

## Minutes

# Winnipeg Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue, Meeting no. 2

Held on 27 September 2000, 5–9 pm  
at St. Paul's College, U of M campus

**Father Luis Melo and Helmut Harder, co-chairs.**

Helmut Harder commented briefly on the recent declaration from Cardinal Ratzinger and the Vatican and the exchanges which had come about because of it [from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith entitled *Dominus Iesus: On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church*].

**Each of the participants in the group spoke briefly about highlights of the summer which might have had some connection to our relationships as Mennonites and Catholics.**

**Michele Sala Pastora:** Was asked to join a delegation to Geneva this summer to make a joint presentation to a UN agency against the sexual exploitation of children.

**Michael Radcliffe:** More involvement with the Hutterite theme. Became involved with a discussion with a group of German families in the Arborg area who are interested in congregationalism with a Hutterite perspective.

**Dr. Richard Lebrun:** Preoccupied with the Ratzinger document.

**Dr. Adolf Ens:** Is doing some teaching at Canadian Mennonite University in his retirement. Has a Catholic student. Spoke of student who is not a believer but “seeking God.”

**Dr John Long:** Connection with Mennonite friends continues. Is using Elmer Thiessen's textbook on “Liberal education ....” in one of his classes. Favorite bedtime reading is Edward Capon, an Episcopalian.

**Henry Loewen:** first month of his retirement, this is his first formal assignment and in preparation for it he prepared a description of Mennonite baptism practice.

**Harold Jantz:** Family interests took centre place during the summer, in particular hosting a cousin from Russia. Spoke about a great-grandmother who was Catholic.

**Ardith Frey:** In her pastoral work officiated at the wedding of a Ukrainian Catholic to one of her members, and had a person of Catholic background join her church. This person has hepatitis and wanted anointing with oil, which became an issue she worked through.

**Elaine Pinto:** Spent seven days at St. Benedict's in centering prayer, with Thomas Keating teaching. She found a tool in working and praying with people of other faiths through Catholics.

**Sr. Elaine Baete:** Came across a video on Anabaptists. Was interested that she should simply have run across it. The St. Boniface Research Centre has given Mennonite Central Committee its 2000 International Award which is given to persons or groups for their outstanding contribution.

**Fr Luis Melo:** A new archbishop has been installed in the Winnipeg diocese. Is impassioned for justice and social issues. Is the chair of dialogue with Anglicans and Lutherans. Fr. Melo was in Rome for beatification of founder of his order. Is now getting groups launched at St. Paul's for the winter—has 270 students in groups.

**Dr. Helmut Harder:** An ancestor was a Braun, in the low German that would be a “Brun” or “Lebrun.” (Perhaps Richard and Helmut are distantly related.)

## **Opening Devotions [Attachment 1]**

Ardith Frey led us in a meditation on Jesus Christ, the true vine: “United through our common source of life.” She accompanied it with music by John Michael Talbot, “I am the vine,” and a liturgy.

## **Agenda Discussion**

### **1. Statement of Purpose [Attachment 2]**

**Helmut Harder** read a draft which attempts to express the purpose of our meetings.

Comments are supportive: it is serious, practical, do-able, the timing for our get-togethers is right, the goal is appreciated, the idea of looking for “parallel and common” initiatives is appreciated.

There is support for the idea of developing a formal statement at the end. It could be the result of a process of discernment. It might simply express what we have learned about our common understandings and our differences.

### **2. What we believe about baptism**

**2.1. Michele Sala Pastora on baptism in the Roman Catholic understanding.** She described the sacraments of baptism, Eucharist and confirmation. The normal order and the actual practice in which these occur may differ. Confirmation age may differ too, even locally. In the St. Boniface diocese it is usually grade 5, in the Winnipeg diocese grade 8. The norm is to baptize infants, but adult baptism is happening increasingly. Infant baptism is a sacrament of “pure gift,” a gift & the grace of salvation, a beginning that takes a lifetime to unwrap, its implication is a long formation. Adult baptism was a part of the early church and has been increasingly promoted after Vatican

Michele used several symbols to speak about baptism. She was given a cross by a priest when her mother was very ill. In baptism all our crosses are given meaning. Baptism is a response to a call. For infants it is the parents who respond on behalf of the child and they must do it in faith.

A bottle of water. Water represents both danger and life. We are plunged into the death of Christ but water is also the source of life.

Sacred chrism. In the anointing with perfumed oil something incredible happens, we become an anointed one, co-heirs with Christ, sons and daughters of God. Baptism. It is a sacrament of faith that provides the condition for growth.

White garment. We put on the garment of Christ. The baptism garment used by her children had been made by Michele's mother for her. Her mother passed her faith on

to Michele and Michele is passing it on again. “I embraced the values of my mother. Christ’s values became mine.”

Light. We embrace Christ’s light and become lights in our world.  
The church has been baptizing since the first Pentecost. We are connected.

## **2.2. Harold Jantz. Mennonite Brethren position on baptism.** [Material circulated earlier]

He read the statement on Christian Baptism in the recently revised Confession of Faith of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren [1999] and then some segments out of the commentary on baptism from the Commentary and Pastoral Application for the Confession [2000]. He also gave each member in the group a copy of a recent pamphlet in the Mennonite Brethren Faith and Life pamphlet series, Baptism and Church Membership [September, 2000].

Emphasis is placed on baptism as confession and initiation. It is a public confession of life in Christ and it represents initiation and incorporation into a visible body of Christians who represent the body of Christ where they are. It involves linkages with a community of faith within which one commits oneself to growth together in Christ. It is a step of obedience.

In a portion of the material which appears in the Commentary, a bridge is made between sacramental understandings of baptism and the purely symbolic: “Historically baptism has been interpreted either sacramentally, as mediating the grace of God, or symbolically, as symbolizing an internal reality that has occurred. Anabaptists have rejected the sacramental understanding and opted for the symbolic meaning. However, a more holistic understanding walks between the two options. Baptism is less than sacrament but more than symbol. It effects real change that reflects both divine grace and human reality. It does this in close association with the faith decision (repentance and trust) and the receipt of the Holy Spirit and not apart from them.

“Mennonite Brethren have used ‘sign’ to express this meaning. A ‘sign’ is a biblical term that refers first of all to an act of God (God delivered Israel from Egypt, Jesus performed signs, the apostles did signs and wonders). Second, a sign also refers to a human action (the Israelites put blood on their doorposts as a sign, unleavened bread was a sign, the law was given as a sign, the Sabbath was a sign).”

## **2.3. Helmut Harder for the Mennonite Church Canada.** [Material circulated earlier]

Baptism is intended for believers. Membership in a local congregation is important. Baptism is a sign of cleansing and of commitment. We’re not upset that children aren’t baptized. They are covered by the faith of their parents and the grace of Christ during their years of innocence. Will become aware of their own sin and need for salvation later. Baptism with ‘water and blood’ is language of Scriptures. Water represents openness to the life in the Spirit. Blood represents suffering and faithfulness to the end. The mode that is used in Mennonite Church congregations is normally sprinkling or pouring. When it is sprinkling, it is done three times in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The pouring is connected to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The most recent confession also includes the possibility of immersion as the mode. The ages of those being baptized may range from 8 to 80, though senior high school is a sort of average.

While we like to say that baptism is on confession of faith, sometimes it is a group movement too. 2.4.

**Ardith Frey for the Evangelical Mennonite Conference.** [Attachment 3] The church recognizes three ordinances, baptism, foot washing and the Lord's Supper. The decision to be baptized is often initiated by a family member or by the persons themselves. Transfer of membership is dealt with through a protocol understood within the conference. Classes are held for non-members which can lead to a decision to be baptized. The church practices baptism by sprinkling, but increasingly some churches practice immersion too.

## **2.5. Discussion of the presentations.**

2.5.1 The discussion began with baptism of adults within the Roman Catholic church. There is a service order for it. It can be part of the mass, but the Easter vigil is usually reserved for baptism of adults. Fr. Luis Melo says he has had four or five infant baptisms, but 23 for adults. St. Ignatius Church is presently preparing 35–40 persons for baptism.

2.5.2. The power attributed to water. Fr. Melo discussed an incarnational understanding of the role of water. Water is a gift, a first order of creation. He sketched the Catholic understanding that through creation, through Christ, through the Holy Spirit working in the church, and through the sacraments, God incarnates himself.

## **3. Baptismal Preparation and Practice**

**3.1. Henry, Loewen presents the Mennonite Church practice** [Attachment 4] He reviewed the normal practice within the Mennonite Church Canada in terms of age of those baptized, the mode, how persons are invited to be baptized, the pre-baptismal preparation, the order a service of baptism might take (including suitable Scriptures and hymns), the introduction to the service, the vows spoken, the statement of the baptizer to the ones being baptized, the reception into the church and the words of commitment that might be used at that occasion.

**3.2. Elaine Pinto describes her experience of baptism in a Mennonite Brethren church.** Also showed some pictures of baptisms. [Attachment 5]

She told the story of her baptism at the age of 15 and what it represented for her. It was a testimony given before several hundred people and had to be vouched for by others. It was understood as a step of "obedience to Christ." She recalls it as a glorious moment. "I knew Christ died for my sins and I had been obedient and responded to his call to be numbered with the followers of Christ." She adds a description of how baptism has historically been practiced in Mennonite Brethren circles and how it is practiced today: little formal instruction earlier, more pre-baptismal instruction and less severe questioning of candidates today.

**3.3. Fr. Luis Melo presents the Catholic Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults** [Circulated earlier]

He described several stages in the preparation and spiritual formation of persons entering the church as adults. It begins with a period of awakening faith and then, as a first step, acceptance into the order of catechumens during which there is a period of deepening faith in which the Catholic tradition is embraced. This is followed by a second step, in which there is an enrollment of those who will be initiated. This is usually celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent. It begins a period of purification and enlightenment, and of self-examination in which what is weak is eliminated and what is holy is affirmed. The third step is the celebration of the Sacrament of Initiation, often at Easter. The discussion that follows turns to children, who will not have the rich experience prescribed for adults. The response is that they are led through catechism and training to a confirmation which is a very personal statement.

## **Supper Break**

### **4. The History of Baptism**

#### **4.1. Richard Lebrun presented a brief history, of Christian baptism. [Attachment 6]**

He looked at baptism through the sweep of church history and specifically within the history of Roman Catholicism. His paper used as a major source the book by Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred. A Historical Introduction to the Sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church* (first published 1981, new editions in 1982 and 1991). He traced baptism from its early practice as the baptism of adults, to the reasons for baptizing infants beginning in the third century, the influence of Augustine in universalizing the practice of infant baptism, the emergence of a “magic” view of baptism, the challenge to both the theory and the practice posed by the Reformation, the failure of the Catholic church to reform the baptism at that time, and the more recent decision to re-visit the theology of baptism as a result of the encounter with the modern ecumenical movement. The results are a revised *Rite of Baptism for Children* (1969) and a *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (1972), both of which were the fruit of the Second Vatican Council.

#### **4.2. Adolf Ens presented a concise history, of Mennonite baptismal practice [Attachment 7]**

He reviewed its roots in the work of Ulrich Zwingli’s radical associates in Zurich in the early 16th century. These came “to one mind” concerning baptism on the “basis of the recognized and confessed faith, in the union with God of a good conscience.” They laid the basis for what has been called a believers church, in which the church consists of those who have affirmed the faith, declared their willingness to live according to the word of Christ, are ready to accept the admonition of the church and accept water baptism as a way of becoming counted with the visible church of Christ. For most of Mennonite history, sprinkling or pouring have been the usual modes, more recently immersion has as well.

### **5. Next meeting**

5.1. We agree to meet at 4 p.m. on January 31, 2001 at Canadian Mennonite University.

5.2. What sort of reporting should be done on these meetings? Encouragement is voiced for reports to our respective church constituencies. (See note earlier in these minutes about a statement at the end of our process.)

5.3. We agree that more time could be spent on the subject of baptism. The co-convenors are given freedom to name further subjects for discussion.

5.4. Reference is made to a fine book written by a Catholic commentator: *Scattering the Proud: Christianity Beyond 2000*, by Sean O’Conaill (The Columba Press).

Michele Sala Pastora closed our time together by leading us in a common prayer.

Notes of the meeting written by: Harold Jantz  
October 20, 2000

**Attachments:**

Attachment 1: Opening Devotions

Attachment 2: Statement of Purpose

Attachment 3: Constitution of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference

Attachment 4: Baptismal Preparation and Practice Mennonite Church Canada

Attachment 5: Baptismal Preparation and Practice

Attachment 6: A Brief History of Christian Baptism

Attachment 7: History of Mennonite Baptismal Practice: Origin and Developments

Attachments to the Meeting of 27 September 2000

Attachment 1



**~United through our Common Source of Life~**

Opening Devotional for Catholic-Mennonite Dialogue September 27, 2000

**Centering: Prayer**  
**Music by John Michael Talbot: "I Am the Vine"**

**Introductory Comments on the Imagery of the Vine**

**Liturgy**

One: *Listen to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ to his disciples:*

**"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower ....  
Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself  
unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.  
I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them  
bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing ....  
I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your  
joy may be complete."** *John 15: 1, 4-5, 11 NRSV*

All: Jesus invites us to intimacy with him.., in the parable of the vine and the branches. Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. We, the branches, can only find our true place by abiding in the vine.

The branch does not come to the vine with its own agenda; it exists only to fulfill the purpose of the vine-bearing fruit. How often have we decided, without consulting God, what we wanted to do, then asked God to help us achieve it? That is not abiding. To abide, we must yield ourselves to God's purposes.

Jesus calls us to exchange our purposes for his and to give up our independence for dependence on him, ... "so that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete." As Jesus' life flows through us, even as the life of the vine flows through the branch, we become not only fruit bearers, but joyful fruit bearers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Marlene Kropf and Eddy Hall, *Praying With the Anabaptists: The Secret of Bearing Fruit* (Winnipeg: Faith and Life Press, 1994), 34-36.

One: *Again, listen to the words of Jesus as he prayed to his Father asking on behalf of his disciples:*

**As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given us I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**

*John 17:21 – 23, NRSV*

The mystery and genius of Christian community is that (it)... doesn't depend on human affinity of any stripe—cultural, political, or doctrinal. God's life flowing through us as the life of the vine courses through its branches—this and nothing else makes us one in Christ.

We are bound together by something that runs deeper than our likes and dislikes, our similarities and dissimilarities, our agreements and disagreements. We are joined by a reality that empowers us to transcend our differences enough to truly love one another.

(We confess that) the Christian community does not always live up to this high calling. Yet it is only here that we can ever find a fully satisfying and lasting answer to our own hunger to be safe, understood and cared for—in the shared life created by the divine life we share.<sup>2</sup>

Together: Gardener God,! you have planted and protected us by your faithful hand!  
Send us the sap of your grace from Christ, the true Vine, and make us blossom and bear the fruit of love as a sign of your life in us! Let the sweet fragrance of the shoots you have planted give you praise forever and ever. Amen.

(Adapted from quote attributed to Pilgram Marpeck, 16th century Anabaptist)<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. pp. 71, 72.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. p. 39.



## Attachment 2

### Statement of Purpose (first draft, September 27, 2000)

We meet as a small informal group of persons from the Mennonite and Catholic churches (about 6 + 6) in the Winnipeg/Manitoba area, about three times a year over a two year period, in the spirit of the international Catholic-Mennonite dialogue taking place at this time (1998–2002) under the theme “Toward a Healing of Memories,” with the intention of seeking understanding and respect for one another’s traditions within the Christian heritage, through exploration of our commonalities and differences as church constituencies, taking into account our histories, our theologies, our patterns of spiritual life, and our practical ministries, so as to discern practical possibilities of common and parallel initiatives in our local setting.

Attachment 3



# CONSTITUTION



1994 Revision

EVGELICAL MENNONITE CONFERENCE

## **11. Ordinances**

An ordinance is a symbolic observance instituted according to Scripture, which is to be administered in and by the church as a visible sign of spiritual truth.

We believe Christ instituted three ordinances: water baptism, the Lord's Supper and foot washing (Matt. 28:18–20; John 13:1–17; 1 Cor. 11:20–32).

### **11.1 Believer's Water Baptism**

We believe a Christian should be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. To qualify for baptism, one must repent of sin and by faith accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Water baptism represents the baptism of the Holy Spirit at the time of conversion and the washing of regeneration which the believer has experienced. It is an act of obedience which identifies the believer with the church of Christ (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 2:36–47; 10:47,48; 18:8; 22:16; Rom. 6:1–4; Titus 3:5).

### **11.2 The Lord's Supper**

We believe that Christians are to celebrate the Lord's Supper as instituted by Christ. The elements—the bread and the cup—symbolize the body of Christ and his shed blood.

With this celebration, Christians call to mind Christ's suffering for the sins of the whole human race and proclaim the Lord's death until he returns to take his followers to himself. It involves fellowship, self-examination, testimony, confession, praise and thanksgiving. Christians should examine their own relationship to God and to other people before participating in this commemoration (Matt. 26:26–29; I Cor. 10:16, 17; 11:17–34; Eph. 2:11–22; Heb. 9:12, 25–28; I John 2:1,2).

### **11.3 Foot washing**

We believe in the practice of foot washing. When Jesus washed the feet of his disciples he gave the church an example to follow. Foot washing is an expression of humility, love and quality. It symbolizes cleansing from sin and the Christian's commitment to a lifestyle of servanthood. When we accept the washing of our feet by other Christians, we demonstrate that we accept Jesus' ministry to us. (John 13:1–20; I Tim. 5:10).

## **The Ordinances**

*Key Verse: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).*

God has planned that the people of God should remind themselves of some of the great spiritual truths by physically participating in symbolic observances of those truths. In the Old Testament, circumcision was a reminder of their covenant with God. The Passover meal reminded them of their deliverance from Egypt and the various sacrifices symbolized the atonement for sin. Again in the New Testament God has commanded His

people to symbolize several important teachings by celebrating these in symbolic observances. This symbolic observance of a spiritual truth is called an “ordinance.” Our church observes three ordinances. Water baptism symbolizes being converted and initiated into the body of Christ. The Lord’s Supper reminds us of the sacrificial death of Christ on our behalf. Feet washing symbolizes spiritual cleansing and the attitudes of humility and service which should characterize the believer.

## **A. Water Baptism**

It is thrilling to see a new Christian take a public stand for God through water baptism. It speaks to the Christian and non-Christian alike. It is a confirmation of the baptismal candidate’s commitment to Christ and His church. Baptism formalizes the new Christian’s covenant with God as Saviour and Lord and with the congregation as a fellow member in the body of Christ.

The practice of water baptism rests on the clear command of Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18–20). It is also of significance that Jesus was baptized. The New Testament church was faithful to this commandment and baptized people whenever they confessed faith in Christ.

Paul, in writing about the Israelites crossing the Red Sea (I Cor. 10: 1, 2), said that the people were baptized into Moses. By following Moses’ leadership, the people had passed through the sea and then watched it close behind them. This totally cut them off from their former life in Egypt. The Israelites were now one with Moses and dependent on God to lead them to a new life in Canaan. This is a picture of the new believer. The new Christian needs to break all ties with a former life of sin and be joined wholeheartedly to Christ and His body, the church.

Scripture indicates that baptism should follow after a conversion experience (Acts 2:38; 9:18; 10:47). Since baptism is an outward sign of an inner spiritual experience it follows that a person should not be baptized before he has become a Christian. Baptism also involves a commitment of one’s future to Christ. Such a commitment can only be made in a meaningful way after a person is responsible for his own decisions.

What is the relationship between baptism and membership in a local church? Through baptism the new believer identifies with the body of Christ, the people of God (Acts 2:41–44). The local church is the visible expression of the church of Jesus Christ. Therefore, to identify with the people of God through baptism and fail to identify with a local church is inconsistent.

Our Conference mode of baptism is pouring. It symbolizes the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, who is given to every believer at the time of conversion (Eph. 1:13,14), is said to have been “poured out on” believers (Joel 2:28; Titus 3:5’7). Some of our churches practice immersion baptism which symbolizes being dead to sin (Rom. 6:1–6) and rising to new life.

Water baptism involves the following:

1. It is administered to the believer upon his repentance from sin and confession of faith in Christ (Matt. 28:18–20; Acts 18:8; 2:38). It is a public testimony of what God has done for us and of our commitment to Him.

2. It symbolizes the Christian's experience of being baptized by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 3:11; Acts 2:38). God gives the Holy Spirit to each person at the time of conversion.
3. It is an act of obedience which identifies the believer with the church of Christ and initiates him into the Christian community as expressed in a given local congregation (Acts 2:41; I Cor. 12:13,27).
4. It symbolizes spiritual cleansing and forgiveness of sins (Ezekiel 36:24–27; Acts 22:16; Titus 3:5).
5. It symbolizes death to sin and the old nature, and a newness of life in Christ (Rom. 6:1–10; Col. 2:11,12).

## Attachment 4

### BAPTISMAL PREPARATION AND PRACTICE MENNONITE CHURCH CANADA

#### **Understanding of Baptism:**

See Article 8 and Article 11, taken from the Confession of Faith from a Mennonite Perspective (Attached to mailing for this meeting)

#### **Age of Baptism:**

The usual age of first admission into the church became traditional at fifteen to eighteen in later Mennonite history in Europe and North America. In Holland, emphasis upon a personal, intelligent commitment led to an age for baptism in the early twenties. In Canada, sixteen to nineteen is common, with baptisms also of those of mature years. In the United States thirteen to seventeen is the more usual range. Some congregations baptize young people at age twelve to thirteen, with a few even below age ten. A youth survey taken in the General Conference churches in 1966 revealed that the age of baptism varies from below age thirteen to age twenty-one, with one-fourth baptized below age thirteen. In *Anabaptists Four Centuries Later*, Kauffmann and Harder reported that the median age of baptism was 14.0 in the Mennonite Church and 16.4 in the General Conference Mennonite Church (p.71).

Influences that have lowered the age of baptism in our churches include the Child Evangelism movement, and evangelistic services in which converts are often baptized and received into church membership a few weeks later with a short period of instruction. Other practices include the emphasis on Sunday School and the church camps as a place for making commitments, the use of catechism came into the Mennonite church in the middle of the seventeenth century (in Holland). Today most Mennonite churches in North America carry on some form of catechism or prebaptismal instruction.

#### **Mode of Baptism:**

The two common forms of baptism are (1) immersion, in which the person enters and is covered by water, or (2) pouring (also sprinkling) in which only a small amount of water is placed on the applicant's head. Pouring is sometimes from a pitcher or by cupped hands taking water from a basin. Pouring is the form most commonly used in Mennonite churches. Because emphasis has been on inward meanings rather than outward forms, Mennonites have recognized other forms also. The symbol is less important than that which it symbolizes. Thus there are individual congregations who use immersion, and other congregations have honoured the request of persons for whom immersion has special meaning. In some of the overseas churches, as in Colombia and Zaire, immersion became the common practice.

### **Invitation to Baptism:**

The congregation invites people to be baptized in various ways. These include:

- Teaching and preaching.
- The celebration of baptism. Usually a Sunday morning. Parents, grandparents, the extended family, a “special” service or festive atmosphere make this an important “teaching” occasion and experience.
- The Youth Pastor, youth class, and program provide a setting where individuals are invited to take this step of faith.
- Mentors: This church program links a person at a young age (8–10 yrs.) with a member to be a friend who walks with, helps, encourages the individual in the life of the church.
- Parents, extended family, individual church members, deacons.

Individuals also request baptism. While this happens more frequently and the baptismal service is organized for that individual on a given Sunday, most baptism occur on the two or three times during the year when the church invites people to consider baptism. Our tradition was that baptism occurred on Pentecost Sunday.

### **Catechism or Prebaptismal Instruction:**

This varies from congregation to congregation.

In some churches the catechism class meets during the Sunday school hour. In others catechism is conducted after school, Saturday, or Sunday for those who respond to the specific invitation.

The length of a course of study is variable. Twelve weeks would seem minimum. Some churches use two years. Most use at least nine to twelve months if the class is during Sunday school time.

The scope of material includes the teachings of the Bible and the Christian faith, opportunity for personal encounter with the Scriptures and application of its meaning for self, the history of the church and of our faith heritage, God’s purpose for the church, and the local congregation’s practice of faith.

### **Order of Service:**

Baptismal services are still predominantly held on a Sunday morning with the whole worship service revolving around this event.

The order of service would usually include the following elements:

1. Appropriate opening worship
2. Introduction (including Scripture)
3. Testimony of the candidate(s) for baptism (and witness of others if desired)
4. Vows (questions)
5. The act of baptism
6. The right hand of fellowship
7. The commitment (response) of the congregation
8. Prayer (prayer might also precede act of baptism)

Scriptures and Hymns frequently used are:

Scripture: Matthew 3:13–17 28:19–20

Mark 1:9–11 Luke 3:18–22

9:57–62 John 1:32–34

3:1–21 Acts 2:37–47

Romans 6:1–11

1 Corinthians 12:12–13

Galatians 3:26–28 Ephesians 4:1–7, 11–16 Philippians 1:3–11

3:7–14 Colossians 2:9–15

1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 2 Timothy 1:3–14

1 John 5:1–12

Hymns: (The numbers are listed in The Mennonite Hymnal)

1 Holy God, We Praise Thy Name

40 I Sing with Exultation

43 Immortal, Invisible God

75 Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

90 In Thee is Gladness

208 O Holy Spirit, Enter In

228 I Sought the Lord

248 I Lay My Sins on Jesus

265 My Jesus, I Love Thee

291 All My Hope on God Is Founded

300 Be Thou My Vision

353 I Bind My Heart This Tide

354 Just as I Am, Thine Own to Be

358 Take My Life and Let it Be Consecrated

376 Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken

385 Blest Be the Tie That Binds

386 Heart with Loving Heart United

398 O Happy Day, that Fixed My Choice

399 My God, Accept My Heart

539 More Love to Thee, O Christ

544 Blessed Assurance



562 Christ Has for Sin Atonement Made  
581 I am Thine, O Lord 606 Praise God From Whom all ...

### **Introduction to Baptism:**

The following could be representative:

Baptism is an act both of a person and a community. It seals our decision to turn from living for ourselves and against God and other people to living from them. John uses the most personal words possible to describe becoming a Christian: it is to be born again, into a new humanity. This new humanity of which we are a part affirms that God is at work, that conversion and baptism are not only the private experience of one person, but acts of God which the church accepts and stands by. Baptism is communal because when we are born again our new life is with others, not against them, most particularly is it with the Body of Christ.

### **Vows:**

Again, these would vary from congregation to congregation. The following include thoughts or ideas usually expressed.

1. Do you accept and confess the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour and Redeemer, trusting in his death and resurrection for the forgiveness of your sins?
2. Do you solemnly consecrate yourself to Christ and His service and do you seek by the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit to turn from the ways of sin, foster communion with God in prayer and the use of His Word, and as far as you know how, lead an upright Christian life according to God's revealed will and to the honour of His name?
3. Baptism is also an act of identifying with God's mission for the world. So I ask you now, do you desire to be baptized upon this faith in Christ, and to be received into the church of Jesus Christ, identifying yourself with God's mission for the world through the church?
4. Do you believe in Christ as your Saviour and Lord, and do you now want to commit yourself to Christ's Church?

### **Statements of Baptism:**

“(Name), Upon your profession of faith, I baptize you in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. (baptism) Amen.”

“(Name), Upon your profession of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Saviour from sin, and your vow of consecration to Him and His service, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord baptize you with the Spirit from above.”

**Right Hand of Fellowship:**

In the name of Christ and the church I now extend to you the right hand of fellowship and welcome you, (name) as a (brother, sister) into the church of Christ.

**The Commitment of the Congregation:**

You have expressed faith in Jesus by your confession of faith and baptism. We too want to join with you now to share our faith and encouragement. We are glad with you. We rejoice that you have chosen to cast your lot with the community of the Spirit. We want you to grow in faith and in this new relationship with God and with others. And our prayer for you we make also for ourselves, that each of us, and all of us together, may be faithful in the purpose of God's kingdom.

## Attachment 5

### **Baptismal Preparation and Practice**

#### **Experiential: by Elaine Pinto**

As a 15 year old, my own experience with baptism was crowded with two primary emotions: fear, and immense relief and joy. Joy because I was keenly aware that I was testifying to the local church and the world about, that I was a follower of Jesus Christ ... and fear because I would have to stand up and tell the story of my conversion, and subsequent willingness to follow Christ, to several hundred people that were members of the Elmwood MB church I attended in 1958.

In this public testimony or “Ausprache” as it was called in German, candidates for baptism essentially asked for those present to confirm the seriousness of their confession of faith in Christ, and grant permission to be welcomed into that local MB church. My testimony was expected to indicate a clear experience with Christ, and include a Scriptural basis for why I wanted to be baptized. I remember saying I wanted to be obedient to Christ and using the text from Acts 2:38, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy spirit.”

After my testimony was heard, the church members were then free to question or confirm the integrity of my request. Anyone could quiz us on the intention of the heart. The minister’s son, with whom I was friends, narrowly escaped rejection when one of the elders noted aloud that he had seen Harold in a pool hall, and this was not in accordance with Christ-like behavior. The MBs at that time interpreted Scripture to state that we should not sit with those that scoff at the way of Christ, and clearly pool hall participants, or those that frequented dance halls, and movie goers were such people. Drinking and smoking were expressly forbidden, and by requesting baptism, you refused both because neither was deemed to be respectful of your body as a temple of the Holy Spirit.

One by one, following our testimonies, we were sent out of the gathering into a side room to await the decision of the church. Friends and family then vouched for you, but often the friends were as afraid of speaking out as you were, and it was left to your parents or aunts and uncles to comment on your behalf. Usually family would give some sort of concrete evidence that they believed you were a Christian and wanted to follow Christ... for instance, they noticed a change in your behavior in the home, and that you were really desiring to be a disciple of Christ. An older candidate would get appropriate comments from his or her friends and relatives.

One by one, after the decisions were made we were called back into the gathered congregation, and told that we were welcomed into the community. The following Sunday evening, we were baptized by immersion in the baptismal tank built into the front of the church. When in the water, I was asked again, “Elaine Martens, do you believe in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord?” and my heartfelt response was “yes”. “Upon your confession of faith I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

Aside from thinking how my wet hair would look to the several hundred gathered to witness, and whether I could change quickly enough to return for the remainder of the service, it was a glorious moment. I knew Jesus died for my sins and I had been obedient and responded to his call to be numbered with the followers of Christ. I was part of a local community that I would be nurtured in, and though I was accountable to them now, and had voluntarily submitted to church discipline, it was a happy day. All the baptisands knelt down to receive the blessings given us from 1 Thess. 5:23–25, we were received into the church and took our first communion.

### **Theological** (Thanks to D. Ewert and *MB Herald*)

When someone's belief in Christ has become a personal faith and requests baptism, the MBs call this the "Believer's Baptism." Romans 6 is the chief Scriptural text that MBs invoke for baptism.

(Rom 6:3–6 NRSV)

3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

4 Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

him in a resurrection like his.

6 We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin

Mennonite Brethren hold that the passage teaches that baptism signifies a cleansing from sin, the beginning of a new life, and other passages such as Acts 2: 38, and Acts 10:44–48 signify the reception of the Holy Spirit. So the candidate believes that he or she is forgiven of past sins, and covenants to live a new life as a follower of Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

When a believer is baptized in the Mennonite Brethren church they are also publicly initiated into a local church. MBs understand the Scriptural phrase to be "baptized into Christ Jesus" implied that one was also in the church. St. Paul always wrote to believers who were members of a church at specific geographical locations whether it was at Jerusalem, Rome, Antioch, or elsewhere. So today, it is St. Alphonses or McIvor MB. In fact the words in the current MB minister's manual for the baptismal act are "Do you confess that Jesus Christ is your personal savior and Lord; and are you willing to follow him in the fellowship of the church?"

### **Historical**

Though the Mennonites find their roots in the Anabaptist Movement of the 16th Century, the Mennonite Brethren, as a denomination broke off from the larger Mennonite Church in 1860 in Russia. My baptism story contained the basic elements of what the baptismal practices have been historically, in the 140 year old MB church...a public confession of faith that follows the inner reality of a conversion experience, submission

to a local congregation for fellowship and discipline, and the outer sign of baptism by immersion.

The public confession has had many nuances over the years. In early days, you went to ask an elder privately if he could confidently grant you a hearing in the church. The elders carried incredible power and could turn you away. Now, the call for baptismal classes is put in the bulletin, and you might come for hour-long sessions in the Sunday School hour for 6–8 weeks prior to the date of baptism. Any sincere person is welcome. The mode of baptism was not the primary question in the earliest days, but rather the importance of a believer's baptism. However, with a study of the early Christian practices and reading of religious books and periodicals of the time, and the influence of the Baptists, within the first few years, the Mennonite Brethren mode became baptism by immersion.

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MBs also feel the Romans 6 pericope also lends strong support to baptism by immersion. Wherever the church could find water..., in Manitoba it was the Assiniboine river and the Bird's Hill gravel pits before we built our own tanks in the churches.

## **Liturgical**

Mennonite Brethren in their earlier days were against any formal preparation such as a specified catechism. It was exactly this that they wanted to get away from, a prescribed set of doctrine and tradition that could be memorized by rote. Therefore, it is difficult to find any written work of the teaching and preparation that went on ahead of baptism, because the important thing was the believers' own confession of faith, and the Bible was the standard all members were to be studying. Only in recent history have there been guidebooks. One's life was to follow the ethical implications of the Bible. The formal "Confession of Faith" was a way of life one committed oneself to at baptism.

In earlier history, the ritual of testimonies given prior to the baptism was a "spontaneous" event, guaranteeing it was something genuine and from the heart. The evening would have several hymns interspersed with the serious business of listening to testimonies, appropriate Scripture, and opening and closing free spoken prayers. In the latest baptism we had in our church, we heard the testimonies Sunday morning because there were 21 people to listen to. We gathered for over two hours and still had 6 people we had to hear in the evening. Candidates are no longer sent out of the room to await the decision of a much friendlier (dare I say more easy-going?) congregation, and a specific Scripture is often given them by their parents or deacon that visited them.

The baptismal service itself contains worship music, Scriptures appropriate to baptism, the ministry of the Word, and the act of baptism. This is followed by the welcoming into the fellowship where the candidates kneel and have the laying on of hands with a Scriptural blessing, often particularly selected for them. The service then

concludes with communion. This deeply impresses the new candidate with the fact that one is “in Christ” in a physical, local community.

Mclvor Ave. Mennonite Brethren Church

200 Mclvor Ave, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Baptism and Communion Service

June 4, 2000 6:00 PM

Congregational Singing:

“Creation Calls”

“I Believe in Jesus”

“Not Be Shaken”

### **Testimonies**

Congregational Song

”I Have Decided To Follow Jesus”

Baptism

Congregational Singing:

“Amazing Grace”

“There Is A Redeemer”

“Create In Me A Clean Heart”

### **Communion**

Response:

“Lord, I Lift Your Name on High”

Ministry Team: Steve Doerksen, Pastor John B. Epp, Gerald Hamm.  
Pastor Terence Hoorman, Phil Janzen. Chantelle Marlens, Judy Martens,  
Lloyd Martens, Pastor John Neufeld, Trevor Olfert, Gerald Penner, Betty  
Plett





- |  |   |
|--|---|
| be an offence to our sisters and brothers;   | Romans 14   |
| 13. To give priority to Christ's great commission to be His witness and to seek to draw others to Christ through a consistent life and testimony;                                | Matthew 28:19–20<br>Acts 1:8<br>2 Corinthians 5:17–21<br>Matthew 5:16 |
| 14. When we remove from this place we will as soon as possible, seek union with some other church of like faith and practice where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant. | Jude 20–21<br>Acts 19:1<br>Luke 4:16                                  |

## Attachment 6

### **A Brief History of Christian Baptism**

by Richard Lebrun

I would like to preface this brief history of Christian Baptism by a few preliminary remarks. In the first place, rituals involving water as part of a religious purification and/or initiation into a religious community predate Christianity. For example, in the Judaism of the time of Jesus there was the practice of “proselyte baptism” by which gentiles were admitted to Jewish communities—it involved instruction about the history of Israel and the commandments of the law, circumcision for males, and a purifying water bath for all. I simply note this prehistory without going into detail.

Secondly, even the words used to name the Christian rites have a prehistory. The term *sacrament* comes from the Latin word *sacramentum*, which in pre-Christian times was a pledge of money or property deposited in a temple by parties to a lawsuit or contract, and forfeited by the one who lost the suit or broke the contract. Later, it referred to an oath of allegiance made by soldiers to their commander and the gods. In either case, *sacramentum* involved a religious ceremony in a sacred place. Similarly, the term “mystery,” used by early-Greek speaking Christians to refer to what we call sacraments, comes from the Greek *mysterion*, which in everyday Greek meant “something hidden or secret,” but which had come to be used as a generic term for the rituals of the so-called “mystery” cults that had become common in the Greek and Roman religious world by the time of Christ. When Latin translations of the Bible were made for Christians who did not speak Greek, *mysterion* was sometimes rendered as *mysterium* and sometimes as *sacramentum*, but in the New Testament, neither *sacramentum* or the original *mysterion* ever refers to Christian rites.

Thirdly, the early Christian community used various practices, such as a rite of baptism for initiation into the community, a meal in common during which they would share bread and wine in memory of Jesus, speaking in tongues, laying on of hands, etc., before anyone developed a general explanation of these ritual actions, that is, a theology of the sacraments. The scriptural passages about these early rituals are usually descriptions of religious experiences or based on such experiences. The development of a theology, an interpretation of the experiences, followed the experiences.

Fourthly, a word about my sources. My primary source for these remarks is the excellent book by Joseph Martos entitled *Doors to the Sacred. A Historical Introduction to the Sacraments of the Catholic Church* (first published in 1981, with new editions in 1982 and 1991). I looked at a number of other books, but Martos appeared to be by far the most useful for my purposes. I also happen to like his metaphor, “doors to the sacred,” as

a way to think about the sacraments.

Fifthly, as Martos points out, until recently the Roman Catholic Church's understanding of its sacraments was largely independent of historical facts, and it was generally assumed that the rituals had remained substantially unchanged for nineteen hundred years. It was only in the later nineteenth-century that the historical process of development and change began to be researched and understood, and only with the liturgical movement of the twentieth century and the Second Vatican Council of the mid-1960s, that deepening historical understanding had a significant impact on both the practice and understanding of sacraments in the Catholic Church. An historical approach, it seems to me, is extremely important for ecumenical discussion. And as Martos puts it, the Catholic ecumenist needs an approach that "looks at the past with a critical eye, simply trying to understand why things happened the way they did and not always trying to justify the Roman Catholic position." It is in this spirit that I would like to tell you what I have learned about the history of baptism as a Christian sacrament.

Lastly, I think that Martos offers a very helpful principle of interpretation when he emphasizes "that ideas and experiences, thinking and doing, theory and practice influence each other over the course of time." This principle can be used to develop an interpretation of the Christian sacraments that is both true to the facts of history and faithful to the basic teachings of Christianity. I take it we can also take it as a given, as something that we can agree on, that religious experiences, and specifically sacramental religious experiences, are genuinely human experiences. Whether one ascribes these experiences to God or some natural cause is a matter of interpretation, but the religious experience, or the experience of the sacred, is as human, as common, as trans-personal, and as transcultural as experiences of joy or sorrow.

Turning now the history of Christian baptism, for the sake of convenience I will treat the subject under six headings: 1) Baptism in the New Testament; 2) The practice of Baptism in the second and third centuries; 3) Fourth-century changes with the end of persecution—including the influence of Augustine; 4) Baptism in the Middle Ages; 5) Baptism in the sixteenth century, including the challenge of the reformers and the response by the Council of Trent; and 6) Baptism in the Roman Catholic tradition since the Second Vatican Council.

The early Church knew about John the Baptist's ritual of baptism, of course, and in particular about his baptism of Jesus, but NT writers stressed the uniqueness of the latter and not its resemblance to later sacramental practice. There is also a mention in John's Gospel (chs. 3 & 4) about the disciples baptizing, but with no description of the rite or any explanation of how this baptism differed from that of John the Baptist. Martos, however, thinks that it was a sign of moral conversion similar to that of John the Baptist. It's interesting that so far as we know, the followers of Jesus known as the apostles (or the twelve) never underwent Christian baptism. What is clear is that soon after they began preaching the good news of his resurrection, they also began baptizing those who accepted that message. In Acts (2:37–41), in the description of the events of Pentecost, after the apostles were "filled with the Holy Spirit," Peter concluded his address to the multitude with the injunction to "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of

Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’’ Other NT accounts of baptisms were similar; in each case those who were baptized were adults who expressed their faith in Jesus beforehand. There were cases where whole families were baptized (for example, Acts 16:29–33), but we simply don’t know if small children were included. The norm, however, appears to have been baptism of believing adults. In most cases, those who were baptized also had hands laid on them. In NT accounts, the immersion in water was generally associated with the forgiveness of sin, and the imposition of hands with the reception of the Holy Spirit, but the accounts do not always distinguish clearly between the two actions and their meanings.

As for the meaning of baptism in the NT, it seems clear that it marked the dividing line between the old and the new, between waiting for the messiah and finding him, between sin and forgiveness. It was in the writings of Paul, the first great missionary of the Church and its first major theologian, that meaning of the experience of baptism was first spelled out. As Martos puts it, ‘‘Reflecting on the experience of his own conversion and baptism as well as on the way it affected others, he strove to express in concepts and images the meaning that being baptized held for those who accepted Christ as their Lord and saviour.’’ (p. 145) What Paul stressed was that those who were baptized in the name of Jesus were baptized into Christ, and into his death and resurrection. By being submerged in water, they had joined Christ in dying, and in coming out of the water they rose to a new and transformed life in the Christian community. Paul used various analogies and images in his explanation of the mystery. Baptism, he said, was like Jewish circumcision in that it stripped off the old ways of the flesh and initiated the convert into the ways of the Spirit. Just as they taken off their clothes in entering the water, they took off sin and divisiveness, and having clothed themselves in Christ, were now united with him and one another. They were now joined together in a community that had been sanctified, justified, and washed clean of sin—like the Israelites who had passed through the sea from slavery to freedom.

Paul’s theology of baptism was the first sustained attempt to articulate the experience of dying to the past and beginning a new life. Baptism was a door to a new life, opened by faith in Jesus as the Christ. Other NT writings, mostly written after Paul of course, reiterate many of these same ideas. Water baptism was, therefore, part of Christian initiation from the time of Pentecost, and spread with the new religion. Documents written in the second century, such as *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* and the writings of the martyr Justin, mention the practice. But in these writings, to the preaching of the good news, instruction in the Christian way of life has been added, and the process was concluded with prayers and a sharing of the Lord’s supper.

By the third century, a pattern of more or less elaborate rituals and practices had developed in the various Christian centres within the Empire. There were variations, but Martos puts together a typical picture of Christian initiation during this period. In the first place, with the Gospel being preached to the gentiles (rather than to Jews living according the Mosaic law), that is to non-Jews of all sorts of backgrounds and walks of life, a simple profession of faith in Christ no longer sufficed for admission to baptism. If someone wanted to become Christian, they had to find someone from the Christian community to sponsor them for a period of formation, and to present them after two or

three years of preparation. If they had followed what was judged a disreputable way of life (if they were pimps, prostitutes, makers of idols, actors, soldiers, etc.), they had to give it up and find a new profession. They would have to avoid serious sins such as murder, adultery, & promiscuity, and be able to prove it. The period of preparation was known as the “catechumenate” (from the Greek word meaning “instruction”), but the instruction was mostly ethical rather than doctrinal. Because of the danger of persecution, catechumens were told very little about the sacred mysteries of Christianity or even the meeting places of the Christian community. Ordinarily any Christian could sponsor another adult, but parents would usually present their own children, and masters their own slaves.

By the end of second century, the time for baptism changed from right after conversion, to any Sunday, and then to right before Easter Sunday. Also, by 200, children as well as adults were being baptized, though the age varied with local and family customs. As for the actual practices and rituals, they had become quite elaborate. A few weeks before the annual baptism, the catechumens began a period of more intensive preparation. They were presented to the bishop and their worthiness for baptism was attested to by their sponsors. Their responsibilities as new Christians were explained. When they were accepted as candidates—they began to receive doctrinal instructions; they listened to the words of Scripture, and heard them explained along with other teachings that had become part of the tradition of the Church. During these last weeks ~ each Sunday they were exorcised of evil spirits, prayed over, blessed, touched, anointed with oil, signed with the sign of the cross on various parts of their body, or blown on by the bishop with the breath of the Holy Spirit.

As the day of baptism drew nearer, the intensity of initiation increased. During the final week, the candidates were instructed daily, their life reexamined, they underwent further exorcisms, and they made promises to renounce the devil and his works. They were taught the Lord’s prayer, and the Apostles Creed. Sometimes they were given salt to remind that they were to become the salt of the earth. On the last two days they fasted from food. The solemn ceremonies began on the evening before Easter in the presence of the bishop and the congregation they were joining. They saw the Pascal candle lit, and heard hymns of praise and thanksgiving for the salvation Christ had brought. There were many readings from the Scriptures—about God’s spirit moving over the waters at creation, about the flood’s destruction of sinners, Noah’s salvation by God, the exodus of Israel through the waters of the Red Sea, etc. They kept vigil all night.

In the early morning, the candidates, the bishop, and his assistants went to a baptismal pool. The water was blessed, the candidates anointed and exorcised a final time, and they made a final renunciation of the devil. They were then stripped naked, the men assisted by deacons, the women by deaconesses, who went down into the pool with them. Standing in the water, they were asked “Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth?” They answered, “I do believe,” and water was poured over them. They were asked again, “Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his Son, who was brought into the world to suffer for it?” Again they answered, and were washed a second time. The third question was “Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Church, the

resurrection of the body and life everlasting?” After again replying “I do believe,” water was poured over them a third time.

Coming out of the pool, they were anointed in the name of Christ, and given a white garment. Individually they presented themselves to the bishop who laid his hand on their head, anointed them with oil a final time, and prayed that they be filled with the Holy Spirit. Now fully baptized, for the first time they were led into the assembled community to join in celebrating the Easter liturgy. There they participated in the Eucharist as their prayer of thanksgiving

During the patristic era, the details of these ceremonies varied with time and place, as did the explanations offered by the fathers of the Church. Despite the variations in these explanations, which reflected a variety of personal and philosophical backgrounds, there was nevertheless general agreement on the basics: baptism brought forgiveness of sins, brought God’s grace, imparted the Holy Spirit, and it was not to be repeated.

Following Constantine’s Edict of Toleration in 313, there were changes in baptismal practices. With the end of persecution, there was no longer a need to be so secretive about Christian worship, and catechumens were allowed to attend the Sunday liturgies up through the Scripture readings and the homily. Restrictions on permissible occupations were relaxed, and baptism began to be celebrated in public buildings rather than in private homes. With great increases in the numbers of conversions (whatever the motives in the new political situation), the lengthy catechumenate was retained, but the period of immediate preparation and teaching was shortened. With people living in what was increasingly a Christian society, it was expected that people could more easily learn more about the Christian religion.

Problems arose however. For example, it was commonly taught that baptism brought forgiveness of sins, and that the baptized were expected to live exemplary lives. There were no provisions for a second baptism, and penitential practices for those who failed live up to their baptismal promises were very severe. So, many converts (like Constantine) often chose to remain catechumens almost for life, counting on a death-bed baptism that would wash away all their sins (and ensure their salvation). In the same way, some Christian parents delayed baptism of their children until after adolescence (and its temptations). On the other hand, there were those who took the doctrine of the necessity of baptism literally to mean that children who died without baptism were forever lost. Together with the high rate of infant mortality of the period, this belief led some parents to baptize their children shortly after birth rather than wait for the yearly liturgical baptism. During the third century in North Africa it became common practice to baptize infants in the week after they were born. Many bishops, seeing the moral danger of a prolonged catechumenate, also pushed for early baptism, and gradually the idea of baptizing infants became widely accepted.

This practice, however, raised a theological question: Why baptize babies? Baptism was supposed to be for the remission of sins, and yet infants were being baptized before they were old enough to sin. The answer was provided by Cyprian of Carthage in the third century, who said it was for the sin of Adam. Arguing from Scripture (Romans 5:12-21

especially) and the practice of the Church, he contended that baptism washed away the guilt contracted by the human race by Adam's fall. The answer seemed satisfactory, but how was the sin of Adam inherited by his descendants? That question remained unanswered until Augustine, a hundred and fifty years later.

The why and how of Augustine's thinking about baptism and the sacraments in general is a complicated story involving his controversies with the Donatists. (who claimed that sacraments administered by ministers—bishops and priests—who had defected from the Church during the last great persecution in the early fourth century were invalid, and that, for example, those who had been baptized by such ministers had to be re-baptized), and Pelagius (a British monk who disagreed profoundly with the theory of grace that Augustine had worked out in his debates with the Donatists).

In his controversy with the Donatists Augustine used the idea that in baptism Christians received a "spiritual seal" that was the image of Christ. This notion of a spiritual seal had its own history and had been developed by Christian thinkers who had tried to work out a logically coherent understanding of their sacramental practices that would take into account the biblical revelation, the traditional practices of the Church (such as the ritual of baptism), and their own religious experience. As inheritors of the Greek intellectual tradition, these Christian thinkers had a philosophical faith in the rationality of the universe (including the spiritual realities they were trying to explain). The theory of a "sacramental seal" tried to answer such questions as: What does the Bible mean when it says Christians are "sealed in the spirit"? Why are some sacramental rites, like baptism and ordination, never repeated? In working out their answers to questions like these, the church fathers gradually came to understand biblical metaphors as metaphysical realities. Put another way, there was, to quote Martos "a gradual movement away from metaphorical descriptions of experienced realities to philosophical explanations of spiritual realities" (Martos, 44). Taking the Bible literally, the fathers came to understand biblical metaphors as objective facts. Thus those who were "sealed in the spirit" by baptism could be thought of as being marked by a something like a spiritual tattoo, which could never be erased, and therefore need never be repeated.

In dealing with the theological problem posed by the Donatists, what Augustine did was to argue that there must be two effects of baptism. The permanent effect was the seal, the other was God's grace, removing sin from the soul of the baptized. If people were baptized by a heretical sect, they might not receive the grace of forgiveness because they were, perhaps unwittingly, in a sinful state of separation from the church until they repented of their error. The other effect, the sacrament as seal, Augustine argued, was valid even if the baptism was conferred by heretics or schismatics. He also argued that the minister of baptism was irrelevant because the baptism and the seal were Christ's, not the ministers. It was the seal that marked them as belonging to Christ, and made them eligible to receive God's grace. Augustine also held that without God's grace—the grace received through baptism and the other sacraments—people could not avoid falling into sin.

It was this last idea that was challenged by Pelagius, who believed that people were born in a state of "original grace," and that what was lost by Adam was not this grace, but a

further “grace of pardon,” which was won by Christ and received by sinful adults when they were baptized. According to Pelagius, children were born innocent, and so had no need of baptism. In responding to Pelagius, Augustine drew on Cyprian’s notion that all were born with the sin of Adam, and developed it by arguing that this “original sin” was on the soul from birth, and this is why it was essential that all persons (even infants) have this initial deformity reshaped into the image of Christ by receiving the baptismal seal.

So great was Augustine’s authority as the last great Latin “church father,” that by the end of the fifth century, infant baptism had become universal in the Latin West. Usually infants were baptized at the yearly Easter celebration, but in some places they were baptized soon after birth. At the same time, this change in the normal age of baptism brought changes in the traditional practice of baptism, which in turn led to changes in the common understanding of the sacrament.

In the first place, the catechumenate disappeared because babies could not be instructed about living a moral life. So did the doctrinal instructions prior to baptism. The exorcisms and anointings were retained since it was thought they could be effective even without the child’s knowledge. The role of the sponsors also changed; in fact, for all practical purposes their role was reversed. Instead of being guarantors of the candidate’s faith before baptism, they were asked to speak in the child’s name when it was asked to renounce the devil and asked whether it believed the doctrines of the creed, and after baptism sponsors became the guardians of the child’s faith. Sponsors were now considered responsible for making sure the child received religious instruction and grew up a good Christian. As for the ritual itself, the practice became one of pouring water over the child’s head (three times), with a baptismal formula based on Matthew 28:19: “I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The entire ritual came to symbolize something done to an infant by a single individual, instead of something that was done for an adult by the community of believers.

Another change was the separation of the ritual into distinct steps. In the patristic period, the entire ceremony that preceded the Easter liturgy (the exorcisms, prayers, and anointings as well as the washings and final anointing or imposition of hands by the bishop) was known as “baptism,” and was followed immediately by participation in the Eucharist. Now, in the West, the baptismal washing was separated from the final anointing by the bishop, and the first reception of communion as part of baptism disappeared. The anointing by the bishop eventually became a separate sacrament, called confirmation, and “first communion” a kind of unofficial sacrament.

We usually think of the Middle Ages as the period between the fall of Rome in the West to Germanic tribes and the Renaissance and Reformation. With respect to baptism, however, this thousand year period saw only a few developments that we need notice. The first, was further simplification and standardization of the ritual. These developments were related to the process of converting the Germanic tribes. Monks were sent out to bring Christianity to the tribes and the lands they came from. In the tribal cultures, the chieftain of the community was the spokesman; what he did the tribe did. Missionaries would talk to these leaders about Rome’s religion (which from the late fourth century was Christianity). Impressed with what they saw of the old empire, many were willing to



adopt a more advanced religion. So they were baptized and so were their people. The ritual used was the rite of infant baptism, since it was the only form of baptism the monks knew, without any catechumenate and very little doctrinal instruction. The monks worked with great zeal for “salvation of souls”; for them each baptism meant another soul washed clean of original sin, marked with the character of Christ, and filled with the Holy Spirit. We can see how the meaning of the sacrament was shifting. Instead of salvation from a sinful life, baptism became salvation from original sin. Instead of marking the beginning of a new moral life, it promised eternal life after death. The ritual itself was administered in Latin, a language that few of the converts understood.

Towards the end of the eighth century, Charlemagne, for the sake of uniformity in the empire he was consolidating, sent to Rome for a copy of its sacramental books. In Rome, the initiation rites that had once stretched over a period of weeks had been compressed into a short ceremony—three exorcisms on the three Sundays before Easter, the blessing of the baptismal water and font on Holy Saturday, children dipped into the font three times while a confession of faith in the Trinity was said, anointing by a priest with oil, the bishop laying his hand on them and making the sign of the cross on their forehead with oil. Charlemagne imposed this rite by edict—but since the Roman ritual restricted the second anointing to a bishop, they adopted the custom of waiting for the bishop to have their baptisms confirmed. So in most of Europe, this resulted in a greater and greater separation of baptism from confirmation. In the following two centuries, in part because bishops and councils noted that infants are always in danger of dying unexpectedly, there was a shift from infant baptism once a year at Easter, to baptism anywhere from a day to a week after birth—so that they could be protected from the danger of dying with original sin on their souls. When this happened, the baptism ceremony disappeared from the Easter vigil, though the font and the water were still blessed for use during the rest of the year. And after the eleventh century, when Christianity had become the sole religion of Christendom, adult baptisms become so infrequent that in the rare cases where Jews or Moslems converted to Christianity, special adaptations had to be made to the rite.

When medieval theologians came to write about the sacrament of baptism, it was the simplified rite administered to infants that they had in mind, and it was the largely metaphysical explanation worked out by the Church Fathers that they borrowed. For most the explanation was a matter of logic and deduction rather than something related to religious experience. By the twelfth century, the schoolmen in the new universities were turning with renewed interest to the Bible, the writings of the Church fathers, and to the statements of the early councils. To deal with the bewildering variety of texts at hand—sermons and letters, statements of bishops and councils, and commentaries and treatises, they compiled summaries on topics that interested them. Peter Lombard’s “book of sentences,” which was the most popular of these summaries, not only provided a definition of “sacrament,” it also offered what became a definitive listing of the seven principal sacraments. In dealing with various problems and disputes that arose in this new intellectual milieu, medieval theologians turned to the newly recovered philosophy of Aristotle for conceptual tools of logic and vocabulary. They created what is called the scholastic method, in many ways a great intellectual achievement, and an approach that has been to be enormously important in Catholic theology down to our own time.

Thomas Aquinas, arguably the greatest and most original of these scholastic theologians, worked out an impressive theology of baptism that brought together the practices of the Church of his time, the teachings of the Bible, the Fathers of the Church, and the philosophy of Aristotle. It was, however an imperfect and unstable synthesis, and later theologians such as John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham retreated from his optimistically rational approach, and denied that the effects of baptism could be proven philosophically. For Ockham, who is known for his philosophy of “nominalism,” baptism was just a name for what happened when the ritual was performed, and what really happened could be known only on the authority of the church.

Another medieval development that had its effect on the practice and understanding of baptism was an evolving preoccupation with ecclesiastical or canon law. At about the same time as Peter Lombard put together his *Sentences*, another scholar, Gratian, was gathering, organizing, and editing materials on the church’s institutional functions. His work, the title of which is variously translated as *The Agreement of Disagreeing Canons*, or *The Concordance of Discordant Canons*, included letters, decrees, and directives of popes, bishops, and councils. Its section on the sacraments was concerned mostly with questions of administration (for example, whether or not lay people may baptize). Canonists tended to be interested in individual sacramental acts, seeking to specify what each particular rite must contain for it to do its spiritual work. In time, this emphasis on proper performance led to a minimalist attitude. For the canonists, the “valid sacrament” was one which met the minimum ritual requirements. And unfortunately, in time, the minimalist of rules for the administration of the sacraments tended to become the norm. What this meant in the lives of ordinary people, as Martos puts it, is that “their acquaintance with the sacraments was all too often an experience of rituals reduced to their bare essentials, and their understanding of the sacraments was all too often a mechanistic idea of sacramental causality” (p. 70).

Summing up the effects of nominalism and legalism on baptism, Martos concludes that “as medieval culture declined, the tendency to understand baptism metaphysically went down and the tendency to regard it magically went up” (165). No one denied baptism’s spiritual effects, and it continued to have social effects, such as making one a member of the Church, and legal effects, such as enabling one to receive the other sacraments. However, the rich spiritual experience, which appears to have characterized the long catechumenate and the elaborate Easter Week rituals of early the church, and which is clearly intended in the current *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the “Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults” (both in your documentation for this meeting) that is now prescribed, had largely disappeared by the end of the Middle Ages.

It was partly in reaction to a situation in which sacraments were too often experienced as perfunctory rituals that seemed almost empty of meaning, that Luther and the other sixteenth century reformers sought to rethink both theory and practice. The majority of reformers kept both the name and idea that sacraments were visible ceremonies instituted by Christ, but because they found no scriptural warrant for the others, they generally rejected all but baptism and the Lord’s supper. They also rejected much of the Catholic theology of baptism as they knew it, and tried to work out explanations that made sense to their own experience. Since Adolf Ens will be speaking about the developments that

led to the new Anabaptist theory and practice of adult believer's baptism, I will not attempt to cover the various positions on baptism that emerged among Protestants in the sixteenth century, but will go immediately to the teachings of the Council of Trent.

The bishops of Trent did not issue a separate statement on baptism, but in dealing with the issues of original sin and justification by faith (which appeared to them most at odds with what they believed to be traditional and orthodox Catholic teaching), they enumerated and condemned what they viewed as the heretical positions of Luther, Calvin, and others respecting baptism. Among the condemned ideas were the following: that the Catholic Church does not teach the true doctrine of baptism, that baptism administered by heretics is not a true baptism, that baptized persons cannot lose God's grace through sin, that those who are baptized may obey their own conscience rather than the laws of the Church, that the grace of baptism covers sins committed after baptism, that anyone should be rebaptized after being baptized in the Catholic Church, that infants should not be baptized, and that children should not be compelled to live a Christian life. As Martos notes, these decrees "missed the heart of the Protestant attack on the sacraments, which was that the medieval ritual had ceased to be effective for most people" (p. 169). Trent, and popes and bishops following the council, worked hard to improve the training and performance of the clergy and to provide effective religious education for the faithful—but neither the theory or practice of baptism within the Church changed very much. When Catholic missionaries went out to non-European peoples in the sixteenth century, they sought to save souls by bringing baptism. We read, for example, of Francis Xavier, baptizing ten thousand in India in December 1543. During the Catholic Reformation no one, it appears, remembered or tried to implement the catechumenate of the early church.

In effect, following Trent, the Catholic Church retained the medieval form of baptism as normative, and kept the medieval theology of baptism as definitive. The only minor development in Catholic baptismal theology until the twentieth century was broadening of the interpretation of the concept of "baptism of desire," which had been spoken of by the early church fathers and the scholastics. With the geographic discoveries of the sixteenth century, some Catholic theologians came to speak of it as a "desire to lead a good and upright life," in effect, to live like a Christian, so that such people could be saved even if they had never heard of Christianity or baptism.

But it was only with the ecumenical movement, in the context of the increasing religious pluralism of the twentieth century, and with better scriptural and historical scholarship, that Catholic theologians began to revisit the theology of baptism, to study their Protestant counterparts, and to discover that there were, as Martos puts it, "other theologies of baptism that could be defended quite well on scriptural and philosophical grounds" (p 171.). It was this new scholarship, which came to the surface at the Second Vatican Council, that led, in 1969, to the revised Rite of Baptism for Children, and to the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) in 1972. With the implementation of these changes in Catholicism today, the medieval theology of baptism is being replaced by one that is more scriptural and patristic in origin.

## Attachment 7

### History of Mennonite Baptismal Practice: Origin and Developments

Mennonite baptismal theology and practice derives originally from the “radical” wing of Ulrich Zwingli’s reform movement in Zurich—the Swiss Brethren.

Briefly, Zwingli’s movement was characterized by a Renaissance drive to return to the sources of the faith. By then Martin Luther and others were asserting the sole (or supreme) authority of the Bible in matters of faith. In Zurich this led to a somewhat austere biblicism. The mode of effecting change was to arrive at a new theological position through public debate and then to follow that up later by a change in practice deemed appropriate to the new theology. The latter was done in the context of the state church, which sought to ensure the maintenance of good order in society.

In 1523 the sacrament of the Eucharist was debated with the conclusion that its sacramental nature was unscriptural. That is, the material elements of bread and wine were held to be (merely) symbols of Christ’s body and blood. The Eucharist would thus change from a kind of re-enactment of Christ’s sacrificial death to a ritual reminder of his historic death at Golgotha.

Delay by the civic authorities in approving appropriate changes in the way the Eucharist was now celebrated led to a gradual separation from Zwingli of “radicals” who did not want to wait until the Zurich Council considered it prudent.

That separation was hastened when in late 1524 the debate shifted to baptism. Zwingli now shifted from his earlier admission that it was difficult to support infant baptism on the basis of New Testament texts. Against the radicals, who pressed that point, he argued on a parallel between circumcision in the Old Covenant and baptism in the New. Public debate of the topic thus became a hot issue and the authorities cut it short.

The radicals in turn had shifted to considering the nature of the church and were beginning to conclude that it consisted of those who had of their own free will committed themselves to the Lordship of Christ. “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved,” described for them not only the *conditions* of entry into the “true” church, but also the *sequence*. Faith must be experiential, not latent within the child or proxy in the parents or godparents.

In the recollections of George Cajakob, several of them “came to one mind” that true Christian baptism must be “on the basis of the recognized and confessed

faith, in the union with God of a good conscience.” [Later: “had properly given themselves to God, and with a good understanding had made covenant of a good conscience with God.” 45. Cf. 1 Peter 3:21 ] He then gives a brief account of the first baptism service in late January 1525. (SAW 1:430)

1. This new baptism took seriously what Luther had popularized as “priesthood of all believers.” Blaurock: “Each confirmed (*bestätigt*) the other in the service of the gospel.” (44) Priestly and other ordination in the previous ecclesial community not carried forward into the new. Baptism became an “ordination.”

2. Baptismal covenant committed the believer to responsible Christian living. “We understand that even an adult is not to be baptized without Christ’s rule of binding and loosing.” (Conrad Grebel et al. 1524 to Thomas Muentzer, SAW 1:80) The new “church” constituted by this baptism took Jesus’ teaching (Mt. 18:15-17) as a mandate for itself. By this “rule of Christ” as they called it, they affirmed: that a Christian “walk” was informed by Jesus’ teaching and example; that a common understanding of what this meant was possible; and that every baptized believer had a responsibility in the “penitential role” of the priest in the former Church.

3. Adult baptism implied that children remained unbaptized. This was based on an explicit rejection of original sin as damning. “We hold [14 specific Scripture references, etc.] that all children who have not yet come to discernment of the knowledge of good and evil ... are surely saved by the suffering of Christ.” [ibid. 81 ]

The Schleitheim Articles (1527—earliest Anabaptist confession or church order) prescribe the sequence of baptism, application of “rule of Christ,” Eucharist. Baptism, they wrote, “shall be given to all those who have been taught repentance and the amendment of life ... who believe truly that their sins are taken away through Christ ... all those who desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ ... who with such an understanding themselves desire and request it from us.” [Legacy, 36]

Balthasar Hubmaier’s form for water baptism includes: the Bishop asks for: 1. affirmation of the Apostle’s Creed (4 questions); 2. pledge to “lead your life and walk according to the Word of Christ;” 3. accept admonition according to Mt. 18:15-17; 4. accept water baptism “and thereby be counted in the visible Christian church.” [CRR 5: 388f]

Modes of baptism included sprinkling and pouring.

Baptism was done in the name of the Trinity (Mt. 28).

Early convictions about baptism as a kind of ordination soon waned. Officiating at baptism and Eucharist was soon restricted to a “bishop.”

The commitment to mutual admonition according to the “Rule of Christ” soon

waned under clerical leadership.

The age of accountability varied, generally remaining above the age of puberty (confirmation).

Among Mennonites in 19th century Russia the practice of immersion began in some groups under the influence of Lutheran separatist pietists and German Baptists.