continuing problems, inherent in diverse understandings especially of baptism, we would urge upon both the BWA and the WARC the need to consider carefully how best these basic issues can be further examined in the interest of closer relationships between our Christian World Communions for the greater good of the One Church of Jesus Christ. Arising out of this common concern we call attention to the final Faith and Order document on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, recently published and known as the Lima Text*, which is now before the Churches for their consideration.

*Faith and Order Paper No 111, WCC, Geneva, 1982*
MISSION

We reaffirm our emphasis on the mission of the church as the context of any meaningful dialogue on church and baptism. Yet we feel that this rather general statement should be specified in terms of the situation in which the world finds itself today. It is not only true that large numbers of our contemporaries are alienated from the Christian faith: the corporate life of humankind is at stake, threatened as it is by war, hunger, poverty and discrimination of all kinds. This world situation does not make dialogue between church families meaningless but pleads for a stronger emphasis on what we have in common as church families with a view to our common mission in the world today.

The mission of the church is at the same time outreach ('Sendung') and gathering ('Sammlung'); the church is an instrument of witness to God's salvation and a community where God's salvation is experienced and celebrated. The phrase 'community of salvation' ('Heilsgemeinde') used in the Report p. 14 could cover both aspects and this double reference was not stated clearly enough.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHURCH

Questions have been asked concerning the use in the Report of the New Testament image of the body of Christ and its members. We did not intend to use this image in a rigid manner without reference to other biblical images (see Thesis 8 on page 23: "While we affirm the New Testament view of baptism as a once-for-all incorporation into the church, the body of Christ, we propose to view baptism in the context of the Spirit's total action upon the total life of the individual and the Christian community").

Thus the insistence of the Reformed participants that the baptism of infants implies that they are truly members of the church does not
prevent a recognition that there are stages of growth towards Christian maturity, including the decisive step by which an individual enters into the full privilege and responsibilities of his or her membership. The Reformed participants prefer to put the matter in this way rather than speaking of a provisional membership but they recognize the point made by the word 'provisional.'

Such recognition of the need to avoid rigidity in applying the image 'body of Christ' also affects the way in which decisions are to be reached about admission to the Lord's Supper. The criteria to be applied are those of I Cor. 11.27 f., not those of an external discipline. With regard to admission to the Lord's Table both Reformed and Baptists have no unified thinking as to the participation of children of Christian parents. Theory and practice vary so much on this point that serious consideration ought to be given by both traditions to this issue.

To some Baptists the suggestions for mutual recognition in para. VII (ii) on page 19 of the Report are not found satisfactory. They would rather receive persons brought up in faith in e.g., a Reformed church on the ground of their faith. We feel that such a solution might mean an escape from the problem of admitting people from other churches into membership rather than a genuine solution. At any rate further work is needed on two points:

a) Baptists ought to consider whether it is theologically tenable to reject an act of infant baptism which has taken place within the fellowship of the church (responsible baptism) and

b) both Baptists and Reformed ought to grapple with the question of whether and if so, how, faith without baptism could be a theologically justifiable initiation into the church.
Children in the purpose of God

We agree that children are born under the grace of God. This is acknowledged by the Reformed churches in their practice of infant baptism and by the Baptist churches in their practice of the blessing of infants and the dedication of parents.

Some Baptists have found it unsatisfactory to regard children of Christian parents as being outside the church and are considering enlisting such children as provisional members (catechumens) of the Church. This is, however, not general practice, and requires further serious consideration by Baptists.

Some Reformed parents, in situations where 'double practice' has been introduced, do not seek baptism for their newborn children. In our Report it was left (p. 19) as one of many unresolved questions "Whether delay of baptism for the child of a Christian parent is in some way a failure to minister God's grace as He intends it for children of Christian families." We emphasize that like the statement in para. 9 page 23 this question "is in no way intended to obscure the general offer of the gospel but rather to emphasize the blessing of a Christian family," which Baptists express differently through services of blessing and dedication.

It is noticeable that in the service books of some Reformed churches published since our Report "acts of thanksgiving and intercession on behalf of a child and its parents" (see Report page 20) are included, with the additional intention of meeting the pastoral needs of a situation in which the church does not feel that infant baptism can appropriately be offered. In a secularized society some parents wish to express their gratitude for the birth of a child but have no clear understanding of the Christian faith. In order to welcome their seeking, however inarticulate, churches have sought to provide a suitable act of worship but have taken care to distinguish this from the sacramental act of baptism. This practice reflects the agreement between Reformed and Baptists in the rejection of indiscriminate baptism (para. 12 on page 24).
Ministry

We realize that the Theses on Ministry (Report p. 25-26) touch briefly on some issues which in other bilateral conversations are of central importance (e.g., the references to episcopal succession in Thesis 5 on page 26). We ask those who have raised questions on this point to recognize that each bilateral conversation needs to be carried on in the awareness that other conversations are happening at the same time. We anticipate that both Reformed and Baptists will continue or engage in such conversations with Christians of other traditions who will raise for discussion the issues of apostolicity and ministerial succession. The issue will also need to be pursued in responding to the Lima text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry.

It is in such a wider context that Baptists and Reformed will most readily discover their common inheritance in understanding special ministries in the setting of New Testament teaching about the ministry of Christ in and through the whole church. This common inheritance ought to be studied so that we may together make an important contribution to the debate on all the questions which concern ministry.

The Church Local and Universal

Some Presbyterian comments have re-affirmed the authority of the wider councils of the church while some Baptist comments have insisted on the autonomy of the local church. On these important questions we believe that the statement in Thesis 5 on page 28 is a genuine reconciliation of the traditional voices: "Local church life should be receptive not only of encouragement through the wider church relationships but also of criticism from their side, as in their turn local churches can bring encouragement and criticism to the wider church relationships."
BAPTISM

Salvation, Church and Baptism

When baptism is discussed in the context of salvation, mission and church, some issues need clarification. They concern the relationship of baptism and salvation and of baptism and church membership.

(i) The question has been asked whether baptism is necessary for salvation. The New Testament does not address itself to this question in so many words. It is, however, clear from New Testament testimony that there is no salvation without faith. On the other hand it is equally clear that God in His grace has the initiative and that man in his faith responds to the promises and claims of God's grace. Not all God's ways to salvation are known to us but we are given the certainty of finding salvation in the communion with Christ. Baptism is the sign of that communion and thus strengthens that certainty.

(ii) The Report has caused some respondents to raise the question whether baptism is necessary for membership in the church of Christ. Sometimes the question is answered negatively, e.g., when it is said that "those who are not baptized as believers" can be accepted as church members on the basis of "the fact that they are 'believers.'" The New Testament does not provide an unequivocal answer to this question. Its evidence suggests that the normal entrance into the church is by way of baptism. Baptism is God's gift to his church. The church is not only an invisible reality but also and essentially a visible community. Baptism is the God-given way of entering into that community.

Baptism and the Word

The emphasis on prevenient grace in the Report has provoked some serious questions concerning the part played by the preaching of the
Word. This gives us reason to restate our position on this subject.

As Baptists and Reformed we agree in confessing God’s prevenient grace. For the Reformed the emphasis on the priority of God’s grace is one of the (not the only!) traditional arguments in favour of infant baptism. For the Baptists, however, the same emphasis on that priority is one of their arguments against infant baptism; within the Reformed tradition Karl Barth strongly supported that position in his emphasizing Jesus Christ as the only Sacrament. Here the spiritual affinity between the Reformed and the Baptist traditions shows very clearly and there is reason to believe that a further exploration of Barth’s position might open up new areas of agreement.

We agree in stating (as several respondents to our Report do) that God’s prevenient grace is pre-eminently manifested in the Cross and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and in emphasizing the proclamation of the Gospel as witness and sign of that prevenient grace. In fact baptism follows the hearing of the gospel.

We agree that the proclamation of the Word intends to create faith. Hence the relationship between faith and baptism - which, when viewed in the context of prevenience, seems to have caused some misunderstandings - is included in the relationship of baptism and the Word. Faith is the connection between the proclamation of the Word and baptism.

**Baptism and the Spirit**

Some comments, especially from the Baptist side, criticize the ‘sacramentalist’ language of the Report; e.g. where it states that "baptism is a powerful sign and an effective means of grace." Here some want to distinguish more clearly between the rite of baptism and God’s action. Can baptism be linked with forgiveness of sins so directly as the Report suggests?

We ourselves want to point to the actual work of the Spirit. The first work of the Spirit is creating faith by the proclamation of the gospel.
That proclamation is itself a human work as well and used as such by the Spirit. Why should we presuppose that the Spirit cannot use special rites such as baptism for His purpose?

In the New Testament, Spirit and baptism are clearly related. According to Paul’s thinking water baptism and Spirit baptism coincide. "We were all brought into one body by baptism, in the one Spirit" (I. Cor. 12, 13). According to Acts this does not mean that they always coincide in time. On the one band we read that the gift of the Spirit comes after the reception of baptism (Acts 8, 14-17). On the other hand we hear that the Spirit is already given before baptism, and it is the preceding gift of the Spirit which in that case is the motive for baptism (Acts 10, 44-48).

Also we find a situation in which baptism and the reception of the Spirit do virtually coincide (Acts 19, 5-6). Of course, this does not mean that baptism as such is identical with the gift of the Spirit. But neither can baptism and the gift of the Spirit be divorced. A connection is presupposed. Where baptism is being administered one is allowed to expect the gift of the Spirit; and where the Spirit is received, baptism should not be omitted.

We cannot find evidence in Scripture for a baptism in the Spirit as a later and distinct complement of baptism in water. But we stress that the work of the Spirit is not restricted to initiation and incorporation in Christ. On the contrary, initiation is also initiation in a life in the Spirit in which the fruit of the Spirit is manifested and the manifold gifts are received to the benefit and the renewal of the Body of Christ.

_Baptism as a Sign_

In our Report, we tried to overcome the dilemma between 'sacramentalism' and 'symbolism' (or between 'objectivism' and 'subjectivism') by the consideration "that a sign exists for the purpose of communication." We want to reaffirm that consideration. The communication of the Gospel is a cognitive and, because of the power of the Gospel, also a creative event; to know Christ is a knowledge
that changes life. Thus we can understand why, in the New Testament, baptism is so intimately associated with such realities as the forgiveness of sins, union with Christ, and the reception of the Spirit. As we stated in our Report: "The sign is not to be separated from the thing signified."

Towards a Comprehensive View of Christian Initiation

To overcome the impasse created by an exclusive insistence on infant baptism or believers' baptism, we have tried to approach the problem in the light of a comprehensive understanding of Christian initiation (Report, p. 19, VII, i). The latter implies that those who focus the initiatory process in a composite rite of confession, baptism with water, admission to the Lord's Table at a specific point of time and those, who relate the significant elements of this process by way of a temporal differentiation between its successive acts and phases may jointly recognize and agree that, in either case, by the grace of God and the work of the Spirit, the result is actual membership in the church of Christ. This comprehensive view of initiation is capable of doing justice to both the heritage of the Reformed tradition with its primary concern for the grace of God in baptism and the Baptist tradition with its primary concern for personal faith and decision. Both emphases are, in a sense, complementary. But the question remains how theological theory and ecclesial practice can be held together. We identified an 'agenda of questions' which are still unanswered and call for intensive reflection and dialogue (Report p. 19-20). The agenda included questions of respect for the 'sacramental integrity' which the communions claim for themselves. (For the term 'sacramental integrity' see Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, p. 5).

The responses from the churches have shown that the concept of a complex of initiation needs further clarification. As regards the

Baptist position it should be noted that the division of initiation into successive phases does not amount to the surrender of the basic conviction as to the inseparable connection of faith and baptism and their sequence. Rather it is a recognition of the completion of a process
of initiation that might serve as a basis for mutual recognition of the good Christian standing of the individual members involved, while the Reformed leave the temporal sequence faith-baptism/baptism-faith to the sovereign disposition of God the Holy Spirit.

The more thorny problem of a 'double practice' calls for pastoral considerations. Some churches find its introduction acceptable and even desirable, especially in a missionary situation, while in other cultural contexts similar pastoral considerations will speak against its admission. Opposition to double practice is understandable where open acknowledgement of one's Christian identity gives special weight to the baptismal confession and vow of the parents, the whole family and the whole congregation. On the other hand, the loss of family solidarity in other secularized societies might lead to the desirability of believers' baptism only, quite apart from the concern for a 'confessing church.’

We already stated in our Report (p. 23) that baptism is an unrepeatable act. The Lima text (p. 4) underlines once more that this is a common conviction of all the churches. Differences, however, continue to exist when one asks what constitutes a valid baptism. Even when one wishes to respect the other church's sacramental integrity the problems still exist because the churches' claims for such integrity might conflict with one another. The necessity of holding together, in certain situations, conflicting views in a genuine Christian fellowship should go together with our constant endeavour to understand each other, to probe the depth of our problems in the light of the Word of God and so to prevent our differences from keeping us apart.
IV. Actions Taken by the Executive Committee of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the General Council of the Baptist World Alliance

The Report of the Evaluation Group was sent in December 1982 to the General Secretaries of the two World Alliances. In a covering letter, the conviction was expressed "that we must warmly recommend the continuation and the deepening of the whole dialogue already underway at different levels of church life." Three aspects were particularly in mind here for the carrying on of the exchange of views begun by this first round of conversations:

1. Bilateral conversations at the level of the World Alliances are only meaningful to the extent they are successful in conveying impulses and motivations to the churches at the local level. "It is important that we avoid any development that might lead to a purely academic exercise. Therefore it is our hope that the executive authorities of both world bodies will consider how best to involve the participation of local churches, Baptist and Reformed, together." For this reason, a letter was prepared which was to be sent to the churches united in the two World Alliances to inform them directly about the conversations which have been carried on and to encourage them to take steps of their own (see below).

2. The necessity was emphasized of seeing more sharply the particular opportunities and difficulties of Baptist/Reformed relationships in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

3. In view of the manifold forms which Baptist and Reformed churches have taken in different cultural contexts the suggestion was made of making as wide a survey as possible of the present Reformed/Baptist relationships in different regions of the world.
WORLD ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

The Executive Committee of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, which met in Kappel am Albis (Switzerland) February 27-March 4, 1983, took a grateful and keen interest in the results of the Baptist/Reformed conversations of the last ten years. In the discussion of the Report of the Theological Conversations, 1973-1977, it was asked why on the Reformed side greater attention was not paid to the voices of those Reformed theologians who within the Reformed tradition itself represent the concern for the baptism of believers (e.g. Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann, etc.). The Executive Committee unanimously accepted the following recommendations:

The Executive Committee receives with much interest the final evaluation of the Reformed/Baptist dialogue report, December 1982, addressed to both the Baptist World Alliance and the WARC. (See Appendix II to this Report). The Executive Committee records its appreciation for all who have participated over the years, with particular mention of the two Co-chairmen, Professor Günter Wagner, (B) and Principal Martin Cressey (R). The Executive Committee approves the action recommended by the Evaluation Group:

- that the dialogue report (1977) and the Evaluation report (1982) be sent to all member churches for further study and response;

- that the suggested letter to individual congregations be sent to all member churches with the request it be widely distributed and that local initiatives be developed with a view to bringing the two traditions closer together;

- that discussion be initiated with the BWA on the nature and method of continuing the dialogue and the possible subjects as recommended.
The Executive Committee registers its gratitude for those areas of agreement already achieved and notes the significance of the dialogue for the ecumenical movement as a whole and therefore the obligation to deepen the common understanding in the faith which already exists.

The Executive Committee requests the Moderator of the Department in consultation with representatives of the BWA to explore the possibility of the publication and interpretation of the materials of the dialogue.

The Executive Committee takes this action on the understanding that the Alliance will stay in close contact with the BWA and looks forward to the reaction of its partners in dialogue.

The Executive Committee records its appreciation for the day of joint-study to be held after this Executive Committee, March 5, in the Baptist Theological Seminary Rüschlikon, with representatives of Baptist and Reformed Churches and members of the Executive Committee, concluding with a joint service of Holy Communion in the Grossmünster, Zürich.

BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE

The results of the Reformed/Baptist conversations were also discussed by the General Council of the Baptist World Alliance meeting in Buenos Aires (Argentina) July 5-9, 1983. The Commission on Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation of the Baptist World Alliance, the study and research agency in charge of dialogues, made the following recommendations which were officially accepted:
"For several years conversations have taken place between the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Baptist World Alliance through the European Baptist Federation. In response to communications from them our Commission has made the following decisions.

(1) to convey to our Baptist World Alliance member bodies information about conversations for our witness, and to help on the local level;

(2) the Commission will enquire of the Regional Baptist Fellowships as to whether they would be interested in sponsoring conversations at a regional level between members of Baptist and Reformed bodies;

(3) the Commission voted to recommend to the General Council that the World Alliance of Reformed Churches be invited to send a non-voting observer to the Baptist World Alliance meetings in Berlin, 1984."

The question of how to proceed with a continued dialogue between Baptist and Reformed churches will be taken up again at the Baptist World Alliance meetings in Berlin, 1984.

In addition to the above mentioned recommendations it was decided to make available to the General Secretaries of all the Baptist World Alliance member bodies the draft of a letter to the member churches for possible editing and/or mailing to their church constituencies.
V. Letter to the Member Churches

The Evaluation Group at its meeting in December, 1982, drafted the following letter to the member churches of the two Alliances:

Dear fellow Christians,

It is probably for the first time in your life that you receive a letter from the Baptist and the Reformed churches together. We have written it because we have come to realize that we need one another’s help and encouragement in fulfilling the difficult task of being a Christian in today’s world. Such help and encouragement is often found in interchurch relationships and conversations. It is from the conversations of Baptist and Reformed theologians that we want to pass on to you some thoughts and suggestions.

1. Baptists and Reformed should come together and talk about their mission as churches of Christ: what do we tell people around us, and what do we pass on to our children? Do we not, in the end, have the same mission and should we not try to see each other first and foremost as fellow-workers in that mission?

2. When we learn to see each other as participants in the common mission, let us move on from there and share with one another the problems and prospects which we have in our specific place. Let us try to spell out what we can do together and where we can help one another.

3. When we learn to help one another and to work together we may begin to tell one another how we see one another, not just as individual Christians but as church members, and our churches as churches of Christ. This is not an invitation to gloss over differences in doctrine and practice! On the contrary, we should be frank with one another, but in the light of what we have in common.
4. In each of our congregations the Lord’s Supper is celebrated. Our rules of admission vary a great deal, much more than our understanding of it. Should we not, in all honesty, try to explain these rules to one another, and, when we have done so, find out whether our rules can stand this test of love. And when we have failed to explain our mutual rules properly, let us sit down together and ask why we failed.

5. It is inevitable and necessary that we talk together about baptism. But let us not do this in an abstract way. Let us meet and pray and talk about our children and their place in the Church. We all hope and pray and do our best that they grow up in the faith and become committed Christians. Let us try to find out what they are in God’s sight and in His purpose.

Let these points be discussed, not only at the level of church officers (though most certainly also there!), but by ordinary church members. Let the officers take the initiative and come together to discuss how these suggestions can be put into practice. Let the members urge them to take this up. It will be to the benefit of our churches and their members and help them in the struggle to be good and faithful Christians in their place and time.

Two words predominate in this letter. They are "together" and "learn." The letter is written in the conviction that we have still much to learn and that we have to learn together.
VI. How to Proceed - Some Suggestions

Ecumenical dialogue at World Alliance level seeks to minister to the concrete life of the local churches, to take up questions and to mediate impulses which might become fruitful on the local level in congregations, in discussion groups and in joint services of worship. The dialogue that has begun is designed to be continued and to be carried on at the most varied levels, in different forms and with particular accents according to the relevant context. And we want to add: dialogue alone is not enough! What we are aiming at is encounter between Baptists and Reformed, a deepening of the fellowship already in existence, and an ever clearer common perception of that to which we are called: one faith, one hope, the fellowship of the one body of Christ, and service in this world as witnesses to Him who alone is the Lord of us all.

The following examples will give some suggestions as to how to continue along the way already begun; they could easily be supplemented.

1. THE DAY OF ENCOUNTER AND THE JOINT COMMUNION SERVICE ON MARCH 5, 1983, IN ZÜRICH (SWITZERLAND)

We have already referred to the fact that on March 5, 1983, that is, immediately following the meeting of the Executive Committee of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, there was held a day of encounter and reflection for Baptists and Reformed. In the morning Baptists and Reformed of various countries met in the rooms of the Baptist Theological Seminary in Rüschlikon (Zürich) to reflect together on "The Future of the Common Reformation Heritage of the Baptist and Reformed Traditions." This occasion was given a special character by the presence of a number of Mennonite representatives who sought to comment on the significance of the Baptist/Reformed dialogue from their point of view (see the basic thoughts offered by Larry Miller which
are reproduced in an appendix to this booklet). This day of encounter was concluded in the afternoon by Reformed, Baptists and Mennonites celebrating publicly a joint communion service in the Grossmünster cathedral in Zürich, formerly the setting of Zwingli’s activity. At a central point of this service a Reformed and a Baptist confession of sin were spoken, complemented by mutual intercession later on in the service. Anyone who is familiar with the long and agonizing history of coexistence and often antagonism between Reformed State Churches and Baptist and Mennonite Free Churches in Switzerland can recognize the significance of such a step of public confession, each of their own guilt. In view of the significance of this act we think it helpful to reproduce the full text of both these confessions.

Joint Reformed/Baptist/Mennonite communion service at the Grossmünster cathedral in Zürich.

The posters in the background portray Johann Gerhard Oncken, founder of the Baptist movement on the European continent (left) and Balthasar Hubmaier, Anabaptist theologian of the 16th century (center).
Reformed Confession of Sin (spoken by the President of the Church Council of the Reformed Church of the Canton of Zürich)

Father in Heaven, in you alone we find truth and life. Therefore we come before you today and pray: renew our faith, the assurance of our calling in Jesus Christ and the fellowship with Him and with one another.

We thank you for all that your Spirit, since the first days and through the centuries, has brought to pass in your church. We thank you for all those who have witnessed to the gospel through their words and with their lives. We thank you particularly for the Reformers, to whose witness and work the church owes so much.

Yet we confess before you how often we have become deaf to the voice of your Spirit, preferring our own insights and ideas.

Today we confess before you and before our Mennonite and Baptist sisters and brothers how often we as Reformed Christians have failed to understand the message you desire to be mediated to your church by the testimony and work of our fellow Christians in the Free Church tradition. We bring before you all the injustice done to them in our country throughout the ages: persecution, oppression, execution and banishment. Lord our God, show your grace and your mercy upon us. Forgive and help us today to begin anew in fellowship with one another through the power of reconciliation and love, in order that wounds be healed and fellowship may grow and deepen. Lord have mercy on us.

Baptist Confession of Sin (spoken by the President of the Swiss Union of Baptist Churches)

Father in Heaven, you alone are the source from which we all live. In Jesus Christ you are our way and our future. Enable us, we pray, to be rooted more deeply in you and to grow more and more to the stature to which you have called us in Jesus Christ.
We thank you for everything you have given to your church in the past and up to now. We thank you for all who have gone before us in faith and by whose testimony we have received your gospel. We praise your name for all the tokens of your goodness.

But we confess before you that we have often refused your will and closed our lives to your blessings. Instead of striving in brotherly fellowship for the unity of your body, we have withdrawn ourselves and given the impression of being better Christians than our Reformed fellow Christians. By our words, thoughts and actions we have often sowed mistrust and built walls instead of meeting one another in mutual esteem and love.

Before you and our brothers and sisters in the State Churches, we confess to you our guilt. We have often lived in unjustified complacency, preferring to see the faults of others rather than our own dire need for renewal.

We pray: be gracious to us according to your great mercy. Give us the spirit of love, of openness and confidence, which overcomes all prejudice and fear. By this spirit set us free for a fellowship within which we may recognize together your truth and live from it. Lord have mercy on us.

In three respects this day of encounter on March 5, 1983, was of particular significance:

- In the first place, there was an opportunity to discuss in a wider circle the dialogue carried on by the Reformed/Baptist dialogue commission over the years in their small circle; to discuss it with ministers, students professors of theology and interested lay people from both confessions, and particularly together with representatives of the Mennonite tradition.

- Secondly, the communion service celebrated together was an attempt to express something of the efforts of the ten year bilateral
conversations in a way which makes existential involvement of a wide public of church members much more easily possible than straight theological discussion ever could. The significance of common celebration of services of worship at the local level as an integral part of such bilateral ecumenical endeavours as ours cannot be too highly estimated.

- Finally, we must take note of the aspect of dealing with historic guilt. Historic guilt as it exists in Switzerland as a result of centuries-old persecution of and discrimination against the Free Churches by the State Churches cannot be disposed of simply through a theological clarification of the controversial issues. Beneath the surface it is still present today and affects the relationship of Reformed and Baptists. Bilateral conversations must also reckon with this reality of guilt. It proves to be liberating to speak out in a joint service of worship what many, consciously or unconsciously, feel of guilt and mutual offence, to be able to confess it before God and before one another, in order then to encounter each other in greater openness on the basis of forgiveness and mutual intercession. It is obvious that such a penitential service stands as a symbol which has to be complemented by further ways of responsible dealing with guilt, but it should not be underestimated in its significance as a symbol.

2. LOCAL WORKING GROUPS

If the encounter started by the two World Alliances in the past ten years is to be deepened, that can only happen at the regional or local level. In this connection account must be taken of the plurality of cultural and historical contexts already mentioned. It may well be that the development of Reformed/Baptist contacts must take very different forms in Switzerland, in Italy, in the USA and in Ghana or Indonesia. The plurality of contexts and situations calls for a specific agenda in each case and a choice of priorities, which may be considerably different from those in the catalogue of themes handled in the past ten years. It would be desirable to see Baptist/Reformed working groups springing
up in different places to further and make concrete the conversations begun on the level of the World Alliances. The two World Alliances are interested in being kept continuously informed of all efforts to progress Baptist/Reformed conversations and they encourage an exchange of experiences, insights and questions which arise in different situations. Baptist/Reformed conversations must be carried on predominantly on the local or regional level. Such dialogues are only valid when carried out in close contact with the practice of local church life so that, besides questioning our various theologies, it comes to a mutual accounting over each church’s practical policy. This practical policy often differs from the "official" theology. Only if we look at both theology and practice can we reckon with the establishment of a communication which is real, living and which will call for practical consequences. More than has generally been the case, theological conversations must be carried on in a way which takes into account with equal seriousness the theology and the specific practice of the church. For this reason the balance of emphasis within the conversations must include non theological aspects or theological aspects which are at least not specific to one confession.

3. SURVEY OF PRESENT BAPTIST/REFORMED RELATIONSHIPS

It would be profitable to set up a survey of present Baptist/Reformed relationships. This should include questions on the already established degree of fellowship and co-operation and also about those areas which are characterized by more or less unrelated coexistence or by tensions. Local or regional working groups could well be interested in setting up such a survey with regard to their region or country as a basis for their wider work. The question should also be raised how far the traditional confessional frontiers between Baptists and Reformed are still decisive today or how far in the time since the Reformation new frontiers have grown up right across the confessional boundaries which are now more important and relevant than the traditional points of controversy between the Reformed and Baptist traditions.
4. RESPONSES TO THE STATEMENT OF CONVERGENCE ON "BAPTISM, EUCHARIST AND MINISTRY" OF THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

In the year 1982 the World Council of Churches published the statement of convergence on 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry,' the result of about twenty years' work of the Commission on Faith and Order. This text was transmitted to all churches with the request for careful study and response by the end of 1984. Among other things, the churches are asked what implications they can see from this text for their relationships and dialogue with other churches. Would it not be conceivable to examine and compare the responses worked out by Reformed and Baptist churches to this statement of convergence, in order to carry further in this way the conversations that have been begun?

5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PARTICULAR THEOLOGIANS FOR THE REFORMED/BAPTIST DIALOGUE

The report of the evaluation group draws attention to the fact that the theology (and especially baptismal theology) of some Reformed theologians, for example, Karl Barth, evidence a clear "spiritual affinity between the Reformed and the Baptist traditions" and that "there is reason to believe that a further exploration of Barth's position might open up new areas of agreement." The same could also be said about a series of other theologians, for example Jürgen Moltmann, whose model of ecclesiology it would be worthwhile examining more closely with respect to its significance for the Reformed/Baptist dialogue. Perhaps there are Reformed or Baptist theologians who would be ready to examine this question further and carry out an appropriate investigation.
6. THE WIDER PERSPECTIVE

The critical questions between Reformed and Baptists all stand today in a wider ecumenical perspective. We have already pointed to that fact. Particularly with regard to the questions of ecclesiology and baptism, it would be appropriate to widen the Reformed/Baptist conversations so that delegates of the Mennonites, the Disciples, and the Church of the Brethren could participate. A first step in this direction has already been taken through the presence of Mennonites at the day of encounter between Reformed and Baptists on March 5, 1983, in Rüschlikon (Switzerland). As a challenge to see Baptist/Reformed conversations in this wider perspective, we give in an appendix the Mennonite response made by Larry Miller in Rüschlikon.

The points set out above are only intended to give a few examples of ways and areas in which the dialogue between Baptists and Reformed described in this booklet could be continued and deepened. Further possibilities could be explored. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the Baptist World Alliance present to their member churches through this booklet the documents of ten years of Reformed/Baptist bilateral conversations. These are presented to the churches with a request for study and for development of the conversation in a variety of ways in different places. Information on planned or already existing initiatives in this direction is requested by the Secretariats of the two World Alliances:

World Alliance of Reformed Churches
150, route de Ferney
1211 Geneva 20
(Switzerland)

Baptist World Alliance
1628 Sixteenth Street N.W.
Washington, DC 20009
(USA)
APPENDIX

"THE FUTURE OF THE COMMON REFORMATION HERITAGE OF THE BAPTIST AND REFORMED TRADITIONS" - FROM A MENNONITE PERSPECTIVE*

LARRY MILLER

It is a privilege to join with you today to celebrate ten years of dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. One way for a Mennonite to express his gratitude for the service rendered to all of us by these conversations is to evaluate them from an Anabaptist-Mennonite perspective and to suggest some themes which might be included in future exchanges, themes growing out of our common Reformation heritage. Obviously, it is impossible to respond satisfactorily in ten minutes to ten years of theological debate. Because it is necessary to be selective, I will focus my remarks first of all on the issue of baptism then move on to three other issues raised implicitly by the discussion on baptism. They are the issues of fraternal support and discipline, discipleship and the relation of church and state.

BAPTISM

According to the official reports, the central issue in the Reformed/Baptist conversations was that of baptism. The meaning and practice of baptism is one of the classical issues which historically divided Christians who recognize their rooting in the left-wing of the Reformation from Christians of other Reformation churches. It was therefore natural and fitting that Reformed/Baptist conversations take up the issue.

One of the services rendered by the dialogue is to hint at the fact that this subject is no longer quite so classical or quite so divisive. Baptists and Reformed - and Mennonites with them - agree that baptism points to God's prior and continuing grace, that it must be linked to faith which is both personal and corporate and that it includes admission into church membership as well as the duty of discipleship. Even the question of baptismal practice, while still troublesome and in need of further discussion, appears to be less classical than
it was historically. For, as the Report on the conversations tells us, "many Baptist churches admit other Christians, baptized as infants, to the Lord's Supper on the basis of their personal faith in Christ and when they are in good standing with their own churches ..." This statement applies equally to numerous Mennonite churches. At the same time, the Report affirms, “... in several Reformed churches a so-called 'double practice' of baptism (according to which believers' baptism is as legitimate as infant baptism) is being discussed or (e.g. in the French Reformed Church) even has been introduced." Furthermore, after implicitly and correctly recognizing that the normal situation of the church today is a missionary one, the Reformed and Baptist representatives agree that adult baptism"... is the natural practice in a missionary situation." Finally, as the Evaluation group points out, at least since Karl Barth it is possible to challenge the practice of infant baptism from within the Reformed tradition, and this not only on practical pastoral grounds, but on theological ones as well.

Would it be an exaggeration to suggest that these developments invite continued discussion, not simply about the legitimacy but also about the normativeness of believers' baptism today? These discussions might include reflection about alternatives to infant baptism, - alternatives which would adequately communicate the common conviction that children are born under the grace of God, and the commitment to nurture them within the community of faith. It may indeed be, as the Evaluation Group suggested, "... that a further exploration of Barth's position might open up new areas of agreement."

I suggested that the Reformed/Baptist conversations have rendered us a service by hinting at the fact that the baptismal issue is no longer quite as divisive as it once was. Let me add that the service to all of us might have been greater and future dialogue facilitated if this fact had been said more clearly.


FRATERNAL SUPPORT AND DISCIPLINE

The issue of baptism, whether still classical or not, continues to point to deeper questions which should be put on the agenda of those who wish to pursue the debate growing out of our common Reformation heritage. Primary among these questions is the ecclesiological one.
The mandate from the Baptist World Alliance (BWA) and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) already said that. It spoke of baptism as presenting "... a theological problem which is central to the ecclesiological question, confronting the whole ecumenical movement on the nature and understanding of the church." But the issue here is not only the question of the ministries in the church, nor only that of the *Volkskirche* versus the Believers' or "gathered" church - themes touched upon in the conversations. The ecclesiological issue raised by the debate about baptism includes also the question of what church members do when they gather. In our common Reformation heritage, the church not only preached the Word, baptized and celebrated the Lord's Supper, it also established structures for mutual support and congregational discipline. I am told that this concern was historically an important element to both Reformed and Baptist traditions, just as it was in the Mennonite tradition. Nevertheless, in the reports of the Reformed/Baptist dialogue, this theme is most conspicuous by its absence.

There would seem to be a clear biblical call to church members to exercise fraternal discernment and discipline. In one of the two instances where the word *ekklesia* is used in the Gospels, Matthew (18:15-20) describes the church's function this way: "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them."

Those disciples of Zwingli who later were to be known as Anabaptists, called this the "Rule of Christ." They linked baptism to its practice. In their 1524 letter to Thomas Müntzer, they wrote: "We have learned that even an adult should not be baptized without Christ's rule of binding and loosing ..." Indeed, this was a primary reason for their rejection of infant baptism; an infant cannot voluntarily submit itself to the Rule of Christ which certainly means forgiveness, but also implies a pledge to give and receive counsel. What might we learn about brotherly address and mutual support, about communitarian discernment and congregational discipline when we read Schleitheim and Hubmaier, Bucer and Calvin?

Rediscovery of this essential activity of the faithful church would appear crucial in today's world. On the one hand, as the Report of the Reformed/Baptist dialogue...
Baptist conversations so aptly puts it: "No longer can any church assume an identity between itself and its surrounding society." On the other, individualism and secularism undermine the reality of believers’ baptism in those Baptist and Mennonite congregations where it is not linked to fraternal address and support.

In a world dominated by other ideologies and religions, would not an ethically and missionary-oriented church necessarily include patterns and structures of mutual support and discipline? What forms might these take so that they lead away from rigidity and legalism into reconciliation and discipleship? The Reformed/Baptist conversations, speaking out of a common Reformation heritage and out of a common concern for the mission of the church in a broken world, would render service to us all by putting this question more prominently on the ecumenical agenda.

DISCIPLESHIP

At the heart of the effort to link baptism to processes of fraternal discipline would be the conviction that baptism means also commitment to obedience and discipleship. For the participants in the Reformed/Baptist dialogue, baptism means not only "dying and rising with Christ, transference and assignment to his Lordship," but also "the duty of discipleship and commitment to service." This is a most important statement. Unfortunately its consequences seem nowhere to be discussed.

Having learned from Zwingli that "to be a Christian is not to talk about Christ, but to walk as he walked," the earliest Anabaptists believed that baptism is the public commitment - the engagement - to follow the footsteps of the disarmed and serving Christ into a new kind of life in the world, into a new kind of ethics in the old social order. This conviction was grounded upon those passages in the Gospels where Jesus calls his disciples to take up their crosses and to follow him, or where he talks about Christian service replacing political domination. It was grounded as well in Paul who talks about conformity to the Son of God and in I Peter 2 where it is said that the atoning Christ “... has left us an example, that you should follow after, in his steps.” It was important for Anabaptist baptismal theology to note that I Peter concludes his reflection on discipleship by talking about baptism and defining it as the pledge to maintain a good conscience before God.

In I Peter, then, baptism leads into discipleship. It means following Jesus Christ into the structures of the world in order to live there for His justice because He died there on account of our injustice. Discipleship means to refuse to exercise
domination over others. It means to retaliate against evil with blessing. It means “... to seek peace and pursue it.” But what does it mean for the church today to follow the disarmed Christ into the path of biblical justice, service and peacemaking? If we do indeed agree that baptism means commitment to service and the duty of discipleship, could we not talk together about what Christian service and discipleship are today?

In this context recent statements on peacemaking by Billy Graham, from the Baptist side, and by the Executive Board of the Reformed Alliance of the Federal Republic of Germany have encouraged and challenged historically pacifist Mennonites. They implicitly call us to reexamine our notions of discipleship and peacemaking even as they challenge us to practice in the world what we sometimes preach in the churches. Particularly the German Reformed statement on "Confessing Jesus Christ and the Churches’ Witness for Peace" seems to be of historic importance. Can we say with them that the problem of peace is an issue which forces us either to confess or deny the Gospel? Are we ready to give this question status confessionis as they have done?

This new approach to the problem of peace invites renewed Reformed/Anabaptist conversation on such fundamental issues as power and powerlessness, oppression and human rights, churches and peace churches. In fact, the conversation has already begun informally. Several months ago, after having addressed the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Ottawa, Professor Moltmann addressed Mennonites in North America on the theme "Following Jesus Christ in the World Today." He closed his lectures with these lines, challenging both Volkskirche and Believers’ Church Christians to greater faithfulness: "The more the church moves from being a church bound to the state to a free church, the clearer can become its witness to peace, and the less ambiguous its initiative for peace. We believe that the Church of Jesus Christ can become a church of peace without sectarian isolation from the world. It will become a peace church to the degree that it confesses Christ and Christ alone as its and the whole world’s peace and shows the necessary consequences of this confession." May we together continue this conversation.

CHURCH AND STATE

While the issue of baptism, one of the historically classic issues dividing Reformed from Baptists and Mennonites, was at the center of the discussions we celebrate today, the other classical issue which divided us seems not to have been raised. I refer to the question of Church and State.
In the Baptist and Mennonite traditions, believers’ baptism has from the beginning implied a church freed from the state. In contrast, the fundamental documents and foundational experiences of the Reformed churches consider it appropriate not only to be citizens and to hold public office, but also to wage war at the request of the state. They also presuppose and sometimes prescribe that government has a place in the administration of the church. It is therefore not surprising that this issue is one about which we have disagreed historically. By the same token, its absence in the Reformed/Baptist dialogue is most striking.

It is of course true that in most parts of the world today, Reformed churches are separated from the state; most receive no special recognition nor wield any special power. Yet, in some European countries the link remains at the point of collecting funds and paying ministerial salaries. The maintenance of these ties can mean not only continued privilege for the established church but occasional difficulty for the dissenters. And at a deeper level, the fact of establishment remains questionable. Is it not in the long run bad for both state and church even though it is no longer so hard on Baptists and Mennonites? Can the church be the church while bound to the state?

But discussion of the church-state issue would not be a one-way street. Someone recently pointed out to me that it was a theology of Reformed orientation which was most able to give guidance and language to the resistance of Protestants to Hitler. Mennonites and Baptists among others did not find in their tradition the resources to say no to him. We were not able to demonstrate the Lordship of Christ in that historical situation. What can we learn from this which might help Anabaptist Christians hold together discipleship and responsibility for the world in a nuclear age?

IN CLOSING

In Ephesians 3:18 and 19, Paul says to the Christians: "May you be strong enough to grasp together with all the saints what is the breadth, the length, the height, the depth of the love of Christ, and to know this love though it surpasses all knowledge." In his commentary on this letter, Markus Barth suggests that the reference to "all the saints" points out that "... worship, theological work and spiritual insight either are ecumenical events or they have nothing to do with the knowledge and proclamation of God ... 'access' to God who is fully present and revealed in the man Jesus Christ is granted solely in the company of fellow saints." I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for inviting Mennonites to join...
this saintly company for a day of theological work and worship. May it be a source of spiritual insight for each of us.

I Though it should be noted that some of the Congregationalist members of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches may feel closer to the Baptists at this point (Ed.).