



THE
LUTHERAN
WORLD
FEDERATION



Healing Memories

Implications of the Reconciliation
between Lutherans and Mennonites



HEALING MEMORIES

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECONCILIATION
BETWEEN LUTHERANS AND MENNONITES

LWF STUDIES 2016/2



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CONTENTS

Foreword.....	7
---------------	---

HEALING MEMORIES: RECONCILING IN CHRIST

Preface.....	11
--------------	----

Part I

Introduction.....	15
-------------------	----

Part 2

Telling the Sixteenth-Century Story Together	23
--	----

Part 3

Considering the Condemnations Today.....	77
--	----

Part 4

Remembering the Past, Reconciling in Christ.....	93
--	----

Appendix A	111
------------------	-----

Appendix B.....	119
-----------------	-----

Participants	121
--------------------	-----

BEARING FRUIT: IMPLICATIONS OF THE 2010 RECONCILIATION BETWEEN LUTHERANS AND ANABAPTIST-MENNONITES

Preface.....	125
--------------	-----

Introduction.....	127
-------------------	-----

I. The Authority of the Lutheran Confessions in Light of the 2010 Stuttgart Action with the Mennonites	137
---	-----

II. Continuing the Conversation on Unresolved Issues: Christians and the Civil Use of Lethal Force	155
---	-----

III. Good Practices of Lutheran-Mennonite Cooperation and Reconciliation..... 169

Conclusion..... 179

Appendix I..... 183

Appendix II 189

Appendix III..... 195

Members of the Task Force 199

Photo Gallery..... i-vii

FOREWORD

Anniversaries and jubilees offer us the opportunity to reflect on the past and to contemplate the future. At times, looking back at history will reveal serious wrongdoings and, painful as these revelations may be, facing up to and recognizing wrongdoings often have a truly healing impact.

The Lutheran–Mennonite reconciliation process received its first impulse from the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession in 1980. Mennonites had been invited to take part in the Lutheran celebrations, but had had some reservations since the Augsburg Confession includes several paragraphs that explicitly condemn Anabaptists, whom the Mennonites regard as their forebears in faith.

The situation in 1980 was the catalyst for a series of national and international dialogues, the major outcome of which was the report of the Lutheran–Mennonite International Study Commission, “Healing Memories–Reconciling in Christ.” The report eventually resulted in the Lutheran World Federation’s repentance before God and the Mennonite sisters and brothers for the violence that has been perpetrated, the persecution as well as the continued misrepresentation. The so-called “Mennonite Action” was a landmark moment at the 2010 Eleventh Assembly of the LWF in Stuttgart, Germany. The Mennonites accepted the LWF’s apology and both church families committed themselves to ensure that the act of reconciliation would bear fruit among Lutherans and Mennonites alike.

Since the act of reconciliation at Stuttgart, Lutherans and Mennonites have seen the dialogue bear rich fruit: new international dialogues and contacts have been initiated and local Lutheran and Mennonite communities have been transformed as they have come closer together in order to learn from one another. Invitations have been extended to participate at global gatherings, such as assemblies and council meetings, and the cooperation in service to the suffering neighbor has increased.

Following the Eleventh Assembly, the LWF formed a Task Force to follow up on the commitments made by the Assembly. In 2016, the Task Force presented its report, “Bearing Fruit—Implications of the 2010 Reconciliation between Lutherans and Anabaptist–Mennonites,” to the Council of the LWF, where it was received and commended for study.

We continue to rejoice over the power of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation and the way in which these transform people, communities and our communions at large. We thank God for the sustained reception of the reconciliation between Mennonites and Lutherans at a local level and

with gratitude receive the report, “Bearing Fruit,” which provides the impetus for deeper mutual understanding and joyful support in God’s mission.

The present publication brings together both above-mentioned reports: “Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ” and “Bearing Fruit—Implications of the 2010 Reconciliation between Lutherans and Anabaptist-Mennonites.” We commend this book for study and further dialogue within and among our communities and global communions.

Martin Junge
General Secretary
The Lutheran World Federation

César García
General Secretary
Mennonite World Conference

HEALING MEMORIES:
RECONCILING IN CHRIST

REPORT OF THE LUTHERAN-MENNONITE
INTERNATIONAL STUDY COMMISSION

THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION
THE MENNONITE WORLD CONFERENCE

2010

PREFACE

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:1-3)

One of the great privileges of a General Secretary is to commend to our churches resources which can strengthen them in the lives to which they are called. It is our deep pleasure to call your attention in this volume to important work which opens the way to a new climate of relations between Anabaptist-Mennonites and Lutherans, developments in which we believe the Spirit of God is at work.

Too often, the apostolic exhortation to the Ephesians seems to reproach us for ways in which we have fallen short. The loving unity which the Spirit gives—a unity marked by humility, gentleness, patience, and peace—often seems far in front of us, far removed from the life of the communities we know. But in this report you will hear from those who have made “every effort” to renew bonds of peace between our two traditions. To receive it is an act of hope.

Between Lutherans and Anabaptist-Mennonites, the parting of ways has a particularly painful history. For half a millennium’s time, we have been separated not only by theological disagreements from the sixteenth century but also by the legacies of violence from that formative period. On the Lutheran side, there had been both persecution and theological justification for these violent actions. While Anabaptists did not return this persecution, they also have carried burdens from that era in their memories of what they had suffered. In recent years, it became clear that the time was right for initiatives of reconciliation. Already our communities were collaborating to relieve suffering in many places around the world. The upcoming half-millennial anniversaries of the Reformation invited efforts to address wounds remaining from that time. It was, then, in a spirit of hopefulness that our two world bodies in 2002 established the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission, whose work is reported here.

This commission’s work provides an excellent example of the ways in which international dialogues can build upon and continue efforts begun in local and regional settings. In the Introduction, the commission describes this earlier work and relates its own progress in understanding the task before it. The surprises which commission members experienced as they overcame mutual misconceptions will be shared by many readers as well. It was a significant advance when the dialogue realized that remaining theological

differences between our two traditions could not be honestly and fruitfully explored until the legacy of the persecutions was faced directly. It is the outstanding contribution of this commission to provide for the churches of both our families this valuable resource for addressing this difficult subject.

The commission discovered that there was no common narrative of the crucial events of the sixteenth century. For the first time, and in an attractive and accessible way, they have presented for us this shared history. To look at the past together in this way is itself an act of reconciliation. We expect that this work will find wide usefulness in our seminaries and other educational settings, as well as in our churches around the world. While it is demanding and sometimes uncomfortable to read, the story is also deeply engaging. It speaks directly to the minds and hearts of all those who care for the Church's history and for its present life in Christ.

The story explored here is not simple. There are many nuances and complications which reward careful attention. Lutherans, for example, can take comfort in the theological insights which Martin Luther could have drawn upon to resist policies of persecution; they can take note that Lutherans were not the only or even, in terms of numbers executed, the most deadly of the sixteenth century persecutors of Anabaptists. But as the report shows, finally all ameliorations and exculpations fail: the only adequate response is repentance. Mennonites and other Anabaptist-related churches too came to this study with a spirit of honest self-assessment of a non-persecuting but still highly imperfect tradition, and at the end they propose steps on their side toward new relationship. Throughout, this report demonstrates how the search for reconciliation can be served by rigorous historical and theological study. Having begun its work by taking up the desire of our churches to address divisive legacies from the past, this commission now returns to these churches concrete recommendations toward a future of greater unity.

We are, then, most pleased with the outcome of this report. For both of us, the hope for healing between our traditions is deeply personal. This is particularly so for Ishmael Noko who grew up in present-day Zimbabwe as the child of a mother from the tradition of the Anabaptists; her relatives from the Brethren in Christ church are part of his family and part of the Mennonite World Conference communion of churches. For him the memories of their separation at the Lord's Supper are still vivid. We welcome this report for its consequences for individuals and families who have known the costs of division.

Indeed, reception of this report will be good for Mennonites and Lutherans around the world. Even before its publication, its recommendations have been greeted with approval and heart-felt enthusiasm on both sides. At the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in Paraguay in July 2009, Ishmael Noko received an emotional standing ovation as he described Lutheran sorrow and regret at their history and their intention to seek forgiveness:

We take these steps as we Lutherans are approaching a milestone anniversary: in 2017, we will observe “500 years of Reformation.” It is important we bring to this observance not only celebration of the fresh insights into the gospel which arose from this movement but also a spirit of honesty and repentance, a commitment to the continuing reformation of our tradition and of the whole Church. It is in this spirit that we hope to move forward on this issue of the heritage of our condemnations.

I have described the history of these condemnations as like the poison which a scorpion carries in its tail. We have not struck out with this poison for some time—but we still carry it with us in our system. We now are on a path which will lead us to expel this poison from our body, to allow us to live together with you, our sisters and brothers in Christ, in new ways.

Yesterday your General Council gave us great encouragement that you would walk with us on this way to healing. When you meet for your next Assembly, we Lutherans hope to be with you in a new way. And in that new relationship our witness to God’s love for the world will be more fully manifest.

In turn, Larry Miller also received warm thanks and a standing ovation in October 2009, as the Lutheran World Federation Council voted unanimously to recommend that the 2010 Assembly ask forgiveness “of God and of our Mennonite brothers and sisters” for the wrongs of the persecution and its legacies “up until the present day.” He said:

We receive your commitment to rightly remember this shared history, and your vulnerability in taking steps to heal the fractured body of Christ in which we live together, as a gift from God.

We are aware of the difficulty of the task. We are dealing with holy histories, yours and ours. We are dealing with our most basic self-understandings, yours and ours. For you, the witness of the Augsburg Confession is foundational and authoritative, an essential shaper of your identity. For us, the witness of the Anabaptist martyrs is a living and vital story, retold in our global community of churches to build group identity.

How can you distance yourself from the condemnations and their consequences while still honoring your history and strengthening your identity? How can we distance ourselves from use of the martyr tradition which perpetuates a sense of victimization and marginalization—and your reaching out for forgiveness pushes us to do precisely that—how can we thus distance ourselves while still honoring our history and strengthening our identity?

Surely these things will happen best if we continue to walk together in the way of Jesus Christ, our Reconciler and the Source of our common history and identity.

In both Strasbourg and Geneva, in the offices of our international bodies, we have already received numerous inquiries about the forthcoming ac-

tion and many requests for this report. We know that around the world our churches are waiting to reach out to one another, to learn about each other and to call upon the Spirit to strengthen anew the bonds of peace. This will indeed be good for both our traditions.

But this is good not for Anabaptist-related Christians and Lutherans alone. The pain of our separation has been borne not only by us; it is a wound for the whole Body of Christ. Similarly, reconciliation between Lutherans and Anabaptist-Mennonites is healing for the entire Body. To address this wrong not with rationalization but with repentance and to seek forgiveness rather than forgetfulness is to respond from the heart of our Christian faith. It is to trust in God's grace and not in our own strength. While in ecumenical relations it is often appropriate to seek forms of consensus or an exchange of gifts, in this distinctive relationship action must come first on the Lutheran side, and begin with repentance. The prayer for forgiveness cannot be an easy or trivial one. We Lutherans believe that in these prayers and in our commitments to transform our teaching about and relationships with Anabaptists, we are acting on behalf of healing for the entire Church. But action must come also from the Anabaptist-Mennonite side. We Anabaptist-related Christians believe that when we respond in genuine humility with forgiveness, with recognition of our own multiple failures in the body of Christ, and with commitments to transform our teaching about and relationships with Lutherans, we strengthen the bonds of unity among all Christians.

But this is good not for the Church alone. Instances of coercive violence, overt and hidden, lie all around us in this hurting world. No religious tradition has been entirely free from the temptation to rely on its insidious appearance of efficacy and inevitability. While our two traditions have been shaped by distinct views of legitimate uses of power—differences which we must continue to explore, as this report explains—we share commitments to seek God's help in working together for the good of all God has made. If we help strengthen one another in this work and witness, it is good for all God's creation.

It is, then, in hopefulness that we commend this report to your careful attention—to your reading, reflection, discussion, and prayer. But even more we commend our churches to new lives with one another. It is our hope that at every level—global, national, and local—Anabaptist-Mennonites and Lutherans now will seek one another out in new ways, that we will see in one another our sisters and brothers, called together to enjoy “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Ishmael Noko
General Secretary
The Lutheran World Federation

Larry Miller
General Secretary
Mennonite World Conference

PART I

INTRODUCTION

In 1980, when Lutheran churches celebrated the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, representatives of Mennonite churches were invited to participate in the ecumenical festivities marking the event. The Mennonites, however, aware that the Augsburg Confession explicitly condemned the Anabaptists and their teachings, wondered whether or how they could celebrate their own condemnation, since they regarded the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century as their spiritual forebears. Most Lutherans, on the other hand, had little awareness of the condemnations of Anabaptists, their persecution and marginalization, or of the ongoing memories of this painful history still alive among Mennonites today. Lutheran leaders were deeply moved by the Mennonite response, recognizing more clearly than ever before certain Lutheran failures in the Reformation. Expressing this new awareness, the Executive Committee of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) adopted a “Statement on the Confessio Augustana” at its meeting in Augsburg on July 11, 1980, that included the following words:

It is with sorrow that we recognize the fact that the specific condemnations of the Confession against certain opinions that were held at the time of the Reformation have caused pain and suffering for some. We realize that some of these opinions are no longer held in the same way in those churches, and we express our hope that the remaining differences may be overcome. We worship Jesus Christ who liberates and call on our member churches to celebrate our common Lutheran heritage with a spirit both of gratitude and penitence.¹

This growing awareness of the condemnations against the Anabaptists in the Augsburg Confession and the consequences of the doctrinal conflicts with them led to official dialogues between Mennonites and Lutherans at the national level in France (1981-1984), Germany (1989-1992), and the United States (2001-2004). Since the Augsburg Confession is one bond that unites the Lutheran churches within the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the LWF found it appropriate to enter into a dialogue at the international level with the Mennonite World Conference. The results of that dialogue,

¹ LWF Report Series No. 10 (August 1982), 69-70.

undertaken by the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission from 2005 to 2008, are summarized in this report.

ORIGIN AND MANDATE OF THE INTERNATIONAL STUDY COMMISSION

In July 1984, aware of both the awkward situation during the 1980 anniversary celebration and the French national dialogue to be concluded later in the year, the Lutheran World Federation expressed a desire for dialogue with Mennonites at the international level. During its global Assembly in Budapest, Hungary, the LWF sent a greeting to the Mennonite World Conference. Gathered a few days later at its own world assembly in Strasbourg, France, the MWC publicly received and read the message. Among other things, the LWF greeting noted that in spite “of our theological differences concerning holy baptism, we wish to express our willingness to overcome the condemnations of the past, and, through a process of dialogue, to find ways of recognizing each other freely as sisters and brothers in the one body of Christ.”

In the late 1990s, LWF and MWC leaders together considered the question of an appropriate process for that dialogue to move forward.² The project to establish an international study commission took shape and received approval in 2002. Its outline emerged in a meeting convened on April 11 at the LWF-related Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg, where LWF and MWC representatives together focused particularly on the results of the national dialogues. Sven Oppegaard, at the time LWF Assistant General Secretary for Ecumenical Affairs, then took the lead—in consultation with Larry Miller, General Secretary of the MWC—to develop a proposal. Several months later, the MWC Executive Committee (meeting in July, in Karlsruhe, Germany) and the LWF Standing Committee for Ecumenical Affairs (meeting in September, in Wittenberg, Germany) passed a joint recommendation to:

Approve the establishment of an international study commission with the following mandate: Drawing upon the results of previous national dialogues in Germany,

² General Secretaries Ishmael Noko (LWF) and Larry Miller (MWC) informally discussed the possibility at the October 1998 meeting of the Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions (CS/CWC), with Noko reiterating the interest the LWF had expressed already in 1984. In August 1999 the MWC Executive Committee went on record in favor of international Lutheran-Mennonite conversations. In December 1999, during the special millennium gathering of the CS/CWC in Jerusalem, Noko, Miller and MWC president Mesach Kristya agreed in principle to proceed with an international Lutheran-Mennonite encounter, pending approval of a specific project by the two communions at the appropriate decision-making levels.

France, and the United States, the commission shall: a) Consider whether condemnations of Anabaptists articulated by the Augsburg Confession (1530) apply to Mennonite World Conference member churches and related churches, and b) Submit a report of the commission's conclusions to the governing bodies of the Mennonite World Conference and the Lutheran World Federation for further action and with a view toward a possible official statement.

STUDY COMMISSION MEMBERS

In keeping with the mandate of the Study Commission, the LWF and MWC appointed historians or theologians representing each of the three national dialogues as members of the dialogue group. In addition, both bodies invited two African theologians to the group in order to better include the voices of the Global South. Additionally, the LWF and MWC each appointed chairpersons and staff to the commission.³

The Study Commission met annually for one week, from 2005 through 2008, at the Institute for Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg (France). Each year prayer united and strengthened the commission and commission participants. Every meeting began and ended with worship led by members of the delegations. Sharing meals twice each day fostered close personal friendships among members of the commission and deepened a sense of enduring Christian communion.

³ Mennonite members of the commission were Prof. Dr Claude Baecher (Hegenheim, France), Ms Hellen Biseko Bradburn (Arusha, Tanzania), Rev. Rainer Burkart (Neuwied, Germany), and Prof. Dr John Roth (Goshen, Indiana, USA). Burkart (MWC Faith and Life Commission Secretary) served as Mennonite co-chair and Dr Larry Miller (MWC, General Secretary, Strasbourg, France) as co-secretary for the duration of the work of the commission. Lutheran members of the commission were initially Prof. Dr Gottfried Seebass (Heidelberg, Germany), Bishop Litsiesi M. Dube (Bulawayo, Zimbabwe), Prof. Dr Annie Noblesse-Rocher (Strasbourg), and Prof. Dr Timothy J. Wengert (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA). Prof. Dr Theodor Dieter (Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg) served as Lutheran consultant; Prof. Dr Marc Lienhard (Strasbourg) joined the commission in 2007. Seebass served as Lutheran co-chair of the commission until forced to resign for health reasons in 2006. Wengert then assumed the role. Rev. Sven Oppegaard was co-secretary for the commission until he left his LWF post in December 2006. Theodor Dieter then served as co-secretary. The Study Commission wishes to express its deep gratitude for Prof. Seebass, who passed away on September 7, 2008, both for his leadership of the Commission and for his valuable contributions to its work. An outstanding scholar and church historian, Seebass edited many Anabaptist sources and published several significant studies on Anabaptist theology and Lutheran attitudes towards Anabaptists in the sixteenth century. May he now see what he believed in!

THE COMMISSION AND ITS THEMES

The commission met for the first time from June 27 to July 1, 2005. At that session, Lutheran and Mennonite commission members presented, interpreted and discussed in detail the reports of the French, German, and American national dialogues. A careful analysis of those reports—helpfully summarized in a systematic inventory of the content prepared by the commission staff—highlighted differences among the three reports concerning their outcomes, their approaches and their emphases. Even though it was not possible simply to summarize their results and offer them on an international level, the commission nonetheless drew on the reports of the national dialogues and regarded them as valuable material for pursuing its goals.⁴ The commission especially appreciated that these reports emerged out of a process of discussion and affirmation and played an important role in improving the relations between Mennonites and Lutherans on both a national and a local level.

The commission then concentrated on major papers from the Lutheran and Mennonite sides that dealt with “The Condemnations of Anabaptists in the Augsburg Confession and the Book of Concord: Their Historical Meaning, Purpose, and Effect.” Participants concluded that a common assessment of the condemnations in the Lutheran confessions would require substantial work on the following seven problems:

1. What exactly was the teaching condemned by the Lutherans?
2. Was the condemned teaching actually affirmed by Anabaptist groups at the time, or are the references to Anabaptists incorrect?
3. Are there implicit condemnations of Lutheran teachings and practices in Anabaptist writings?
4. Is the teaching condemned in the Lutheran confessions also rejected today by Lutherans—and must this be so?
5. What is the position of Anabaptists today regarding the teaching that was condemned by the Lutherans?
6. What can both sides state together today concerning the teaching at issue?

⁴ Indeed, the American report, referring back to the French and German reports, explicitly called for further studies. This is what the Study Commission understood as its task.

7. In what specific ways did the condemnations, or their misuse, contribute to the unjust persecution of Anabaptists?

The second meeting of the international study commission took place June 5-9, 2006. Since the term “Anabaptist” (= “rebaptizer”) was imposed on the movement in the sixteenth century by its opponents as a derogatory label—and since leaders of the movement initially rejected the term, arguing that that were not “re-baptizing” but baptizing correctly for the first time—Lutherans were surprised that the Mennonite World Conference calls itself “a community of Anabaptist-related churches.” The Mennonites explained how they see their tradition as linked to Reformation-era Anabaptists. Over the past century, Mennonites in Europe and North America have developed a renewed and growing awareness of the spiritual heritage of their Anabaptist forebears, finding there a source of inspiration, orientation, and renewal. Mennonites often have summarized Anabaptist teaching in three essential points: that true faith must be expressed in daily discipleship; that the church is a visible, disciplined community; and that love—including love of enemy—is the basis of Christian ethics. Even though Mennonites had not been unaware of Anabaptists in previous centuries, what was new in the second half of the twentieth century was the self-conscious, systematic appeal to “Anabaptism” for the purposes of identity and renewal.

Today, the term “Anabaptist” seems to serve several purposes: it functions as an umbrella term to describe a general cluster of groups descended from the radical reformation; it serves as an explicit critique of certain practices and teachings within the contemporary Mennonite church; and it has become a useful reference to a cluster of theological convictions that transcend narrow denominational or national identities. Mennonite participants in the study commission emphasized that there is no full consensus among Mennonites regarding the precise theological meaning of “Anabaptism” or exactly how those meanings relate to modern-day Mennonites. The commission therefore affirmed once again that dealing with the condemnations required a careful and precise examination of both historical and contemporary Mennonite (and Lutheran) understanding.

The commission then focused systematically on each condemnation within their historical and theological contexts. The analysis confirmed one conclusion of the national dialogue reports, namely that most of the condemnations in the Augsburg Confession (CA) applied neither to contemporary Mennonites nor to their Anabaptist forebears in the faith.⁵ However, members of the bilateral panel paid particular attention to the condemna-

⁵ See Part Three.

tion regarding baptism (CA IX)⁶ and the condemnation regarding civic affairs (CA XVI), after agreeing that these two articles deal with matters of continuing significant theological difference between the two churches.

In the course of the common work, it turned out that the history of persecution and marginalization of Anabaptists consistently intervened in theological analysis and discussion of these controversial themes. Thus the commission decided to write a joint history of Anabaptist and Lutheran relations in the sixteenth century, paying particular attention to issues about which Lutherans and Anabaptists have disagreed in the past.

The commission met for the third time from June 18-22, 2007. At that meeting the panel reviewed the "Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Condemnations of the Anabaptists" (adopted November 11-13, 2006) as well as the response of the Mennonite Church USA (April 2007). It also examined "'Called Together to be Peacemakers': Report of the International Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Mennonite World Conference (1998-2003)," with a view to its relevance for Lutheran-Mennonite dialogue.⁷

The commission received an extensive draft of a joint historical account of "Lutheran Reformers and the Condemnations of the Anabaptists." This draft gained more and more significance as the discussions of the commission continued. It represents a significant first attempt to tell together the history of the relations between Anabaptists and Lutherans in the sixteenth century, to describe what Anabaptists suffered from Lutheran authorities, and to analyze how Lutheran theologians argued in this matter. The commission felt it would be especially important for Lutherans to learn more about what happened to the Anabaptists, the spiritual forebears of the Mennonites, and for Mennonites to see that this history is now being told jointly by Mennonites and Lutherans.

The commission also continued to study the historical context of the condemnations in CA IX and XVI and their meaning in 1530. It identified and described social and ecclesial changes that influenced their respective

⁶ This report refers to individual articles of the Augsburg Confession (CA) using Roman numerals.

⁷ The 2006 Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, together with the 2004 Report of the ELCA-Mennonite Church USA Liaison Committee, "Right Remembering in Anabaptist-Lutheran Relations," can be found at www.elca.org/Who-We-Are/Our-Three-Expressions/Churchwide-Organization/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Bilateral-Conversations/Lutheran-Mennonite.aspx. The Mennonite letter of response is found at www.mennoniteusa.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=9ptCMKotmQQ%3d&tabid=1336. "Called Together to be Peacemakers" is found at www.mwc-cmm.org/en/files/Catho-Menno/Report%20cathomenno%20Final%20ENG%20-%20PDF.pdf.

understanding and practice of baptism, as well as the relation between Christians and the state in the centuries following the Reformation, and it discussed systematic aspects of their understanding today.

The fourth and final meeting of the commission took place June 2-6, 2008. The commission again discussed the text, “Telling the Sixteenth-Century Story Together: Lutheran Reformers and the Condemnation of Anabaptists,” proposed revisions to the document and finalized this section of the report, which is now **Part Two** below. The commission sees the joint presentation of this history as one of its major accomplishments. Christian reconciliation under these circumstances may properly begin with such a mutual telling of and listening to each other’s history.⁸

Discussions on the doctrinal conflicts about baptism and the relation of Christians to the state continued. The commission finalized its analysis of the two condemnations in CA IX and XVI in the theological, social, legal and political context of the Reformation. It quickly became apparent that a careful and detailed description of those changes in societies and churches that are significant for resolving our differences on the issues of baptism and Christian/state-relations would require much more time than allotted for the commission’s work. The main challenge would be to establish a theological framework that allowed Lutheran and Mennonite insights, convictions and concerns to be expressed to each other in such a way that each side would feel it was correctly understood by the other. This would require an analysis of the different thought structures, a clarification of differences in basic theological distinctions (such as the distinction between what God does and what human beings do), and more conversation regarding our different evaluations of New Testament statements on baptism and the relationship between systematic and biblical argumentation. Addressing these important questions in the necessary detail would require another round of dialogues. The commission will make available for further study the papers presented at its meetings.

In **Part Three** of the report (“Considering the Condemnations Today”), the commission summarizes what it can say about those condemnations in the Augsburg Confession that do not apply to Mennonites, and it describes the problems connected to the two remaining areas of disagreement. **Part Four** (“Moving Beyond Condemnations”) analyzes and describes how Lutherans recognize the failures of their forebears in dealing with Anabaptists during the Reformation and with Mennonites since that time, and how they should now understand and respond to this history. The Mennonite participants

⁸ Included in this report are also two appendices: a select bibliography of resources and a translation of a document by Luther and Melancthon sanctioning capital punishment of Anabaptists.

of the commission in turn respond to the Lutheran statement. One goal of this exchange would be an action by the Lutheran World Federation at its General Assembly in Stuttgart (2010). The three national dialogue reports, available in a variety of languages, contain many detailed suggestions as to how Mennonites and Lutherans can work together in the future in places where Lutherans and Mennonites live close to each other and how they can improve their relations further. The commission points to the recommendations of the national reports and offers additional suggestions on how to move beyond condemnations in a spirit of reconciliation in Jesus Christ and in the mission with which Christ entrusted his disciples and his church.

PART 2

TELLING THE SIXTEENTH- CENTURY STORY TOGETHER

LUTHERAN REFORMERS AND THE CONDEMNATION OF ANABAPTISTS⁹

From the very beginning of the dialogue, participants in the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission realized that reviewing the early history of relations between Lutherans and Mennonites was an important step in helping churches interpret the condemnations of the Anabaptists in the Augsburg Confession (CA) that might hinder further conversations. Knowing this history will also help to clarify the connection between confession and persecution. As Prof. Gottfried Seebass stated in his initial presentation to the group: “We should keep in mind that under the conditions of the sixteenth century a church condemnation actually always had civic and secular consequences. The secular powers and often also the Reformers took the view that the holders of certain beliefs should not be tolerated by the authorities.”¹⁰ Seebass went on to list four causes for this connection: the old Roman idea

⁹ Abbreviations used in this chapter: CA: Augsburg Confession; *BC 2000: The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000); CR: *Corpus Reformatorum: Philippi Melanthonis opera quae supersunt omnia*, ed. Karl Bretschneider and Heinrich Bindseil, 28 vols. (Halle: A. Schwetschke & Sons, 1834-1860); LW: *Luther's Works* [American edition], 55 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress and St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-86; MBW: *Melancthons Briefwechsel: Kritische und kommentierte Gesamtausgabe: Regesten*, ed. Heinz Scheible, 8+ vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1977-); MBW *Texte: Melancthons Briefwechsel: Kritische und kommentierte Gesamtausgabe: Texte*, ed. Richard Wetzell et al., 6+ vols. (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1991-); ME: *Mennonite Encyclopedia*; MQR: *Mennonite Quarterly Review*; MSA: *Melancthons Werke in Auswahl* [Studienausgabe], ed. Robert Stupperich, 7 vols. (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1951-1975); WA: *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* [Schriften], 65 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883-1993); WA Br: *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe: Briefwechsel*, 18 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1930-1985).

¹⁰ Gottfried Seebass, “The Condemnations of Anabaptists in the Confessions of the Lutheran Churches: Their Historical Meaning, Purpose and Effect,” delivered in June 2005 in Strasbourg, France, p. 5 (par. 36).

that right worship guaranteed the *salus publica*; the view that dissimilar preaching and teaching in a single city or country led necessarily to strife; the paternalistic view of government, which greatly expanded the prince's duties as *pater patriae*; and the threat that some Anabaptist teachings (e.g., their refusal to take oaths or serve as armed guards) posed to social and political order. This jointly-written historical overview offers a brief account of the origins of the Anabaptist movement in the early sixteenth century, its relationship to early Lutheranism, and a description of its central theological motifs, followed by an analysis of the Lutheran reactions to the Anabaptist movement prior to and following the presentation of the Augsburg Confession in 1530, with particular emphasis on the role of the condemnations. It is hoped that this joint summary of history will help both churches better understand each other and, even more importantly, will lead to deeper levels of cooperation and fellowship among our churches.

ANABAPTIST MOVEMENTS IN THE 1520S

Traditionally, the origins of the European, sixteenth-century “reformations” are traced back to October 31, 1517 and Martin Luther's invitation to debate the theological suppositions surrounding indulgences. However, it is clear that even before Luther, several important reform movements were already changing the face of the medieval church. From the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century arose north of the Alps the strong movement of what is often called Biblical Humanism—a commitment to purified, classical rhetoric and investigation of the ancient church and its sources, especially the Bible. Remnants of the fifteenth century's conciliar movement continued to champion the call for a reform of the church “in head and members.” In Bohemia, John Hus, the Bohemian Brethren and the more radical Taborites promoted broader access to Scripture, demanded ethical renewal and challenged the church's teachings on the Lord's Supper. And a lively movement of lay reform originating in Holland, called the *Devotio moderna*, included the founding of the Brethren of the Common Life, a quasi-monastic group highly critical of traditional forms of monasticism.

Luther's invitation to scholarly debate over indulgences and the sacrament of penance quickly escalated into a full-blown legal case, involving condemnations by the church in 1520 and by the Holy Roman Empire in 1521. Luther's own theology centered on God's gracious justification of the sinner received by faith alone and not earned by works. It also included new understandings of authorities in the church—often summarized under the heading *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone) but more fully understood as *solo Verbo* (by the Word alone)—a renewed appreciation for God revealed in the opposite place one would reasonably look (the theology of the Cross),

and a distinction between Law and Gospel (that is, between God’s Word that reveals sin and the Word that declares forgiveness). In 1520, in his tract *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther reduced the number of sacraments from the traditional seven to two (baptism and the Lord’s Supper), defining them both in terms of God’s gracious promise received in faith.

As early as 1520, Luther joined his criticisms of papal authority—culminating in his naming the papacy “anti-Christ”—with an appeal to secular authority to intervene in the church’s governance.¹¹ One early result of this call came on Luther’s return from the Diet of Worms in 1521, when Luther’s prince, the Elector Frederick the Wise, engineered a friendly “kidnapping” to the safety of the Wartburg Castle. In 1523, Luther wrote an extensive tract on the limits of obedience to secular authority, dedicated to the elector’s brother, John.¹²

The series of events instigated by Luther and the reformed-minded members of the University of Wittenberg faculty (including Andreas Karlstadt), triggered similar movements in other parts of northern Europe, as pastors, preachers and others also began to test the limits of church authority in the face of their recovery of what they thought to be biblical truth. For example, in the early 1520s Ulrich Zwingli, the city preacher of Zurich, encouraged by Luther’s example, began to press the civil authorities for changes in church practice. Likewise, Martin Bucer in Strasbourg and Johannes Brenz in Schwäbisch Hall, began to preach a message in harmony with Luther’s own.¹³ And university teachers, especially those at the University of Wittenberg (Philip Melancthon foremost among them), also began to expound on this “evangelical” theology, as they often designated it.

EMERGENCE OF THE ANABAPTISTS

Among other initiatives for religious and social reform in the early sixteenth century was a grassroots movement that opponents labeled Anabaptists (*Wiedertäufer* = re-baptizers). Whereas Roman Catholics, Lutherans and Reformed¹⁴ alike baptized infants, the so-called “Anabaptists” argued that

¹¹ *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation concerning the Improvement of the Christian Estate* (WA 6: 381-469; LW 44: 115-217).

¹² For more discussion of both of these issues in Luther’s theology, see below in this chapter.

¹³ Both of these men had first encountered Luther in 1518 at a meeting of the Augustinian order held in Heidelberg, the site of Luther’s famous Heidelberg Disputation.

¹⁴ Throughout this document, we will use the anachronistic terms “Roman Catholic,” “Lutheran” and “Reformed” to denote those Evangelical (as opposed to Reformed) theologians who would later sign and defend the Augsburg Confession and those “old church” supporters of Rome, respectively.

true Christian baptism assumed a prior recognition of one's sin and need for repentance, followed by a conscious decision to accept God's gracious gift of forgiveness and the invitation to become a disciple of Jesus—something they believed no infant could do. Members of the movement generally referred to themselves as *Brüder* (Brethren—or later by more descriptive terms such as *Täufer* (Baptizers) or *Taufgesinnten/Doopsgezinde* (Baptism-Minded)—since in their minds they were not “re-” baptizing, but rather baptizing correctly for the first time.¹⁵ Still, the name “Anabaptist” stuck, not least because their opponents recognized that Roman law regarded “rebaptism” as a criminal offense, punishable by death. Despite its negative overtones in the sixteenth century, in contemporary English usage “Anabaptist” has become an accepted umbrella term for all Reformation groups who practiced believers' (rather than infant) baptism, and the contemporary denominations directly descended from them such as the Amish, Mennonites and Hutterites.¹⁶

The Anabaptist movement cannot be understood apart from its time, particularly the religious heritage of the Middle Ages, the economic, political and social upheaval of the early sixteenth century, and the dynamic voices of theological reform that gave rise to the Reformation.¹⁷ All of the earliest participants in the Anabaptist movement started out as Roman Catholics—baptized into the church as infants and raised in the rituals, images, and stories of late medieval Catholicism. Their concerns inevitably reflected the social and economic context of their day. Deteriorating economic conditions in the German territories, for example, fueled growing tensions between peasants and artisans on the one hand, and feudal lords and princes on the other. Resentment against rising ecclesiastical tithes and widespread corruption in the *sacerdotum* fostered deeply-rooted attitudes of anticlericalism across nearly all the sectors of early modern German society. New technologies

¹⁵ For more information on details regarding nomenclature, cf. ME, 1:113 (“Anabaptist”); ME, 2:86 (“Doopsgezind”); ME, 3:670 (“Swiss Brethren”).

¹⁶ See, for example, Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, Pa: Herald Press, 1944). This landmark essay, first presented as the 1943 presidential address to the American Society of Church History and published in *Church History* (March, 1944) 3-24, became a symbolic point of theological and ecclesiological renewal that elevated “Anabaptism” to a central role in anchoring North American Mennonite group identity.

¹⁷ The literature on emergence of the so-called Radical Reformation is vast. A very useful reference work summarizing current scholarship on the entire field is John D. Roth and James M. Stayer, eds. *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 1521-1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); an encyclopedic treatment can be found in George Hunston Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd ed. (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1992); a very helpful concise summary of the events is James Stayer, “The Radical Reformation,” in *Handbook of European History, 1400-1600*, eds. Thomas A. Brady, Jr., Heiko Oberman and James Tracy (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 2:249-282.

such as the printing press were revolutionizing the nature of communication, making possible the rapid dissemination of novel theological ideas. Moreover, the early Anabaptists regarded themselves as full participants in the broader evangelical movement of religious renewal that eventually became known as the Reformation: they shared the early reformer’s enthusiasm for the principle of *sola Scriptura*, they read the pamphlets of the early reformers, and they participated eagerly in lay Bible studies, always asking themselves how Scripture might be applied to their lives. Indeed, when Luther and other reformers began to raise serious criticisms of the church between 1517 and 1521 that eventually led to a rupture with their opponents, many of the early Anabaptist leaders could be found among their early followers.

The tensions that came to separate Lutherans and Anabaptists—particularly those related to baptism and understandings of the Christians’ relation to the state—crystallized only gradually in the opening years of the Reformation. The separation that emerged resulted less from a series of closely-argued, face-to-face debates over theological doctrine, than as an evolving process of group formation within the complex, sometimes confusing, dynamics of religious convictions, political self-interest, and a basic struggle for survival.

To be sure, many of the differences that came to divide Lutherans and Anabaptists were expressed in theological vocabulary. But those concerns took on particular urgency since popular understandings of the Anabaptists associated them, sometimes even exclusively, with two traumatic events: the Peasants’ Revolt of 1525 and the violent seizure of the north German city of Münster a decade later. Any understanding of the vehemence behind Luther and Melancthon’s denunciation of the Anabaptists—or their condemnation in the Augsburg Confession—must acknowledge the importance of this context.

THE PEASANTS’ REVOLT OF 1525

Unrest among rural peasants and urban artisans had been building in the German territories for decades. Angry at the imposition of new feudal dues, frustrated by the immorality of local priests, and fearful of the economic and demographic changes unfolding around them, a diverse coalition of peasants and artisans began to demand a hearing for their grievances.

The events of the early Reformation seemed to encourage these sentiments. Not only did Luther provide a model of heroic opposition to Europe’s most powerful leaders, he also offered a clear rationale for reassessing the authority of tradition. Moreover, when Luther proclaimed in his early pamphlets that the Christian is “freed from the law,” the peasants were quick to interpret this as a political statement—that they were freed from oppressive feudal laws. When Luther implied that the authority of Scripture normed all other authorities

for the Christian, the peasants took Luther at his word and claimed that their demands for economic and social reform were nothing more than an attempt to structure their communities around the teachings of the gospel. Nowhere in the Bible, for example, could they find justification for feudal labor obligations, the elaborate tangle of church tithes, or the traditional restrictions on their hunting and fishing rights. In 1524 and 1525 peasants and artisans throughout the German-speaking territories of the Holy Roman Empire summarized their demands in the Twelve Articles—a program of sweeping social and political reform explicitly based on Scripture—and launched a campaign of bloody uprisings against their feudal overlords.¹⁸

Luther and other reformers, to whom peasants and princes turned for advice, were taken by surprise. This was not the kind of reform they had intended. When asked by the peasants for an opinion of the Twelve Articles, Luther obliged by writing a more or less moderate tract, in which he excoriated both princes and peasants. Less than one month later, in May 1525, Luther, having experienced the revolt in Thuringia first-hand, dashed off an angry appendix to his tract, which was almost immediately published as a separate pamphlet titled “Against the Robbing Murderous Hordes of Peasants.” In it he called on the princes and lords of Europe to unite in repressing the peasant uprising. Indeed, such a response from the authorities was already underway. At the Battle of Frankenhausen in May 1525, knights fighting on behalf of the princes and nobles slaughtered the largest of the peasant armies. By the summer of 1525 and beyond, the Peasants’ War, and with it the Twelve Articles, came to a bloody and decisive defeat.

It was within this complex and dynamic context that the Anabaptists emerged as a distinctive expression of religious reform. Yet even though early Anabaptist leaders explicitly renounced the use of violence,¹⁹ the first generation of Anabaptists reflected many of the same frustrations that had given rise to the Peasants’ War along with a desire to create godly communities structured around the teachings of Jesus and the early church.²⁰ And even

¹⁸ For a useful overview of these events, see Peter Blickle, *From the Communal Reformation to the Revolution of the Common Man* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1997).

¹⁹ See, for example, the letter written by the Grebel circle in Zurich to Thomas Müntzer in September, 1524 in which they challenged Müntzer to put down the sword: “Moreover, the gospel and its adherents are not to be protected by the sword, nor [should] they [protect] themselves ... True believing Christians are sheep among wolves, sheep for the slaughter. ... They use neither worldly sword nor war, since killing has ceased with them entirely.” Leland Harder, ed. *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism: The Grebel Letters and Related Documents* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1985), 290.

²⁰ For a nuanced account of the relationship between the early Anabaptists and the Peasants’ War, see James M. Stayer, *The German Peasants’ War and Anabaptist Community of Goods* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1991).

though the movement drew heavily on the insights of the early Reformation (with its challenge to traditional religious institutions and its elevation of Scripture as the ultimate authority for Christian faith and practice), their teachings represented something new and seemingly dangerous. By calling on Christians to refrain from swearing oaths, participate in lethal violence, or serve in magisterial offices, for example, they seemed to threaten the foundations of political stability. The Anabaptist model of economic sharing and social equality unsettled both theologians and civic authorities who viewed traditional societal structures as ordained by God. By defining the church as a voluntary community, separated from the “fallen world,” Anabaptists raised doubts about whether Europe could legitimately call itself a “Christian” society.²¹

Although these teachings may not sound so radical in the light of today’s pluralistic societies, political and religious authorities in the sixteenth century generally regarded them as both heretical (a threat to orthodox Christian doctrine) and seditious (a threat to the authority of the state). Indeed, the theologians and princes of Europe were so troubled by Anabaptist teachings that between 2,000-3,000 Anabaptists were executed during the course of the sixteenth century, and thousands more imprisoned, tortured, and exiled.

Establishing the precise number of judicially authorized Anabaptist executions—quite apart from the number of people who were tortured, imprisoned or exiled—has proven to be a difficult matter, complicated by the fragmentary nature of the source material, the theological orientation of scholars investigating the topic, and an Anabaptist-Mennonite martyrological tradition less interested in empirical numbers than a resolute focus on the theological significance of those who “died for their faith.” Clearly, the estimated 5,000-10,000 Anabaptist executions cited in some Mennonite sources need to be revised downward on the basis of more careful calculations. Claus-Peter Clasen attempted to make an exact count of executions that he could independently confirm in primary sources and came up with 845 executions in the Swiss-south German area, though scholars have raised methodological questions about his quantitative methods and Clasen himself acknowledged that large bodies of sources have been destroyed. The figures generally cited for Dutch Anabaptist martyrs range from 1,000-1,500. Although caution is certainly in order regarding any claims to precision, current estimates suggest a total of approximately 2,500 executions. See the very helpful perspectives of Brad S. Gregory (note 22 below).

James Stayer provides a helpful summary of the significant differences among Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed princes in terms of their policies toward religious dissenters:

²¹ See Scott Hendrix, *Recultivating the Vineyards: The Reformation Agendas of Christianization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004).

Reformed Zurich and Berne and Lutheran Electoral Saxony, which killed considerable numbers of Anabaptists, were the exception, not the rule, among Protestant rulers. In general, Protestant authorities spared the lives of religious dissenters, punishing them in milder ways. 84% of the executions that Clasen accounted for were carried out by Catholic governments. [Nevertheless], instead of Philip of Hesse and Strasbourg being commendable exceptions, as was previously thought, they were closer to the norm of Protestant practice than Melancthon, Luther and Zwingli, and the Protestant Schmalkaldic League protected governments that refused to carry out the Imperial mandate of 1529 that required death for Anabaptists.

If Gottfried Seebass is correct that one quarter of all executions by Protestant princes took place in Saxony, then the total number of Anabaptists killed in Saxony was likely around 100. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain how many of these executions if any might be directly attributable to the condemnations in the Augsburg Confession. As will be shown, it was the link between Anabaptist beliefs and the governmental responsibility to extirpate blasphemy that led directly to persecution.²²

Part of the animosity directed toward the Anabaptists was fueled by a genuine confusion about their teachings and intentions. Like all grassroots movements, the first generation of Anabaptists struggled to reach agreement on the principles that would distinguish the group's core membership from the fringe teachings of a few inspired eccentrics. Some of its early converts were disillusioned veterans of the Peasants' War still hoping to transform social and political realities according to a biblical template. Others reflected the apocalyptic mood of the times, drawing from the prophetic writings of Daniel and Revelation a message of God's imminent judgment. Still others were gripped by the teachings of Jesus and assumed, naively perhaps, that the Sermon on the Mount and the story of the early church offered a clear blueprint for a renewed and purified church, separated from a fallen world. Contributing to the somewhat fluid boundaries of the movement was a general suspicion many Anabaptists shared of formal theology, preferring instead to focus on the concrete practices

²² For these paragraphs, see Claus-Peter Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1972), 370-372, 437; Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 6; James M. Stayer, "Numbers in Anabaptist Research," C. Arnold Snyder, ed. *Commoners and Community: Essays in Honor of Werner Packull* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 2002), 51-73, quote from 60. Gottfried Seebaß, "Luther's Stellung zur Verfolgung der Täufer und ihre Bedeutung für den deutschen Protestantismus," in *Die Reformation und ihre Aussenseiter. Gesammelte Aufsätze und Vorträge zum 60. Geburtstag des Autors Gottfried Seebaß*, eds. Irene Dingel and Christine Kress (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997), 271-82. Seebass suggests that Luther's influence in Electoral politics would have been sufficient to resist this if he had so chosen.

of Christian discipleship within the context of the local congregation. Moreover, most of the first generation of educated leaders were executed by 1530. That painful fact, combined with the on-going threat of persecution, made communication among various Anabaptist groups difficult and complicated efforts of the various Anabaptist groups to reach consensus in matters of belief and practice.

Thus, it is not surprising that Luther, Melancthon and other prominent reformers had only partial, or even contradictory, understandings of “the Anabaptists” in the opening decades of the Reformation or that they were quick to lump together everyone who rejected the baptism of infants—including Andreas Karlstadt and Thomas Müntzer—regardless of their other teachings, and to dismiss the movement and its members as *Schwärmer* (fanatics) or *Rottengeister* (divisive spirits).²³ Yet for all of the evident diversity among the early Anabaptists, between 1525 and 1550 three identifiable Anabaptist groups had emerged which, despite their differences, clearly shared a similar theological worldview and recognized each other as members of the same religious tradition: the Swiss Brethren in the German-speaking territories; the Hutterites in Moravia; and the Mennonites of the Netherlands and North Germany, organized around the leadership of Menno Simons.

THE SWISS BRETHERN IN SWITZERLAND AND SOUTH GERMANY

The earliest forms of Anabaptism appeared in the first half of the 1520s as part of the Reformation movement in the Swiss city of Zurich.²⁴ In 1519, the

²³ Several Hussite leaders, such as the radical Taborite Pierre Kanis, had advocated that baptism be withheld until around the age of 30, and then only for believers who requested it. Petr Chelcicky, the fifteenth-century Bohemian reformer, also taught baptism at a later age, and even the excommunication of someone in the Church who refused to confess Christ even if they had been baptized as a child. He himself, however, did not propose a “re-baptism.” Only later, that is, after 1460, did the first generation of the Unity of the Czech Brethren practice rebaptism—that is, baptism after a personal confession of faith. But they were not systemically against the baptism of children so that children, belonging to the spiritual body of the church, might be led to faith.— Cf. Amedeo Molnár, “La mise en question du baptême des enfants par les hussites radicaux,” *Bibliotheca dissidentium* 3 (1987), 35-52, 37, 41, 43. The practice of confirmation is largely the contribution of this family of faith to the larger Protestant church.

²⁴ This story is recounted in many texts. One of the most helpful summaries is still that of the Reformed Swiss historian Fritz Blanke—*Brothers in Christ: The History of the Oldest Anabaptist Congregation Zollikon, Near Zurich, Switzerland* (1961; rpt. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005); see also Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, 212-245 and Bruce Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 191-224. A very useful compendium of primary sources from this period is found in Harder, *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism*.

Zurich City Council invited Ulrich Zwingli, a university-educated Catholic priest, to assume the pulpit of the Great Minster church—one of the most important religious positions in the city. Zwingli was deeply committed to the authority of Scripture and he had a strong interest in church reform. Soon after his arrival in Zurich, he introduced a disciplined pattern of Bible study to a group of bright young students who were eager to read the New Testament in the original Greek and to apply its teachings to the renewal of the church. Zwingli also began to preach daily, captivating large audiences by his systematic study of the gospels and the epistles, particularly his ability to elucidate the relevance of a particular text to contemporary Christian life.

In the course of their study Zwingli and his students were quickly struck by the absence of a biblical basis for a host of traditional late medieval practices. Initially, their questions focused on the mass—why, for example, was the mass in Latin? and why were common people permitted to receive the bread in communion, but not the wine? Doubts also emerged, probably influenced by similar criticisms from Luther, about the biblical basis for such things as monasticism, clerical celibacy, and religious relics and images. In January 1523, as religious controversies of all sorts swirled throughout the Empire, the Zurich City Council held a formal debate about the city's religious future. Zwingli's appeal for reform won the day. The Zurich Council voted to break ties with the Catholic Church and declare the city for the "evangelical" cause. What that meant in practical terms, however, was still quite unclear.

In the meantime, other lay Bible study groups had begun to form, especially among villagers in the small towns and hamlets scattered around Zurich. As with Zwingli's circle, these groups were emboldened by the example of other reformers to criticize church traditions that could not be directly defended on the basis of Scripture. But their critique soon became even more radical: where in the Bible, for example, could one find justification for the host of church tithes that peasants were expected to pay? On what basis were local congregations denied the right to select their own pastors? Perhaps most revolutionary, what was the biblical justification for the baptism of infants?

Gradually, a coalition formed between leaders of the rural Bible studies and the more radical voices in Zwingli's own study circle. Given the City Council's expressed openness to "evangelical" reforms, the coalition began to pressure Zwingli to implement these changes immediately. In October of 1523, the City Council met to consider arguments regarding the content and pace of church reforms. Aware that radical reforms, introduced suddenly, could lead to social and political upheaval, the Council called for moderation. When Zwingli agreed with this decision, the first clear signs of division emerged. Simon Stumpf, a spokesman for the radicals, challenged Zwingli directly: "You have no authority to place these questions in the

Council’s hands,” Stumpf insisted, “for the matter is already settled; the Spirit of God has decided.”²⁵ That claim—that the authority of Scripture and the Spirit trumped the authority of tradition, church hierarchy or political sanctions—marked the first public use of an argument that the Anabaptists would return to again and again. And it was an argument that they felt they had learned directly at the feet of Luther, Zwingli and the other reformers.

In the year that followed, tensions in Zurich between Zwingli and the more radical reformers continued to mount. The heart of the debate focused especially on baptism, though it seems that the radicals were also questioning the biblical basis for the oath and the Christian use of the sword. When some of the radicals refused to baptize their newborn babies—arguing that Christ’s instructions in the Great Commission implied that teaching should precede baptism (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:16)—the Council responded fiercely. On January 21, 1525, the Council issued an ultimatum, demanding that the radicals baptize their infants or risk expulsion from the city.²⁶ That same day, in defiance of the mandate, a small group gathered in a home close to the Great Minster church to plan a response. According to an account preserved in the Hutterite *Chronicle*, the meeting concluded with George Blaurock, a former priest, asking Conrad Grebel to baptize him with water for the remission of his sins. Blaurock then baptized others at the meeting, thereby marking a symbolic beginning to the Anabaptist tradition.²⁷

The re-baptism movement spread rapidly. Already by the next day, reports had begun to trickle into the city of additional baptisms in Wytikon and other villages surrounding Zurich. Conrad Grebel, a humanist scholar and son of a prominent Zurich family, was soon discovered baptizing new converts in Schaffhausen; Blaurock went on a mission campaign into the Tyrol, southeast of Zurich; Hans Brötli began baptizing in Hallau, as did Lorenz Hochrütner in St Gall. According to Sebastian Franck, a chronicler sympathetic to the Anabaptists, the movement “spread so rapidly that their teachings soon covered the whole land and they secured a large following and also added to their number many good hearts who were zealous toward God.”²⁸ Some details of Franck’s account—his report of 1500 baptisms in the Swiss city of Appenzell, for example—may have been an exaggeration. But the angry response of Zwingli and the Zurich City Council makes it clear that they regarded the Anabaptist movement as a serious threat. On March

²⁵ For a transcription of the Second Zurich Disputation, cf. Harder, *Sources of Swiss Anabaptism*, 234-250.

²⁶ Harder, *Sources of Swiss Anabaptism*, 337.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 338-342.

²⁸ Sebastian Franck, *Chronica, Zeitbuch vund Geschichtsbibell* (Ulm, 1536), Book I, viii.

7, 1526, the council declared that “whoever henceforth baptizes another will be seized by Our Lords and ... drowned without any mercy. Hereafter, everyone knows how to avoid this so that no one gives cause for his own death.”²⁹

The rapid growth of Anabaptism was both a strength and a weakness. Clearly, the biblicism of the early Anabaptists, combined with their call for a voluntary, disciplined church and a commitment to follow Christ in daily life appealed to many, especially those who were dissatisfied with Roman Catholic sacramentalism and a Lutheran theology of grace that did not seem to them to bear fruit in a regenerated life. At the same time, however, it quickly became clear that not all Anabaptists shared the same understanding of what baptism actually meant. Balthasar Hubmaier, a university-trained theologian and close friend of the Zurich radicals, is a good case in point.³⁰ Hubmaier was far and away the most articulate early defender of adult baptism. In public debates with Zwingli and in his numerous publications, he consistently presented systematic biblical arguments in favor of the practice. Hubmaier, however, did not necessarily link adult baptism with a voluntary, separated church; nor was he convinced that Christians should practice nonresistance—both principles that were soon to become central to the dominant Anabaptist tradition. Thus, in the spring of 1525, Hubmaier baptized virtually the entire town of Waldshut in one fell swoop. At the same time, he vigorously promoted the “Twelve Articles” of the Peasants’ War and encouraged the citizens of Waldshut to arm themselves for battle against the Austrian government. Clearly, Hubmaier still held to a traditional view of society, often labeled Christendom, in which re-baptized believers might serve as magistrates and use violence to defend the “godly community” against perceived evil-doers.³¹

In contrast to Hubmaier, most other early Anabaptist leaders insisted that true Christians could not swear oaths, serve as magistrates or use coercive violence, even against their enemies. Some, following the example of the early church, taught a radical view of property that called on Christians to share their wealth with all in need. Although the Zurich radicals agreed that infant baptism and several aspects of medieval Christianity were not scriptural, they had still not reached consensus on the exact shape of the new church that they wanted to introduce in its place.

²⁹ Harder, *Sources of Swiss Anabaptism*, 448.

³⁰ For a translation of all of Hubmaier’s published works, cf. H. Wayne Pipkin and John H. Yoder, eds. *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1989).

³¹ Arnold Snyder offers a detailed overview of this story that continues to generate vigorous historiographical debate.—“The Birth and Evolution of Swiss Anabaptism,” 80 *MQR* (October 2006), 554-564.

In the spring of 1527, two years after the first baptisms, a group of Anabaptists met in the small town of Schleitheim, north of Zurich. There, under the leadership of Michael Sattler, a former Benedictine prior, they agreed on seven principles that would come to define the most distinctive features of Anabaptist doctrine.³² The Brotherly Union of Schleitheim—sometimes called the Schleitheim Confession—was not intended to be a summary statement of Christian faith (for this, the Anabaptists generally appealed to the Apostolic Creed). They composed the confession hurriedly, under the threat of imminent arrest and execution. And at least one of the original Zurich radicals—Balthasar Hubmaier—would openly reject the statement. But the written agreement provided a useful and enduring expression of shared convictions. In the century that followed, the central themes of the Schleitheim Confession, and occasionally the text itself, continued to resurface within many German-speaking Anabaptist congregations.

At the heart of the Schleitheim Confession of 1527 is a view of the world in which the forces of good and evil are engaged in a dramatic spiritual struggle. As participants in this cosmic battle, human beings are faced with a genuine choice: to act according to their natural (though fallen) impulses of greed, selfishness, and violence, or to pledge allegiance to Jesus, who teaches the principles of love, generosity, and peace and who, through the Holy Spirit, empowers his followers to live according to his example. Baptism marks a clear and conscious transfer of allegiance—a “crossing over”—from the kingdom of darkness (the world) to the kingdom of light (the church). Those who are baptized should separate themselves from the sinful practices of the world and promise to hold each other accountable for their actions and attitudes, following the pattern laid out by Christ in Matthew 18:15-20. The Lord’s Supper, according to the Schleitheim Confession, should be celebrated as a commemoration of Christ’s suffering and death, and as a symbol of the unity of believers in their commitment to following in his steps. Leaders within the church are to wield their authority as gentle shepherds, not as coercive kings. Christ’s followers should respect governing authorities, but—in keeping with Christ’s teaching and the example of the early church—abstain from using the court systems or any form of lethal violence to defend their rights; likewise, believers should not serve in government positions that require the use of coercive force, but must instead treat all human beings—including enemies—with love. Finally, in accordance with Jesus’ instructions in the Sermon on the Mount, the Schleitheim confession rejected the swearing of oaths, with the admonition that Christians should keep their speech simple and always speak the truth.

³² John H. Yoder, trans. and ed. *The Schleitheim Confession* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1973).

In short, the 1527 Schleitheim Confession affirmed a view of the church as a voluntary community separated from society at large by the distinctive practices of its members, who are united by their commitment to Christ, the path of Christian discipleship, and a commitment to mutual admonition and discipline. Viewed in the light of 480 years of history, these claims may not sound overly radical. At the same time, however, the rhetoric of the confession was uncompromising and polemical:

Now there is nothing else in the world and all creation than good or evil, believing and unbelieving, darkness and light, the world and those who are [come] out of the world, God's temple and idols. Christ and Belial, and none will have part with the other... From all this we should learn that everything which has not been united with our God in Christ is nothing but an abomination which we should shun. By this are meant all popish and repopish works and idolatry, gatherings, church attendance, winehouses, guarantees and commitments of unbelief, and other things of the kind, which the world regards highly, and yet which are carnal or flatly counter to the command of God, after the pattern of all the iniquity which is in the world.

It is not surprising, then, that sixteenth-century authorities regarded the convictions expressed in the Schleitheim Confession as a serious threat to religious faith and social order. From the perspective of the reformers and Roman Catholics alike, the Anabaptists' refusal to baptize infants seemed callous, even cruel. Their view of the church as a "separated" community—identifying everyone outside their fellowship as part of the fallen world—sounded arrogant and, in the ears of some reformers, like a return to monasticism. Civil authorities were especially troubled by the Anabaptist rejection of the civic oath and their suggestion that good Christians could not serve as magistrates or defend the territory against its enemies. Such arguments, with memories of the Peasants' War still fresh in mind, sounded like a formula for anarchy—as if Christians need not be concerned with social justice or maintaining political order.

In January of 1527, two years after the first baptisms, the Zurich City Council approved the execution by drowning of Felix Mantz. His execution would soon be followed by the death of hundreds of other Anabaptists, and the arrest, interrogation, imprisonment and torture of thousands more.

THE HUTTERITES IN MORAVIA

The seven articles of the Brotherly Union at Schleitheim were an effort to unify a movement that was in danger of spinning off in a dozen different

directions. But just as the Lutheran reformers began to realize that a commitment to “Scripture alone” did not inevitably lead to unity (especially regarding the Lord’s Supper), the radicals who broke with Zwingli in Zurich quickly discovered that a seven-point statement did not automatically result in broad agreement on all Anabaptist beliefs or practices. The Hutterites are a good case in point. Although contemporary Hutterites are not currently members of the Mennonite World Conference, several references to the Anabaptists in the Augsburg Confession and the Formula of Concord clearly seem to be referring to the Hutterites.

On the surface, the group that eventually became the Hutterites shared a great deal with the Swiss Brethren—indeed, the Hutterites looked upon the first adult baptisms in Zurich as the beginnings of their tradition, and they included the Schleitheim Confession of 1527 among their treasured texts. Yet the combustible mixture of personalities, historical context, and new readings of Scripture created a Hutterian form of Anabaptism distinct from that of the Swiss Brethren.

The spiritual and genealogical roots of the Hutterites began in the Tyrol, a region southeast of Zurich under the jurisdiction of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria.³³ As an ardent defender of the Roman Catholic faith, Ferdinand did not hesitate to bring the full weight of his authority to bear against heretics of any sort, and especially against the Anabaptists. In the face of the Archduke’s persecution, many Anabaptist converts in the Tyrol left their homes (and sometimes their families) and emigrated eastward to Moravia—a territory east of Austria now divided into Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Although the lords of Moravia were technically under the authority of the Habsburg emperors (at that time Ferdinand’s brother Charles V), they had long ignored imperial edicts against religious dissidents and charted their own course in matters of religion. As a result, Moravia had gained a reputation for being tolerant of dissident religious groups. For persecuted Anabaptists, it became a haven where they could practice their faith in relative safety.

In the Tyrol and other parts of Austria the Anabaptist movement took on its own distinctive character, one heavily influenced by the currents of late medieval mysticism and end-times apocalypticism. A key figure in all this was Hans Hut, a traveling book peddler, preacher and close friend of Thomas Müntzer—the fiery preacher of social reform who had led the peas-

³³ Werner O. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings: Communitarian Experiments during the Reformation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) and Leonard Gross, *The Golden Years of the Hutterites: The Witness and Thought of the Communal Moravian Anabaptists during the Walpot Era, 1565-1578* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1980) provide the best overviews of sixteenth-century Hutterite faith and practice.

ant army to its disastrous defeat at Frankenhausen in the spring of 1525.³⁴ Hut was present at the Battle of Frankenhausen and was deeply shaken by the catastrophic end of the peasant uprising. In the following year, he renounced the tactics of violence, but he did not give up on his vision of a renewed Christian social order. Instead, Hut reformulated his message in language that echoed nearly all the themes of Swiss Brethren Anabaptism, albeit with a distinctive mystical and apocalyptic twist. Hut shared, for example, the Swiss Brethren emphasis on following Jesus in the suffering of the cross as well as in the glory of his resurrection; but the language he used to describe this—with numerous references to “yieldedness” (*Gelassenheit*), suffering and purification—sounded very much like late medieval mysticism. Like the Swiss Brethren, Hut rejected violence; but only as a temporary measure until Christ returned to lead his followers in a final decisive battle against the forces of evil. In a similar way, Hut, like the Swiss Brethren, baptized adults (hence, he was a “re-baptizer”); but he did so by marking converts on their foreheads with the “sign of the Thau,” a spiritual symbol that would distinguish the 144,000 elect mentioned in Revelation from the ungodly on the day of judgment.³⁵

When Hut’s confident prediction that Christ would return at Pentecost, 1528 did not come to pass, he accepted the counsel of other Anabaptists to cease speculation about the date of the Judgment Day. Still, the mystical and apocalyptic themes in Hut’s preaching hint at the range of expressions evident among the first generation of Anabaptist leaders.

In May of 1527 Hut’s travels took him to Nikolsburg, Moravia—a thriving commercial city where hundreds of Anabaptists and other religious dissidents had found refuge under the benevolent protection of the lords of Liechtenstein. Shortly before Hut’s arrival in Nikolsburg, Balthasar Hubmaier had won over the local prince, Leonard of Liechtenstein, to the Anabaptist cause and set about to pursue his vision of civic reform. Unlike most Anabaptists, Hubmaier defended the principle that Christians could legitimately serve in government, and he made a case for the magistrate’s use of the sword. Hut, by contrast, publicly rejected the idea that a Christian could be a magistrate, denounced all forms of lethal violence, and reiterated his themes of suffering as the Christian calling.

³⁴ Cf. Werner O. Packull, *Mysticism and the Early South German-Austrian Anabaptist Movement, 1525-1531* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1977), esp. 62-129, traces Hut’s career and influence. See also the seminal work by Gottfried Seebass, *Müntzers Erbe: Werk, Leben und Theologie des Hans Hut* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2002).

³⁵ It bears notice that the conviction of the approaching end of the world was prevalent among many reformers in Europe at the time, including most Lutherans.

Not surprisingly, Hut's teachings immediately came into conflict with Hubmaier, who insisted on a formal disputation to resolve their differences. Just as predictably, the lords of Liechtenstein, who adjudicated the debate, ruled against Hut. As a result he and some 200 of his followers—who called themselves *Stäbler* (or “staff-bearers”) to distinguish themselves from the *Schwertler* (“sword bearers”)—were forced to flee Nikolsburg in the dead of winter. Just outside the city they laid out a blanket and asked everyone to pool their possessions.

Historians differ as to whether the decision behind the radical step of “community of goods” was based primarily on Scripture or whether it was the result of economic necessity. Clearly, the concept of mutual aid had been an important part of Swiss Anabaptism from the start. Yet here in Moravia the principle of sharing moved beyond an occasional and voluntary act to an explicit rejection of all private property. Whatever the motivation, even after finding safe haven in the nearby town of Austerlitz, the group continued to share their material goods—a practice that became a defining feature of their community.³⁶

In 1533, a missionary/preacher from the Tyrol named Jacob Hutter assumed leadership of a portion of the Austerlitz group, now relocated in the nearby town of Auspitz. Although Hutter would be executed only two years later, he brought a new sense of administrative order to the community, especially regarding the community of goods, and ultimately lent his name to the “Hutterite” tradition that emerged. Shortly after Hutter's execution, Peter Riedemann, another gifted leader, produced a lengthy statement on Hutterite beliefs, which provided the Hutterites with a theological foundation for their community.

Like the Swiss Brethren, the Hutterites did not emerge instantaneously as a fully formed community. Rather, the movement—like all Reformation movements—took root in the midst of fluid, complex circumstances in which clarity of leadership, organization and theology took shape only gradually as a result of intense debates. This same transition toward theological clarity and group identity was a central theme in the story of a third branch of Anabaptism: the movement taking shape in North Germany and the Netherlands.

³⁶ For a detailed account of this story, and the broader context of early Hutterite life, see Martin Rothkegel, “Anabaptism in Moravia and Silesia,” in: Roth and Stayer, eds. *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism*, 163-210.

ANABAPTISM IN THE NETHERLANDS

As the Hutterites were moving toward a form of Anabaptism characterized by tightly structured communities in which members shared all their possessions, Anabaptists in North Germany and the Netherlands moved in a slightly different direction. Anabaptist ideas were introduced to northern Europe by a zealous evangelist and self-styled prophet named Melchior Hoffman.³⁷ As a young man, Hoffman was attracted to the teachings of Luther and he began to promote Lutheran doctrine as a traveling preacher in Roman Catholic regions. Like other early reformers, Hoffman associated faith with an intimate encounter with the Holy Spirit. Since God was Spirit, he reasoned, and since Christians were to worship God in “spirit and in truth” (John 4:24), then everything external and “non-spiritual” (religious images, for example) was an impediment to true faith. So he traveled throughout north Germany and Sweden, preaching fiery sermons against religious statues, images, altars and relics, and leading several iconoclastic rampages through churches and monasteries aimed at destroying “idols.” Hoffman’s anticlerical message and the promise of a new, purified Christian order were especially appealing to the poor. Not surprisingly, his actions also aroused the hostility of local authorities and other reformers. Even though Luther had once written a letter recommending Hoffman for a pastorate, by 1529 Luther firmly distanced himself from any association with his teachings and actions.

Eventually, Hoffman’s travels took him to Strasbourg, a haven for religious dissidents. There he was won over to Anabaptism, and he began to preach and practice adult baptism. At the same time, Hoffman’s biblical studies—drawing especially on the books of Daniel and Revelation—increasingly focused on the End Times, leading to confident assertions regarding Christ’s imminent return. To be sure, Luther and other reformers were also convinced that they were living in the End Times; however, Hoffman began to preach that he was the first of two witnesses prophesied in Revelation 11, called directly by God to gather 144,000 of the elect to await the Second Coming. Like Hut, Hoffman understood baptism as a spiritual seal that marked the believer as a member of the elect. He also began teaching his own distinctive understanding of the Incarnation: namely, that Jesus had a “heavenly flesh” untainted by any human physical qualities. Though born of Mary, Jesus passed through her “like water through a tube,” thereby retaining his divine character.

Most of Hoffman’s mission success came from converts in the Low Countries. When Dutch authorities, under pressure from the Habsburg

³⁷ Cf. Klaus Deppermann, *Melchior Hoffman: Social Unrest and Apocalyptic Visions in the Age of Reformation*, trans. Malcolm Wren, ed. Benjamin Drewery (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark., 1987).

emperor, began to crack down on Hoffman, he incorporated the experience of suffering into his apocalyptic vision, predicting that Christ would return on Easter of 1533. As Hoffman’s followers gathered in Strasbourg to await the event, the Strasbourg City Council, having long since tired of such claims, had him thrown into prison. The appointed date of the Lord’s return came and went with Hoffman languishing behind bars. Ten years later, he died in prison—a broken man, ignored and irrelevant.

Even though Hoffman was gone from the scene, his teachings continued to live on. One disciple, Jan Matthijs, a baker from Haarlem, argued that Hoffmann had been wrong only about the place and the date of Christ’s return.³⁸ Claiming to be the second witness prophesied in Revelation 11, Matthijs called on Hoffman’s disciples and other new converts to leave their homes and join him in the north German city of Münster. There they would form the vanguard of a holy army that would help Christ destroy the wicked and godless when he returned in glory. As believers began to make their way to Münster, rumors swept through the Netherlands, inspiring hope among ordinary churchgoers and fear among the authorities.

Meanwhile, initiatives for religious reform in the Roman Catholic city of Münster had brought the guilds into conflict with the church, with both groups struggling for control of the City Council. Initially, the council sought to maintain a neutral position; but slowly civic support shifted in favor of the reformers. Leading the reform movement was a former priest named Bernhard Rothmann, who had come under the influence of Melchiorite teaching and had begun to implement believers’ baptism—a radical step for the City Council since rebaptism was now a capital offense throughout the Holy Roman Empire. When voices on the council called for restraint, Rothmann’s Anabaptist supporters managed to gain a majority during the February 1534 elections, effectively taking control of the city.

The events that followed were tragic. In response to the rising power of the Anabaptist party, allied armies of the Roman Catholics and evangelical princes, led by the Bishop of Waldeck, sought to retake the city by force. In the meantime, Jan Matthijs moved into Münster with many of his followers and began to prepare the besieged inhabitants for Christ’s return on Easter, 1534. When Christ failed to appear, Matthijs led a small squad of armed men in a wild charge against the army encircling the city. Matthijs was killed immediately—his head cut off and mounted on a pike where all the inhabitants of the city could see it.

³⁸ The best summary of the complex events that unfolded in Münster—often described by contemporary observers and modern historians alike as “the Anabaptist kingdom in Münster”—can be found in the essay by Ralf Klötzer, “The Melchiorites and Münster,” in Roth and Stayer, eds. *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism*, 217-254.

Matthijs's sudden death and the failure of the prophecy led to still more radical measures. Leadership now fell into the hands of twenty-four-year-old Jan of Leiden, an actor who was more at home with the pageantry of Old Testament kingship than with the New Testament gospel. Jan saw himself as the reincarnation of King David. In short order he replaced the elected council with 12 elders, introduced polygamy, mandated adult baptism, enforced community of goods, proclaimed the Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster (complete with its own currency), and, in September of 1534, declared himself to be "King of the New Israel and of the whole world." In the face of dissent Jan resorted to and dramatically staged demonstrations of his absolute authority that included public executions.

By the spring of 1535 the inhabitants of Münster were hungry and exhausted. They had come to the city convinced that they were players in the fulfillment of a divine plan. Now they were tired and disappointed. On June 25, 1535, troops from both Roman Catholic and evangelical territories stormed the city. The bloody massacre that ensued brought a decisive end to the kingdom of Münster. Leaders who survived the battle were interrogated, tortured with red-hot tongs, and then executed—their bodies exposed to the public in three iron cages hoisted to the top of the bell tower of the Lamberti church, cages that can still be seen to this day. Indeed, centuries after the ill-fated event, the story of the so-called "Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster" continues to live in the European imagination as the only Anabaptist story that really mattered.³⁹ In the eyes of many, the tragic events at Münster revealed the true character of the Anabaptist movement: religious fanatics who preached heresy and spread sedition and chaos wherever they were to be found. As a result, a new wave of anti-Anabaptist persecution rolled across Europe.

EMERGENCE OF THE "MENNONITES"

The collapse of the Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster left hundreds of people dead and thousands more deeply disillusioned. Yet out of the ashes of Münster a new Anabaptist group emerged. Led by Menno Simons (1496-1561), a Roman Catholic priest turned radical reformer, Anabaptism in northern Europe regained its theological moorings.

In the spring of 1535, as the horrors of the Münsterite kingdom unfolded, Menno penned his first surviving tract—a polemic against Jan of Leiden, in which he denounced the visions and violence of the Münsterites

³⁹ See, for example, a detailed survey of the lingering perceptions of "Anabaptism" created by the Münster debacle in Stadtmuseum Münster, *Das Königreich der Täufer: Reformation und Herrschaft der Täufer in Münster*, 2 vols. (Münster: Stadtmuseum Münster, 2000).

and advocated a method for interpreting Scripture based firmly on the teachings of Christ. For the next nine months, Menno preached his new message of practical Christianity from the pulpit of his parish church in Witmarsum. Finally, on January 20, 1536—just as public sentiment against the Anabaptists reached a crescendo—Menno resigned his priestly office, gave up the salary, status, and security of his former identity, and publicly aligned himself with the Anabaptist cause. “Without constraint,” he wrote, “[I] renounced all my worldly reputation, name and fame, my unchristian abominations, my masses, infant baptism, and my easy life, and I willingly submitted to distress and poverty under the heavy cross of Christ.”⁴⁰

Immediately, Menno set out to rebuild the scattered and dispirited fellowship. For the next three decades, he and his wife, Gertrude, traveled almost constantly—preaching, baptizing, and instructing new believers in the faith. To a movement of uneducated peasants and disillusioned artisans, Menno brought a renewed commitment to Scripture, anchoring the distinctive themes of the radical reformation within the broader categories of orthodox Christianity. The group that gathered around his energetic leadership was dedicated to a biblicism shorn of apocalyptic visions, to an ethic of suffering love in all human relations and to a vision of a disciplined, visible church committed to Christian discipleship in daily life.

Menno was among the first Anabaptist theologians to publish his thought in print, giving his teachings considerable influence beyond his own circle. His focus was consistently on Christ, both the practical teachings of Jesus and his saving work in the cross and resurrection. Indeed, these themes were so central to Menno’s thought that the title page of every book he published included the inscription “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11). The transformation of the Christian into a “new creature,” Menno argued, is made possible only through Christ’s atoning sacrifice. But in the very next breath, he insisted that this new birth was more than simply an opportunity to have one’s sins forgiven. The gift of grace must lead to a life of Christian discipleship. It will not “help a fig,” he wrote, to “boast of the Lord’s blood, death, merits, grace and gospel so long as we are not truly converted from this wicked, immoral and shameful life.”⁴¹ Becoming “like minded with Jesus” implied a commitment to actually live like Jesus. Menno wrote, “True evangelical faith cannot lie dormant. ... It clothes the naked; it feeds the hungry; it comforts the sorrowful; it shelters

⁴⁰ Menno Simons, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons, c.1496-1561*, trans. by Leonard Verduin, ed. by John C. Wenger (Scottsdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1956), 671.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

the destitute; it returns good for evil; it serves those that harm it ... it binds up that which is wounded, it has become all things to all people.”⁴²

Many of Menno’s writings focused on the distinguishing characteristics of the church. He argued that the true body of Christ would be found not in the state-dominated churches of Christendom, but in the voluntary gatherings of believers who pledged themselves to study Scripture, to follow Jesus in daily life, and to practice mutual aid. This community was an alternative society where violence and coercive force had no place. Here discipline, practiced according to the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 18, could happen in Christian love. By presenting itself as the bride of the risen Christ “without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish” (Eph 5:27), the church offered the world a collective witness to the resurrected Christ. The church was Christ’s body made visible.

The violence at Münster had also convinced Menno of the profound danger of confusing Christian convictions with the power of the sword. Thus, in virtually all his writings, Menno challenged his readers to reconsider Christ’s teachings on peace, and particularly the alliance medieval Christians had made with the political order. God offered the gift of unconditional love, Menno insisted, while humans were still enemies of God, alienated from him (Rom 5:8-11). The gift of God’s grace has world-transforming power precisely because it enables followers of Jesus to express that same grace-filled love to others, including those who might be considered their enemies. “The Prince of Peace is Jesus Christ,” wrote Menno. “We who were formerly no people at all, and who knew of no peace, are now called to be ... a church ... of peace. True Christians do not know vengeance. They are the children of peace. Their hearts overflow with peace. Their mouths speak peace, and they walk in the way of peace.”⁴³

Over the following centuries, the group that gathered around these teachings—initially called “Mennists,” and then, more commonly, “Doopsgezinde” (“baptism-minded”)—became an enduring and visible presence in the emerging Dutch state. Although not given full legal status until the early nineteenth century, the Doopsgezinde entered vigorously into the expanding Dutch commercial life, participated fully in the eighteenth-century flowering of arts and literature known as the Dutch “Golden Age,” and found a home within the relative tolerance of Dutch urban society.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., 307.

⁴³ Ibid., 554.

⁴⁴ For a fuller account of this fascinating and complex story, see Piet Visser, “Mennonites and Doopsgezinden in the Netherlands, 1535-1700,” in: Roth and Stayer, eds. *A Companion to Anabaptism and Spiritualism, 299-343* and Samme Zijlstra, *Om de ware Gemeente en de oude Gronden: Geschiedenis van de dopersen in de Nederlanden, 1531-1675* (Leeuwarden: Fryske Akademy, 2000).

SUMMARY

The story of Anabaptist beginnings amid the tumultuous upheaval of the sixteenth century Reformation is filled with a host of colorful characters, an intricate storyline, and numerous complex subplots. Yet beneath all of these details, traces of a coherent narrative are still evident. The Swiss Brethren, Hutterites and Mennonites all emerged out of the same soil: they all drew deeply on forms of piety inherited from late medieval spirituality; they all were indebted to the Protestant reformers of their day for a new awareness of the power of Scripture as the “Word of God;” and they all reflected something of the utopian vision of the peasant revolutionaries who tried, unsuccessfully, to restructure medieval village life around a New Testament blueprint. With few exceptions, the first generation of Anabaptist leaders shared a commitment to the radical principle of voluntary, or believers’, baptism and to a life of practical discipleship, including the love of enemies. And they envisioned the church as a gathered community of true believers, followers of Christ who were ready to leave behind the tradition and assumptions of late medieval Christendom to shape an alternative community.

Yet their teachings—to the degree that they were understood by the religious and political leaders of their day—were deeply unsettling. Although today we may lament the willingness of sixteenth-century theologians to condemn collectively all Anabaptists, and may wince at their arguments invoking capital punishment, there can be no question but what Anabaptist teachings—especially within the context of the Peasants’ Revolt of 1525 and the debacle at Münster a decade later—seemed to call into question not only the gospel message but also the very foundations of sixteenth century European society.

INITIAL RESPONSES FROM WITTENBERG’S THEOLOGIANS AND THEIR ALLIES

To understand the responses by the Wittenberg theologians and their allies to these various Anabaptist movements, it is important to recognize that in 1525 there was no “Lutheran” church per se. Most political jurisdictions throughout the Holy Roman Empire had witnessed few if any changes in church doctrine or practice. Moreover, even those who called themselves “evangelical” (including some early Anabaptists) hardly agreed among themselves. At the same time, the very opponents of Luther who had labeled him a heretic and had had him condemned by the pope and imperial diet, were not only continuing to attack Luther and his supporters but were also quick to blame the Wittenbergers for the teachings of other quite different

reform movements and for the Peasants' Revolt of 1524-1525. In addition, Luther's own experience with secular authorities had been quite mixed. On the one hand, in some areas of the Empire his "followers" were being driven out of their positions or, in a few cases, executed. On the other hand, certain princes and cities (especially Luther's own Saxon electors) protected him and, at least beginning in 1525, heeded his call for reform, expressed already in his tract from 1520, *Address to the Christian Nobility*. Similarly, his experience with the clergy was also divided. Although no bishops supported him he did receive wider support among the pastors, preachers and teachers.

Luther had also thoroughly addressed the question of baptism in his 1520 tract, *Prelude Concerning the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*. There, while rejecting the notion that baptism was effective by the mere performance of the rite (*ex opere operato*) and thus underscoring the importance of faith to receive baptism's benefits, he defined baptism in terms of God's unconditional promise of grace and mercy received in faith. To be sure, he later criticized Karlstadt and Müntzer for rejecting baptism but never for advocating what he regarded as rebaptism. The earliest echo of controversies specifically over rebaptism in Martin Luther's correspondence came on March 21, 1527, in a letter to one Clemens Ursinus, where Luther warned Ursinus to flee the "blasphemous" work on infant baptism by Balthasar Hubmaier.⁴⁵ By the end of the same year, in a letter to Georg Spalatin dated December 28, Luther was equating the growth of Anabaptists with the work of the Devil.⁴⁶ In 1528, both Luther and Philip Melancthon, his colleague at the University of Wittenberg and chief drafter of the Augsburg Confession, wrote refutations of the movement.⁴⁷ At the same time, Johannes

⁴⁵ WA Br 4: 177, 17. As WA 26: 137-40 makes clear, earlier encounters with the Zwickau prophets and Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, who also questioned infant baptism, did not cause Luther to react publicly. To be sure, in 1525, in an open letter to the Christians in Antwerp, Luther mentions people who do not want to baptize at all. See WA 18: 547, 29-34. In a lecture on 1 John delivered on October 9, 1527 (WA 20: 745), Luther mentions that Cyprian practiced rebaptism, about which Augustine stated that such sins should be overlooked in martyrs. On the preceding day, he referred, for the first time in his lectures, to current rebaptizers (WA 20: 738, 27; cf. WA 20: 779; LW 30:315). (This information was obtained from *Luthers Werke im WWW*.) This relatively late date contrasts to Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich, who published his first extensive refutation of Anabaptism early in 1526.

⁴⁶ WA Br 4: 303, 10-12. In this early phase, Luther and others used the word "Anabaptist" to designate those who practiced rebaptism and not necessarily a specific group or movement.

⁴⁷ Luther's open letter, *Von der Wiedertaufe an zwei Pfarrherrn* (WA 26: 137-74; English: *Concerning Rebaptism*, LW 40: 225-62) appeared by 5 February 1528, according to WA 26: 138. Melancthon's Latin tract, *Adversus anabaptistas iudicium* (MSA

Brenz, a reformer in the imperial city of Schwäbisch Hall and an ally of Luther who worked with Melanchthon on the Augsburg Confession, dealt directly with the question of capital punishment for rebaptizers (a practice already being used in Swiss territories and in lands of princes faithful to Rome) and rejected it. These tracts serve as a benchmark for the early position of “Lutheran” reformers on the question of (what they viewed as) rebaptism. What we find in these responses are concerns both about the doctrine of baptism and about the political and social ramifications of these early Anabaptist movements.

MARTIN LUTHER’S VON DER WIEDERTAUF (1528)

Luther’s tract, an open letter to two unnamed pastors published in early 1528, began by claiming that he had read Balthasar Hubmaier’s work and had responded to it in his collection of sermons on the appointed Scripture readings for the church year, published in 1525.⁴⁸ Although admitting that Saxony had had no direct experience with such people, he directly criticized those who killed them for their faith, although he allowed capital punishment for those convicted of sedition. He even suggested that his Roman opponents, who put people to death for rebaptizing, were guilty of the same “crime” when they rebaptized Lutherans.⁴⁹

Not knowing much about Anabaptist beliefs, Luther attacked several of their presumed theological arguments, suspecting all along that they were

1: 272-95; English: *Against the Anabaptists*, in: *Melanchthon: Selected Writings*, ed. Elmer E. Flack and Lowell J. Satre, trans. Charles L. Hill [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1962], 100-22), was finished by January 1528 and probably published soon thereafter. It was hurriedly translated into German by his Wittenberg colleague Justus Jonas (*Underricht Phillips Melanchthon wider die lere der Widerteufer*) and published in the original Latin or in translation both separately and in combination with the work of Johannes Brenz, *An magistratus iure possit occidere anabaptistas* [Translated into English as part of the collection made by Sebastian Castellio in 1554, under the title *Whether the Magistrate Has Authority to Put to Death Anabaptists and Other Heretics*, in: Sebastian Castellio, *Concerning Heretics*, trans. Roland Bainton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1935), 154-69].

⁴⁸ See especially his sermon for the third Sunday after the Epiphany, where the text (Matthew 8:1-13), especially v. 8 gave Luther leave to explain alien faith. See WA 17/2: 78-88 (part of the *Kirchenpostil* first published in 1525), where he takes after both the scholastic understanding of the sacrament effective by its mere performance (*ex opere operato*) and the Waldensians and first defends the notion of infant faith.

⁴⁹ One of the Roman Catholics whom Luther accused of this practice wrote a tract against Luther insisting that he had done no such thing.

the work of Satan.⁵⁰ To the claim that baptisms under the (anti-Christian) papacy were invalid, Luther, on the basis of Christ's practice of not rejecting everything taught by the Pharisees, pointed to things taught correctly by Rome. To the notion that baptisms had to be personally remembered to be valid, Luther argued that one also only trusts Christ based upon the secondary testimony of the apostles. In the argument that faith must precede baptism because the word "believes" precedes "is baptized" in Mark 16:16, Luther saw only a recipe for uncertainty and works righteousness, for trusting in one's own faith as an idol rather than in God's promise.⁵¹

Luther then posed the theological question of infant faith and baptism. In light of references to John the Baptist "leaping in his mother's womb" and Jesus' blessing of children, he insisted that infant faith cannot be completely ruled out.⁵² Baptism of "households" recounted in Scripture must have included babies. Even presuming that children do not yet have faith did not provide sufficient grounds for rebaptizing them, any more than a woman who marries a man she does not love would have to be remarried after she fell in love with him. Against what Luther viewed as a Donatist claim that the unbelief of the one baptizing invalidates baptism, he argued that one can never trust the officiant, but only God's promise. If it turns out that children should not be baptized, he argued, God would regard it as a minor offense, since the Scripture does not clearly forbid it. Moreover, the history of the church proved that plenty of people baptized as infants showed all the signs of the work of the Holy Spirit.⁵³ Otherwise, the church had not existed for over 1,000 years—a notion Luther found absurd. God's covenant with human beings in baptism did not exclude children.⁵⁴ Luther was convinced that Anabaptists viewed baptism more as a human invention than as God's ordinance. "But because we know that baptism is a divine thing, instituted and commanded by God himself, we do not look at the misuse of it by god-

⁵⁰ The problem of ignorance and distortion in tracts by Luther, Melanchthon and, later, Justus Menius, has been fully investigated by John Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers against Anabaptists: Luther, Melanchthon and Menius and the Anabaptists of Central Germany* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1964), especially pp. 239-52.

⁵¹ WA 26: 161, 35-37.

⁵² On this question, Luther also discusses the objection that the children brought to Jesus were circumcised. Luther retorts that since girls were also among those brought to Jesus the argument holds no water. See WA 26: 157, 24 - 158, 27, where he also refers directly to his arguments in the *Kirchenpostil*.

⁵³ This and several other arguments Luther will repeat in the Large Catechism, published the following year in 1529.

⁵⁴ Melanchthon will make this argument much more extensively in his tract.

less people but simply at God’s ordinance. Thus we discover that baptism in itself is a holy, blessed, glorious and heavenly thing.”⁵⁵

Despite the heated polemic and despite the fact that in other situations Luther often referred to the societal consequences of his opponents’ positions, Luther clearly treated rebaptism as a theological dispute not a political one. As noted above, he even chastised those who would condemn Anabaptists to death on the basis of their beliefs. He simply wanted to protect these unnamed pastors and other readers against what he regarded as false teaching.⁵⁶ This same focus on the doctrinal differences, rather than on social matters, recurred in his comments on infant baptism penned the following year for his *Large Catechism*.

PHILIP MELANCHTHON’S ADVERSUS ANABAPTISTAS IUDICIUM (1528)

At nearly the time Luther’s tract was being published, the Imperial government promulgated a rescript on January 4, 1528 declaring that all who practiced rebaptism should be put to death. Melanchthon’s tract, which appeared months later, must be viewed in the light of this new political situation. Melanchthon began with general comments about the nature of theology, before providing a definition of the word “sacrament” (“a divinely instituted sign of grace”).⁵⁷ Such sacraments were not simply signs to distinguish Christians from other people (something Ulrich Zwingli had argued) but were “signs of God’s will toward us”⁵⁸—signs that did not justify by their mere performance but only in conjunction with faith. Melanchthon then defined baptism as “a sign of repentance and the forgiveness of sins”⁵⁹ and its “use and fruit”⁶⁰ in revealing God’s wrath against sin (placed upon

⁵⁵ WA 26: 171, 10-14.

⁵⁶ Luther’s other published comments on the Anabaptists written before the 1530 Diet of Augsburg came in the form of a preface to the work of Justus Menius, *Der Wiedertäufer Lehre* (WA 30/2: 209-14). He only briefly (and inaccurately) describes their teaching: holding secret meetings, teaching a community of property and goods, anticipating that Christ will crush their enemies with the sword, and imagining that good works are worthless. This may reflect somewhat the teaching of Melchior Rinck, but many other groups, including later Mennonites, rejected many of these teachings, too.

⁵⁷ MSA 1: 274, 30-31.

⁵⁸ MSA 1: 276, 9. Melanchthon will reiterate this distinction in CA XIII over against, among others, Ulrich Zwingli.

⁵⁹ MSA 1: 277, 27-28.

⁶⁰ MSA 1: 278, 22.

Christ) and God's mercy. In all afflictions, Christians ought to regard their baptisms and thereby be humbled and promised God's aid. Melanchthon then argued that the baptisms of John and Jesus⁶¹ are the same as far as the external sign goes (just as there is no difference in the external Word of God, regardless of the speaker). Indeed, John's pointing to Jesus as the Lamb of God simply proves that Christ, not human works, removes sin.

Melanchthon then focused on infant baptism, referring to the examples of Origen, Augustine, Cyprian, and Chrysostom, which were not to be rejected without the clear testimony of Scripture. There was no such clear word forbidding the baptism of infants. Here he described other teachings held by Anabaptist groups—including holding property in common and calls for the abolition of government—teachings that Melanchthon labeled signs of the End Times.

Now, one-third of the way into the document, he finally asked whether infants should be baptized. Circumcision and Christ's blessing the children proved that the promise of grace applies to infants. Yet, these promises applied specifically to those whose sins are forgiven, something that occurs in the church through God's appointed means of grace—the Word and the sacraments. Thus, Word and sacraments applied to children, too. While admitting to the lack of a clear biblical command to baptize infants, Melanchthon insisted that the example of Scripture (with circumcision and the proven need for grace) remained on his side, demanding that those opposing infant baptism come up with a single command forbidding such a practice.

Part of Melanchthon's argument assumed the existence and forgiveness of original sin, which he then described in some detail,⁶² refuting both Roman and Anabaptist opponents who imagine that such corruption is not sin. Only at the very end of the document did Melanchthon again note other characteristics of those he labels Anabaptists, especially in relation to government and the holding of communal property, which he called seditious and derived from Platonism.⁶³

Clearly, this tract, like Luther's, was constructed as a theological argument and as a serious refutation of an important, opposing viewpoint. Often published with Brenz's argument against capital punishment, it doubtless had as much influence as Luther's. By attaching other teachings regarding political authority and communal property, however, Melanchthon introduced what he considered legal grounds for their punishment by the government for sedition, which was a capital crime.

⁶¹ MSA 1: 280-81.

⁶² MSA 1: 285-87.

⁶³ MSA 1: 291-95. Most of these issues are also mentioned in CA XVI. See MSA 1: 294, 31, where he refers to Plato's *Republic* 5, 7.

JOHANNES BRENZ'S AN MAGISTRATUS IURE POSSIT OCCIDERE ANABAPTISTAS (1528)

If Luther and Melanchthon's tracts concerned chiefly theological issues, Brenz's was an official opinion related to the punishment of rebaptizers. Because it is less known and directly addressed the political ramifications of theological condemnations, it deserves more detailed analysis. In August 1528, a German translation of Melanchthon's attack on the Anabaptists appeared, published by Johannes Setzer in Haguenau,⁶⁴ to which was appended a short memorandum by Johannes Brenz, the reformer in Schwäbisch Hall.⁶⁵ Earlier that year, Brenz had received a request from the city of Nuremberg (which would two years later be among the original subscribers to the Augsburg Confession) for his opinion on the use of capital punishment for Anabaptists. The city fathers were, in essence, asking for theological opinions concerning the imperial mandate of January 4, 1528, which, based upon the decrees of Roman emperors against Donatist rebaptisms, had prescribed the death penalty for rebaptizers. Whereas no one doubted the legitimacy of the death penalty for sedition, Nuremberg's theologians, unlike its lawyers, counseled less stringent measures for non-revolutionary Anabaptists.⁶⁶

Brenz's answer, published without reference to date, place or printer, caused quite a stir, and efforts were even made to prevent its publication.⁶⁷ Brenz addressed two questions: first, whether Scripture allows this and,

⁶⁴ Setzer had studied at Wittenberg but took over his father-in-law Thomas Anshelm's printery in Haguenau upon the latter's death. In the 1520s, Melanchthon, who had worked at Anshelm's printshop when it was located in Tübingen, often used him as a printer.

⁶⁵ For this section, see James Estes, *Christian Magistrate and State Church: The Reforming Career of Johannes Brenz* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 123-41. Estes based his work on Gottfried Seebaß, "An sint persequendi haeretici?" Die Stellung des Johannes Brenz zur Verfolgung und Bestrafung der Täufer," *Blätter für Württembergische Kirchengeschichte*, 70 (1970): 40-99 (reprint: Gottfried Seebaß, *Die Reformation und ihre Außenseiter* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997, 283-335]). For the tract, *Ob eyn weltliche Oberkeyt ... möge die Widerteuffer.. zum Tod richten lassen*, and an introduction (also dependent upon Seebaß), see Johannes Brenz, *Werke: Eine Studienausgabe*, part 2: *Frühschriften*, ed. Martin Brecht et al. (Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1974), 472-98. (Henceforth referred to as *Frühschriften* 2: 472-98.)

⁶⁶ Luther was also asked for advice. See WA Br 4: 498-99 for material associated with a letter to Wenceslaus Linck, dated July 14, 1528.

⁶⁷ Sebastian Castellio included its Latin translation in his work on tolerance, *De Haeticis, an sint persequendi & omnio quomodo sit cum eis agendum, Luteri et Brentii, aliorumque multorum tum veterum tum recentiorum sententiae* (Basel, 1554), and he even dedicated the work to the Duke of Württemberg in part because Brenz, now in the duke's service, had shown himself to be so tolerant.

second, whether Roman law requires that all Anabaptists be killed. Brenz then distinguished between spiritual and secular offenses.⁶⁸ Only the latter may be punished by the sword. Spiritual crimes (he listed unbelief, heresy and the misinterpretation of Scripture) were to be punished by the spiritual sword, that is, Scripture. Brenz was convinced that secular punishment of any kind for such matters would only strengthen heresy not extirpate it. Otherwise “what point would there be in studying Scripture, for the hangman would be the most learned doctor?”⁶⁹ As long as heretics or unbelievers lived among Christians peaceably, secular authorities had no business persecuting them.

Brenz then addressed several objections. To the use of Deuteronomy 13:1-10, which authorized the killing of false prophets, Brenz insisted that such commandments applied only to the Kingdom of Israel and not to Christ’s kingdom, since they were simply signs of the coming reign of Christ. To the traditional distinction between spiritual authorities, which had no right to wield the sword in such matters, and secular authorities, which should, Brenz repeated his distinction between the two and claimed that secular authority had only to concern itself with external peace and order. He also reminded those who insisted that the magistrate wield such power against heretics that they would have no argument to contradict its use in future generations against the true faith. “Therefore, it is by far safest and surest for secular government to exercise its own office and let spiritual sins receive spiritual punishments. For it is much better and more preferable to tolerate a false faith four or ten times than to persecute the true faith only once.”⁷⁰ To the objection found in Melancthon’s tract that the Anabaptists are also guilty of other crimes, Brenz noted that at least they did not force others to follow their practices (for example, holding property in common—something the monks also did). Their crime was simply misunderstanding a few passages of Scripture, for which no one should be put to death, lest all Christians be liable to such punishment.

Brenz turned aside concerns that the growth of Anabaptism might lead to insurrection by arguing that this had not happened with monks in the past and that such worries could also be applied to such practices as public drinking, markets, and the like, since they, too, could lead to riot. Even the Anabaptist unwillingness to take oaths and their teaching on the impossibility of Christians being magistrates did not rise to the level of a capital offense, because priests and monks taught as much. One should simply deprive them of civic privileges. “To impose any greater punishment would be tyranny

⁶⁸ For a discussion of this in Luther’s theology, see below.

⁶⁹ Estes, *Christian Magistrate*, 124, paraphrasing Brenz, *Frühschriften* 2: 485, 18-20.

⁷⁰ Brenz, *Frühschriften* 2: 487, 31–488, 3; see Estes, *Christian Magistrate*, 125.

and oppression and unjust. Why in the world should one in this case punish an Anabaptist more sharply [than anyone else who breaks such a law]?”⁷¹

Brenz then turned his attention to the ancient imperial rescript against the Donatists (opponents of Augustine, bishop of Hippo), which provided the justification for the current law. After quoting it in Latin and German, he first attempted what James Estes characterizes as a strained reading of the text, arguing that it only applied to the clergy.⁷² Second, he insisted that it applied only to those caught in the act of rebaptizing. Third, given Emperor Theodosius’s erudition, Brenz doubted that this law applied to “rebaptism pure and simple” (*uff das schlecht und bloß wiedertauften*), as if there was no place for instructing those ignorant of the truth, but to some specific crime, which was not recorded in the rescript itself. In this connection, Brenz pointed out that other greater crimes (that of a bishop who rebaptizes someone) were met with milder punishments. Even a relapse into Judaism had a lesser punishment attached to it in Roman law (namely, confiscation of property). Brenz also suggested that if rebaptizing were such a serious crime, then priests who rebaptized children baptized in an emergency by midwives should also be killed.⁷³ Even Cyprian of Carthage had, in error, rebaptized some people. If the law were aimed at rebaptism pure and simple, Brenz added, then it must have been the product of “bloodthirsty bishops.”⁷⁴ In any case, he concluded, a Christian magistrate should have far more concern for simple-minded people who misunderstand Scripture. The sword was no cure at all. If magistrates wanted to prevent rebellion, they should consider first their own lifestyles, the way they oppressed the poor, and the discontent that sprang from that behavior.⁷⁵

Brenz’s position was not unique in 1528 (other Nuremberg theologians and the City Council held the same position), and even Luther’s and Melancthon’s views did not exclude his position on punishment.⁷⁶ The publication of this memorandum in both German and Latin, however, led to it being a counterpoint during the sixteenth century to other Lutheran views. Moreover, by 1531, as we shall see below, the Saxon theologians and government were practicing much harsher measures, placing Brenz’s opinion in sharper contrast to them and to others who supported capital punishment for spiritual

⁷¹ Brenz, *Frühschriften* 2: 492, 7-9; see Estes, *Christian Magistrate*, 126.

⁷² Estes, *Christian Magistrate*, 126, where he rightly points out that such readings were not exceptional in interpreting such texts in the medieval or early modern times.

⁷³ Brenz, *Frühschriften* 2: 495, 29-32. Luther, Brenz and others approved baptism by midwives without rebaptism.

⁷⁴ Brenz, *Frühschriften* 2: 496, 27; see Estes, *Christian Magistrate*, 127.

⁷⁵ See Brenz, *Frühschriften* 2: 497, 27–498, 8, where he mentions how King David’s adultery led to Absalom’s insurrection.

⁷⁶ See Estes, *Christian Magistrate*, 128-29.

crimes. In later memoranda from 1530 that were not widely disseminated, Brenz, while still trying to remain true to his principle of the two realms, did allow for the banishment of particularly stubborn Anabaptist teachers, not on the grounds of their beliefs but because they disseminated them in public.⁷⁷ He remained opposed to the death penalty but also held to his principle that the government has no authority in matters of faith.

At nearly the same time, Brenz also prepared (unpublished) memoranda for another signer of the Augsburg Confession, Margrave Georg von Brandenburg-Ansbach.⁷⁸ As a result of interviews with some Anabaptists arrested in the margraviate, Brenz and his fellow theologians counseled that their leaders be banished but not killed. Even though their leader had propagated Hans Hut's theory that secular government would be destroyed within three-and-a-half years of the Peasants' War, he was to be treated as a follower of insurrection, not a leader, and thus spared the death penalty. Brenz's concern throughout was not to punish false belief but to prevent false teaching.

Only in a later memorandum to the prince from February 1531, written in conjunction with other theologians in Ansbach, did Brenz seem to allow capital punishment.⁷⁹ That memorandum distinguished leaders from followers and three kinds of teaching (errors, open blasphemy, and sedition). Those who fell into the first group should be punished the least severely, despite the demands of secular law. Those guilty of open blasphemy (the memorandum mentioned Trinitarian errors and teaching universal salvation) should be given plenty of opportunity to recant but otherwise dealt with according to the civil code. Finally, the secular authorities already knew how to deal with those guilty of trying to overthrow the government. This memorandum was to serve in negotiations with the Saxon theologians, who, as shall be seen, took a much stricter position. It did not reflect either Brenz's ongoing position or the policy of the Margrave, both of whom opposed the death penalty.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, it is further evidence of the effect that the political situation exercised over theological discussion.⁸¹

⁷⁷ See Estes, *Christian Magistrate*, 130-31. See Brenz, *Frühschriften* 2: 498-541.

⁷⁸ See Estes, *Christian Magistrate*, 132-35, and Brenz, *Frühschriften* 2: 541-76.

⁷⁹ Estes, *Christian Magistrate*, 134-35.

⁸⁰ This, at least, according to Estes, *Christian Magistrate*, 134-35. For Brenz's later negotiations with Melancthon in the 1550s and his unchanging position against the death penalty, see pp. 135-41.

⁸¹ It is also important to note that Johannes Brenz was by no means open to Anabaptist theology and practice. See, for example, comments Brenz made in a sermon on John 12:38-41 delivered in the 1540s and noted in Martin Brecht, "A Statement by Johannes Brenz on the Anabaptists," *MQR*, 44 (1970): 192-98.

POLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE DISPUTE TO 1530

What immediately complicated relations with the so-called “rebaptizers” was imperial law. As we have seen, an imperial rescript, which passed into Roman law already in the fourth century, called for the capital punishment of such people, in line with Augustine’s political solution to the problem of the Donatists.⁸² This meant that as soon as theologians, who at some level had the power of the state on their side, labeled sixteenth-century Christian dissenters Anabaptists, these people became liable to extreme persecution.⁸³ Indeed, several governments, including Zurich on the “Reformed” side and Austria on the Roman Catholic side, immediately began putting people labeled Anabaptists to death. On the contrary, Johannes Brenz’s position vis-à-vis capital punishment, which seems to have influenced policy in Ansbach and Nuremberg, represented a rejection of the government’s use of such extreme coercive power in matters of conscience.⁸⁴ However, when the imperial diet renewed this very law in 1529, events were set in motion enabling severe persecution of these believers.

Moreover, when Melancthon’s tract labeled the rejection of government and the holding of property communally as sedition and inferred that all Anabaptists held to this position, he opened an avenue for government intervention that had little to do with the theological debate. This concern over sedition, heightened by recent experiences during the Peasants’ War

⁸² See W. H. C. Frend, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) and the above discussion on Johannes Brenz. Already among the Hussites, the charge of Donatism and rebaptism arose. See Amedeo Molnár, “La mise en question du baptême des enfants par les hussites radicaux,” in: *Anabaptistes et dissidents au XVIe siècle* (Bibliotheca Dissidentium scripta et studia, 3), ed. Jean-Georges Rott and Simon I. Verheus (Baden-Baden and Beuxwiller: Koerner, 1987), 35-52.

⁸³ It should be remembered that throughout the 1520s, others were also persecuted for their faith. In 1523, the first Lutheran martyrs were burned in Brussels, and to commemorate that event, Luther wrote his first hymn. (See WA 35: 411-15; LW 53:211-16.) Many “Lutherans,” as they were called, were exiled from or fled their homelands and often ended up as refugees in Wittenberg, Strasbourg or other important evangelical centers. Among others were nuns who fled their monasteries (Katherine von Bora, Luther’s later wife, among them), priests (Caspar Aquila, who was briefly arrested in Augsburg by the bishop), and well-to-do citizens (the parents of Caspar Cruciger, Sr., who left Leipzig).

⁸⁴ For a review of the statistics, originally compiled by Claus-Peter Clasen, see Eugène Honé, “Burning Heretics—A Sin against the Holy Ghost? The Lutheran Churches and How They Dealt with the Sixteenth-Century Anabaptist Movement,” in: *Truth and Its Victims*, ed. Wim Beuken et al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 94-104, esp., 100-101, citing C.-P. Clasen, *Anabaptism: A Social History* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1972), 358ff.

of 1525 and sharpened later by the events in Münster in 1534-1535, would continue to color all contacts between Saxon Lutherans and these opponents.

The time between 1526 and 1529 represented a hiatus for those territories that were beginning to experiment with church reform arising out of Luther's teachings. The imperial diet (parliament) met in Speyer in 1526 and in the absence of Emperor Charles V agreed that each jurisdiction should behave in such a way as they could answer to God and the Emperor. For evangelical princes like John of Saxony, this meant implementing serious reforms of the church and even an official, though not episcopally sanctioned, "visitation" of the churches in Saxony, starting in 1527. In 1529, however, with a victorious Emperor eager to assert more control over the Empire through his brother Ferdinand, the Second Diet of Speyer rescinded the earlier agreement and demanded enforcement of the decree against Luther and his teaching passed at the 1521 diet meeting in Worms, while at the same time affirming the imperial decree that sanctioned capital punishment for Anabaptists. Against the former action, the evangelical princes and cities filed an official appeal, called a *protestatio* (from which comes the term Protestants, literally, appellants). These Protestants argued that their reform had not broken any imperial law. Their imperial opponents, however, would sometimes lump them together with rebaptizers as a way of proving that they stood in violation of imperial law.⁸⁵ Thus, these evangelical theologians and political leaders had to show not only that their own teaching conformed with Christian teaching of the past (and, hence, could not be illegal) but also that they were in no way connected to heresies condemned by church and empire—especially to the practice of rebaptism. Thus, some of the evangelical princes supported the measures against the Anabaptists.

The decision reached at Speyer had an immediate effect upon Electoral Saxony's reaction to Anabaptists in its territories. An incident that occurred near Gotha in 1529 was particularly important.⁸⁶ A group of folks labeled Anabaptists, who had been previously apprehended and released, had been rearrested near the monastery of Reinhardsbrunn. When six of their number refused to recant, the Saxon authorities summarily executed them. This caused serious consternation among some evangelical pastors in the region. It is clear that the Saxon officials had been placed in a dif-

⁸⁵ See, for example, John Eck, *Four Hundred Four Articles*, trans. Robert Rosin, in: *Sources and Contexts of The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and James Nestingen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 58-60 & 73-75, where positions on baptism and secular authority held by Luther and Melancthon are mixed with those of Hubmaier and Zwingli among others.

⁸⁶ See Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 50-51, 182.

ficult political position by the second diet of Speyer. Faced with the diet's clear condemnation of Anabaptists, with which the evangelical princes had agreed, some protesting princes decided to prove that they were not condoning a universally condemned teaching and thus were not themselves *ipso facto* heretical (and also worthy of the Empire's outright condemnation). Thus, when one of the concerned pastors, Friedrich Myconius, expressed his misgivings to Philip Melanchthon, the Wittenberg reformer responded that these rebaptizers were "angels of the devil." Had the Saxon elector not responded so ruthlessly, he continued, their blasphemy could easily have engendered theological uncertainty and civil unrest.⁸⁷

At the same time, the Wittenberg theologians published Justus Menius's defense of such punishment, accompanied with a preface by Martin Luther in 1530.⁸⁸ Although Luther did not mention the issue of capital punishment directly, Menius defended it on two grounds: because of treason (already intimated as an issue in Melanchthon's tract and mentioned in Luther's preface and in his commentary on Psalm 82) and blasphemy (mentioned in Melanchthon's letter and in Luther's commentary). Of course, some reformers, notably Johannes Brenz, did not agree with this position and continued to argue that Anabaptists should not *ipso facto* be liable to the death penalty.⁸⁹

Comparison of what Luther first wrote in 1523 about secular authority with his commentary on Psalms 82, published in early 1530 before the drafting of the Augsburg Confession, reveal important changes in his position on civil punishment for religious crimes. (This is even more remarkable given that Luther was condemned in the papal bull of excommunication for rejecting capital punishment for heretics by the church, a position that Luther then continued to defend in his rejection of that bull.)⁹⁰ Those changes even appear, in part, to be a response to Brenz. Again, debates in the city of Nuremberg over the question of punishment for heretics caused

⁸⁷ MBW 868 (MSA 7/1: 127-31), dated the end of February 1530. Melanchthon claimed that the Anabaptists and Ulrich Zwingli were actually offspring of Nicholas Storch, one of the Zwickau prophets with whom Melanchthon had dealings in 1521. Melanchthon also remarked that Brenz's position was so lenient in part because he had never dealt with any Anabaptists personally (as had Justus Menius) or experienced the kind of contagion they spread.

⁸⁸ For a thorough review of this document, see Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*, 179-210. The preface of Luther is in WA 30/2: 209-14. He had a copy of the manuscript, which he showed to Philip Melanchthon, before 12 April 1530. See WA Br 5: 274 (no. 1545), a letter to Menius dated April 12, 1530.

⁸⁹ See above.

⁹⁰ See, for example, Grund und Ursach aller Artikel D. Martin Luthers, so durch römische Bulle unrechtlich verdammt sind (March 1521) in WA 7: 439-42; LW 32: 87-89.

Lazarus Spengler, secretary of the City Council, to ask Luther for advice (via Veit Dietrich, Luther's companion and later preacher in Nuremberg).⁹¹ Specifically, Spengler criticized the "new teaching" (i.e., Brenz's) that governmental authorities could not intervene in matters of faith and had to tolerate all forms of religious teaching and practice.⁹² Luther responded in his commentary, originally intended as a simple "mirror for Christian princes," appending to his comments on Psalm 82:4 a lengthy excursus.⁹³ In it Luther identified four different situations. First, some heretics, who taught disobedience to governmental authorities, abandonment of property or the communal sharing of property, were seditious and ought to be punished by the authorities in accord with Romans 13. Second, there were those who taught contrary to the common Christian faith as expressed in the Apostles' Creed. Here he specifically mentioned Turks and Anabaptists [!] who, he claimed, deny Christ's divinity, but he also included his Roman opponents, who did not teach that Christ forgives sins, and "Epicureans," who do not believe in heaven or hell. Just as the Nicene Fathers drowned out the Arians with hisses to prevent their being heard and Moses commanded the Israelites to stone blasphemers (Lev 24:16), so in Luther's day magistrates were to silence such people.⁹⁴ Rulers could not force anyone into believing the truth, but they could prevent them from speaking publicly. The third case involved a city in which there were both "Lutheran" and "Papist" preachers, as he called them. Here, Lutherans were to keep silent if not granted a fair hearing, but the Christian magistrate, following Constantine's example, could determine which of the two groups most clearly preaches according to Scripture, since in Luther's view having more than one Christian message in a jurisdiction would only lead to confusion and trouble. Fourth, one should under no circumstance mention disagreements about non-essentials from the pulpit.

Luther then turned his attention to clandestine preachers, arguing that, because they had no call, they have no right to preach. All Christians were priests, but not all were pastors. Citizens should turn such self-appointed preachers over to the authorities. Luther even argued that had people done this when Müntzer and Karlstadt first began to preach, they could have prevented the later unrest. Although Christ's command

⁹¹ WA 31/1: 183-84.

⁹² He refers directly to Luther's tract from 1524, *A Letter to the Princes of Saxony concerning the Seditious Spirit* (WA 15: 199-221), where Luther seems to have said as much.

⁹³ WA 31/1: 207, 33-213, 22.

⁹⁴ Despite Luther's reference to Leviticus, he does not make direct reference to the use of capital punishment by present-day rulers.

to the Apostles to evangelize all gave them the right to preach secretly, pastors and bishops do not have such a command and must remain with their specific parishes and dioceses. Anticipating the objection that he himself had not limited his preaching to his Wittenberg pulpit, Luther answered that he was called as a doctor of the Bible, that he did not choose to publish anything but was forced into it, and that people freely used his writings in other places. To the objection (expressed by Brenz) that one should not punish such people or guard against them, just as one tolerated the Jews, Luther pointed out that Jews already bore the punishment of being outside Christendom and that they did not have the right to preach publicly. To Brenz's objection that giving the authorities such power would give their enemies more encouragement to punish the evangelicals, Luther seemed unconcerned, admitting that the same thing had happened when Israel's kings killed the prophets. Yet that did not prevent good rulers from using the law correctly. With these comments, Luther now had more closely connected the work of the Christian magistrate with the prevention not only of sedition but also of public blasphemy. Condemnations of Anabaptists for matters of doctrine could therefore more easily translate into political punishment.

Thus, in 1530, when the Emperor surprised the Protestants by calling another diet to meet in Augsburg in his presence, at which all would give an account of their faith, the issue of rebaptism was bound to find a place in their response. Fueling their concerns was the fact that John Eck, one of the most notorious opponents of the Lutherans, published his *404 Articles* in April 1530 in which he listed 386 heretical statements gleaned from the writings of Protestants. Included in the accusations were several charges regarding baptism and disobedience to governing authorities that seemed to associate them with the Anabaptist heresy, which the imperial government had agreed was a capital crime. In the account of their faith that followed, these theologians had to make clear that especially these statements did not apply to them.

THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION AND ITS CONDEMNATIONS

Sketched upon this background, problems regarding the condemnations of the Anabaptists, or “rebaptizers,” in the Augsburg Confession take on new clarity. For one thing, these statements were not intended primarily to reflect or refute the theological positions held by specific Anabaptist leaders. Instead, they were meant to distance the reformers theologically and politically from a group with which their Roman opponents had falsely identified them and whose behavior could *prima facie* be construed as wor-

thy of capital punishment. Some were even designed, indirectly, to accuse their Roman opponents of supporting Anabaptist positions.

There is, however, another, more difficult historical problem lurking behind these condemnations. As we have seen, the reformers did not know very much about the specific beliefs of many Anabaptists. Not only were there relatively few Anabaptists in Saxony at this time, but also they had only limited access to the printing press. Thus, one of the few Anabaptist theologians whose writings were known to the reformers was Balthasar Hubmaier. This may explain, for example, the condemnation of Anabaptists in CA V: "Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that we obtain the Holy Spirit without the external word of the gospel through our own preparation, thoughts, and works."⁹⁵ Although one might plausibly—*if* unfairly—associate this understanding of human agency with Hubmaier, the argument is not found in the writings of any other Anabaptist and certainly not among the later Mennonites. Moreover, the rhetorical point being made in CA V had less to do with what Anabaptists taught and more to do with the "others," including Gabriel Biel and many other late medieval theologians who taught that from one's own powers (*ex puris naturalibus*) one could, by doing what is in one (*facere quod in se est*), merit God's grace and the Holy Spirit.⁹⁶ By linking the thought of the opposition with the universally condemned Anabaptists, Melanchthon hoped to turn the tables on his opponents through a kind of theological guilt by association.⁹⁷ Comments in CA XVII, condemning the apocalyptic theology of Anabaptists, also involved a small number of theologians (perhaps only Hans Hut and Melchior Rinck), whose theology the reformers also knew firsthand but who hardly represented most Anabaptist or later Mennonite theology. Similarly, CA XII's accusation that Anabaptists were Novatians (who insisted that after baptism one may not sin) also involved few if any actual Anabaptists. Finally, an oblique reference to people who thought even political authorities ought not take revenge (i.e., punish crimes) in CA XXVII.55 may have had the teaching of some Anabaptists in mind, but it comes in the midst of an attack on the reformers' Roman opponents and their views on monasticism.

⁹⁵ CA V.4, as translated in *BC 2000*: 40. See Balthasar Hubmaier, *On Free Will*, in: *Spiritual and Anabaptist Writers*, ed. George H. Williams and Angel M. Mergal (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957), 112-35, especially, 123-27.

⁹⁶ This is a connection made clear in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession IV.61-68, in *BC 2000*: 130-31. That "and others" (*BC 2000*: 40) refers to late medieval theologians like Gabriel Biel and their followers is also proved by Melanchthon's explanation in Apology II.7-10 (*BC 2000*: 113-14) and IV.9-11 (*BC 2000*: 121-22).

⁹⁷ This approach can also be seen in Brenz's 1528 memorandum.

On the other hand, some articles condemning the Anabaptists may appear to be more widely applicable. The condemnation in CA VIII.3 (“What is the Church”), for example, mentions the Donatists expressly but may have been intended to reflect Luther’s 1528 tract against rebaptism. Whether this represented most Anabaptists or not, Luther was convinced that they, like the Donatists, predicated the validity of baptism upon the holiness of the officiant. Again, however, the main point was to distance the evangelical princes at Augsburg and their teachers from such positions and to prevent dismissal of their confession out of hand.⁹⁸ Similarly, condemnations expressly mentioning Anabaptists in CA IX (on the validity of infant baptism) and CA XVI (on secular government) reflect Luther and Melanchthon’s impressions of the Anabaptists, already stated in his earlier tract.

What was the political force of such condemnations? In the light of Luther and Melanchthon’s growing support for the responsibility of governmental authorities in matters not only of sedition but also public blasphemy, certain comments in the preface and conclusion to the Augsburg Confession take on new weight. The preface of the confession (par. 3)—written not by Philip Melanchthon but by the Saxon chancellor, Gregory Brück—quotes the emperor’s summons to Augsburg, “so that all of us can accept and preserve a single, true religion.” Even more striking in its assurance that princes have responsibility in religious matters is a statement in the Conclusion (par. 5), where the princes and their allies state that, “we have very diligently and with God’s help (to speak without boasting) prevented any new and godless teaching from insinuating itself into our churches, spreading, and finally gaining the upper hand.” Thus, these evangelical rulers are claiming the right to prevent the spread of such teaching as they and their theologians judged to be “new and godless” (a term that would have included Anabaptist teaching), and in so doing they do not clearly distinguish between church and territory. At the same time, CA XXVIII carefully distinguishes between the office of magistrate and the office of bishop, where the latter alone has authority to condemn false teaching.

Here a closer analysis of CA XVI may also help clarify possible political ramifications for these condemnations. The topic discussed in CA XVI (German: “Concerning Public Order and Secular Government”; Latin: “Concerning Civic Affairs”), gets near to the heart of historic differences between Lutheran and Mennonite churches and their Anabaptist predecessors: the role of the Christian in society. In the Latin version of CA XVI.3, we read, “They condemn the Anabaptists who prohibit Christians from assuming

⁹⁸ See Melanchthon’s comments in the Apology VII/VIII, as he reflects on the condemnation of CA VII-VIII by the opponents in their *Confutatio*, in part on the basis of suspected Donatism.

such civil responsibilities.”⁹⁹ The list of such responsibilities includes: “to hold civil office, to work in law courts, to decide matters by imperial and other existing laws, to impose just punishments, to wage just war, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to hold property, to take an oath when required by magistrates, to take a wife, to be given in marriage.”

This cornerstone of Lutheran social ethics—that the gospel does not forbid full engagement in worldly affairs—was first spelled out in Luther’s 1523 tract, *On Secular Authority*.¹⁰⁰ Philip Melanchthon, whose own reflections on what he often calls the two-fold righteousness of God come to expression best in his commentaries on Colossians 2:23 from 1527 and 1528, also holds a similar position, reflected in CA XVI.¹⁰¹

Several comments may help in understanding the condemnations of CA XVI. First, although the German is more indiscriminate in its condemnation, at least the Latin is clearly not finding all Anabaptists in default for the entire list of approved civic duties (including marriage and owning property) but is specifically talking about those “who prohibit Christians from assuming such civil responsibilities.” Second, as the following paragraphs in CA XVI make clear, another serious point of disagreement lies with late medieval monasticism and its claim to be in a state of perfection by means of the vow.¹⁰² Third, the other unnamed “opponent” here is the charge of treason emanating from the imperial court, the Roman legate, and the polemics of John Eck, all of whom in one way or another accused the evangelical princes of sedition. Thus, CA XVI also, ironically, contains a defense of civil disobedience on theological grounds, as the closing lines make clear. “But if a command of the political authority cannot be followed without sin, one must obey God rather than any human beings (Acts 5[:29]).”¹⁰³

As we have seen, CA XVI came in the midst of a process through which evangelical reformers were slowly developing new understandings of the

⁹⁹ *BC 2000*: 49. The German version (*BC 2000*: 48) reads, “Condemned here are the Anabaptists who teach that none of the things indicated above is Christian.” As the footnote (86) indicates, by not distinguishing among various groups and persons this statement exaggerated the differences by lumping all Anabaptists together.

¹⁰⁰ WA 11: 245-281.

¹⁰¹ See Timothy J. Wengert, *Human Freedom, Christian Righteousness* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 110-36. In large measure, Melanchthon’s point of view was also shaped over against Thomas Müntzer’s role in the Peasants’ War. We have also seen how important this distinction is for Brenz.

¹⁰² The language will lay the groundwork for the arguments against monastic vows in CA XXVII.

¹⁰³ CA XVI.6-7, in *BC 2000*: 50/51.

magistrate's role in religious matters (*cura religionis*).¹⁰⁴ By the mid-1530s, when Luther and Melanchthon wrote their memorandum defending the use of capital punishment against the Anabaptists (see below), not only had the debacle at Münster occurred but they had now become even more convinced that princes had a positive role to play in maintaining order and preventing blasphemy.¹⁰⁵ Yet other theologians of the time, notably Johannes Brenz (who worked on the Augsburg Confession with Melanchthon in Augsburg), insisted that Luther's earlier tracts and Melanchthon's commentaries made the division between the political and theological much sharper to prevent the killing of heretics. Thus, CA XVI found approval among those Lutherans who opposed the very position that was developing among Wittenberg's theologians, a position that justified the capital punishment of heretics, especially Anabaptists. Therefore its condemnations cannot be said necessarily to have led to persecution.

REACTIONS IN THE 1530S

In the aftermath of the rejection of the Augsburg Confession by the Emperor and his acceptance instead of the *Confutatio* (a refutation of the Augsburg Confession), the reformers in Wittenberg became more and more convinced that Christian (read: Lutheran) princes had a positive role to play as rulers in protecting true doctrine. Already in 1527, it was Elector John of Saxony who had called for official visitations of the churches in his territories. It was he, among others, who presented and signed the Augsburg Confession in 1530. He continued to support and maintain evangelical (Lutheran) churches in his territories. But what happens when these very churches were faced with purveyors of what they determined to be false doctrine?

On the one hand, and already before 1530, these theologians realized that governments could punish religious folk for sedition. Luther had mentioned this in his tract *On Rebaptism*, although Brenz was far more skeptical of this charge. Having lived through the uncertainty of the Peas-

¹⁰⁴ See James Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God: Secular Authority and the Church in the Thought of Luther and Melanchthon, 1518-1559* (Leiden, Brill, 2005).

¹⁰⁵ *Daß weltliche Oberkeit den Wiedertäufern mit leiblicher Strafe zu wehren schuldig sei, Etliche Bedenken zu Wittenberg* (1536) in WA 50: 6-15 (dated 5 June 1536 and published in late August in Wittenberg; see also MBW 1748 [MBW *Texte* 7: 150-57], based upon the fair copy). The letter was jointly written by Philip Melanchthon and Martin Luther, and signed also by Johannes Bugenhagen, and Caspar Cruciger, Sr. To be sure, the document still tries to distinguish the two hands of God by dividing the clerical and magisterial offices and by distinguishing treason from blasphemy. However, it is precisely on the last point that it struggles with opposing voices within the evangelical camp.

ants' Rebellion of 1525, the reformers were convinced that one of the chief duties of secular government was to maintain peace. To these sixteenth-century theologians, this meant preventing and punishing sedition. On the other hand, there was more uncertainty regarding blasphemy. Put in their terms, these theologians were convinced that government had a responsibility to maintain the so-called "second table" of the law (beginning with obedience to parents through the tenth commandment). They were divided about what to do with the first table (the first through the commandment on keeping the Sabbath), especially the command not to blaspheme or "take God's name in vain." Whereas Johannes Brenz consistently rejected capital punishment for people deemed heretics, Luther and Melanchthon took a harsher position.

One thing that hardened their position was the 1534 uprising in Münster by people who rejected the validity of infant baptism. The political disorder and violence unleashed by this kind of Anabaptism underscored Luther and Melanchthon's tendency to equate the practice of rebaptizing itself with seditious and godless behavior.¹⁰⁶ Not to punish these people, they argued, would leave the land itself vulnerable to rebellion and open to God's retribution, an argument already found in Melanchthon's 1530 letter to Myconius. In February 1536, Melanchthon wrote and published *Verlegung etlicher unchristlicher Artikel, welche die Widerteuffer fürgeben* (*Refutation of Some Unchristian Articles That the Anabaptists Have Proposed*).¹⁰⁷ He did it in part to instruct the simple folk but also to encourage governmental authorities to act against a sect that, he claimed, undermined public order, oaths, and marriage. He connected their claim of being pacifists to the uprising in Münster, where, in his opinion, people also began by renouncing the sword before rebelling against their overlords. He attributed the popularity of the movement to the devil's ability to deceive and humanity's lust for novelty. The bulk of the tract examines five political articles of Anabaptists¹⁰⁸ and the question of infant baptism.¹⁰⁹ In the concluding pages, Melanchthon again calls upon the governmental authorities to take action against such blasphemers

¹⁰⁶ From Luther we have, among other things, two prefaces that appeared early in 1535, one to Urbanus Rhegius's tract refuting Münster's confession of faith (his *Widerlegung des Bekenntnisses der Münsterischen neuen Valentinianer und Donatisten*; WA 38: 336-40) and the other to the anonymous *Neue Zeitung von den Wiedertäufern zu Münster* (WA 38: 341-50).

¹⁰⁷ MSA 1: 301-22.

¹⁰⁸ MSA 1: 307-15: ban on involvement in secular government; insistence that Christians have no other authorities than servants of the gospel; ban on oaths; insistence on holding property in common; permission to divorce an unbelieving spouse. Brenz's position clearly had no impact on Melanchthon.

¹⁰⁹ MSA 1: 315-20.

of God’s clear Word, especially given the way they deceive people through their fancy words and the appearance of humble behavior.¹¹⁰

At the same time, the Augsburg Confession itself was taking on a new role, beyond its original function as a confession of faith, to serve increasingly as a norm for teaching and theology in the lands of princes who had subscribed to it.¹¹¹ For example, in 1537 a host of leading evangelical theologians also subscribed to the document.¹¹² This meant that the complex reasons for singling out and condemning Anabaptist teaching as a defense against the false accusations of the Roman party became obscured by the larger goal (shared by church and government officials alike) of establishing doctrinal harmony in the developing territorial churches. Luther’s warning of 1527 against punishing a person for false belief was now forgotten or mitigated even by Luther himself! Now the condemnations in the Augsburg Confession, far from simply defining theological disputes, became the means for enforcing theological conformity and, thus, punishing dissenters.

In several tracts from this period, Martin Luther also weighed in. His open letter against clandestine preachers, published in 1532, made such people (perhaps especially Anabaptists) liable to civil punishment, not because of their teaching but because they taught without a legitimate call. “Thus, officials, judges and those who govern should simply know and be certain that such skulkers must be held under suspicion not only of false teaching [which Luther did not regard as a capital offense *per se*] but also of murder and rebellion, because the authorities know that such people are driven by the devil.”¹¹³ Even before that, in an addendum to a letter from January/February 1531 drafted by Melanchthon and sent to Elector John of Saxony to assist in negotiations with the Smalcald League, Luther also agreed to stricter punishment.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ MSA 1: 320-22.

¹¹¹ See Robert Kolb, *Confessing the Faith: Reformers Define the Church, 1530-1580* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1991).

¹¹² See *BC 2000*: 343-44.

¹¹³ WA 30/3: 520, 8-11 (*Ein Brieff D. Mart. Luthers Von den Schleichern und Winkelprediger*, 1532).

¹¹⁴ For a synopsis of the dating arguments, see MBW 1119 (*Regesten*, 2: 18f.; *Texte* 5: 39-43; against WABr 6: 222-23). Luther argued that defaming called pastors was worse than cruel punishment of Anabaptists (who presumably did such things). Melanchthon justified punishment on these grounds: breaking the law by holding secret meetings; teaching seditious things such as that the magistrates were not Christian; blasphemous condemnation of ministers of the gospel (ministers the authorities are, according to the second commandment, supposed to protect). He went on to argue (answering Brenz) that this is the reason for the condemnation of the Donatists in Imperial Law. Furthermore, he distinguished beginners from

In 1536, these developments culminated in an official letter to Prince Philip of Hesse (a signatory of the Augsburg Confession)—written jointly by Luther and Melancthon, signed also by Bugenhagen and Cruciger and published in August—which defended the use of coercion, and especially capital punishment, against Anabaptists.¹¹⁵ Although it was not the only direction Protestant thought would follow, it was one of the most important and shaped the reception of the Augsburg Confession and its use in that punishment.¹¹⁶

Prince Philip had recently arrested a group of Anabaptists—including several who had already been arrested and banished from Hesse—and wanted an opinion from the theologians under what circumstances, if any, one could use capital punishment. The response of the Wittenberg faculty showed by its very convolution how difficult they perceived the problem to be. The authors began by distinguishing the preaching office from that of governing and insisted that pastors could not wield the sword, lest they fomented another Münster.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, theologians also bore responsibility for shaping public policy. Second, they made clear that their advice presupposed judicial due process. The mere accusation of being Anabaptist was not a crime, against which one did not need to prove one's innocence. Third, they argued that the government had authority to punish those who fomented rebellion. At this point, the authors turned to an examination of Anabaptist doctrine and tried to show, first, that their teaching about government, property and marriage was *ipso facto* seditious.¹¹⁸ Despite Anabaptist protests that this was not their intent, Luther and Melancthon insisted that the teaching itself proved the contrary. To be sure, the reformers included a proviso that, for any teaching to rise to this level, it must have been shown to be unjust and to undermine secular authority directly and that the governmental authorities had to determine how severely to respond to such a threat. Upon this background, the reformers then answered the objection (posed by Philip of Hesse and Brenz's memorandum of 1528) that secular authorities could not rule the heart. They replied, first, that they were only discussing external unjust teaching that called into question oaths and property, things that made up the fabric of sixteenth-century society and that they saw being undermined in the Peasants' Revolt and the Münster uprising. Second, as they had argued at least since 1530, the reformers insisted

those who are hardened in their beliefs and counsels that punishment be milder for them. *Texte* 5: 42, 71-72: "All this one should make milder or stiffer according to the circumstances." He also did not think that the fact that the Anabaptists went to their deaths joyfully should have much, if any, impact on their punishment.

¹¹⁵ See n. 105 and Appendix A.

¹¹⁶ For this reason, an English translation of that letter is appended to this statement.

¹¹⁷ WA 50: 9, 21-29.

¹¹⁸ Here their claims seem directed toward the Hutterites.

that secular authorities had to guard against blasphemy as well as sedition.¹¹⁹ They described—albeit inaccurately in many instances¹²⁰—Anabaptist teaching on infant baptism, original sin, the means of grace and Christology, and insisted that these doctrines take God’s name in vain. Again, they insisted that such an argument against the Anabaptists had to be proved in each instance through due process and not simply on the basis of hearsay. However, because Anabaptists were establishing separate churches, they had become guilty of crimes spelled out in imperial law and thus were liable to the death penalty. To answer the objection posed by Johannes Brenz and other reformers—that none of this behavior rose to the level of capital crimes—the Wittenbergers argued that for Christians both secular and ecclesial offices had to serve God’s glory, which meant specifically preventing blasphemy and idolatry. Because, in the reformers’ view, Matthew 13:30 (the parable of the weeds sown among the wheat) applied only to the preaching office, governmental officials had to protect their citizens from blasphemy and heresy by preventing and punishing both.

On the question of punishment, the authors, while acknowledging that the grounds for judging secular crimes were easier to determine, stressed the dangers of denying infant baptism—a practice that in their opinion jeopardized the infants’ salvation and created two peoples (the baptized and unbaptized) in a single jurisdiction. They concluded that such teaching, when adhered to by repeat offenders, was worthy of capital punishment. Although admonishing the magistrates to practice discernment by allowing people to change their mind and by meting out milder punishments for neophytes, the tract also counseled them to be hard on those who might be filled with “Münsterish” ideas. Furthermore, the reformers insisted that they themselves had to defend God’s honor and to follow their conscience in giving this instruction to would-be judges. They asserted that stiff-necked people, blinded by the devil, only gave the appearance of humility. These wolves in sheeps’ clothing were known by their fruit: an unwillingness to be convinced by clear statements from Scripture. Thus, the judge could rest assured that the sect is from the devil. This was perhaps the most chilling conclusion of all: that a refusal to agree with the reformers’ view of Scripture was itself a sign of the devil’s work and grounds for severe punishment.

The conclusion of the printed tract revealed why these theologians felt they had to address the government: it was their pastoral duty to instruct all kinds of folks in their daily callings.¹²¹ In the manuscript version deliv-

¹¹⁹ WA 50: 11, 26–12, 7. See James Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*.

¹²⁰ Most historians would argue that the reformers’ knowledge of the mainstream Anabaptist groups was extremely limited. See, for example, Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers*.

¹²¹ The notion that Christian leaders had a duty to address their own magistrates may serve to remind Lutherans that although the reformers may well have been completely

ered to Philip of Hesse but, unfortunately, not included in the published version, there was some further appeal for fairness in these matters. In a handwritten postscript, Luther somewhat mitigated the force of these arguments (drafted by Melanchthon) with these words, "This is the common rule. However, our gracious lord may also mete out leniency [*Gnade*] alongside punishment according to the situation of each case."¹²² This slight appeal for flexibility, however, should not be used to excuse the support by Wittenberg's theologians for capital punishment of Anabaptists simply because the Anabaptists held beliefs both contrary to Wittenberg's own teaching and condemned by imperial law.

LUTHERAN-ANABAPTIST ENCOUNTERS IN THE 1550S

Formal encounters between Lutherans and Anabaptists were somewhat sporadic in the 1540s. But two events occurring close together in 1557 merit brief attention, not because they introduce new theological insights to Lutheran-Anabaptist relations, but because they bear evidence to a continuation of positions delineated in the 1530s.

In August, 1557, Ottheinrich, the Lutheran Elector of the Palatinate, called for a disputation between the two groups to be held at Pfeddersheim, just outside of Worms. Johannes Brenz—joined by Jakob Andreae, Johannes Marbach and Michael Diller—represented the Lutheran position; Diebold (Theodore) Winter, an Anabaptist elder active in the northern Alsace and Palatine region, spoke on behalf of the Anabaptists. Based on the minutes from the day-and-a-half exchange, however, the sessions resulted in a rather perfunctory restatement of five standard charges. Although framed as a "disputation" the protocol describes the procedures as a "juridical examination" and the frustration on the part of the Lutheran theologians regarding the outcome of the exchange is palpable. At a later disputation in Frankenthal, organized in 1571 by the Reformed elector of the Palatinate, Winter complained bitterly that the Anabaptists at Pfeddersheim were never given a chance to speak freely or to defend themselves.¹²³

wrong about their advice in this instance, they did preserve the notion that Christians in general and pastors in particular (in their calling) have a word to deliver to the powers and principalities of this world, something demonstrated by the lives and work of people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Desmond Tutu.

¹²² WA 50: 15, note on l. 4.

¹²³ For a transcription and translation of the recorded proceedings, see John S. Oyer, ed. and trans., "The Pfeddersheim Disputation, 1557," *MQR* 40 (July 1986), 304-351. For Winter's complaint, see Jesse Yoder, "The Frankenthal Debate with the Anabaptists in 1571: Purpose, Procedure, Participants," *MQR* 36 (Jan. 1962), 14-35.

THE PROZESS OF 1557

This failed attempt to win over the Anabaptists in public exchange must have been the context for a subsequent statement, issued two months later by eight prominent Lutheran theologians in Worms, under the heading “Thoughts Regarding the Anabaptists: On Church Courts and the Ensuing Ecclesial and Corporal Punishment of the Anabaptists.”¹²⁴ The document, immediately published as a pamphlet (*Prozeß, wie es soll gehalten werden mit den Wiedertäufern*), seems to represent a consensus regarding Anabaptist beliefs and policy for dealing with them in Lutheran territory. The list of charges against the Anabaptists is familiar, echoing the arguments Melanchthon made in 1536 that Anabaptist teachings were to be condemned and that civil authorities were justified in executing dissenters on the grounds of blasphemy as well as sedition. The statement is especially significant since it indirectly refers to the Augsburg Confession [i.e., it mentioned *symbola*, a term for creeds and confessions of faith that for Lutherans included the Augsburg Confession], since both Melanchthon and Brenz are among the signatories,¹²⁵ and since it elicited a sharply critical response from both the Swiss Brethren and the Hutterites.

The document began by calling on the church courts to uphold purity of doctrine (1 Cor 5:1-3; Titus 1:13-14) with God, not humans, serving as the ultimate judge through the authority of God’s Word and the confessions of the church. Because the devil could often deceive “with false piety, like an angel of the light,” it was important that the central teachings of the Anabaptists were broadly known and carefully considered, so that all would be persuaded that “the Anabaptist sect is not a Christian church, but rather a seduction of

¹²⁴ “Bedenken der wiederteufer halber. Von kirchgericht und volgenger kirchenstraf und leiblichen straf der widerteufer.”—Bossert, 161. On the basis of a manuscript copy located in Berlin, Bossert’s date of Nov. 5, 1557 should be corrected to read Oct. 16, 1557.—MBW, no. 8388 (in *Regesten*, vol. 8, 139-40). The published version of the document appeared as *Prozeß, wie es soll gehalten werden mit den Wiedertäufern* (Worms: Paul & Philipp Köpfel, 1557).

¹²⁵ According to Scheible, the document emerged in the aftermath of meetings between the evangelicals and representatives of the pope, which broke down when the Gnesio-Lutherans refused to join forces with Philip Melanchthon and his supporters. In addition to Melanchthon, the presumed author of the document, other signers include Johannes Brenz and Jakob Andreae [one of the authors of the Formula of Concord], from Württemberg; Jakob Runge of Mecklenburg, Johannes Marbach of Strasbourg, Johannes Pistorius, Sr., from Hesse (Marburg), Georg Karg, Superintendent in Brandenburg-Ansbach, and Michael Diller then professor in Heidelberg and author of the Palatinate’s church order. These names are added according to a report of W. Köhler on the basis of a manuscript he had seen.—*Bibliographia Brentiana* (1904), 154f., no. 338.

the devil.” Christian preachers should instruct people in Anabaptist teachings so that “god-fearing people might be strengthened against their deceit.”

There were, the document continued, two forms of Anabaptist confusion. In the first group were Anabaptist teachings affecting temporal government that were open lies and seditious. Specifically, the Anabaptists: 1) considered the magisterial office to be sinful and refused to acknowledge magistrates as Christians; 2) believed that all Christians were obligated to hold their possessions in common; 3) held that settling suits in courts is sinful; 4) refused to take oaths; and 5) encouraged a convert to leave his or her spouse for the sake of faith.

Other beliefs held by Anabaptists were false, but not directly relevant to temporal order. Here the statement listed the following errors: 1) the denial of original sin since the time of Christ’s passion and that children born since then were without original sin; 2) that infant baptism was wrong; 3) that God was one person, thereby denying the Christian doctrine of the eternal Son and Holy Spirit; 4) that God revealed himself without consideration of the outer Word, the ministerium and the sacrament; 5) that sacraments were only a sign, not an application of grace, and that the Lord’s Supper was only an outward sign of their fraternity; 6) that justification was effected by pious Anabaptist works and suffering and one’s own fulfillment of the law, or by special inner revelation; and 7) the doctrine of eternal security.

God-fearing and reasonable people, the writers continued, should recognize that these “gross errors are the mark of the devil ... and that the Anabaptist sect is the devil’s ghost from which one should earnestly flee.” Governments were responsible to order pastors and administrators that they instruct common people in the errors of the Anabaptists and tell them to “flee from the sect as from the devil’s excrement.” “For Anabaptist error in regards to temporal government . . . is sedition against God Himself and should not be taken lightly, and it should be said to the prisoners that [authorities] have the right to punish them with execution because of their sedition.” Then followed instructions for church officials in procedures for handling people suspected of Anabaptism: apprehension, questioning, and instruction (“which may take several weeks”).

The document then described the “blasphemous errors” of the Anabaptist—which were both “horrific sins” and destructive to religion and good order—and outlined procedures for restoring those who confessed their sins. No one who recanted should be executed, since this would discourage the more stubborn of them from confessing their errors. Those who did persist, however, should be formally excommunicated and then given over to the government for corporal punishment. Others should be imprisoned, for as much as two or three years, and authorities should be vigilant to prevent all Anabaptist gatherings since “wherever they find a space, as in

Münster, there the devil can be openly seen in sedition, immorality, robbery and blasphemy.” Authors of the document apparently debated over the wording regarding the punishment. The initial draft of the statement argued that leaders and deceivers who still refused to recant “should be judged and punished according to the latest Imperial decree for sedition and blasphemy.” A later version replaced the word “blasphemy” with the sentence: “should be judged and executed with the sword for sedition.”

Anticipating the argument that no one should be killed on account of their faith, the theologians responded that governments were clearly commanded by scripture to punish the seditious. Moreover,

God has clearly and explicitly commanded temporal government that they should punish blasphemers in their own territory. Thus it is written in Leviticus 24 that whoever speaks blasphemy should be put to death, and this law is binding not only for Israel, but is a natural law that constrains all governments in their order—kings, princes, judges, etc. For the temporal government should not only defend the bodies of their subjects, like a shepherd watches over oxen or sheep, but should also maintain outward discipline, and governments should bring order to the honor of God, they should punish and do away with public idolatry and blasphemy.

Wise authorities should resist Anabaptist blasphemy with “a correct understanding of their office and take heed that this is God’s work and that they are struggling not merely against human wantonness [*Mutwill*] but against the devil ...”

The theologians then returned to the role of government in ensuring the purity and unity of Christian doctrine. Rulers needed to recognize, they argued, that when there was public idolatry in their lands and people were running to the Anabaptists, they themselves were to blame for this misery. “For the government should plant correct teaching in their churches and do away with idolatry.” They needed to ensure that people were being instructed in the faith, “for all governments owe this service to God.” The well-being of the church and the prevention of divisions clearly fell within the responsibilities of a godly magistrate.

On June 25, 1558 Duke Christoph issued a mandate against “the Anabaptists, sacramentarians, Schwenckfelders and anyone else like them.” The charges against them picked up on most of the items listed in the *Prozeß*, with additional emphasis on the Anabaptist teachings against the sacraments. The mandate even cited the Augsburg Confession as a standard for determining heresy and threatened anyone teaching, associating with or offering aid to those who teach these things with corporal punishment (“which has been established in numerous Imperial

decrees”), banishment from the territory, and the confiscation of land and possessions.¹²⁶

ANABAPTIST REACTIONS

In 1557 Swiss Brethren leaders reportedly wrote a letter to Menno Simons expressing concern about the decree and their intent to write a refutation.¹²⁷ The text, however, if indeed it ever existed, has since disappeared. At about the same time, Hans Büchel, a Swiss Brethren preacher, composed a hymn of 20 stanzas intended to challenge the arguments of the *Prozeß* and to comfort those who expressed fear of renewed persecution.¹²⁸ Büchel’s hymn—“A New Christian Song about the present fearful last time, in which so many and various factions, sects and false prophets arise, together with bloodthirsty tyrants”—is a distillation of several typical mid-century Swiss Brethren theological and ethical themes. In it, Büchel lamented the religious chaos and disorder of the day, suggesting that part of the problem is that “kings, prince and lords / now wield the spiritual sword.” Stanzas 7-9 referred explicitly to the *Prozeß* of 1557. “Papists, sects and godless mobs,” he wrote,

have resolved with one accord / to crucify the godly man / according to that which I have read / An edict went out at Worms / where there were gathered / as man counts the seventh and fiftieth year / high priests and religious authorities / whose final decision was / that whoever teaches anything against them / him shall men judge with the sword / his blood man shall spill; / also those who will not go to their church / these shall man take prisoner / and lock them up as mad. / Torture him three or four times a year/ while in prison until he swears an oath / to believe what they want him to. / Is this not tyranny / that one is to confess / that the Truth is a lie? / But who has ever heard the like / that with the sword Christians shall be / converted into God’s kingdom / as is now undertaken by the learned one? / You children of God, take heed / Let not the world hinder you, / God will break and recompense / pride and high minded-

¹²⁶ Gustav Bossert, ed. *Herzogtum Württemberg*, Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte, 13, Quellen zur Geschichte der Wiedertäufer, 1 (Leipzig: M. Heinsius Nachfolger Eger & Sievers, 1930), 168-171. On p. 171 it reads: “und sonsten unserer fernern ernstlichen ungnad und straf, wölche auch nach gelegentheit unnachleßlichen gegen solchen ubertretern, widerspenstigen und ungehorsamen als abgeschnittenen gliedern der christlichen gemeind.”

¹²⁷ Gross, *Golden Years*, 90; *ME* 4:643.

¹²⁸ *Songs of the Ausbund* (Millersburg, OH: Ohio Amish Library, 1998), 83-92. This is hymn #46.

ness / Unto the authorities yield you / body and possessions. / Let yourself be
shamed and ridiculed now, / as they also did to the Lord.¹²⁹

The rest of the hymn, drawing frequently on the Lord's Prayer, developed a strong argument for loving the enemy, patience in the face of adversity, and the promise of eternal reward for those who are willing to suffer as Christ suffered. Preserved in the *Ausbund*, the hymn continues to be sung by the Amish today.

The longest and most forceful response to the *Prozeß*, however, came from the Hutterites, whose missionaries had long been active in the Württemberg territories and who felt especially threatened. Composed by Leonhard Dax, a former Catholic priest, the work appeared around 1561 under the title "Handbook Countering the 'Proceedings.' Issued in 1557 at Worms on the Rhine Against the Brethren who are Called Hutterites, and Signed by Philip Melanchthon and Johannes Brenz, Among Others from their Midst."¹³⁰ The booklet, extending to 150 folio pages, was never published but it circulated in various manuscript copies through the Hutterite communities, several of which are still extant.

Dax divided his response into twelve "books" or sections, each of which attempted to refute a particular charge. The heart of his argument can be summarized in three main points: 1) the Lutherans are misinformed about what it is that Anabaptists, specifically Hutterites, actually teach; 2) Lutherans have misinterpreted Scripture, especially the role and teachings of Jesus; and 3) if governments really want to be Christian, they should follow the teachings of Jesus, which means, among other things, that they should not use the sword against other Christians (here he responded specifically to the reference from Lev 24:16 that governments should execute blasphemers by referring to the new precept of Christ for dealing with sinners as described in Matt 18:15-20 and I Tim 6:5). True messengers of God use only the sword of the spirit.

Several later Lutheran conferences, including a week-long gathering at Stuttgart at the turn of the year 1570-1571 and a document published in 1584, drew heavily on the *Prozeß*. Moreover, one of the signers, Jakob Andreae, was

¹²⁹ Ibid., 86-87.

¹³⁰ "Handbiechl wider den process der zu Worms am Rein wider die Brüder, so man die Hutterischen nennt, ausgegangen ist, welches war im 1557 jar dessen sich dann Philippus Melanchthon und Johannes Barenthius selbst andre mehr aus ihren mittel unterschrieben haben."—Cod. EAH-155, fol. 1-151, Archives of the Hutterian Brethren/Bruderhof, Rifton, NY. See also Robert Friedmann, *Die Schriften der Huterischen Täufergemeinschaften: Gesamtkatalog ihrer Manuskriptbücher, ihrer Schreiber und ihrer Literatur, 1529-1667*, (Wien: Kommissionsverlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Wien, 1965), 80, 144; *ME* 2:645-646.

among the authors of the Formula of Concord, the twelfth article of which attacked positions labeled Anabaptist, including some found in the *Prozeß*. Nonetheless, the record suggests that the magistrates themselves refused to heed these 1557 recommendations by Lutheran theologians for capital punishment. Many Anabaptists were captured and imprisoned in Lutheran territories after 1557, but those arrests resulted in few executions, and indeed Anabaptists in Lutheran lands during the second half of the sixteenth century received notably lighter sentences than they did in Roman Catholic territories.

The condemnation of those who held different theological positions from Lutherans took a surprisingly more irenic turn in *The Book of Concord* and the Formula of Concord contained therein. For one thing, in the preface the signatories (princes and cities), at the urging of Pomeranian theologians, excluded from condemnation French and English Protestants and their churches.¹³¹ For another, the authors of the Formula steadfastly refused to name names in their condemnations, despite objections lodged by the theological faculty at the University of Helmstedt. Moreover, the twelfth article of the Formula—where, among other kinds, Anabaptist errors were rejected—mentions no names. Indeed, the reason for including this article was, in the words of the Epitome, “so that such heretical groups and sects may not tacitly be associated with [the Lutherans].”¹³² Even when the authors of the Formula state that certain *teachings* of the Anabaptists are “not to be tolerated or permitted in the church, or in public affairs, or in domestic life,”¹³³ they were not addressing the teachers but rather the assumed ramifications of the teachings.

SUMMARY

By placing the Augsburg Confession within its historical context, several important aspects of its condemnations of Anabaptists become clear. First, although the condemnations themselves may seem to reflect theological differences and not political consequences, it is quite clear that from the very beginning the condemnations of Anabaptists were framed in the midst of political struggle and, from their very inception, entailed severe consequences for those labeled Anabaptists. To be sure, initial Lutheran responses to what they regarded as rebaptisms were framed as theological

¹³¹ The Book of Concord, Preface, 20, in *BC 2000*: 12-3.

¹³² The Epitome of the Formula of Concord, XII.2, *BC 2000*: 520. The Solid Declaration, XII.1-8 (*BC 2000*: 656), gave an even fuller explanation, stating that opponents, “have baited our churches and their teachers.”

¹³³ The Solid Declaration, XII.9, in *BC 2000*: 657.

debates. However, they very quickly took note of the imperial condemnations and began to discuss matters of punishment, first for what the reformers perceived as political crimes (sedition) but then for blasphemy as well. At the same time, however, debates in Nuremberg, the published opinion of Johannes Brenz and the behavior of George of Brandenburg-Ansbach and Philip of Hesse, provide an important minority voice among the signers and drafters of the Augsburg Confession—people who did not believe that purely religious crimes merited capital punishment. Yet, however important these voices may have been, the fact that by the mid-1530s both Luther and Melancthon had come out clearly in favor of capital punishment for not only sedition but also, in certain cases, blasphemy, means that the condemnations in the Augsburg Confession, when coupled with the princely signers' own view of their custody over political matters expressed in that Confession, had severe consequences for Anabaptists—not only for those who were executed but also for those whose faith and lives were tested under such threats. The reference to the Augsburg Confession in the 1557 *Prozeß* underscores this point. Although the Formula of Concord disassociated teachers and churches from their teaching, the experience of Anabaptists in Lutheran lands and the support of capital punishment for false teaching by the reformers cannot be gainsaid. In the common telling of the history of Lutherans and Mennonites, these results must be acknowledged and dealt with in the present. For Mennonites, the history of persecution has always remained an integral part of their identity; for Lutherans it is essential to rediscover the history of their complicity in such persecution in order to face it honestly today.

PART 3

CONSIDERING THE CONDEMNATIONS TODAY

INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

The national Lutheran–Mennonite dialogues in France (1981–1984), Germany (1989–1992), and the US (2002–2004) along with the international study group (2005–2008) all had the task of clarifying how the statements of the Augsburg Confession that explicitly or implicitly mention Anabaptists and their doctrines relate to the teachings of present-day Mennonite World Conference (MWC) member churches. These dialogues are important for the relationship between Mennonites and Lutherans today since, on the one hand, Mennonites refer to Anabaptists in the sixteenth century as their forebears who continue to offer spiritual inspiration and theological orientation while, on the other hand, Lutherans are still committed to the Augsburg Confession. Indeed, the Constitution of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) states: “It [the LWF] sees in the three Ecumenical Creeds and in the Confessions of the Lutheran Church, especially in the unaltered Augsburg Confession and the Small Catechism of Martin Luther, a pure exposition of the Word of God” (Article II).

These national dialogues have made it clear that the task requires both historical investigation and systematic reflection. The meaning of the relevant articles of the Augsburg Confession as well as the Anabaptist teachings of the sixteenth century must be determined in their historical context. Moreover, in the course of the last four centuries, Lutherans and Mennonites have developed an extensive history within the changing context of their churches, societies and states. Thus, the present-day relation of Lutherans and Mennonites—both to their own doctrines and to the doctrines of the other church—are different in some degree today than they were in the sixteenth century. Such changes need to be described historically and evaluated systematically.

This task has two dimensions or levels. The first deals with identifying the precise *content* of Anabaptist doctrine and practices that seem to be in tension or even in conflict with Lutheran understandings, either in the sixteenth century or today. The second level inquires into the *relation* between these conflicting doctrines or practices and the divisions separating our church bodies. Since the Augsburg Confession uses the word

“condemnation” in relation to Anabaptists and their doctrines, we need to ask how deep the disagreements actually are and how much they affect on-going relations between the two churches.¹³⁴

Serious theological disagreement at the first level does not necessarily mean that the beliefs or practices in question must be “condemned.” To be sure, the use of condemnations can be traced back to the Apostle Paul, who in Galatians 1:8-9 states that “if anyone proclaims a *gospel* that is contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed.” The later tradition of the church frequently appealed to these two verses of Paul to reject all manner of heretical doctrines from the orthodox understanding of Christian faith, and quite often also to exclude the people holding these positions from the Christian community. Sometimes this happened through a formal process of excommunication, at times through the ban and shunning, and at other times by making them liable to judicial process including capital punishment.

The problem Lutherans and Mennonites face, however, is more complicated than simply identifying a contradiction between true and false gospel. When members of one Christian church study the doctrines, life and order of another church they often realize that they have much in common with the members of the other church. These commonalities include elements that create, sustain and serve a shared, saving faith in the Triune God and that ground the Christian life and the life of the church in continuity with the Apostles. At the same time, each group also recognizes doctrines and practices in the other church that, according to its understanding, may be in tension with or even contradict what both churches share. In the eyes of one of the two churches, these conflicts may even weaken, damage or destroy the sound elements foundational for Christian faith that both churches have in common. Thus, the first church cannot simply say that there is no Christian faith or true community in the other church. To the contrary, it explicitly acknowledges elements present in the other church that create and sustain, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Christian faith and the church. At the same time, however, it also recognizes other doctrinal elements and practices that seem to be in conflict with those shared elements. The situation is the same, of course, for how the second church views the first.

Since Christian doctrine is not only the sum total of discrete elements but a structured whole, in which each element has its specific place, it is sometimes difficult to describe the precise character of the differences in specific doctrines and practices. The structure of one church’s doctrine as a whole is different from the structure of another church’s doctrine, so that individual elements—for example, baptism—may claim a different status and significance in their respective teachings. Therefore, it is a complex

¹³⁴ The Formula of Concord only “reject[s] and condemn[s] the Anabaptists’ erroneous, heretical teaching” (Art. XII).

task for both churches to identify how deeply what they have in common is affected by those differences. It is also possible that the two churches in dialogue will approach these questions in different ways.

CONDEMNATIONS THAT NO LONGER APPLY

Before attempting to analyze the content of the doctrinal conflicts between Lutherans and Mennonites, it is important to identify several condemnations in the Augsburg Confession that never applied to Anabaptist doctrines. Historical research has demonstrated a broad diversity of Christian communities in the sixteenth century that contemporaries labeled “Anabaptist.” Thus, what might have been true of one group was not the case with others. Even when Lutheran theologians had direct contact with Anabaptists through their writings or through judicial interrogations their texts often demonstrate that they actually had very limited knowledge of Anabaptism. It is also clear that Lutheran reformers may have had broader concerns in mind in their condemnations of the Anabaptists: since they themselves were accused by Catholic authorities of being “Anabaptists” (a capital offense), Lutherans may have sought to prove their orthodoxy by explicitly rejecting any doctrine that might be attributed to Anabaptists.

The national dialogues and the international study commission all agree that at least three condemnations in the Augsburg Confession mentioning “Anabaptists” are in fact—to use the words of the 2004 dialogue report from the USA—“based on erroneous judgments about what sixteenth-century Anabaptists believed and practiced.” These are found in Articles V, XII and XVII.

1. Article V states: “Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that we obtain the Holy Spirit without the external word of the gospel through our own preparation, thoughts, and works.”¹³⁵ Although so-called Spiritualists like Caspar Schwenckfeld and Sebastian Franck may have held this opinion, the Anabaptists themselves did not.¹³⁶ Nor does the condemnation in Article V apply to Mennonites today. In the national dialogues, Mennonites and Lutherans

¹³⁵ *BC 2000*: 40; German text.

¹³⁶ But see n. 95 above. Melancthon’s reference to the “Anabaptists *and others*” probably was an effort to refute Johannes Eck’s accusation that the reformers were Anabaptists, by turning the argument back against those scholastic theologians who advanced the idea of a “pact of God” [*pactum Dei*] according to which God will not refuse to give his grace to those who perform what is in their power, namely an act of love of God above all. In this respect, some scholastic theologians claimed, the Holy Spirit can be obtained by one’s own preparation. This train of thought becomes crucial to the arguments in the Apology II, 7-10 (*BC 2000*: 113-14) and IV. 9-11 (*BC 2000*: 121-22).

jointly affirmed the significance of Scripture and the external word of the gospel. Moreover, on the related question of justification by human actions apart from God's mercy in Christ, the German national dialogue expressed the convergence among Lutherans and Mennonites with particular clarity:

Mennonites and Lutherans are united in the Reformation's stress on the Pauline insight regarding the justification of the sinner by grace through faith alone. Thereby they not only understand justification in the sense of God's judgment that declares the person righteous and that is received in trusting God but also connect God's justifying action to the process of human renewal. Justification is always also a 'making righteous' that frees a person to behave justly, to struggle against sin and to use this world's justice properly. Mennonites and Lutherans together stress that the human being's standing before God remains always completely reliant on the gift of forgiveness and salvation. Justification, understood as the declaration of the sinner as free and accepted [by God], always stands in very close connection with the sanctification and renewal of the human beings, which enable them to follow after Jesus Christ.¹³⁷

2. Article XII of the Augsburg Confession declares: "They [the churches among us] condemn both the Anabaptists, who deny that those who have once been justified can lose the Holy Spirit, and also those who contend that some may attain such perfection in this life that they cannot sin."¹³⁸ With the possible exception of Melchior Hofman, most Anabaptists did not hold this understanding. Although the strong Anabaptist emphasis on themes like sanctification, "yielding to Christ," or "participating in Christ" may have opened them to charges of perfectionism, the fact that they were so attentive to the exercise of church discipline makes it clear that Anabaptist Christians continued to struggle with the reality of sin. No contemporary Mennonite confession of faith would endorse a doctrine of perfectionism.

3. Article XVII claims: "They condemn the Anabaptists who think that there will be an end to the punishments of condemned human beings and devils."¹³⁹ Again, the teachings of several isolated Anabaptist writers like

¹³⁷ "Gemeinsame Erklärung der lutherisch-mennonitischen Gesprächskommission zum Abschluss der Gespräche zwischen Vertretern der Vereinigten Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche Deutschlands (VELKD) und der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden in Deutschland (AMG) von September 1989 bis Dezember 1992," in *Heilung der Erinnerungen—befreit zur gemeinsamen Zukunft*, ed. Fernando Enns (Frankfurt: Lembeck, 2008), 160.

¹³⁸ *BC 2000*: 45; Latin Text. The German text has only the first part of this twofold condemnation, without mentioning the Anabaptists.

¹³⁹ *BC 2000*: 51, Latin Text.

Hans Denck (d. 1527) and Clemens Ziegler (d. ca. 1553) may be interpreted as advocating a theory of the “restoration of all things” [*apokatastasis panton*], first proposed by Origen. But this was never a doctrine held generally by Anabaptists, nor is it advocated by Mennonites today.

4. Anabaptists may also be among those referred to in Articles VIII and XXVII by the term “others.” Article VIII, for example, says: “They condemn the Donatists *and others like them* who have denied that the ministry of evil people may be used in the church and who have thought that the ministry of evil people is useless and ineffective.”¹⁴⁰ But even though Martin Luther elsewhere lumps Anabaptists and Donatists together,¹⁴¹ the concern here regarding the efficacy of the sacraments consecrated by evil ministers (as in Donatism) is quite different from the Anabaptist claim that human beings should only be baptized upon their confession of faith.

Article XXVII of the Augsburg Confession declares: “*Others* err still more, for they judge that all magistracy and all civil offices are unworthy of Christians and in conflict with an Evangelical counsel.”¹⁴² This problem belongs more properly to Article XVI (“On Civil Authority”) and will be addressed in that context. In any case, Article XXVII is focused chiefly on late medieval monasticism.

PRESENT DOCTRINAL DISAGREEMENTS

In contrast to these articles, substantial doctrinal differences do seem to exist between Lutherans and Anabaptist-Mennonites in our understanding of baptism (Article IX of the Augsburg Confession) and in the relation of Christians to the political and social community (Article XVI of the Augsburg Confession). The American and French reports state this clearly and suggest that further dialogue is needed in these specific areas. The German report, by contrast, goes further and states that Articles IX and XVI do not apply to Mennonites.

Given these varied conclusions from the national dialogues, the LWF-MWC international study commission pursued Articles IX and XVI anew. In addressing the two articles here, we cannot simply ask whether the condemnations of Articles IX and XVI applied to Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, even though the answer to this question is one important element of our task. Rather, the question must also include whether the statements of the two articles are

¹⁴⁰ *BC 2000*: 43. Emphasis added.

¹⁴¹ See, for example, his *Confession concerning Christ's Supper*, 1528 (LW 37:366).

¹⁴² *BC 2000*: 91. Emphasis added.

actually applicable to present-day Mennonite understandings. In answering the latter question, it will not be enough for Lutherans simply to repeat the two articles from the Augsburg Confession; nor can Mennonites simply cite statements from their spiritual forebears in the sixteenth century. Instead, both will need to consider their experiences over the past five centuries and take seriously the deep changes in church, state, and society that have occurred since then.

CHRISTIANS AND CIVIL AUTHORITY

Article XVI states: “Concerning civic affairs they [i.e., Lutherans] teach that lawful civil ordinances are good works of God and that Christians are permitted to hold civil office, to work in law courts, to decide matters by imperial and other existing laws, to impose just punishments, to wage just war, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to hold property, to take an oath when required by magistrates, to take a wife, to be given in marriage. They condemn the Anabaptists who prohibit Christians from assuming such civil responsibilities.”¹⁴³ The article offers a list of teachings that the reformers accuse the Anabaptists of rejecting or denying. Here again, not all of the accusations applied to the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century. Only a few fringe Anabaptists, for example, rejected marriage. Most Anabaptists—along with the Mennonites today—emphasized the principle of mutual aid and the sharing of resources within the community, though they did not fully reject private property. One particular Anabaptist group, the Hutterites, did practice community of goods and continues to do so today in some 400 communities in the US and Canada.

In the light of the national and international discussions, the most relevant issue was whether or not Christians could hold certain offices “without sin,” as it is worded in the German text.¹⁴⁴ The point here is not that Christians will never be free from sin in the daily exercise of such offices but that participating in an office is not in itself a sin—so that an office bearer does not sin simply by virtue of carrying out the tasks associated with the office. The article notes five main areas of concern: (a) administrative offices of magistrates and princes; (b) juridical tasks, including passing death sentences; (c) execution of punishment; (d) participation in wars; and (e) taking oaths. On all of these points, both sixteenth century Anabaptists and contemporary Mennonites would likely advocate teachings and practices that this article of the Augsburg Confession rejects.

One step toward resolution, particularly on the question of taking oaths, is to recognize the significant political and cultural differences between

¹⁴³ *BC 2000*: 49; Latin Text.

¹⁴⁴ *BC 2000*: 48.

the sixteenth century and contemporary society. Promissory and assertory oaths were ubiquitous in sixteenth-century Europe—they were the “glue” that held society together. Indeed, someone who refused to swear an oath seemed to undermine the very foundation of political authority and communal life. This is very different, however, in modern secular states. Today many states in the developed West and elsewhere guarantee both the freedom of religion and the freedom of conscience, and have provided their citizens with alternatives for swearing oaths. Moreover, even someone who has sworn to respect and obey the constitution and the laws of a state can still appeal to the freedom of conscience if a conflict should arise, and act according to the principle of Acts 5:29 that Christians must ultimately “obey God rather than humans.” These changes in political philosophy in the modern West and elsewhere do not resolve all the theological problems related to swearing oaths, but the refusal to swear oaths is far less significant today and poses none of the same threats to the foundations of the state as it seemed to in the sixteenth century.

Other issues raised by Article XVI, however, are less easily resolved. On the general question of the Christian understanding of civil authority, both Anabaptists and Lutherans shared the challenge of how to interpret Christ’s commandment to nonresistant love (e.g., “But I say to you: Do not resist an evildoer” [Matt 5:39]) in light of Paul’s apparent affirmation of the temporal sword of government (“For it [the governing authority] is God’s servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain” [Rom. 13:4]). In interpreting these texts, Anabaptists and Lutherans draw quite different distinctions and come to quite different conclusions.

In an early summary of Anabaptist shared convictions called “The Brotherly Union of 1527” (sometimes referred to as “The Schleithem Confession”), Anabaptists in the Swiss and South German regions summarized their understandings of civil government in the following words:

The sword is an ordering of God outside the perfection of Christ. It punishes and kills the wicked, and guards and protects the good. In the law, the sword is established over the wicked for punishment and for death... But within the perfection of Christ only the ban is used for the admonition and exclusion of the one who has sinned, without the death of the flesh.

Drawing heavily on the teachings and example of Christ, Article 6 of “The Brotherly Union” went on to reject: the Christian’s use of the sword (“Christ teaches and commands us to learn from Him, for He is meek and lowly of heart”); Christians serving as judges (“Christ did not wish to decide or pass judgment between brother and brother So should we also do”); and Chris-

tians acting as magistrates (“Christ was to be made king, but He fled and did not discern the ordinance of His Father. Thus we should also do as He did”). For the Anabaptists, the contrast between the fallen world and the gathered community of Christian believers hinged on these points: “The worldly are armed with steel and armor, but Christians are armed with the armor of God, with truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and with the Word of God.”

Contrary to the fears of their contemporaries, the Anabaptists did not call for resistance to government authority, even in the face of persecution. Since, in accordance with Romans 13, the temporal authorities were “an ordering” of God, they were prepared to obey these authorities as long as obedience was not inconsistent with the commands of Christ (like taking oaths, participating in wars, etc.). Thus, the Anabaptists were not anarchists who sought the destruction of political order; indeed, they frequently tried to persuade magistrates that they were exemplary subjects in terms of their moral character. Yet, insofar as they questioned whether Christians could legitimately participate in civil society as soldiers, judges, and magistrates, Anabaptists seemed to be undermining the theological legitimacy of the political community. And the authorities (princes, magistrates and theologians) clearly perceived that the Anabaptist position was calling their own Christian faith into question.

In their own understanding of civil authority, the Lutheran reformers appealed to three inter-related distinctions. God is understood as reigning over the world in two ways. With the left hand, God is preserving the world against falling into chaos through continuing creation, thereby using the law and human cooperation like temporal authorities to maintain order and restrain sin. With the other hand God is reigning over the world through the gospel, using the human preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Through these means God the Holy Spirit creates faith and brings people into communion with him and with each other. This rule of the right hand is related to the human being insofar as he or she has or is called to have a relation to God; the rule of the left is directed to individual human beings insofar as they have relations to other human beings, to the world and to themselves. Concerning those persons whose cooperation God uses, there is a third distinction: a person may act for him- or herself or—as office bearer—for others or on behalf of others.

These three distinctions, first employed by Luther but used more generally within the Lutheran Reformation, never function separately, as unfortunately has sometimes been understood. It is one God who reigns in a twofold way, and it is the believer who lives under God in both realms simultaneously. This also means that there is an inner connection between both ways of reigning. Luther quite often stresses this connection. Concerning the apparent conflict between Matthew 5:39 and Romans 13, Luther uses the third distinction stating: as a private person a Christian has to suffer what an evildoer does to him or her; however, as an office-bearer, the Christian has to resist the evildoer.

Mennonites worry that this distinction may result in a refusal to follow the example and words of Christ in every aspect of one's life or an inability to recognize the inherent evil in certain walks of life. Lutherans would argue that the Christian practices love in both cases mentioned above, but that this love takes on a different shape depending on the situation: if a Christian as a private person is hurt by another, he or she may suffer this and forgive the evildoer; but if a Christian as a judge encounters an offender, the judge has to act on behalf of all and care for the victim. Thus the judge will sentence and punish the evildoer. The judge—as an office bearer, acting not on behalf of his own but for the others—practices love of the victim and the peace of the community by resisting the evildoer, whereas the Christian as a private person would be expected to suffer damage from others and to forgive. Thus the question is whether Christian love can take on different shapes, perhaps, in the case of the judicial process, even the opposite shape from what appears loving.

Even though the teachings of the sixteenth century are still important for both churches, our main task here is not to describe how Anabaptist and Lutheran teachings related to each other in the sixteenth century but to focus on how Mennonite and Lutheran teachings in these matters relate to each other currently. During the past five centuries, Mennonite and Lutheran understandings regarding civil government have changed in light of new circumstances in societies and states. Thus, Lutherans today would not simply repeat Article XVI of the Augsburg Confession. Mennonite thinking has also undergone changes that reflect the context of modern democracies. For example, some Mennonites have moved from a separatist understanding of political witness to a more engaged posture, expressed in active peacemaking, reconciliation, conflict resolution and peace education. Most Mennonites today assume that Christians can and should make an impact on the societies in which they live, working for a world with more justice and for the wellbeing of all people. Mennonites express political responsibility today in many different ways: in their professions; through the life and witness of the church; and, occasionally, by serving in various levels of political office. In all of this, Mennonites are prepared to work together with Christians of other churches and with all people of good will.

Nevertheless, most Mennonites continue to define the limit of their involvement at the point of lethal force, whether this is within states (as police) or in conflicts between states (as members of the military). In their understanding, taking the life of another human being is contrary to the will of God. It violates the gift of life given by God to each person, is contrary to the teachings of Jesus and bears false witness to the triumph of the resurrection over the cross. So although many Mennonite attitudes have changed since the sixteenth century, most Mennonites still expect church members not to participate in acts of lethal violence or to support war in any active form, even if required by their

government. They do, however, have a calling to model reconciliation in their own relations with others, to promote peace wherever possible, and to offer material and spiritual support to victims of violence.

The *Shared Convictions*, accepted by the MWC General Council in 2006 include the following affirmations:

The spirit of Jesus empowers us to trust God in all areas of life so we become peacemakers who renounce violence, love our enemies, seek justice and share our possessions with those in need. (Nr. 5)

As a world-wide community of faith and life we transcend boundaries of nationality, race, class, gender and language and seek to live in the world without conforming to the powers of evil, witnessing to God's grace by serving others, caring for creation and inviting all people to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. (Nr. 7)

These two paragraphs express how Mennonites strive to live in the world, serving critically and constructively in its institutions, while also witnessing to God's grace in Jesus Christ who loved us while we were still enemies (Rom 5), calls us to love our enemies (Matt 5), and enables us, through the resurrection, to face death without fear.

This contemporary development of the Mennonite tradition opens new possibilities for encounters between Mennonites and Lutherans, especially since Lutherans also have learned in and from their history. They have recognized that Luther's "doctrine of the two kingdoms" (as it sometimes labeled)—the two ways in which God reigns the world—was often misunderstood, as if both ways could be separated, so that Lutheran churches too easily adapted to the political and social world in which they lived. Too often they regarded the political and social structures of this world as God-given, not asking whether they should engage in contradicting them and contribute to changing them according to the will of God. Furthermore, princes, kings, and other temporal authorities in Germany and other countries exercised oversight of the Lutheran churches in their lands not only in external matters but also in matters of doctrine (*cura religionis*). This sometimes impeded these churches' distinctive Christian teaching and witness vis-à-vis governmental authority. Due to changes in the constitutional structure of many modern states regarding religious freedom, this kind of church government is no longer current in most countries in which Lutheran churches exist.

Especially concerning the participation of Christians in wars, Lutherans have tried to draw consequences from the terrible wars of the last century and the beginning of this century. The character of wars, especially their destructive capability, has changed in the course of the last centuries. This has in turn had consequences for debates over whether a Christian could serve as a soldier "without sin," and whether Luther's distinctions between

the office that is good and right and the person who may use it in a bad way (and thus make it a bad thing) are still tenable. Weapons technology continues to change rapidly, and wars now wreak such damage that Lutherans have found it necessary to revisit the question of “just wars.” In addition, it has become clear that wars have their own “logic” and that they create devastating effects that no one foresees or intends. Thus, even if a war in defense of innocent people against a cruel aggressor may seem “justified,” soldiers may still bear some guilt independently of their personal misconduct.

Nevertheless, Lutherans would ask Mennonites about the ethical consequences of failing to render assistance in an emergency. For example, in their refusal to use lethal violence in defense of innocent people, do they not also become guilty for not offering help to those who desperately need it—especially if, according to all available knowledge, this is the only way to save hostages or other victims from being killed?

At the same time, Lutheran churches hold a wide variety of opinions today, especially concerning participation of Christians in wars. Some of them may be closer to Mennonite teaching, even though the rationale behind their views may be expressed differently. Thus, it is no longer possible for Lutherans to condemn other Christians outright for refusing to use lethal force simply on the basis of Article XVI.

Differences in emphasis (e.g., what is *one* position in Lutheran churches is the predominant position in Mennonite churches and regarded there as a matter of principle), thought structure, theological reasoning, use of the Bible, reference to Jesus Christ as example, etc., clearly still persist. But in this area it is no longer appropriate for Lutherans to express their church’s relation to the doctrine of the other by using the word “condemnation,” especially as that word was understood in the Augsburg Confession.

BAPTISM

Article IX of the Augsburg Confession reads: “Concerning baptism they [the churches among us] teach that it is necessary for salvation, that the grace of God is offered through baptism, and that children should be baptized. They are received in grace when they are offered to God through baptism. They condemn the Anabaptists who disapprove of the baptism of children and assert that children are saved without baptism.”¹⁴⁵ Regarding infant baptism, the German text states that “through such baptism [infants] are entrusted to God and become pleasing to him.”¹⁴⁶ Article IX thus condemns

¹⁴⁵ *BC 2000*: 43, Latin Text.

¹⁴⁶ *BC 2000*: 42.

two opinions: (1) that infant baptism is unacceptable; and (2) that children can be saved without baptism (a point that appears only in the Latin text).

In the “Brotherly Union of Schleithem” (1527), the Anabaptists summarized their understanding of baptism in this way:

Baptism shall be given to all those who have been taught repentance and the amendment of life and [who] believe truly that their sins are taken away through Christ, and to all those who desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and be buried with him in death, so that they might rise with him; to all those who with such an understanding themselves desire and request it from us; hereby is excluded all infant baptism, the greatest and first abomination of the Pope. For this you have the reasons in the testimony of the writings and practices of the apostles. We wish simply yet resolutely and with assurance to hold to the same.

For the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century, the most relevant biblical text regarding baptism was the Great Commission. Jesus instructed his disciples: “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation,” (Matt 28:19) and “whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16). Jesus’ words here make it clear, they argued, that preaching and repentance must precede baptism. Since, in their understanding, infants were incapable of repentance or belief, baptism should take place only among those who were able to make a fully conscious commitment to following Christ as a disciple.

In many of their writings, Anabaptists referred to 1 John 5:6-12 to describe baptism as having three components: a baptism of the spirit; a baptism of water; and a baptism of blood. Water baptism is an outward sign of a prior transformation in the believer by which the Holy Spirit has moved the individual to repentance of sin and offered the assurance of God’s mercy and grace. The covenant of water baptism witnesses to this baptism of the spirit and serves as a public affirmation that the believer is prepared to give and receive counsel and admonition within the community of believers. Water baptism also testifies publicly to a readiness to receive a baptism in blood, referring both to the possibility of martyrdom as well as the sacrifice of self-denial and suffering that followers of Jesus should anticipate.

Although a systematic treatment of Anabaptist-Mennonite understandings of baptism would require much more careful biblical and theological reflection, most Mennonites today would affirm the following basic themes:

1. Proclamation of the gospel, repentance, confession of faith in Jesus Christ, and a public commitment to a life of discipleship must precede water baptism.

2. Baptism is the response of the baptized to God’s initiative in their lives; it is a public confession of—and a witness to—the saving action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.
3. According to Christ’s teaching and the New Testament witness, baptism appropriately follows repentance; hence, it should be administered only to those who are fully conscious of the commitment they are making.
4. Baptism marks the incorporation of the believer into the Church of Christ through integration into a local church (i.e., a congregation).
5. Even though the faith of the believer cannot ultimately be judged by another person, the congregation must affirm the request of a person who desires to be baptized by discerning signs of conversion, faith, and commitment to a life in discipleship.
6. Baptism upon confession of faith allows baptism to be voluntary instead of involuntary; it safeguards the freedom of the individual conscience.
7. Children are born with an inward disposition toward sin, but are nonetheless incapable of discerning good and evil or of possessing an active faith. They are therefore innocent, and saved by Christ’s atonement (Rom 5:18).

The *Shared Convictions of Global Anabaptists* (2006) summarize these understandings as follows: “As a church, we are a community of those whom God’s Spirit calls to turn from sin, acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, receive baptism upon confession of faith, and follow Christ in life.”

Today, Mennonite congregations are not always unified in their baptismal practices. Congregations have had varying understandings, for example, about the appropriate age of baptism. Some groups have disagreed about the biblical mode of baptism (e.g., sprinkling, effusion, immersion); and not all congregations have been clear about the relationship between baptism and church membership. Perhaps most relevant for these conversations, member congregations in the MWC are not all of one mind regarding the baptism of new members who were previously baptized as infants in other traditions. In these, and other areas, actual practice in some Mennonite congregations may be at variance with the theological position outlined above.

The basics of the Lutheran understanding of baptism may be described as follows:

1. “What is baptism? Namely, that it is not simply plain water, but water placed in the setting of God’s Word and commandment and made holy

by them.”¹⁴⁷ Here “Word of God” means both the command to practice baptism (Matthew 28:19) and the promise that is connected with it and relates to its effect (Mark 16:16).

2. Baptism is essentially an act of God performed through human actions and words. Thus, in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (Art. XXIV.18), Philip Melanchthon states, “Thus baptism is not a work that we offer to God, but one in which God, through a minister who functions in his place, baptizes us, and offers and presents the forgiveness of sins according the promise [Mark 16:16], ‘The one who believes and is baptized will be saved.’” In *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, Luther reflects more fully on this relation between the human act of baptizing and God’s action.¹⁴⁸
3. Luther’s strong emphasis on what God does in baptism does not mean that faith is not also important. On the contrary, since faith is crucial for salvation, “faith must have something to believe—something to which it may cling and upon which it may stand.”¹⁴⁹ Faith does not create what a person believes but in the process of hearing and seeing, perceiving and receiving, faith trusts in what is given to the person: God himself in his word of promise, visibly and audibly extended to the baptized in baptism.
4. At the same time, faith itself is indispensable for baptism. “Faith alone makes the person worthy to receive the saving, divine water profitably. Because such blessings are offered and promised in the words that accompany the water, they cannot be received unless we believe them from the heart. Without faith baptism is of no use, although in itself it is an infinite, divine treasure.”¹⁵⁰
5. Baptism is an event at a certain moment in a person’s life, but receiving baptism and living in it is the lifelong task of a Christian. This response is twofold: (a) Since baptism is the visible word of God’s promise to accept a person into communion with him as his child and to forgive all the sin of the baptized, trusting in this promise is the first and basic response to baptism. God aims at this reception of baptism in faith. It is the Holy Spirit who creates this faith in us through God’s

¹⁴⁷ The Large Catechism, Baptism, 14 (*BC 2000*: 458).

¹⁴⁸ LW 36, p.62f.

¹⁴⁹ Large Catechism, Baptism, 29 (*BC 2000*: 460).

¹⁵⁰ Large Catechism, Baptism, 33-34 (*BC 2000*: 460).

promise, initially spoken in baptism. (b) In light of the communion with God the life of the baptized appears to be in contradiction to it; his or her desires, longings, affects, thoughts, words and deeds often contradict that communion. Thus repentance will arise: the rejection of what stands against God, mourning this situation, offering one's life to God and asking for renewal and the will to live according to God's purpose. This twofold response to baptism will give the structure to the whole Christian life from baptism to death. In the life of a person, this response may change, it may become stronger or weaker, or it may even be forgotten; nevertheless baptism initiates lifelong response.

6. According to Luther, infants can and should be baptized since the Great Commission sends Christians to "all" people and Jesus' blessing of the children includes the statement that children can participate in the Kingdom of Heaven (Mark 10:13-16). This means that infants can be saved. They are even a model of how to receive that Kingdom: "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter in it" (v.15). For Lutherans this shows that infants can also have faith, that is, experience God's assurance (trust). When infants are baptized, they are not baptized simply with reference to the faith of parents or godparents. Instead, parents and godparents pray to God to give and nurture the faith of the newly baptized. This faith must grow as they grow, it will need proclamation of the gospel, catechesis, and Christian life in community. In the course of life the faith of the baptized child can grow and be strengthened or it can diminish and even be lost.

This short presentation of Mennonite and Lutheran understandings of baptism suggests significant divergence that calls for further dialogue. At the same time, we note that several changes in Lutheran perspectives on baptism have taken place since the sixteenth century. In certain churches within the LWF, for example, a growing number of Lutheran parents are withholding baptism of their children until they are old enough to make their own decision about being baptized. Although the theological basis for this practice is not always elaborated explicitly, these parents seem to assume that their children are saved. Lutheran churches generally do not criticize these parents for a practice that could be taken to "assert that children are saved without baptism" (CA IX, Latin Text). On the other hand, parents in some churches of the LWF do not actively participate in church and yet wish to have their children baptized. Many pastors are reluctant to baptize such children, since no Christian education and catechesis can be expected and the parishes are not in all cases able or willing to take

over these tasks. In these cases, it has seemed better to these pastors and church leaders to postpone baptism.

In terms of on-going relations between Mennonites and Lutherans, we acknowledge an asymmetry in our approach regarding the question of baptism of newcomers who join our churches from the other tradition. Whereas Lutherans universally recognize baptisms performed in Mennonite churches, Mennonite churches do not generally recognize the baptism of infants performed in Lutheran churches and often require newcomers who have been baptized as infants to be baptized according to Mennonite practice, something that Lutherans would view as rebaptism. At the same time, however, some Mennonite churches do recognize infant baptisms to the extent that they require only a public confession of faith for membership, which completes whatever may have been lacking in the original "water baptism."

Both Mennonites and Lutherans agree that baptism cannot be seen as an isolated event. Thus, how baptisms are recognized must be understood within a larger framework that explores how the practice of baptism is related to a larger set of theological doctrines. Since these frameworks are different, Lutherans feel misunderstood by Mennonites when Mennonites assess the Lutheran practice of baptism according to their own framework. Conversely, Mennonites feel misunderstood by Lutherans when Lutherans assess the Mennonite practice according to their own framework. Clearly, both sides experience great anguish in this conflict since the deepest convictions of their faith seem to be at stake and each side can easily feel misunderstood by the other.

The members of this study commission hope that neither the Anabaptist-Mennonite rejection of infant baptism nor the condemnation of Anabaptists in Article IX will remain a church-dividing issue. Nevertheless, we have not yet found a way to bridge the divide between the two churches regarding their teaching and practice on baptism. Further conversations are needed, perhaps especially among our MWC and LWF member churches. Among other topics, those conversations will have to address our mutual understandings of the relationship between divine action and human (re) action in baptism. Engaging these questions will require deeper biblical accounts of our understandings of baptism and will require that these understandings be considered within a broad theological framework.

PART 4

REMEMBERING THE PAST, RECONCILING IN CHRIST

MOVING BEYOND CONDEMNATIONS

As we look to the future of Lutheran-Mennonite relations, it is clear that further rapprochement between our two churches will need to acknowledge not only the theological differences that still divide us but also the different ways in which the past continues to inform our contemporary identity. By the twentieth century Lutherans had forgotten, or perhaps even repressed, much of the history of persecution by adherents to the Augsburg Confession only to “rediscover” this history in the context of renewed ecumenical discussions. Mennonites, by contrast, have generally cultivated a more active memory of this part of their past. Although Mennonites have often looked on Martin Luther as a positive figure in church renewal,¹⁵¹ they have also regarded the history of persecution at the hands of church and civil authorities—Protestant and Catholic alike—as a central theme in their story. A commitment to rightly remembering our shared story in the future can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, help to heal this part of the broken Body of Christ and offer an authentic witness to the freedom that comes through Christ in mutual vulnerability and forgiveness.

This part of the report, therefore, has three elements. The first sections acknowledge the way in which Lutheran reformers (Luther and Melancthon included) and their teaching, which they understood as maintaining the theological positions of Lutheran confessions, were complicit in the persecution of Anabaptists, and suggest steps that the Lutheran World Federation now

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Walter Klaassen, “Das Lutherbild im Täuferum,” in: *Martin Luther: Leistung und Erbe*, ed. Horst Bartel, et al. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1986), 396-401 or Irvin B. Horst, “Menno Simons: ‘Luther Helped Me,’” in: *Bibliotheca Dissidentium*, Nr. 3, ed. Jean-Georges Rott and Simon Verheus (Baden-Baden: Editions Valentin Koerner, 1987), 189-190. In 1850, Leonhard Weydmann, a Mennonite pastor at Monsheim, published an appreciative biography of Luther called *Luther: Ein Charakter- und Spiegelbild für unsere Zeit*.

may take to provide a new and healthier basis for continued dialogue with the Mennonite World Conference. The following sections discuss the role that memories of persecution have played in Anabaptist-Mennonite identity, reflect on several areas in which Mennonites have also been complicit—however unwittingly—in the divisions that have separated our church bodies, and suggests next steps the Mennonite World Conference may take. On this basis, the conclusion proposes several specific recommendations to our two communions for moving forward in a journey of forgiveness and reconciliation. This part of our report is dialogical, providing opportunities for both communions to speak to one another on the basis of our common retelling of the story in order to reflect on the import of these matters for our churches today. Thus, Lutheran members of the study commission wrote the sections 1 and 2 which follow; Mennonite commission members wrote sections 3 and 4. In the introduction and conclusion we reflect on our work together.

I. LUTHERAN INTEGRITY OF TEACHING AND THE PERSECUTION OF ANABAPTISTS

In the view of the Lutheran members of this commission, retelling the history of relations between Lutherans and Mennonites must lead Lutheran churches, which continue to subscribe to the Augsburg Confession, to view their commitment to maintaining “pure doctrine” in a new light and to take responsibility for remembering how their forebears in the faith persecuted Anabaptists and even used this very confession to advocate that persecution. This problem is heightened by the fact that the Lutheran confessions themselves, especially the Augsburg Confession, single out Anabaptists for condemnation. Because churches of the Lutheran World Federation continue to subscribe to these confessions and confess their faith today in light of these confessions, they must develop ways to negotiate these condemnations without undermining the authority of the confessions themselves at the same time. Unlike those other churches whose confessions have significance more in their history than in their present, Lutherans continue to identify with and to derive part of their identity from these confessions of faith.

When Lutherans today study the history of Lutheran-Anabaptist relationships in the sixteenth-century and beyond, they are filled with a deep sense of regret and pain over the persecution of Anabaptists by Lutheran authorities and especially over the fact that Lutheran reformers theologically supported this persecution. What happened in the past cannot be changed. Nevertheless, the presence of the past—our memories—can change. Many Mennonites have a lively memory of what happened to their

forebears in faith. Listening to their stories we can hear how the memory of their martyrs has shaped their identity. Quite often, Lutherans have not recognized their complicity in this history, or they have forgotten or even suppressed this memory. Lutherans pray to God to grant the healing of memories in Mennonite-Lutheran relations, and they are committed to contribute to this by striving for right remembering.

Clearly, Lutherans have Martin Luther, Phillip Melancthon, and the other reformers to thank for so much, especially for disclosing the liberating truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the doctrine of justification by grace alone that is received by faith alone, the distinction between law and gospel and between different “uses” of the law, the understanding of the sacraments as means of the grace used by the Holy Spirit, and the clear distinction between Scripture and human traditions. Lutherans are still committed to these Reformation insights. Nevertheless, they also have come to realize that in some aspects of their work the reformers could err. Even though the reformers emphasized so strongly the distinction between Scripture and human traditions, they shared some convictions with their contemporaries that Lutherans today would consider to contradict the gospel. These convictions led many Lutheran reformers to support the Anabaptist persecution. In the present day, one can easily identify a few of these convictions, in part because they have generally disappeared from our societies and churches. Fairness to the reformers requires, as has been done in Part Two above, that we take carefully into consideration their motives and presuppositions in order to understand them fully. Nevertheless, understanding them does not imply excusing them. The example of Johannes Brenz shows that a Lutheran reformer of the sixteenth century could defend a point of view that rejected severe persecution and capital punishment for Anabaptists. This demonstrates that the Lutheran understanding of both baptism and the relationship between Christians and the state *by itself* does not lead to persecution of Anabaptists. On the other hand, the fact that Luther and Melancthon were familiar with Brenz’s position increases their responsibility for their respective statements.

Many in the sixteenth century believed both that there needed to be unity within the church and that a political community could tolerate only one religion. Concerning the former, the reformers shared the conviction that this unity was a gift of the Holy Spirit bestowed through the Word, not through the imposition of political force. However, that did not always stop Lutherans from trying to use the state’s powers to attain ecclesial unity. Along with this mistaken attitude, they shared the prevailing understanding of the time that the existence of different religious groups would inevitably lead to a civil war and the destruction of the community itself. From the perspective of a modern state with a pluralistic society comprised of dif-

ferent confessions and religions, these ideas seem quite unconvincing. But the principle of religious tolerance and, later, the declaration of the human and civil right of religious freedom emerged to some degree as a result of religious wars, mainly in Europe (with consequences for the United States), when religious uniformity could no longer be achieved by military force. Before the idea of the civil right of religious freedom prevailed over the idea of religious uniformity as the *vinculum*, or bond, that keeps a society together and at peace, the latter idea paradoxically seemed to support social unity, since the very existence in sixteenth century Europe of *different* confessions (Lutheran, Reformed and Roman Catholic), actually led to terrible civil and religious wars. The observation that the bonds of a religiously engaged person to God are stronger than any bond or loyalty to temporal authorities or the institutions of the state provided strong support for the necessity of such uniformity. At the same time, religious bonds were seen to bind people together more strongly than other bonds, whereas religious differences seemed more powerful than the unifying bonds of human traditions, culture, and economic interest. Even today, the phenomenon of so-called civil religion suggests that states adopt certain “religious” elements in order to sustain the solidarity and coherence of their citizens (yet without needing to use sanctions or offer rewards). In the sixteenth century, temporal authorities were convinced that they had to take measures in order to eliminate religious differences from their territories—for the sake of the stability of their towns, principalities, or kingdoms.

In his treatise *On Temporal Authority* (1523), Luther took a different stance from what he and Melanchthon would later argue in 1536. In the second part of this treatise, often cited by Anabaptists in the sixteenth century and initially praised by Melanchthon, Luther raised the question of the extent of temporal authority. He emphasized the significance of this issue: “we must now learn how far its [the temporal authority’s] arm extends and how widely its hand stretches, lest it extend too far and encroach upon God’s kingdom and government. It is essential for us to know this, for where it is given too wide a scope, intolerable and terrible injury follows.”¹⁵² Luther then clearly defined the limits of temporal authority:

The temporal government has laws that extend no further than to life and property and external affairs on earth, for God cannot and will not permit anyone but himself to rule over the soul. Therefore, where the temporal authority presumes to prescribe laws for the soul, it encroaches upon God’s government and only misleads souls and destroys them. We want to make this so clear that everyone will grasp it, and that our fine gentlemen, the princes and bishops, will see what

¹⁵² LW 45: 104.

fools they are when they seek to coerce the people with their laws and commandments into believing this or that.¹⁵³

Luther offered several reasons for this statement: “No one shall or can command the soul,” he wrote, “unless he is able to show it the way to heaven; but this no man can do, only God alone. Therefore, in matters which concern the salvation of souls nothing but God’s word shall be taught and accepted.”¹⁵⁴ Luther also referred to Matthew 10:28 according to which temporal government can only destroy the body. Thus the realm of its authority does not extend to the soul.¹⁵⁵ In addition, since God alone is able to look into a human being’s heart, he alone may command the soul. “For faith is a free act, to which no one can be forced. Indeed, it is a work of God in the spirit, not something which outward authority should compel or create. Hence arises the common saying, found also in Augustine, ‘No one can or ought to be forced to believe.’”¹⁵⁶

Pursuing an argument that would also appear in the treatise of 1536, Luther insisted that Anabaptists should not be forced to believe what the reformers considered was right; instead they should only be prevented from spreading their heresy.

Again you say, “The temporal power is not forcing men to believe; it is simply seeing to it externally that no one deceives the people by false doctrine; how could heretics otherwise be restrained?” Answer: This the bishops should do; it is a function entrusted to them and not to the princes. Heresy can never be restrained by force. One will have to tackle the problem in some other way, for heresy must be opposed and dealt with otherwise than with the sword. Here God’s word must do the fighting. If it does not succeed, certainly the temporal power will not succeed either, even if it were to drench the world in blood. Heresy is a spiritual matter which you cannot hack to pieces with iron, consume with fire, or drown in water. God’s word alone avails here, as Paul says in II Corinthians 10[4–5].¹⁵⁷

These arguments, which may well still carry weight today, suggest that Luther’s theology has resources capable of supporting the civil right of religious freedom. Thus, Lutherans, simply by virtue of living in a modern state, need not view such a civil right as contradicting their own basic

¹⁵³ LW 45: 105.

¹⁵⁴ LW 45: 106.

¹⁵⁵ “Soul” means the human being in relation to God in contrast to the human being in relation to other human beings or to himself or herself.

¹⁵⁶ LW 45: 108. See Augustine’s *Contra litteras Petilianii* II, 184 (J.-P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina* (Paris, 1861) 43, 315).

¹⁵⁷ LW 45: 114.

theological principles. On the contrary, modern political developments may even have helped Lutheranism reclaim Luther's early understanding of how Christians may struggle "against heresy": "God's word, however, enlightens the heart, and so all heresies and errors vanish from the heart of their own accord."¹⁵⁸

As it turned out, Luther was forced to recognize that the Word of God did not inevitably have the effect of eradicating "all heresies and errors ... from the heart." Instead, many heard this Word differently from him and continued to hear it in their own way. Yet if the Word of God is clear and unambiguous, and if it enlightens the heart, then it seemed to Luther that those who heard it in ways irreconcilable with his own did so only because of a special stubbornness or even the work of the devil. This made it conceivable for him to call on the temporal authorities to intervene in stopping the spread of such "heresies" as those of the Anabaptists.

But Luther's later arguments and behavior did not overturn the insights of his treatise *On Temporal Authority*. Indeed, in the words of the Small Catechism, Lutherans confess:

I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common true faith.¹⁵⁹

If all this is the work of the Holy Spirit, then temporal authority cannot play a role in preserving the true faith.

Thus, Lutherans today seriously regret that Luther and Melancthon did not continue to adhere to the understanding of the limits of temporal government that Luther had so clearly explained in 1523. Even though we will never be able to reconcile all conflicting understandings of Christian faith in this earthly life, it is clear that resolving this problem by calling for or accepting the intervention of state authorities in matters of faith must be rejected for all time.

Luther's arguments were also relevant with regard to the second conviction that he shared with his contemporaries, namely the idea that persons who committed blasphemy were liable to capital punishment. Princes and magistrates in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe were afraid that blasphemous acts, left unpunished, would stir the wrath of God, who might punish a country or a town with plague, famine, earthquake, etc.

¹⁵⁸ LW 45: 115.

¹⁵⁹ BC 2000: 355f.

The governments felt obliged to try people accused of blasphemy in court to prevent such catastrophes from occurring in their territories.

Although there is no inherent connection between rejecting the Anabaptist understanding of baptism and declaring it to be blasphemous, several Lutheran reformers did assert that Anabaptist understandings of baptism were blasphemous and thus called for punishment. Nevertheless, it was still an open question as to whether or not Lutheran reformers would develop theological justification for temporal governments to take action against such blasphemers. In the document of 1536, Melanchthon referred to the second commandment (“Whoever dishonors God’s name shall not remain unpunished”) and to Leviticus 24:16 (“Whoever blasphemes God is to be killed”), arguments Luther had previously proposed in his exposition of the Psalm 82.¹⁶⁰ This was a second step the reformers took. Both decisions—equating Anabaptist baptism with blasphemy and calling on secular authorities to punish blasphemers—contributed to the theological support of Anabaptist persecution.

Again, this line of argument is quite surprising when compared to what Luther explicitly wrote in his 1525 pamphlet *How Christians Should Regard Moses*. The text, based upon a sermon delivered in August 1525 shortly after the Peasants’ War, was directed against so-called “enthusiasts” who appealed directly to Moses’ law. But here Luther clearly stated that the Law of Moses:

is no longer binding on us because it was given only to the people of Israel. And Israel accepted this law for itself and its descendants, while the Gentiles were excluded. To be sure, the Gentiles have certain laws in common with the Jews, such as these: there is one God, no one is to do wrong to another, no one is to commit adultery or murder or steal, and others like them. This is written by nature into their hearts; they did not hear it straight from heaven as the Jews did. This is why this entire text does not pertain to the Gentiles. I say this on account of the enthusiasts.¹⁶¹

Nevertheless, a decade later, Luther and Melanchthon did the very thing for which Luther had criticized the enthusiasts, namely, they based their arguments directly on a quotation from Mosaic law without proving that the same action against blasphemers prescribed in the Mosaic law obtained in their day.

The assumption that temporal governments needed to punish blasphemers, even with the death penalty, was deeply rooted in the minds and hearts of people during the Middle Ages and Reformation. Nevertheless, Luther

¹⁶⁰ Cf. LW 13: 62.

¹⁶¹ LW 35: 164.

had offered good arguments for not following this line of reasoning. Thus, we see again that Luther and Melanchthon's theological support for the persecution of Anabaptists was not necessarily rooted in the core of their theology; on the contrary, it contradicted it. Nevertheless, both reformers later provided a theological rationale for that persecution, which had terrible consequences for Anabaptists. Then, when the Augsburg Confession became more and more a standard for measuring correct teaching and heresy, it, too, became swept up in this persecution.

Lutherans today regret that Luther and Melanchthon were so deeply embedded in these widespread assumptions of their time that brought harm to the Anabaptists and that they did not follow their own insights more consistently. Even so, these circumstances allow Lutherans today to adhere fully to Luther's understanding of the gospel of Christ while *at the same time* rejecting vigorously and without reservation any arguments in favor of persecuting the Anabaptists.

A third aspect of Melanchthon and Luther's arguments against the Anabaptists concerns the accusation of sedition. It may seem surprising that theologians leveled this charge, given the fact that the political authorities were the appropriate judges in this matter. And, indeed, some Lutheran princes and magistrates were far more moderate on this point than the reformers themselves. Luther or Melanchthon argued that since Anabaptists did not believe that true Christians could serve as a magistrate or a prince or in any political office, they had therefore delegitimized theologically the authority of the state. In contrast to the political authorities the reformers refused to recognize that most Anabaptists were prepared to obey the authorities (except in swearing oaths and serving as soldiers) and that most Anabaptists believed that the political institutions were indeed instituted by God (Romans 13), albeit outside the "order of perfection" in which Christians should live (cf. Matthew 5:39). Granted, swearing oaths was a decisive element for the functioning of sixteenth-century European societies—refusing to take oaths was seen as a form of self-exclusion from society. Theologians like Melanchthon, however, developed arguments from generalized, abstract principles. They did not have concrete situations in mind but instead raised the question of what would happen if Anabaptist convictions "should become generally accepted." "Then indeed," Melanchthon wrote, "would the magistracy, the oath, personal possessions, etc. all be abolished" (below, appendix A). Thus "they [the Anabaptists] are direct destroyers of civil government". In order for civil government to preserve itself, it had to punish people who held such convictions and expressed them publicly.

Melanchthon therefore regarded not only acts of disobedience but also certain theological convictions concerning the institutions of a political community as seditious. Although this logic is completely foreign to mod-

ern understandings of the civil right of freedom of speech, nevertheless, in a political community of people who all understood themselves to be Christians, it had serious consequences for how this community and its institutions would be interpreted theologically. Thus, Melancthon’s insistence that the convictions of the Anabaptists in this respect “are not solely matters of faith, but they are directly, in and of themselves, an obvious threat to civil government” may be somewhat understandable. Nevertheless, one may also wonder why the Lutheran reformers did not seem to have greater confidence in their own theological understanding of political government as being well-grounded in Scripture and convincing to their contemporaries. One may ask why they were so eager to call for coercive measures to eliminate a theological position that in their eyes was wrong.

Yet another aspect of this debate arises from Luther’s well-known explanation of the eighth commandment (“You are not to bear false witness against your neighbor”) in his Small Catechism: “We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.”¹⁶² Unfortunately, Lutheran reformers did not always seem to apply this interpretation of the commandment in their struggle against the Anabaptists. Instead they condemned them in the Augsburg Confession and accused them of blasphemy or sedition, while quite often demonstrating that they did not have very much detailed information about the Anabaptists and their different convictions. In the Large Catechism, Luther says that his comment on the Eighth Commandment refers to private sins.

But where the sin is so public that the judge and everyone else are aware of it, you can without sin shun and avoid those who have brought disgrace upon themselves, and you may testify publicly against them. For when something is exposed to the light of day, there can be no question of slander or injustice or false witness [...] Where the sin is public, appropriate public punishment should follow so that everyone may know how to guard against it.¹⁶³

Several aspects of Luther’s statement here raise questions. As Luther himself acknowledged about his own writings, such books, pamphlets and public statements can be misunderstood, misinterpreted, taken out of context, exaggerated or suppressed. Thus, even regarding public statements, “slander or injustice or false witness” can and does occur quite often. Even if one grants—as both Luther and the Anabaptists assumed—that pure doctrine can be identified and

¹⁶² *BC 2000*: 353.

¹⁶³ *BC 2000*: 424.

expressed, it does *not* follow that theologians can correctly understand and evaluate doctrines that oppose their own and propose appropriate measures regarding their opponents. In their statements on the Anabaptists, Luther and Melanchthon did not show that they took seriously the possibility that they could err in perceiving Anabaptist teachings, that particular interests or distorted emotions could play a role in their ability to judge, or even that one could sin “in thought, word, and deeds” while defending pure doctrine. It is true that Luther could not avoid entering into conflict with the Roman Catholic Church and later with other groups about the pure understanding of the gospel. Nevertheless, struggling for the truth of the gospel is a human undertaking that is never completely free from error and sin. As Luther himself testified, even the good works of a justified person are not exempt from sin.

Lutherans today deeply regret the lack of awareness of this dimension in Luther and Melanchthon’s statements about Anabaptists. The acknowledgment in Part Three of this document (that some of the condemnations of Anabaptists contained in the Augsburg Confession never applied to Anabaptists, at least not to “the” Anabaptists) could also be judged as a serious breach of the command against bearing false witness.

To be sure, as noted in Parts Two and Three, the Augsburg Confession was addressed to the imperial authorities and not directly to Anabaptists or to their understanding of the Christian faith. Nevertheless, given that the Roman Catholic opposition associated the reformers with Anabaptism, several articles in the Confession attempted to clarify the reformers’ confession of faith over against positions associated with Anabaptists, whose practice of “rebaptizing” had been deemed to transgress imperial law and thus to be a capital offense. In several instances—for example, CA V, VIII, XII, XVII, and XXVII—the drafters of the Augsburg Confession rejected positions hardly ever associated then or now with most Anabaptists. Indeed, the reformers showed very little awareness of the actual positions of Anabaptists on these matters. Thus, Lutherans today have rightly declared that these condemnations no longer stand between them and Anabaptist-Mennonite churches.¹⁶⁴ The condemnations in CA IX (on baptism) and CA XVI (on civil authority), however, do remain central areas of theological disagreement among our churches, as was made clear in Part Three.

Had the disagreements and condemnations remained strictly theological, the history of the relations between Anabaptist churches and Lutherans would have differed greatly from what was described above. Instead, this telling of our common story revealed the degree to which many, though not all, Lutheran theologians (including Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon) and their princes

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, the national dialogues and the statements of churches in Germany and the USA.

(including the rulers of Saxony) came to advocate persecution, physical torture and even capital punishment for Anabaptists, who held positions that differed from their teachings as witnessed to in the Augsburg Confession. To be sure, the continued existence of theological differences between Anabaptists, on the one hand, and the theologians and princes of the Augsburg Confession, on the other, led to varying responses by sixteenth-century Lutherans. Most regrettably, however, the result of these differences sometimes led to persecution and death, where not only imperial law but also the teachings of the Augsburg Confession itself were used to justify such punishment.

Especially in the joint memorandum by Wittenberg’s theological faculty in 1536, we saw how charges of sedition and treason were mixed with the charge of blasphemy. It is especially this connection—which never gained the approval of all Lutheran pastors and princes of that day—that Lutherans today repudiate. Lutherans must provide clear alternatives from within their own tradition for interpreting the biblical texts used by the reformers to justify such persecution. For example, the lives of Israel’s monarchs or believing Gentile rulers may finally be fulfilled in Christ but are certainly not to be used indiscriminately as models of behavior for later Christian magistrates. Lutherans today may thus also repudiate how, in order to defend pure teaching, their spiritual forebears condoned persecution in the 1530s and in the 1550s even associated the Augsburg Confession with such a defense.

2. LOOKING FORWARD: MOVING BEYOND THE CONDEMNATIONS

The preceding has helped Lutheran participants to identify where Luther and Melancthon went wrong in dealing with Anabaptists and to describe more precisely what Lutherans today deeply regret about Anabaptist-Lutheran relations in the past. But it does not seem fully appropriate only to regret what Anabaptists had to suffer. The Christian way of dealing with guilt is the request for forgiveness. To be sure, there are serious objections to this request. Can Lutherans today ask for forgiveness for the harm that their confessional forebears did to the Anabaptists? Can Mennonites today grant forgiveness for something that their spiritual forebears had to suffer hundreds of years ago? On the other hand, both sides share a deep sense of solidarity with their respective forebears. Lutherans today are still very grateful for the teaching of the gospel they received from Martin Luther, and they are still committed to his understanding of the Word of God, especially as expressed in their commitment to the Augsburg Confession and the other Lutheran confessional documents. But present Lutherans also bear responsibility for addressing the “dark sides” of the reformers’ thought and actions, especially since the descendants of the victims have not forgotten them. When Men-

nonites read and meditate on the “Martyrs’ Mirror” or similar books, they identify with their forebears and feel their suffering.

So Lutherans, following the example of the returning exiles in Nehemiah 9, dare to ask for forgiveness for the harm that their forebears in the sixteenth century committed against Anabaptists, for forgetting or ignoring this persecution in the intervening centuries, and for all inappropriate, misleading and hurtful portraits of Anabaptists and Mennonites made by Lutheran authors, in both popular and academic publications, to the present day. Lutherans dare to ask for forgiveness because they are aware that finally God alone forgives sins. The Word of God proclaims: “While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son” (Romans 5:10). “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us” (2 Corinthians 5:19). May it also become true of Lutherans and Mennonites what the letter to the Ephesians states about the Gentiles and Israel: “Christ is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Ephesians 2:14). Reconciliation with God and among Mennonites and Lutherans is, from the beginning to the end, only possible and real in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Lutherans and Mennonites are continually reminded of this reconciliation of humankind with God in the prayer that they pray every day: “Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.” In this light, Lutherans today ask forgiveness for all the harm that Lutherans have done to Anabaptists and Mennonites since the time of the Reformation. Lutherans direct their request for forgiveness to Christ in whose hands, as they believe, are both the Anabaptist martyrs and the Lutheran reformers, princes and magistrates, and from this perspective they also ask their Mennonite brothers and sisters for forgiveness.

Important first steps in ecumenical rapprochement are an acknowledgment of the harm that one group of Christians may have perpetrated upon another in the past and a willingness to begin anew to listen to and appreciate the other’s witness to the gospel. Repudiation of past behavior and a more judicious understanding of sixteenth-century Anabaptist beliefs, however, do not constitute the only fruits from such listening to our common history and analyzing our confessions of faith. There is no longer any place for a selective retelling of the history of Lutheran relations with Anabaptist and Mennonite churches. We have much to learn from one another about the centrality of Christian baptism and faith and about the proper relation of Christians to their societies. Lutherans have also become convinced of and are committed to rejecting all attempts to use the coercive means of the state in order to marginalize or even persecute any other religious group and thus repudiate all past use of the condemnations in the Augsburg Confession to this end. Already

in the preface to *The Book of Concord*, Lutherans explicitly rejected using the confessions of that book against the persecuted Reformed churches in France.¹⁶⁵

This common telling of our history calls Lutherans away from basing either their current relationship with Anabaptist-Mennonites or their commitment to reconciliation with Anabaptist-Mennonites, now or in the future, upon deeply flawed and failed theological and political positions of the past. It is now clear that the use of the state to promote or defend Lutheran teaching and to persecute those who held opposing beliefs often led to dire consequences. In light of this tragic story and acknowledging the vagaries of history, however, Lutherans must continue to reflect on how they may best prevent their confession of faith from ever again becoming part of a theological or legal pretext for punishing others for their beliefs. Lutherans now know more fully the history of this persecution and to what extent it was based on the Augsburg Confession and its teachings and was approved by some of its most prominent theologians. As a result, the churches of the Lutheran World Federation need to consider how best to acknowledge their historic complicity in this persecution perpetrated upon the spiritual forebears of the churches of the Mennonite World Conference, and how best to ask forgiveness for these actions. We ask the Lutheran World Federation to take appropriate action in these matters.

3. MENNONITE MEMORIES OF ANABAPTIST PERSECUTIONS BY PROTESTANTS

As Mennonite members of the study commission reflect on these matters, they recall that in the standard Mennonite telling of the story today, Anabaptists were sober-minded, earnest followers of Jesus who were inspired by a fresh reading of Scripture and the movement of the Holy Spirit to live according to Christ's teachings following the model of the early church. Contrary to the violent response that they evoked, their distinctive practices—believer's baptism, the separation of church and state, a rejection of the oath and the sword, sharing of earthly possessions—posed, from this Mennonite perspective, no threat to political order. At the same time, 2000-3000 Anabaptists were executed between 1525 and 1550, and thousands more tortured, imprisoned, or forced to flee their homes—their properties confiscated.¹⁶⁶ In the centuries that followed, the Anabaptists and their Men-

¹⁶⁵ See the Preface to *The Book of Concord*, 20, in: *BC 2000*: 12-13.

¹⁶⁶ For an overview of Anabaptist martyrdom, especially in its comparative context with Catholic and Protestant martyrs, see Brad Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 197-249.

nonite, Hutterite, and Amish descendants lived at the margins of European society, often forbidden to build churches or to proselytize, subject to a wide range of arbitrary “toleration taxes,” and frequently forced to move at the whim of the prince or reform-minded church authorities.

From the very beginnings of the movement, Anabaptists interpreted their persecution as a confirmation of faithful Christian discipleship. “True Christians,” wrote Conrad Grebel in the fall of 1524, “are sheep among wolves ... and must be baptized in anguish and affliction, tribulation and persecution, suffering and death.”¹⁶⁷ Followers of Christ, they taught, should expect opposition from the world. Indeed for many, suffering was a concrete sign of Christian faithfulness.¹⁶⁸ Over the centuries, stories of faithful suffering—preserved in numerous pamphlets, hymns, and visual images—became a vital part of Anabaptist-Mennonite identity.

In 1660, for example, a Dutch Mennonite pastor by the name of Thieleman van Braght compiled these martyr accounts into a massive 1300 folio page volume.¹⁶⁹ Known as the *Martyrs Mirror*, the book is organized into two parts: a century-by-century chronicle of Christian martyrs, beginning with Christ himself, that narrates the history of the church from the perspective of dissenters persecuted for advocating adult baptism and Christian defenselessness; followed by an enormous collection of stories, letters and devotional material related to the Anabaptist martyrs of the sixteenth century. The stories, combined with a series of copperplate engravings that accompanied the second edition of 1685, provided later generations with dramatic and memorable accounts of Christian faithfulness in the midst of suffering: the image, for example, of Anneken Jans handing her infant son to bystanders as she goes to her execution; or the moving letters of Maeyken Wens pleading with her children to remain faithful to Christ and

¹⁶⁷ Harder, *Sources of Swiss Anabaptism*, 290. Anabaptist adherents frequently described baptism as a three-stage process: an inner baptism of the spirit, followed by the outer baptism of water, which was then sealed for the true Christian by a third baptism of blood.

¹⁶⁸ Nowhere is this clearer than in the hymns preserved in the *Ausbund*, many of which are martyr ballads or songs of encouragement in the midst of persecution. The *Ausbund* was reprinted dozens of times in Europe and it continues to be used in worship by the Old Order Amish. See also, Ethelbert Stauffer, “The Anabaptist Theology of Martyrdom,” *MQR* 19 (July 1945), 179-214; Alan Kreider, “The Servant is Not Greater Than His Master: The Anabaptists and the Suffering Church,” *MQR* 58 (January 1984), 5-29; and C. J. Dyck, “The Suffering Church in Anabaptism,” *MQR* 59 (January 1985), 5-23.

¹⁶⁹ Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater, or, Martyrs’ Mirror Compiled from Various Authentic Chronicles, Memorials, and Testimonies*, trans. Joseph F. Sohm, 15th ed. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1987).

to love their enemies in spite of her suffering; or the depiction of Simon the Grocer refusing to bow in the marketplace before the bishop's elevated chalice and the story of his subsequent death by fire. The archetypal figure in the *Martyrs Mirror*, second only to Christ, is Dirk Willems.¹⁷⁰ Imprisoned in 1569 for his beliefs, Willems managed to escape his cell and to flee across an icy pond. A soldier gave chase but, burdened with his heavy weapons, he broke through the ice and called out desperately for help. An etching associated with the story depicts Willems returning to rescue his drowning pursuer from the icy waters. Despite his compassion, Willems was recaptured and burned at the stake.

Most Mennonites today, of course, live in an entirely different context to that of their sixteenth century spiritual ancestors. Yet for many, the martyr stories continue to be a living and vital source of group identity. The English edition of the *Martyrs Mirror*, reprinted nearly twenty times in the past century, continues to sell several thousand copies each year. The etching of Dirk Willems rescuing his enemy is unquestionably the most popular iconographic image in use among North American Mennonites today, appearing frequently on posters and banners, or in church bulletins, brochures, newsletters, and books. In recent decades a traveling exhibit on the *Martyrs Mirror* itinerated in more than seventy Mennonite and Amish communities across North America, accompanied by local lectures, children's activities and discussion groups. And a collection of Anabaptist martyr stories written to accompany the exhibit has been translated into nine different languages and has found an eager readership within the global Anabaptist-Mennonite church.¹⁷¹

Anchored in the model of Jesus, and rooted in a long train of witnesses who suffered for their commitment to follow Christ, the Anabaptist martyrs remind contemporary Mennonites that they have a faith worth dying for. Furthermore, the martyr stories caution contemporary Christians against the persistent temptation to justify violence in the name of Christ; they witness to the possibility of non-violence and “enemy love” even in the most extreme circumstances; and they call Mennonites to a life of compassion and humility, while recognizing that nonresistant love is not likely to be rewarded.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ *The Martyrs Mirror*, 741-742.

¹⁷¹ For a website on the traveling exhibit, see www.bethelks.edu/kauffman/martyrs. The book written to accompany the exhibit is by John S. Oyer and Robert S. Kreider, *Mirror of the Martyrs* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1990).

¹⁷² As historian James Juhnke has written, the martyr stories “prepare us for the possibility of persecution and marginalization in our own time—especially as our pacifist convictions become unpopular in a war-crusading America.”—James Juhnke, “Rightly Remembering a Martyr Heritage,” (unpublished paper presented to the ELCA-Mennonite Liaison Committee dialogue held in Sarasota, Florida, Feb. 28, 2003), 1.

For many contemporary Mennonites, especially in areas where there is a greater awareness of Anabaptist history, keeping these stories alive is an affirmation that those who relinquished their lives did not do so in vain. Remembering the martyrs is a way of giving voice to those whose tongues were torn out before their deaths, or were forced into silence by an iron tonguescrew. Remembering those who died for the principle of nonresistance testifies to the Christian conviction that the resurrection will ultimately triumph over the cross.

4. LOOKING FORWARD: MOVING BEYOND CONDEMNATIONS

Yet even as those in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition have actively worked to preserve the memory of Anabaptist martyrs, these conversations have also illuminated ways in which nurturing these memories can be problematic. Framing our history in the context of martyrdom has sometimes led Mennonites to a caricatured understanding of the sixteenth-century reformers. Frequently, for example, Mennonites have failed to distinguish among Catholic, Reformed and Lutheran theologians and princes in describing the persecution of Anabaptists. In so doing they have overlooked the fact that comparatively few Anabaptist martyrs were executed in Lutheran territories.

We also confess that at times Mennonites have reduced the theological contributions of the Lutheran reformers to their hastily composed arguments against the Anabaptists, thereby overlooking the broader contributions of the reformers to the Christian church and, indeed, to the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition itself. By the same token, at times Mennonite versions of their martyr stories—told with the goal of establishing group identity—have reduced the complex story of the sixteenth century to a simple morality tale of good and evil, in which historical actors are easily identified as either Christ-like or violent.

In a similar way, we confess that Mennonites have sometimes claimed the martyr tradition as a badge of Christian superiority and have sometimes nurtured an identity rooted in victimization that has fostered a sense of self-righteousness and arrogance and has blinded us to the frailties and failures that are also deeply woven into our tradition.

We also acknowledge with deep regret that in the contested religious climate of the sixteenth century, some Anabaptists used language that caricatured their opponents in extreme language, sometimes calling into question their Christian integrity or even associating them with the Antichrist.

In their concluding reflections, the Lutheran members of the International Study Commission issued a request for forgiveness “for the harm

that their forebears in the sixteenth century committed to Anabaptists, for forgetting or ignoring this persecution in the intervening centuries, and for all inappropriate, misleading and hurtful portraits of Anabaptists and Mennonites made by Lutheran authors, in both popular and academic publications, to the present day.” In light of our collective work, and with particular appreciation for this overture of Christian reconciliation, we recommend the following:

1. That the joint report of the LWF-MWC International Study Commission be received by MWC and sent to its member churches for discussion and response.
2. That the MWC undertake discernment of the issues raised by the joint report, especially regarding Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching on and practice of baptism, and the possibility of further dialogue with the Lutheran World Federation. Among other topics, those conversations will have to address our mutual understandings of the relationship between divine action and human (re)action in baptism. Engaging these questions will require deeper biblical accounts of our understandings of baptism and will require that these understandings be considered within a broad theological framework.
3. That if the LWF Council should issue a statement asking forgiveness for the Lutheran persecution of the Anabaptists, the MWC initiate a process to acknowledge that request, with the goal of a mutual granting of forgiveness in a spirit of reconciliation and humility.

CONCLUSION

The past cannot be changed, but we can change the way the past is remembered in the present. This is our hope. Reconciliation does not only look back into the past; rather it looks into a common future. We are grateful that in many places where Mennonites and Lutherans live together, cooperation as brothers and sisters in Christ has already been occurring for many years. Mennonites and Lutherans recognize each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. The national dialogues in France, Germany, and the USA have shown how much Mennonites and Lutherans have in common. This has often been realized and put into practice through common service projects, shared worship and even eucharistic fellowship. In these encounters, Mennonites and Lutherans offer the witness of their lives and give witness to their faith. These forms of bearing witness and being open

to the witness of others deepen the bonds of community. In this way, both sides may become increasingly aware of the special gifts that God has bestowed on both churches.

Yet, even though Lutherans and Mennonites have much in common, they nevertheless remain different traditions. In the past, they have been divided by a terrible conflict. We are deeply convinced that this has changed in recent times and that it will continue to change, so that both traditions may begin to challenge each other to become more faithful to the call of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have often experienced that the strengths in our respective traditions also bring with them certain weaknesses. So, even as we recognize each other's strengths, each community may also assist the other in addressing their respective weaknesses.

Today, living in the forgiveness and reconciliation given by Christ, Mennonites and Lutherans may make observations and raise questions concerning the doctrine and life of the other community in a brotherly and sisterly way. Such conversations will assist each church in developing a self-critical attitude toward its own doctrine and practice. Learning to view those who belong to other Christian traditions truly as Christians will also help all of us to develop a sense of the catholicity of the church. For example, when Lutherans practice infant baptism they should have in mind the Mennonite question about whether this practice actually is in line with the theology of baptism that they teach and have explained to Mennonites. And, of course, they will have to be prepared to respond to the enduring Mennonite question about whether Lutheran doctrine of baptism is in line with Scripture. This is a healthy challenge for Lutherans that motivates them to refer back to Scripture. Similarly, whenever Mennonites question the validity of a Lutheran's baptism as an infant, comparable reflections are in order for Mennonites. There will be similar mutual challenges when it comes to questions of war and peace, the use of violent means by state officials to defend innocent people, and the like. In a world that changes so rapidly, these questions are constantly evolving, so that both Lutherans and Mennonites must look for answers that are in line with the word of God, take into consideration the insights of their respective traditions, and take seriously the complexity of the world in which we live, act, suffer, and confess our faith in Christ.

We offer the results of our study for discernment within our respective church bodies, trusting that readers might find here both evidence of the movement of the Holy Spirit for the unity of Christ's church and concrete witness to Christ's prayer "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you ... so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21).

APPENDIX A

THAT THE CIVIL MAGISTRACY IS OBLIGATED TO APPLY PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT AGAINST THE ANABAPTISTS: A FEW CONSIDERATIONS FROM WITTENBERG (1536)

[The original letter signed by Martin Luther, Philip Melanchthon, Johannes Bugenhagen and Caspar Cruciger, Sr.]
Leonard Gross, translator¹⁷³

WHETHER CHRISTIAN PRINCES ARE OBLIGATED TO APPLY PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT AND THE SWORD AGAINST THE UNCHRISTIAN SECT OF THE ANABAPTISTS

First of all it is to be noted that with this question, the office of preacher (Predicanten) is not being spoken of, for the preachers and servants of the gospel do not wield the sword. Therefore, they are not to use any physical force whatsoever, but are to fight against error solely through correct teaching and preaching. Where they, however, delve into another office and want to wield the sword, as did [Thomas] Müntzer, and as happened at Münster, such

¹⁷³ The translation by Leonard Gross appeared in: **The Mennonite Quarterly Review** 74 (July 2002), 315-321. A photomechanical reproduction of the 1536 tract immediately follows on pp. 322-335.

is incorrect and seditious. Here, however, the question deals with the civil magistracy, whether it is obligated to proceed with physical force and punishment against the false teachings of the Anabaptists and other similar sects.

Second, before punishment is meted out, misled people are first of all to be presented with clear Christian instruction and admonition that they might be induced to renounce their errors. If they desire so to do, it is Christian to show them mercy. If they, however, remain obstinate and do not want to renounce their errors, then punishment is obligatory.

Third, it is obvious that the magistracy is obligated to protect against sedition and the destruction of civil government, and to punish the seditious with the sword, as Paul says, "Whoever opposes the magistracy is to be punished."¹⁷⁴

Now the Anabaptists hold to two types of articles. Some have to do especially with the outward, civil government, whereby they maintain that Christians are not to hold that office which wields the sword. Likewise, Christians are to hold no office except that of servant of the gospel. Likewise, Christians are not to swear oaths. Likewise, Christians are not to own property. Likewise, Christians may forsake their wives if they do not want to embrace Anabaptism. These and similar articles are held by all Anabaptists. Now it is obvious that these articles directly undermine the outward, civil government: the magistracy, the oath, personal possessions, marriage, etc. For if these articles and teachings were to be held to throughout the land, what destruction, murder and robbery would follow!

Therefore, without a doubt the magistracy is obligated to counter these articles as seditious and punish with physical force—and, depending on the circumstances, also with the sword—obstinate individuals, whether Anabaptists or others, who hold to one or more of these articles. For these articles are not solely matters of faith, but they are directly, in and of themselves, an obvious threat to civil government.

And it is not to be taken into consideration that the Anabaptists say in response, "We desire to harm no one." This is *protestatio contraria facto* (a declaration, contrary to fact)—tearing apart governments, yet saying, "We desire to harm no one." For if their teachings should become generally accepted, then indeed would the magistracy, the oath, personal possessions, etc., all be abolished.

Now since Holy Scripture clearly teaches that the noted articles of the Anabaptists are wrong and devilish, and it is clear and obvious that they are direct destroyers of civil government, it follows without a doubt that the magistracy is obligated to counter such false and seditious teachings, and in keeping with the authority of its office, to apply punishment, mild or severe, as it sees fit.

¹⁷⁴ Probably a loose rendering of Rom. 13:2, "...those who resist [authority] will incur judgment."

If someone were to contradict this, saying, “The magistracy is not able to give anyone faith, therefore it dare not punish anyone for the sake of faith,” to this there are many proper answers. But we shall limit ourselves to this one answer: The magistracy does not punish on account of opinions and views as held in the heart, but on account of outward wrongful speech and teachings, through which others are also led astray. Therefore, just as the magistracy is obligated to punish others who talk seditiously and menacingly, through which rebellion is truly incited, in the same manner it is also obligated, using as much force as it can muster, to punish those who proclaim these seditious [Anabaptist] teachings, since through this the people are also truly incited to rebel. For [the Anabaptists] wish to eliminate the magistracy, the oath and personal possessions.

And even if they might color and excuse some of these articles with hypocrisy, interpreting them otherwise, the above is still their basic view. For our feeling is not that one should subject the Anabaptists to subtle questions, but instead should seek out and note the correct, clear foundations as found in their own teachings, and enter into discussion about such—thereby, however, not being duped by the devil’s hypocrisy. Some [Anabaptists] are able to embellish things that, upon closer analysis, are found to contain the above-noted errors, wherein their seeming holiness is pure hypocrisy and a devilish apparition. For Paul clearly teaches that they who hold to such erroneous articles concerning civil government, and present them as examples of a new holiness, are from the devil. Therefore, let the Christian magistracy not be frightened by the make-believe and hypocritical holiness or patience of such spirits, but rather consider their erroneous articles as a witness, that these obstinate people are a devilish sect.

Enough has been said about the seditious articles. For it is not difficult to understand that, concerning these articles, it is incumbent upon the magistracy to use its office to preserve the government. Those [Anabaptists] at Münster also maintained that there must be a physical kingdom preceding Judgment Day, composed solely of the holy, etc. Also, they practiced polygamy. Such erroneous ideas are seditious and must be defended against in earnest.

Second, the Anabaptist articles, in spiritual matters, present interpretations—namely, concerning infant baptism and original sin—which lie outside of and counter to God’s word. Others, such as those in Münster, have also acknowledged that Christ did not take his own body from Mary’s body, and that there is no forgiveness for mortal sin, etc. Regarding such articles, here is also our answer: Just as the civil magistracy is obligated to restrain and punish public blasphemy and perjury, it is also obligated to restrain and punish individuals in its own judicial district, for public false teachings, improper worship services and heretical acts. And this God orders in the second commandment, where he says, “Whoever dishonors God’s name,

shall not remain unpunished.”¹⁷⁵ Everyone is obligated, in keeping with his station and office, to avoid and to deter blasphemy. And on the strength of this commandment, princes and magistrates have the power and duty to abolish improper worship services, and in their place, to establish true teaching and correct worship services. This commandment also instructs them to deter public false teaching, and to punish the obstinate. Leviticus 24[16] speaks to this: “Whoever blasphemes God is to be killed.”

The magistrates must give themselves to constant and correct instruction, so that they are sure of their cause and do not treat anyone unjustly. For it is not right, solely according to custom, to judge against God’s word and against the old and pure church’s understanding and teaching. Custom is a great tyrant. Therefore one must ground himself upon God’s word and the old, pure church. For one is to accept no teaching which has not been attested to by the old, pure church, since it is easy to understand that the old church must have possessed all the articles of faith, namely, all those needed for salvation. Consequently the ruler is obligated to give himself to a thorough study of God’s word and the old church’s teachings.

Now there are certain articles of the Anabaptists, already noted, which would certainly lead to confusion, such as not baptizing children. What would the end result of this be, other than an obviously heathen spirit?

Likewise, infant baptism is so well established, that the Anabaptists have no legitimate reason to overturn the same.

Likewise, that they say children do not need the forgiveness of sins, that original sin does not apply [to them]—such are public errors of a very dangerous character.

In addition the Anabaptists separate themselves from the church, also at those places where pure Christian teaching is at hand and where abuses and idolatry have been eliminated—establishing their own ministry, church and gathering—which also is against God’s command. For where the teaching is correct, and idolatry is not practiced in the churches, all people are obligated before God to remain with the official public ministry, and not to establish any separation. And in such a case, whoever establishes a separation and a new ministry is acting most certainly against God, as was the case long ago with the Donatists who also established rebaptism and a separation, having no cause except this alone: There were priests and people in the other churches who were not godly, [therefore the Donatists] wanted to create a church that was completely pure. This we have also heard from a number of Anabaptists as to why they were establishing a separation from those churches whose teaching and worship services they

¹⁷⁵ Ex 20:7, “You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.”

could not object to. They said that we are leading an evil life, are greedy, etc. They wanted, however, to create a pure church.

In this case the law was established in *Codice*, through Honorius and Theodosius, wherein it is stated that Anabaptists [German *Widertaufer*, “re-baptizers”] are to be killed.¹⁷⁶ For separation, and the establishing of a new ministry solely on account of other evil moral practices is most certainly against God, and since this is very vexing, and precipitates eternal unrest, the civil magistracy should deter and punish this practice with serious measures.

Some people argue that the civil magistracy in no way ought to be concerned with spiritual matters. This argument is stretched too far. True, both offices—the office of preaching, and that of the civil government—are distinct from one another. At the same time they both are to serve unto God’s glory. Princes are not only to protect their subjects, along with their possessions and physical lives, but the most important task of their office is to further God’s honor, and to oppose blasphemy and idolatry. Thus also did the kings in the Old Testament—and not only the Jewish kings, but also the converted kings of the Gentiles—who executed those who established false prophets and idolatry. Such examples belong to the office of the prince, as Paul also teaches, “The law is good for punishing the blasphemers,” etc.¹⁷⁷ The civil magistracy does not exist solely to serve people in the area of physical welfare, but most of all for God’s honor, for it is a servant of God, whom it, through its office, is to acknowledge and glorify. Ps 2[:10]: *Et nunc Reges intelligite* (Now therefore, O kings, be wise).

Concerning the words about the weeds, “Let both grow,” used to counter [the above argument], here it is not the civil magistracy that is spoken of, but the office of preacher—that the preachers, upon the authority of their office, are not to exercise temporal power. From all this it has now become clear that the civil magistracy is obligated to deter blasphemy, false teachings and heresy, punishing the adherents physically.

Now where the Anabaptists have articles against the civil government, this is all the easier to judge. For there is no doubt that in such a case the obstinate are to be punished as seditious. Where, however, someone has articles solely on spiritual matters, such as regarding infant baptism, original sin, and unneeded separation, to be sure, these articles are also significant. For casting children out of Christendom, putting them into an uncertain situation, indeed, bringing them into damnation, is of no small import. Likewise, establishing two peoples among ourselves: the baptized,

¹⁷⁶ *Codex Justinianus* (6th century) formalized what up to that time had been the practice of Constans, Theodosius and Honorius, etc., in putting apprehended Donatists to death on the basis of their practice of “repeating” the sacrament of baptism.

¹⁷⁷ Source not found. Possibly Rom 2:23-24, in the form of a very loose paraphrase.

and the unbaptized. Thereupon one indeed sees and understands that there are grossly false articles held to by the Anabaptist sect. We conclude that in this case the obstinate may be killed. Beyond this, where both types of error, regarding civil and spiritual matters, are found among the Anabaptists, and they do not renounce such, the judge may be all the more certain, and shall punish in all severity.

In every case, however, moderation must prevail, so that the people first of all are instructed, and admonished to renounce their errors. Likewise, the judge shall also differentiate [among the different classes of Anabaptists]. Some have been misled solely out of simplemindedness and are not obstinate. With these, one should not proceed in haste. Also, these people may be given a lesser punishment, such as expulsion from the land, or imprisonment, so that they do others no harm. Some are beginners¹⁷⁸ and at the same time obstinate. Here the judge shall demonstrate severity. And if they hold to errors regarding the civil government, then one must assume that they are pregnant with a Münster-like government. Therefore he punishes them as insurrectionists.

Likewise, if we hold God's honor in high respect, we must in all seriousness take preventive measures, so that blasphemy and damaging errors are not carried far and wide.

And in order to instruct and confirm our inner conscience, the following is especially to be noted: We should at all times take note of a few, clear articles wherein the sect is in gross and obvious error. Through this we should know that the obstinate are blinded by the devil. And this is certain, that they possess no good spirit, even though they have a great appearance of the same. For one well knows that false prophets have sheep's clothing—that is, a certain good appearance. But by their fruits we shall know them. Now the most certain testing of these fruits is, namely, that one attempts obstinately to defend false articles against the clear and obvious word of God—with this the judge can instruct and strengthen his conscience. For thus he knows that the sect is from the devil. Therefore he knows that the sect must be opposed, even though there may be needy and ailing individuals among them, in need of mercy; he still knows that they must be opposed as a group.

And in sum and substance, understanding *examinatores* (examiners) well know how to proceed in these matters. In addition they also well know that among these Anabaptists, much abominable error resides. For, after all, it is a Manichean sect and a new monasticism. For outward, unruly barbarity, having no personal possessions, and not submitting to [civil]

¹⁷⁸ The German “anfenger” here has more the sense of “instigator” or “agitator.” (Theodor Dieter)

government—such matters are their holiness, by which one may conclude that they are far from Christ, and do not have the correct understanding of Christ.

Just as an understanding preacher instructs other estates about their vocations, just as he teaches a mother that bearing children is pleasing to God, etc., in this same manner he is to instruct civil magistrates how they are to serve unto the honor of God, and counter manifest blasphemy.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁹ The following paragraph, part of the original letter (now in MBW 1748, *Texte 7*: 157), was omitted from versions published in 1536: “And because our gracious lord [Philip of Hesse], the landgrave, reports that some leaders and teachers of rebaptism are now in custody who were admonished and yet did not keep their promise [not to spread their teaching], h[is] p[rincely] g[race] may in good conscience allow them to be punished with the sword also for this reason: that they were disobedient and did not keep their promise or oath.” Added by Luther: “This is the common rule. But our gracious lord may at all times act leniently regarding the punishment according to the specifics of the case.”

APPENDIX B

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BEARING FRUIT: IMPLICATIONS
OF THE 2010 RECONCILIATION
BETWEEN LUTHERANS AND
ANABAPTIST-MENNONITES

**REPORT OF THE LUTHERAN WORLD FEDERATION
TASK FORCE TO FOLLOW UP THE “MENNONITE
ACTION” AT THE LWF ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY IN 2010**

PREFACE

It is with great pleasure that I present to you the report of the Lutheran World Federation Task Force to Follow Up the “Mennonite Action” at the LWF Eleventh Assembly in 2010 (Task Force), which responds to promises made at the 2010 Eleventh Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). While building on communion-defining ecumenical affirmations, such as the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, the “Action on the Legacy of Lutheran Persecution of ‘Anabaptists,’” taken at the Eleventh Assembly, was a major step for the LWF. At that moment, this Lutheran world communion did three things: it “asked for forgiveness from God and from our Mennonite sisters and brothers;” prayed for “healing of memories and reconciliation;” and, last but not least, looked toward the future. As Lutherans, we “committed ourselves” to a series of processes and changes, whose unifying hope is the resolution that “this action of the LWF will bear fruit” in the life and teaching of our churches.¹

The Task Force’s report is one part of the response to these commitments. The international Task Force, established in 2012, was composed of members from different parts of the LWF communion and a Mennonite representative, Prof. John Roth, Goshen College, USA. Special thanks are due to Dr Kathryn Johnson, a consultant to the Task Force, who was instrumental in finalizing this report. The Task Force met three times: in Tutzing (Germany), Goshen (USA) and Utrecht (the Netherlands) and explored how best to follow up on the commitments taken at the 2010 Assembly. In its report it not only describes but also suggests further steps. The Task Force would like to encourage the LWF member churches to take up this resource in their own settings, acknowledging that paths to a deeper relationship between Lutherans and Anabaptist-Mennonites will need to respond to the diverse contexts in which we live. It is fitting that this report comes to the LWF member churches on the threshold of the commemoration of the 500th Reformation anniversary. As we prepare for the Twelfth Assembly and the 2017 commemorations, Lutherans are strengthened by the memory of the Eleventh Assembly, where the healing power of God’s Spirit to move through moments of repentance brought gratitude and hope. In moving toward reconciliation in one of the relationships wounded 500 years ago,

¹ “Action on the Legacy of Lutheran Persecution of ‘Anabaptists,’” in *Give Us Today Our Daily Bread. Official Report. LWF Eleventh Assembly* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2010), 47–48.

we took new courage to approach the half-millennial anniversary in a way that advances the unity of the church and the healing of the world.

OKR Michael Martin

INTRODUCTION

LUTHERAN–MENNONITE RECONCILIATION: THANKFULLY RECEIVING THE SPIRIT’S GIFTS

“*Veni, Creator Spiritus!* Come, Holy Spirit!”—so the Church intensively prays for God’s guidance during times when it seeks healing and renewal. In Stuttgart, Germany, on 22 July 2010, as Lutherans and Mennonites engaged in a formal act of reconciliation, this was their prayer. Those present at that moment could not doubt that the Spirit of God was at work in their midst.

The occasion was the Eleventh Assembly of the LWF, the highest governing body for that international communion of churches, which embraces over ninety-five percent of the world’s Lutherans. Endorsing a dialogue process that had begun years before, the Assembly voted to ask for forgiveness from members of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition for wrongs going back to the beginnings of the Lutheran movement in the sixteenth century. Painful divisions between these two Christian families had persisted since their formative years. Now, as both approached their half-millennial anniversaries, the moment for moving toward reconciliation had finally come.

The action in 2010 began already thirty years earlier, when Lutherans were celebrating the Augsburg Confession’s (CA) 450th anniversary. With the memory of persecuting Anabaptists having largely faded from active awareness, they invited Mennonites to join the celebration in Augsburg and were taken aback when Mennonites observed that it was difficult to celebrate a confession that condemned them. This encounter helped to spark substantive dialogues in France, Germany and the USA, which together helped to pave the way for a Lutheran–Mennonite International Study Commission (Study Commission) established by the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) and LWF in 2003. Lutherans had every reason to trust the process of bilateral theological dialogues: they had engaged in many such conversations and had, in 1999, succeeded with the Roman Catholic Church to reach a major agreement on a central quarrel of the Reformation, the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. In this conversation with the Mennonites, however, it became apparent on both sides that ongoing theological differences could not be constructively examined until the wounds of the past were directly confronted. Thus, the Study Commission determined that its principal work would be to write a common history of

the painful relations during the sixteenth century—the first jointly-written history of this contentious era. As the study continued, it became clear that writing such a common history was itself an ecumenical act and thus already a contribution to reconciliation.

While the mutual accountability of this project brought precision to the narratives of both sides, the recognitions were particularly painful for Lutherans, since they alone had been the persecutors. To be sure, the careful study elucidated ways in which esteemed Lutheran leaders, including Martin Luther himself and Philip Melancthon, could have appealed to their own best theological insights to resist the endorsement of violent persecution. Yet, recognizing that they could have decided differently made all the sharper the acknowledgement that in fact they had not. Similarly, while the Study Commission lifted up the example of the often overlooked reformer Johannes Brenz, a signatory of the Augsburg Confession, who opposed execution on the ground that governments lack such authority in matters of faith, in the end, Brenz offered only limited consolation to the Lutheran members. If such opinions were in fact live options in sixteenth-century debates, then Luther and others cannot be excused simply as products of their own violence-stoked age, people who unfortunately lacked the advantage of a later concept of freedom of conscience. Lutheran members of the Study Commission, having laid out the inner complexities of their tradition, were left with the recognition that finally there was no adequate defense to be made of persecution. Their only course was to recommend an act of repentance to the LWF.

In the eyes of the Mennonite members, the costliness of this recognition by their devoted Lutheran counterparts made their recommendation all the more significant. While they had no comparable legacy of persecution to repent, they found themselves also drawn to recognize imperfections in their own tradition, with its own willingness to engage in harsh and uncharitable characterizations of theological opponents, including Lutherans. They joined with their Lutheran colleagues in longing for a future of repaired relationship.

Clearly, however, the imbalance of guilt meant that the initiative needed to come, first and principally, from the Lutheran side. Thus the LWF began to move toward a formal act of repentance—an action that has very little precedent in the history of relations between church bodies. For Lutherans alive today, with no personal participation in or individual memories of persecuting Anabaptists, the action involved some theological reflection in order to articulate their living relation to these persecutions. It was crucial to recognize that the continued authority of the Augsburg Confession brings its condemnations of Anabaptists into the present time. Even in parts of the world where contemporary Anabaptist-Mennonite

communities are unknown and Lutheran churches were established long after the sixteenth century, those churches have received negative views of Anabaptists in the process of their study of Lutheran history and confessions. Thus, the Study Commission argued that to affirm the Augsburg Confession in the twenty-first century requires addressing the persecution, which its condemnations have been seen to justify, and also to acknowledge the willingness of subsequent Lutheran generations to pass this legacy over in silence. When this proposal was put forward, there were wise voices within the Lutheran communion, drawing prominently on experiences from the anti-apartheid struggles and their aftermaths, who powerfully articulated the need for communities as well as individuals to recognize when they are in need of genuine repentance and forgiveness. When it came to the Eleventh Assembly at Stuttgart, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, explored the topic of forgiveness in his keynote address. He said that living by the receiving and extending of forgiveness, as expressed in the Lord’s Prayer, is the rhythm of life, not only for Christians individually but for the church itself.

From such reflection came the language of the Assembly action, with its central petition for forgiveness “from God and from our Mennonite sisters and brothers”:

When Lutherans today realize the history of Lutheran–Anabaptist relationships in the sixteenth century and beyond as it is presented in the report of the Lutheran–Mennonite International Study Commission, they are filled with a deep sense of regret and pain over the persecution of Anabaptists by Lutheran authorities and especially over the fact that Lutheran reformers theologically supported this persecution. Thus, The Lutheran World Federation, A Communion of Churches wishes to express publicly its deep regret and sorrow.

Trusting in God who in Jesus Christ was reconciling the world to himself, we ask for forgiveness—from God and from our Mennonite sisters and brothers—for the harm that our forebears in the sixteenth century committed to Anabaptists, for forgetting or ignoring this persecution in the intervening centuries, and for all inappropriate, misleading and hurtful portraits of Anabaptists and Mennonites made by Lutheran authors, in both popular and scholarly forms, to the present day.

We pray that God may grant to our communities a healing of our memories and reconciliation.²

While plans for adopting the resolution had followed the parliamentary protocol of other Assembly actions, at the actual moment it became clear that another course was demanded. LWF President Mark S. Hanson noted that the unique

² *Ibid.*, 47.

character of this motion seemed to require a posture of prayer—and then, in an inspired impromptu gesture, he invited those present in the assembly hall to indicate their approval not by holding aloft a green card but rather by kneeling or standing. Turning to the ecumenical guests, he asked them also to join in this posture. He spoke first to the Reformed and Roman Catholic representatives, who joined Lutherans in the sixteenth-century persecutions, but then to all the others as well. He noted that Lutherans had first envisaged this act of reconciliation as one to be done “in the presence of” the entire Body of Christ—but it was now clear that such a healing act was also being offered “on behalf” of the whole Body. Thus, in a moment, only guests from the Mennonite World Conference remained seated, as those around them knelt or stood in prayer. “I never thought I would see this day,” one said later. “Beside me was an Anglican archbishop, kneeling in prayer for us.”

To that unforgettable moment another was to follow, this time from the Anabaptist-Mennonite side. This response, however, should not have been a surprise, for it also had been long prepared. When Lutherans had begun to plan an official action, Mennonites replied that they needed equally to ready their hearts. Accordingly, a year earlier the MWC had invited LWF General Secretary Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko to describe the action to the MWC Assembly 15, in Asunción, Paraguay. Explaining the urgency for reconciliation imparted by the upcoming 500th Reformation anniversary in 2017, Noko linked the trust in God’s grace, which repentance presupposes, to the heart of the gospel message. He continued:

I have described the history of these condemnations as like the poison which a scorpion carries in its tail. We have not struck out with this poison for some time—but we still carry it with us in our system. We now are on a path which will lead us to expel this poison from our body, to allow us to live together with you, our sisters and brothers in Christ, in new ways.

[...] When you meet for your next Assembly, we Lutherans hope to be with you in a new way. And in that new relationship our witness to God’s love for the world will be more fully manifest.³

MWC General Secretary, Dr Larry Miller, responded to Noko’s presentation:

We receive your commitment to rightly remember this shared history, and your vulnerability in taking steps to heal the fractured body of Christ in which we live together, as a gift from God.

³ *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ*. Report of the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation/The Mennonite World Conference, 2010), 7, in this publication, 13.

We are aware of the difficulty of the task. We are dealing with holy histories, yours and ours. We are dealing with our most basic self-understandings, yours and ours.

For you, the witness of the Augsburg Confession is foundational and authoritative, an essential shaper of your identity. For us, the witness of the Anabaptist martyrs is a living and vital story, retold in our global community of churches to build group identity.

How can you distance yourself from the condemnations and their consequences while still honoring your history and strengthening your identity? How can we distance ourselves from use of the martyr tradition which perpetuates a sense of victimization and marginalization—and your reaching out for forgiveness pushes us to do precisely that—how can we thus distance ourselves while still honoring our history and strengthening our identity?

Surely these things will happen best if we continue to walk together in the way of Jesus Christ, our Reconciler and the Source of our common history and identity.⁴

To take the next steps, the MWC determined that its officers would meet concurrently with the LWF Assembly in order to allow an immediate and authoritative response. While original plans imagined some exchange of formal documents between the LWF and the MWC, it had long been clear that this was an action for communities to experience and to know in prayer. In Stuttgart, MWC President Danisa Ndlovu, from Zimbabwe, conveyed the meaning of the occasion:

Today in this place, we together—Lutherans, Anabaptist-Mennonites, and other Christians—are living out a basic and essential meaning of church: binding and loosing; seeking and granting forgiveness; restoring and healing relationships in the body of Christ.⁵

He presented the LWF with a foot-washing tub made in an Amish community steeped in the costly practices of forgiveness and reconciliation. This gift honored a central practice in Anabaptist worship and recalled the text from John 13 to which its dedicatory plaque alludes: “From this time forward let us serve together our common Lord and Teacher.”

On behalf of the MWC, Ndlovu also made clear that the Anabaptist-Mennonites not only wanted to extend the forgiveness that was asked but together with Lutherans to move forward together toward a common future.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7f., in this publication, 13.

⁵ “Mennonite World Conference response to the Lutheran World Federation Action on the Legacy of Lutheran Persecution of Anabaptists,” in *Give Us Today Our Daily Bread*, *op. cit.* (note 1), 49.

Thus, while the request for forgiveness was initiated on the Lutheran side, there were two sets of commitments made on 22 July 2010:⁶

FOR THE LWF:

We commit ourselves:

To interpret the Lutheran Confessions in light of the jointly described history between Lutherans and Anabaptists;

To take care that this action of the LWF will bear fruit in the teaching of the Lutheran Confessions in the seminaries and other educational activities of our member churches;

To continue the exploration of unresolved issues between our two traditions, in particular baptism and relations of Christians and of the Church to the state, in an atmosphere of mutual openness and the willingness to learn from each other;

To affirm the present consensus, gained by the experience of our churches over the centuries, in repudiating the use of the state's power either to exclude or enforce particular religious beliefs; and to work towards upholding and maintaining freedom of religion and conscience in political orders and societies, and

To urge our international bodies, member churches, and in particular our congregations, to seek ways to continue and deepen relations with the Mennonite World Conference and with local Mennonite communities through common prayer and Bible study, shared humanitarian engagement, and common work for peace.

FOR THE MWC:

We commit ourselves:

To promote interpretations of the Lutheran-Anabaptist story which take seriously the jointly described history found in the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission Report;

To take care that your initiative for reconciliation is known and honoured in Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching about Lutherans;

To continue with you deliberation on the unresolved issues between our two traditions, in a spirit of mutual vulnerability and openness to the movement of the Spirit;

To encourage our member churches, their local congregations, and their institutions to seek fuller relations and greater cooperation with Lutherans in service to the world.

The report of this Task Force has its origins in these mutual commitments. The need for a resource to help member churches fulfill the promises was raised immediately by an LWF Council member who became a member of

⁶ For the LWF, *op. cit.* (note 1), 47f. For the MWC, Mennonite World Conference response..., in *ibid.*, 50.

this Task Force. Inspired by the Assembly action to seek out the local Mennonite community when she returned to her home country, she inquired at the seminary of her small Asian church how they would implement the LWF commitment to teach differently about Anabaptists, especially to how they are described in the Augsburg Confession. To help such churches, pastors, seminaries and congregations, is a principal goal of this work.

This report assembles resources for understanding, teaching and continuing the work of the 2010 Assembly toward Lutheran–Mennonite reconciliation.

The first of the three chapters, “The Authority of the Lutheran Confessions in Light of the 2010 Stuttgart Action with the Mennonites: Resources for Interpreting and Teaching the Confessions,” responds to Assembly commitments regarding the confessions. The examination of the teachings from the Augsburg Confession concerning Anabaptists, compiled by Timothy J. Wengert, professor emeritus, are likely to be most helpful in academic settings. Everyone who reflects on their Lutheran identity benefits from engaging in the discussion on how best to interpret the confessions in light of their characterization of other Christians, which in the past have led us to commit errors for which we have repented, without having to set aside the authority of the confessions. Finally, the chapter proposes an explanatory approach, interpreting the confessions, drawing on the Augsburg Confession and showing how the Mennonite action can be seen to honor rather than to undermine confessional authority. It ends with this strongly positive conclusion:

This means that by emphasizing the message of the gospel, witnessed to by Christians throughout the ages and experienced by all Christians as sheer mercy and consolation, the Augsburg Confession remains an ecumenical, catholic testimony for the entire church and an essential tool for Lutherans in ecumenical discussions. By interpreting the Augsburg Confession in this way, the LWF continues that very witness and enhances the very experience of Christ’s mercy to which the Augsburg Confession itself calls the church. In the entire sweep of ecumenical conversations, never before has one church or communion of churches asked another for forgiveness for the ways in which it has treated the other church. The Augsburg Confession itself and its confession of faith in God’s mercy in Christ assist in freeing Lutherans to take such actions as they did in 2010. These actions strengthen the Augsburg Confession’s authority, preserve it as a living confession of faith and help it to function, to borrow the dynamic words of the Solid Declaration, “as our creed for this age.”⁷

⁷ See 154.

The second chapter, “Continuing the Conversation on Disputed Issues: Christians and the Civil Use of Lethal Force,” provides an example of engaging the third Stuttgart commitment, “to continue the exploration of unresolved issues ... in an atmosphere of mutual openness and willingness to learn from each other.”⁸ The heart of this chapter is a dialogue between a Lutheran from Germany and a Mennonite from the USA, both members of the Task Force. Building on what was said by the Study Commission, which is repeated here, this dialogue examines disagreements and convergences with regard to the civil state and the use of lethal force. The self-critical openness of both participants toward their own tradition and their mutual respect allow remaining differences to emerge with enhanced clarity and precision.

The third chapter, “Good Practices of Lutheran–Mennonite Cooperation and Reconciliation,” can spark hope, creativity and collaboration. While there are many examples of good practices in Lutheran–Mennonite cooperation around the world, this chapter lists some of those directly inspired by the Mennonite Action at the Stuttgart Assembly. One is a pioneering three-sided dialogue, which includes Roman Catholics, on baptism, the other subject identified for further study. Some of these witness to forms of collaboration that local communities can initiate.

In the appendices you will find the order of the reconciliation service in Stuttgart, some brief explanations on how to understand the Augsburg Confession’s passages on Anabaptists and the letter sent by the MWC to Mennonite educational centers, encouraging them to take up and implement the commitments that Mennonites made in regard to Lutherans at the Eleventh Assembly.

The MWC also appointed a task force to follow up on its promises. One of its emphases was to increase awareness among Anabaptist–Mennonites of the actions taken by Lutherans (and others) to address the legacies of persecution. They decided, for example, to encourage the telling of Anabaptist history at historical interpretive centers, which help their own members to learn their stories and also to present these stories to a wide range of visitors. In consultation with both Mennonite and Lutheran scholars, MennoHof, a prominent such center in Indiana, USA, has undertaken to revise its historical exhibits in order to include not only the persecution of early Anabaptists but also recent movements towards reconciliation. The inauguration of these new perspectives will be celebrated by the local bishop from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, whose 2004 report on “Right Remembering in Anabaptist–Lutheran Relations” lifted up a crucial theme which helped pave the way to the Stuttgart action.

⁸ See 132.

In many ways, the 2010 reconciliation did not come out of nowhere. It could build on the extensive collaboration in service of Anabaptist-Mennonites and Lutherans around the world, existing theological dialogues and on the longing in many local settings for more, daily, personal changes in relationship. After 2010, however, Lutherans and members of the Anabaptist tradition are able to meet one another in new ways, with more intentionality, ecclesial engagement, mutual accountability and joy.

We can rejoice that the 2010 act of repentance has in many ways become part of the life of the LWF. For example, in *From Conflict to Communion, Lutheran-Catholic Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, the document produced with the Roman Catholic Church that has helped shape the approach to the 2017 Reformation anniversary, the Mennonite Action concludes the section on Lutheran repentance.⁹ In a world in which peaceful reconciliation is both all too rare and deeply yearned for, this example of seeking healing for longstanding wrongs speaks easily even to those who do not know its history.

And so again we say, Come, Holy Spirit, come! *Veni, Creator Spiritus!*

⁹ *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017*, Report of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity (Leipzig/Paderborn: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt GmbH/Bonifatius GmbH Druck-Buch-Verlag, 2013), 85, para 237.

I. THE AUTHORITY OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS IN LIGHT OF THE 2010 STUTTGART ACTION WITH THE MENNONITES

RESOURCES FOR TEACHING AND INTERPRETING THE CONFESSIONS

INTRODUCTION

The LWF Assembly action in 2010 included these commitments:

to interpret the Lutheran Confessions in light of the jointly described history between Lutherans and Anabaptists

to take care that this action of the LWF will bear fruit in the teaching of the Lutheran confessions in the seminaries and other educational activities of our member churches.¹⁰

The prominent references to the Lutheran confessions in these promises reflect a distinctive mark of the Lutheran tradition. Some churches regard their historical confessions of faith as useful benchmarks for past beliefs with no direct, continuing authority for believers in the present. Lutherans do not. Instead, from the time that the Augsburg Confession was read aloud before Emperor Charles V on 25 June 1530, Lutherans have understood that both this particular moment of confessing and the content of this confession continue to guide and authorize their message and work. The LWF is a communion of churches whose theological unity arises significantly from agreement on the teachings of the Lutheran confessions,

¹⁰ Op. cit. (note 1), 47f.

especially the Augsburg Confession.¹¹ While the confessions have not always functioned ideally as a strong and life-giving voice in the Lutheran churches, they continue to inspire and instruct the Lutheran witness in our time. Thus, it is an important task for Lutheran theologians, especially those interpreting the confessional writings in settings of education and formation, to give an account of the relation of the Mennonite Action to the Lutheran confessions.

By arguing that the condemnations of Anabaptists in the Augsburg Confession were badly used and no longer apply and then by asking the MWC for forgiveness, the LWF has placed before itself and its member churches a challenge: to maintain and support the confessions' authority—especially as they define our life within this communion of churches—while, at the same time, demonstrating the proper limitations of these same confessions of faith. As *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ* states:

Because churches of the Lutheran World Federation continue to subscribe to these confessions and confess their faith today in light of these confessions, they must develop ways to negotiate these condemnations without undermining the authority of the confessions themselves at the same time.¹²

(This concern clearly resonates with current discussions centering on biblical hermeneutics.)

Conversations with the MWC demanded that Lutherans recognize how their own confessions of faith were used in the past to persecute other Christians. By asking for forgiveness, the LWF demonstrated how a communion of churches functions: recognizing its own errors and clarifying its confession of the church's faith. The LWF also made clear that such confessions ought never be used in coercive ways. But the 2010 actions also continue to challenge Lutherans to develop ways to appropriate their own confessions of faith without undermining their authority. Thus, far from eroding the importance of the Augsburg Confession and other confessional documents, those actions now require Lutherans around the world to take seriously the historical context of the confessions and their past use and to develop new ways of reading them that invite both confession of faith and ecumenical conversation. Thus, the action at Stuttgart in 2010

¹¹ Because the Batak Church of Indonesia was accepted as a member of the LWF without directly accepting the Augsburg Confession, it is more proper to speak of the teachings of the Augsburg Confession rather than the Augsburg Confession itself. It is in that spirit that the following comments should be understood. For an in-depth look at the question of the authority of the Augsburg Confession, see 149ff.

¹² *Op. cit.* (note 3), 92, in this publication, 95.

can mark an important point in understanding the Lutheran confessions and their authority.

This section provides resources to carry out the promises of Stuttgart concerning the confessions.

First, it examines the sixteenth-century context of the confessions, with particular attention to the relations of Lutherans to Anabaptists. Since this is not the perspective from which the documents have most often been studied, the account provides information that will be new to many Lutherans; it draws upon the insights of *Healing Memories*, which was the first common narrative of the Reformation period told together by Lutherans and Anabaptists. Learning more about who Anabaptists were and are is itself an important step for Lutherans since there is an important asymmetry in how these two traditions have preserved their histories. While for Mennonites the specter of persecution has played an important role in their self-understanding to this day, the memory of the Lutheran persecution of Mennonites and their theological forebears has largely disappeared among Lutherans—a self-serving forgetfulness which the process of reconciliation helps to address. Then, with the historical setting in mind, specific condemnations of Anabaptists are described. Finally, a hermeneutic toward interpreting the confessions is proposed, drawing on the Augsburg Confession itself and showing how the Mennonite action can be seen to honor rather than to undermine confessional authority.

REMEMBERING A HISTORY OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY AND BEYOND

For Lutherans, it is necessary first to acknowledge what most have forgotten: many, though not all, Lutheran reformers (including Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon) advocated the use of capital punishment against Anabaptists, sometimes even on the basis of allegiance to the Augsburg Confession. The action in Stuttgart marks a decisive rejection by Lutherans of such use of coercive force in religious matters. In order fully to claim the significance of this repudiation, Lutherans need to look again at their history of involvement with religious persecution.

LUTHERANS AND MENNONITES IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Most Lutherans have at least a passing knowledge of the role Martin Luther played in sparking a movement now called the Reformation. Beginning with the distribution of the 95 Theses, a critique of the sale of indulgences, what started as an academic debate over the nature of penance and the

role of indulgences quickly became a struggle between Martin Luther, the University of Wittenberg's theologians and Luther's prince, the Elector Frederick III, on the one side, and the Roman curia and its supporters on the other. When Pope Leo X excommunicated Luther in 1520 and the imperial diet of the Holy Roman Empire meeting in Worms declared him an outlaw in 1521, the reformer and his supporters moved on a trajectory that culminated in the presentation of their confession of faith at the imperial diet meeting in Augsburg on 25 June 1530. When their Roman opponents rejected this confession in their so-called *Confutation* of August 1530, the reformers and their people defied the emperor's edict by accepting this document, and churches of the Augsburg Confession began to emerge throughout northern Europe in the coming decades.

What far fewer Lutherans are aware of is that during the 1520s another Christian movement took shape that opposed not only the Roman church but also the reforms emanating from Wittenberg and Zurich, where the city preacher, Ulrich Zwingli, was initiating a reform similar to Luther's, from which the Reformed tradition (including Presbyterian, Union and certain kinds of Anglican churches, among others) arose. Their opponents often nicknamed these Christians Anabaptists (rebaptizers), although such groups understood that "baptisms" of infants were not baptisms at all but that only "believers' baptism," as it is now sometimes called, constituted genuine baptism. These small, scattered groups of Christians often held varying practices and beliefs, although their opponents often thought of them as simply "Anabaptists." Today, historians identify several different strands of Anabaptists that continue as churches in the present, and most of these groups now proudly identify with their Anabaptist roots and, despite the origins of the term, will even call themselves Anabaptists.

SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ANABAPTISTS¹³

Historians have identified three major strands of Anabaptism of the sixteenth century. The first group practicing believers' baptism arose in Zurich, Switzerland, and often called themselves Swiss Brethren. Among their founders were Conrad Grebel, Felix Mantz and George Blaurock. Originally they were influenced by Ulrich Zwingli, the chief preacher and reformer of Zurich, and by his criticisms of a host of medieval practices, including rules for fasting, images in churches and the meaning of the Lord's Supper. From their own study of the Bible, they came to believe that their baptism

¹³ The following description is based on *ibid.*, 28–41. There were, of course, also other Anabaptist groups then and now, but the groups described here continue to represent the most important traditions today.

as infants at the hands of priests in communion with the Roman Pope was no baptism at all and that teaching and personal confession of faith must precede any true baptism. On 21 January 1525, these men and their followers underwent baptism. The movement, based upon believers' baptism and a voluntary, disciplined church life coupled with a strict biblicism, spread from Zurich to outlying areas in the Swiss and German countryside. Among the early converts was the university-trained priest, Balthasar Hubmaier, who baptized nearly the entire population of Waldshut but also supported the Peasants' War of 1525—an unusual position, given many Anabaptists' pacifism and separation from secular government.

In January 1527, the first execution of an Anabaptist, the cofounder of the original Swiss Brethren Anabaptist congregation in Zurich, Felix Mantz, was carried out in Zurich. In spring of the same year, representatives from these groups met in Schleitheim and approved a series of articles, written by the former Benedictine prior, Michael Sattler. These "Schleitheim Articles" depicted a cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil, in which true Christians were called upon to separate themselves from greed, selfishness and violence and pledge allegiance to Jesus and his teachings of love, generosity and peace. Believers' baptism marked the "crossing over" to this new existence in a voluntary community, led by gentle shepherds, in which the swearing of oaths, a mainstay of late medieval society, along with serving to rule or defend a community with force of arms, was rejected. The Roman church and its Reformation offshoots were all dismissed as in league with the world.

A second important strand of Anabaptists arose among the followers of Jacob Hutter in Moravia (now the Czech Republic) and hence called Hutterites. Hutter's leadership was preceded by that of Hans Hut, whose preaching in Nikolsburg, Moravia, brought him into conflict with Hubmaier and the local prince over the question of whether government officials could be Christians. Expelled from the city in the dead of winter 1527, Hut and about 200 followers began sharing their possessions, both to survive and to conform more closely to the Jerusalem community described in Acts. Under Hutter this renunciation of personal property and the sharing of goods became a defining mark of the community. After Hutter's execution in 1536, he was succeeded by Peter Riedemann, whose lengthy statement of Hutterite beliefs formed the theological foundation of the community.

Anabaptist ideas and practices also spread north into Germany and the Netherlands. Here an important early figure was Melchior Hoffman, an itinerant preacher, who first championed Luther's Reformation before being won over to Anabaptism while in Strasbourg. There he predicted that the world would end on Easter 1533. Although imprisoned at the time (he died behind bars ten years later), one of his disciples, Jan Mattheijs, continued his apocalyptic preaching, especially in the city of Münster. In the wake

of the institution of believers' baptism and the takeover of the city council by Anabaptist supporters in 1534, Roman Catholic and evangelical princes laid siege to the city. When Matthijs was killed in a wild raid, Jan of Leiden, a twenty-four-year-old actor and follower of Matthijs, took control of the increasingly desperate city and declared himself "King of the New Israel and of the whole world." He claimed absolute authority and inaugurated public executions. After their defeat and bloody massacre in June 1535, many in Europe associated all Anabaptists with the so-called "Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster" and thus with fanatical preaching and sedition.

Nevertheless, in the wake of the Münster debacle, a new Anabaptist group (Mennonites) emerged, led by the former Roman Catholic priest, Menno Simons (1496-1561). Menno is credited with having brought to the movement of largely "uneducated peasants and disillusioned artisans ... a renewed commitment to Scripture, anchoring the distinctive themes of the radical reformation within the broader categories of orthodox Christianity."¹⁴ By renouncing the unbridled apocalypticism of Hoffman and others, Menno gathered groups dedicated to the Bible to an ethic of suffering love and to a disciplined, visible church. The events in Münster also convinced him of the deadly danger in confusing Christian faith with governmental coercion. The true Christian way was one of peace within a properly disciplined community of believers.

VIEWS OF HERESY AND COERCION IN LUTHERAN CIRCLES

At the onset of the Reformation in the 1520s, participants inherited several options regarding the use of force against heretics. The medieval church agreed that whereas the church could excommunicate heretics and blasphemers, only the state could punish them "with the sword." At the same time, certain people within the church (especially abbots and bishops) exercised offices in both realms as ecclesiastical and secular "lords" and thus often could both excommunicate and punish wayward believers. However, others, especially those under a vow (monks, nuns and friars), renounced the use of force completely. When the Emperor Charles V offered Luther safe passage to the Diet of Worms in 1521 and then honored it, this represented a continuation of the delicate balance between political power and theological dissent. When the Diet itself unanimously declared Luther an outlaw of the Empire, this, too, followed the expectations of the time, especially shaped by the condemnation (and execution) of Jan Hus, the Czech reformer, a century earlier at the Council of Constance.

¹⁴ Ibid., 39, in this publication, 43.

These circumstances set the context within which the Lutheran and Anabaptist understandings of political power and religious conviction developed. In the mid-1520s, reformers often objected to the use of force against their followers by supporters of Rome. They separated the church's work of proclaiming the gospel (understood as the unmerited forgiveness of sins in Christ) from the coercive powers of the prince, established by God to maintain order in the world and restrain the wicked. Nevertheless, they did not reject the close relation between political authorities favorable to their cause and their pastors and theologians. At first, the reformers argued (especially in the wake of the Peasants' War of 1525) that political authorities always had the power to punish those who used religion as a cover for sedition and rebellion. At the same time, especially Luther argued that "Christian" princes did not have the right to resist higher political authorities.

Anabaptist groups, on the contrary, explored different approaches to governmental authority. While the leaders of what became the Swiss Brethren initially tried to convince the Zurich city council of the virtue of their cause, they and other groups influenced by them rejected oaths of allegiance and other ways that Christians could become entangled in supporting the government's coercive powers. During the Peasants' War, an Anabaptist leader such as Balthasar Hubmaier could support armed resistance and later, in 1535, the Anabaptists, who took over the city of Münster, made the establishment of a kingdom on earth through armed force a central part of their self-understanding. Nonetheless, the majority of Anabaptists, particularly the Swiss Brethren, the Hutterite and the Mennonite traditions, rejected these approaches to governmental authority. They insisted that, although government and good order were works of God, Christians could not become entangled in the affairs of state, given the state's commitment to the use of lethal force and Christ's command not to judge but rather to turn the other cheek.

With the appearance of these groups in the 1520s, Martin Luther and Philip Melancthon both wrote tracts that condemned what they understood as "Anabaptist teaching," although their statements sometimes reveal how little they understood this diverse movement at the time. Both defended the practice of infant baptism and rebuffed calls for Christians to share their property and to reject oath taking, where ownership of property and oaths were hallmarks of late medieval society. While not always in agreement about the details of such counter-cultural behavior, Anabaptists believed that such practices contradicted Christ's commands in the Sermon on the Mount.

Some reformers and their princes labeled such positions seditious. When the imperial Diet of Speyer of 1529 condemned what it described as rebaptism and applied the ancient Roman imperial edicts against such practice to Anabaptists, new avenues for using violence against religious

dissenters opened. First, Philip Melanchthon in 1529 and later other reformers, including Martin Luther, argued that, although princes could not establish or judge doctrine, they could punish public, heretical teaching because it was blasphemy. Indeed, the reformers believed that God would punish any society that tolerated such blasphemy and did not attempt to extirpate it from their midst. Political authorities could thus also use capital punishment against such teachers for blasphemy and not simply for sedition. This argument gained more traction following the rebellion in the city of Münster in 1535, when both Luther and Melanchthon jointly advised the Landgrave Philip of Hesse to use lethal force against Anabaptist leaders. As a result, Lutheran theologians supported the use of force against the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century, although always subject to the decisions of the princes, who were often more lenient than their theologians.

One exception to this trend was Johannes Brenz, reformer first in the south German city of Schwabisch Hall and later in the duchy of Württemberg. In 1528, he argued strongly against the use of capital punishment for Anabaptists found in evangelical (Lutheran) territories. “What point would there be in studying Scripture,” he wondered, “for the hangman would be the most learned doctor?” He insisted on a strict division between secular authority and the spiritual authority of the gospel.

Therefore, it is far by safest and surest for secular government to exercise its own office and let spiritual sins receive spiritual punishments. For it is much better and more preferable to tolerate a false faith four or ten times than to persecute the true faith only once.¹⁵

In 1530, the Augsburg Confession itself explicitly condemned certain “Anabaptist” teachings, especially those dealing with baptism (CA IX) and the relation of government to the Christian faith (CA XVI). Naming Anabaptists in that document had both theological importance (indicating that the emerging Lutheran church held views on these matters at odds with the Anabaptist tradition) and strategic significance, given that the reformers’ Roman opponents had tried to associate Luther’s followers with the Anabaptists and thus to place them, too, directly under the condemnations decreed in 1529 at the second Diet of Speyer.

By the 1550s, “right doctrine” had become directly associated with acceptance of the Augsburg Confession. As a result, the Augsburg Confession, which most clearly shaped Lutheran identity, also became associated with violence against those who disagreed with it—especially heirs to the Anabaptist tradition. This is especially clear in a Lutheran document produced

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 48, in this publication, 52

in 1557 (the *Prozess*), which charged Anabaptists not only with sedition but also with blasphemy—since denying baptism to infants jeopardized their eternal salvation.¹⁶ While the final draft of the document limited capital punishment to seditious acts, the authors (citing Leviticus 24 as proof) wrote, “God has clearly and explicitly commanded temporal government that they should punish blasphemers in their own territory.”¹⁷ This law was binding not only for Israel but part of natural law, they claimed.

For the temporal government should not only defend the bodies of their subjects, like a shepherd watches over oxen or sheep, but should also maintain outward discipline, and governments should bring order to the honor of God; they should punish and do away with public idolatry and blasphemy.¹⁸

When, in 1558, Duke Christopher of Württemberg issued a mandate against the Anabaptists based on the *Prozess*, he cited the Augsburg Confession itself as the standard for determining heresy. Of course, this did not prevent governmental authorities or theologians from accommodating the Anabaptists and, in time, direct persecution and capital punishment became a thing of the past, although of lasting importance for the self-understanding of Mennonites, while largely forgotten by their former persecutors.

FROM THE REFORMATION TO THE PRESENT

Many events contributed to the Lutheran movement toward the rejection of religious coercion, which culminated in 2010. First, the “minority opinion” of Brenz and others never disappeared from Lutheran consciousness, so that in the seventeenth century theologians continued to argue whether and to what extent the government could punish its citizens for theological offenses.

By the eighteenth century, the rise of Pietism and the Enlightenment among Lutherans had reshaped their understanding of relations to other Christians. Certain aspects of Lutheran Pietism had also influenced Mennonites and continue to influence parts of their tradition to this day, both positively (e.g., concern for mission work) and negatively (defining church as a collection of individuals). Moreover, as the state developed more tolerant attitudes toward religious dissent, Lutherans and Mennonites began to live side-by-side openly without recrimination. For instance, this occurred already in the eighteenth century in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, then one of the British colonies in North America and still

¹⁶ Described in detail in *ibid.*, 64–72, in this publication, 68–75.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 67, in this publication, 71

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 67–68, in this publication, 71,

today an important place where Lutheran and Anabaptist communities are to be found together.

Such rapprochement, however, should not be seen as a smooth process from persecution to toleration and acceptance. Indeed, in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some Lutheran theologians, especially in Germany, argued that, in addition to the traditional three God-given “estates” (household, government and church), to which Luther often referred in his writings, there was also a fourth, nationhood. This sphere of life demanded similar obedience and respect from Christians as God’s gift in the world. The events in Germany during World War II played a role in the changing view of state-sponsored violence in the name of religion and the uncritical acceptance of nationalism. The Confessing Church, unlike the “German Christians” (*Deutsche Christen*), rejected Nazi control of the churches, and the Barmen Declaration in particular dismissed the mixing of governmental power and Christian teaching. After the war, Lutheran theologians and historians began to scour the writings of Luther and Melancthon and engage in theological reflection in order to see if a different approach to political power could be developed that remained true to core Lutheran beliefs while more clearly rejecting the use of force in service of the gospel. In light of this reassessment, the steps taken at Stuttgart can be better understood.

An immediate need after the Stuttgart action was the careful examination of those articles in the Augsburg Confession in which condemnations of Anabaptists occur.

ANABAPTISTS IN THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS¹⁹

Blanket statements such as “condemned are Anabaptists” raise important issues regarding the Augsburg Confession’s authority. Two preliminary questions arise:

WERE DESCRIPTIONS OF ANABAPTIST TEACHING PURPOSEFUL DISTORTIONS?

Although perspectives on truth and accuracy have changed somewhat over the centuries, we can say that the framers of the Augsburg Confession

¹⁹ Questions of the present status of sixteenth-century condemnations arise also for Lutherans in other ecumenical relations, notably with Roman Catholics and the Reformed. The relation between the condemnations and unilateral persecution has, however, given these questions distinctive importance in relation to the Anabaptists.

operated with the assumption that false or inaccurate claims in theological debates could easily lead to a blanket dismissal of their arguments. While not trying to falsify these condemnations, the drafters used the mentioning of Anabaptists (especially in CA V and XII)—a group already condemned by all parties at the 1529 Second Diet of Speyer—as a way of attacking their opponents in Augsburg—a kind of “guilt by association.” Moreover, although the Augsburg Confession uses the broadly inclusive term (“Anabaptists”), it is clear from the context that it refers only to those who hold true to the specific doctrine being condemned. The language of the Formula of Concord, first published in 1580, is more discerning and reflects the fact that the reformers’ successors realized the differences between various Anabaptist groups.²⁰

HOW WELL WERE ANABAPTIST POSITIONS UNDERSTOOD?

Although the authors of the Formula of Concord seemed more cognizant of the variety of Anabaptist teachings and practices, things were not so clear to the drafters of the Augsburg Confession. At this point in their history, the various Anabaptist movements were not nearly as unified as they are today. Moreover, although some groups or individuals espoused believers’ baptism, they did not necessarily hold any other beliefs in common with those who formed the Swiss Brethren, the Hutterites or the Mennonites. Finally, for better or worse, the Lutheran reformers often confused the Anabaptists with certain revolutionaries from the Peasants’ War in 1525 and the revolt in Münster of 1534–1535. As a result, they tended to associate Anabaptism *per se* with sedition.

As both the national dialogues (in France, Germany and the USA) and the Study Commission discovered, several condemnations in the confessions simply did not accurately reflect the actual beliefs (then or now) of groups associated with Anabaptism. For a detailed description of those condemnations, which did and do not apply, see Appendix II.

Thus, with the exception of CA IX (on baptism) and CA XVI (on secular authority), the condemnations of Anabaptists in the other articles did not accurately apply in the sixteenth century and certainly do not apply today. On these two issues important differences remain and require further dialogue between the two traditions.

²⁰ “Formula of Concord,” Solid Declaration, Article XII, 27: “They hold other similar articles, but they are divided among themselves into many factions with one group holding more errors and another fewer,” in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 658.

CONTEMPORARY WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING THE LANGUAGE OF CONDEMNATION

What is the authority of condemnations? How can the Mennonite Action be seen in relation to the condemnations in the confessions?

Today, Lutherans give a variety of answers to this important interpretative concern: on the one hand, we recognize that condemnations have been a part of statements of faith, at least since the Council of Nicea in 325, where phrases of the Creed familiar to us from liturgical use (e.g., we believe in...) were originally followed by a series of anathemas (e.g., condemned are those who say,...). Similar condemnations may already be found in the New Testament (e.g., Gal 1:8-9; 1 Cor 16:22). Such condemnations may help to define more precisely the positive content of a particular teaching by clarifying those cases when belief in "X" means, at the same time, a rejection of that which is "not X." Doing theology "by negation" can remind Christians that they are confessing a mystery, the whole truth of which is accessible to no one. Seen in this light, such condemnations may even aid ecumenical conversations, both by clarifying what a particular confession is saying and by allowing conversation partners, at whom the condemnation may originally have been aimed, to deny that they hold such a teaching.

On the other hand, condemnations have often restricted serious ecumenical conversations and, in situations where confessions of faith have become connected to governmental authorities, have been used coercively. Moreover, the blind application of condemnations to others can keep Christians from seeing their own "blind spots" and from recognizing the gifts others have to offer. It has sometimes been easy to move from rejecting a position perceived as being dangerous to condemning persons. In these circumstances, condemnations do not have the same authority as positive statements of doctrine and can actually do serious harm.

It is precisely this second set of circumstances that allowed the Eleventh Assembly to repudiate the condemnations of Anabaptists for the way in which they were used in the past. In any case, even in the Augsburg Confession itself, condemnations of doctrine never imply eternal condemnation of people in God's eyes.

What is the intent of the condemnations? How can the Mennonite Action be understood in light of this proper intent?

Because of Lutheranism's commitment to distinguishing between Law and gospel and its focus not only on the definition of doctrine but also on the effect of God's Word, questions of the intent and effect of theological statements and confessions of faith remain a central aspect of our teaching. *The Book of Concord* defines the intent of the confessional documents: to

bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.²¹ This implies that a hermeneutical principle for properly reading these documents must always examine whether one's interpretation fosters that central intent. Seen in this light, the actions at Stuttgart (which themselves implicitly condemned the reformers' own behavior) rejected any use of these confessions that fosters violence. Thus, the witness to the gospel at Stuttgart simultaneously upheld the confessions' own witness and eliminated uses of the confessions that would distort that very witness. By asking the MWC for forgiveness for the way in which the condemnations of these divergences were used to persecute Anabaptists in the sixteenth century, the LWF insisted in no uncertain terms that doctrinal differences should never have been and could never again become an excuse for the coercive use of the Lutheran confessions.

INTERPRETING THE AUTHORITY OF THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS IN LIGHT OF THE ACTION WITH THE MENNONITES

Ecumenical discussions and decisions do not undermine the churches' self-understanding and identity but instead help them better to understand their own witness to the gospel in light of newfound convergences with other Christians. One necessary, initial step on the road to convergence involves setting aside condemnations of one side by the other, in order to clear the way to mutual conversations. The work of the Study Commission and the resultant decision by the LWF represent a fine example of this.

Such an act of reconciliation, however, brings with it two important questions for Lutherans. Given the decision at Stuttgart, how do we understand the authority of the Lutheran confessions and, especially, the teachings of the Augsburg Confession? In view of continuing, deep theological differences between Lutherans and Mennonites, how do we approach matters that still divide our churches?

The decision at Stuttgart did not simply repudiate the misuse of the Lutheran confessions; it also challenged Lutherans to define the authority of these confessions in ways that both support the gospel to which they witness and repudiate the use of violence among Christians to defend the faith. These twin goals demand careful examination of those articles in the Augsburg Confession in which condemnations of Anabaptists occur.

²¹ See, for example, the "Smalcald Articles," II. ii, in, *BC*, *ibid.*, 300–301, especially para. 5.

THE VIEW OF AUTHORITIES IN THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION

When developing such an approach, Lutherans may turn for help to the confessions themselves, where they will find discussions on authorities other than the Bible and even the authority of the confessional writings themselves. One important resource comes in CA XX, where Philip Melancthon, the Augsburg Confession's chief drafter, discusses the various authorities for justification by faith alone.

CA XX has a special place in the document because, unlike most of the other first twenty-one articles, it was not based on articles from previous documents that the reformers brought with them to Augsburg.²² Instead, Melancthon wrote it in Augsburg to answer a very particular challenge by the reformers' opponents, namely that the reformers forbade good works. At the very time the Saxon party entered Augsburg in April 1530, John Eck's wide-ranging attack on their theologians' teaching, *The 404 Articles*, was rolling off Augsburg's presses.²³ Among other things, Eck accused the reformers of forbidding good works, thus charging them with heresy and sedition.

Melancthon's response in CA XX, however, did not simply insist (as had CA VI) that good works were the necessary fruits of faith. Instead, it sharply rejected Eck's charges (CA XX. 1), stating "[o]ur people are falsely accused of prohibiting good works."²⁴ After rejecting the "childish, unnecessary works" of the opponents (listing such things as rosaries, monasticism, fasts and pilgrimages in paragraphs 3-7), he then outlined the reformers' teaching on faith (9-22) and good works (27-34), with an excursus on the nature of faith (23-26) and some concluding statements (35-40).

In his description of justification by faith, Melancthon begins with a definition of justification (CA XX, 9-10).

²² Among the documents that served as sources for the *Confessio Augustana* were the Schwabach and Marburg articles of 1529, the "Visitation Articles" for Saxony of 1528 and Martin Luther's *Confession Concerning the Lord's Supper*, which contained his own general confession of faith in the third section. The articles defending changes in practice among the Reformation churches (XXII-XXVIII) were largely based upon memoranda developed in 1530 during meetings at the Torgau castle and, hence, called the Torgau Articles. For translations of these documents, see Robert Kolb and James A. Nestingen (eds), *Sources and Contexts of the Book of Concord* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001).

²³ *Ibid.*, 31-82.

²⁴ "The Augsburg Confession" in *BC*, op. cit. (note 20), 53. Because it represents a fuller text, the Latin version will be used throughout this section. This sharpness was noted in the Roman response to the CA, the *Confutation*. See *Sources and Contexts*, op. cit. (note 22), 117.

To begin with, they remind the churches that our works cannot reconcile God or merit grace and forgiveness of sins. Rather, we can obtain this only by faith, when we believe that we are received into grace on account of Christ, who alone has been appointed the mediator and atoning sacrifice through whom the Father is reconciled. Therefore, all who trust that they merit grace by works despise Christ's merit and grace and seek a way to God without Christ through human powers, since Christ has said about himself [Jn 14:6a] "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

This statement echoes the language of CA IV and V and, for the first time in the confessors' own words, refers to "faith alone" and "Christ alone."²⁵

What aids the interpretation of the Augsburg Confession in the present context comes in the statements immediately following this definition. In short order, Melanchthon refers to three different authorities for this teaching: first, he reminds the reader that "this teaching concerning faith is treated in Paul everywhere."²⁶ Whereas CA IV had cited Romans 3–4, here he cites Ephesians 2:8–9. In the German version, Melanchthon stresses that Paul treats this teaching about faith "publicly and clearly."²⁷ For the reformers, citing Scripture is not a matter of secret or obscure doctrines but clear, explicit teaching.

Then he introduces references to the Church Fathers, referring to "many writings" of Augustine²⁸ and also to *Concerning the Calling of the Gentiles*,²⁹ which he thought was written by Ambrose but was actually the work of Prosper of Aquitaine. The introduction of these authorities is particularly important here "[s]o that no one may quibble that we have contrived a new interpretation of Paul, this entire approach is supported by the testimonies of the Fathers [*testimonia Patrum*]."³⁰

Lutherans of the sixteenth and the twenty-first centuries were and are not trying to manufacture novel teachings not supported by Scripture. Instead, we rely on the entire tradition of the church for help. This assistance helps to deflect the charge of novelty, especially noteworthy in

²⁵ The term first appears in CA VI,3 (*BC*, 40) but in a citation of a pseudonymous interpretation of the Pauline epistles ascribed in the Middle Ages to Ambrose of Milan. In the sixteenth century, Erasmus of Rotterdam nicknamed the author Ambrosiaster.

²⁶ "The Augsburg Confession" in *BC*, op. cit. (note 20), 55.

²⁷ "Dise lere vom glauben ist offentlich und clar im Paulo an vielen orten gehandelt," in *Die Bekenntnisschriften der Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

²⁸ "The Augsburg Confession" in *BC*, op. cit. (note 20), 55. The German version explicitly mentions Augustin's book, *De spiritu et litera*, in op. cit. (note 27), 121.

²⁹ *De vocatione Gentium et alibi*, in op. cit. (note 27).

³⁰ CA XX, 12, in *BC*, op. cit. (note 20), 55.

our age, where the newness of an idea is seen as commending it. But help also comes in a very particular form, designated by the words “*testimonia Patrum*.”³¹ The question regarding the authority of tradition was and remains hotly contested. The way in which Melanchthon denotes such authority as “testimonies” or “witnesses” clears the way to accept other authorities in the church and to place them in proper relation to Scripture and Christ.

To call the Church Fathers as witnesses to the truth of Scripture helps in two ways. It means that Christians are not in the business of concocting new teachings but, rather, of witnessing to the truth of Christ revealed in Scripture. Such witness is not restricted to the earliest centuries of the church. Indeed, sixteenth-century Lutherans argued that this kind of witness occurred throughout the ages, including such people as Augustine, Bernard of Clairvaux and Johannes Tauler, among others, as such witnesses.³² More importantly, they also included Martin Luther as such a witness, not just in later documents but even in paintings and woodcuts, depicting him as John the Baptist, pointing from Wittenberg’s pulpit to the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29).³³

Alongside the Fathers’ witness, Melanchthon also invokes experience, not as a general category of thinking and feeling or an appeal to individualism, but specifically as the experience of receiving the comfort of the gospel of Christ for the forgiveness of sins. Thus he writes:

Moreover, although this teaching is despised by those without experience, nevertheless devout and anxious consciences find by experience that it offers the greatest consolation. For consciences cannot be calmed by any work, but only by faith when they are certain that they have a God who has been reconciled on account of Christ. As Paul teaches in Romans 5[1]: “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God.” This whole teaching must be referred to that struggle of the terrified conscience, and it cannot be understood apart from that struggle. That is why those who are wicked and without experience judge it badly. For they imagine that Christian righteousness is nothing but civil and philosophical righteousness.³⁴

³¹ For the crucial role of this concept in Philip Melanchthon’s thought, see Peter Fraenkel, *Testimonia Patrum: The Function of the Patristic Argument in the Theology of Philip Melanchthon* (Geneva: Droz, 1961).

³² CA XX also cites an ancient hymn of the church to the Holy Spirit. In its later articles, the CA cites popes, canon law and even the medieval theologian, Nicholas of Cusa (CA XXII.8–12, in *BC*, op. cit. [note 20], 62).

³³ See the “Binding Summary,” 2 and 12–13, of the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord, in *BC*, op. cit. (note 20), 527, 529.

³⁴ CA XX.15–18, in *BC*, op. cit. (note 20), 55.

This third level of authority, already introduced by Martin Luther in his famous tract, “The Freedom of a Christian,”³⁵ also helps to understand how the Lutheran confessions function authoritatively by insisting that the center of Christian faith and experience is the comfort of the gospel of Christ alone. By noticing that Paul’s argument in Romans moved from defining the doctrine of justification by faith (Rom 3–4) to its effect (Rom 5:1), namely peace with God, Melancthon underscores that every teaching in the church be measured not simply by standards of truth but also by its fruits. To confess “Christ alone,” “grace alone” and “faith alone” results in “the greatest consolation” for “devout and anxious consciences.” This examination of the confessions thus provides perspectives from which their enduring authority can be freshly articulated.

THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION AND THE 2010 ACTIONS IN STUTTGART

When the LWF, as a communion of churches, rejected the misuse of the Augsburg Confession as grounds for the persecution of Anabaptists, while insisting on the continued efficacy of its confessions of faith, it expressed the very principles of authority imbedded in CA XX itself.

First, the LWF continues to insist that the center of Scripture clearly teaches that the grace and merit of Christ alone justify us by faith alone in his gracious promises. Because this is the heart of the Augsburg Confession, one may even judge everything in it according to that very center. The Lutheran persecution of Anabaptists, using this confession, does not abrogate its central authority, namely as a witness to the gracious Word of Christ’s death and resurrection for the salvation of the world.

Second, and closely related to this, the Augsburg Confession understands itself as a witness and testimony, pointing not to itself but to the Lamb of God. Because of this, Lutherans do best to restrict their use of this confession to this witness. Thus, when statements in the Augsburg Confession mistakenly condemn others, or when those condemnations and their later use point away from Christ and his mercy, then Lutherans today, in confessing the very faith to which the Augsburg Confession witnesses, must reorient it back to its fundamental purpose. Far from denigrating the authority of the Augsburg Confession, this reorientation actually undergirds it and contributes to its lively use among Lutherans today.

Third, these first two points already reveal the role experience plays in interpreting and teaching the Augsburg Confession and other Lutheran confessions of faith. The point of these documents is not simply to describe

³⁵ Martin Luther, “The Freedom of a Christian, 1520,” in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther’s Works*, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), 343–44.

“right doctrine” but to attest to the comforting message of the gospel. Indeed, such attestation and experience of Christ’s consoling message marks every truly catholic, universal teaching of the church. For this reason, Philip Melancthon concluded the first part of the Augsburg Confession with these words: “As can be seen, there is nothing here that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic church, or from the Roman church, insofar as we can tell from its writers.”³⁶

This means that by emphasizing the message of the gospel, witnessed to by Christians throughout the ages and experienced by all Christians as sheer mercy and consolation, the Augsburg Confession remains an ecumenical, catholic testimony for the entire church and an essential tool for Lutherans in ecumenical discussions. By interpreting the Augsburg Confession in this way, the LWF continues that very witness and enhances the very experience of Christ’s mercy to which the Augsburg Confession itself calls the church. In the entire sweep of ecumenical conversations, never before has one church or communion of churches asked another for forgiveness for the ways in which it has treated the other church. The Augsburg Confession itself and its confession of faith in God’s mercy in Christ assist in freeing Lutherans to take such actions as they did in 2010. These actions strengthen the Augsburg Confession’s authority, preserve it as a living confession of faith and help it to function, to borrow the dynamic words of the Solid Declaration, “as our creed for this age.”³⁷

³⁶ “The Augsburg Confession,” in *BC*, op. cit. (note 20), 59.

³⁷ See the “Binding Summary,” 5, of the Solid Declaration, in *BC*, op. cit. (note 20), 527.

II. CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION ON UNRESOLVED ISSUES: CHRISTIANS AND THE CIVIL USE OF LETHAL FORCE

In the conclusion of *Healing Memories*, the Study Commission looked with hope toward a future of continuing engagement:

Today, living in the forgiveness and reconciliation given by Christ, Mennonites and Lutherans may make observations and raise questions concerning the doctrine and life of the other community in a brotherly and sisterly way. Such conversations will assist each church in developing a self-critical attitude toward its own doctrine and practice.³⁸

These conversations cannot be accomplished once and for all but must arise from current realities and diverse settings:

In a world that changes so rapidly, these questions [put by the two traditions to each other] are constantly evolving, so that both Lutherans and Mennonites must look for answers that are in line with the word of God, take into consideration the insights of their respective traditions, and take seriously the complexity of the world in which we live, act, suffer, and confess our faith in Christ.³⁹

In the spirit of this invitation to conversation, two members of the Task Force agreed further to explore issues around civil authority and the use of lethal force.

The dialogue between them builds on the work of *Healing Memories*, and excerpts from that discussion are included here to introduce the conversation.

THE DISCUSSION OF CHRISTIANS AND CIVIL AUTHORITY FROM HEALING MEMORIES⁴⁰

CA XVI states:

³⁸ *Healing Memories*, op. cit. (note 3), 109, in this publication, 110.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 109-110, in this publication, 110.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 78-84, in this publication, 82-87.

Concerning civic affairs they [i.e., Lutherans] teach that lawful civil ordinances are good works of God and that Christians are permitted to hold civil office, to work in law courts, to decide matters by imperial and other existing laws, to impose just punishments, to wage just war, to serve as soldiers, to make legal contracts, to hold property, to take an oath when required by magistrates, to take a wife, to be given in marriage. They condemn the Anabaptists who prohibit Christians from assuming such civil responsibilities.⁴¹

The article offers a list of teachings that the reformers accuse the Anabaptists of rejecting or denying. Here again, not all of the accusations applied to the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century. Only a few fringe Anabaptists, for example, rejected marriage. Most Anabaptists—along with the Mennonites today—emphasized the principle of mutual aid and the sharing of resources within the community, although they did not fully reject private property.

The most relevant issue raised by this article for the contemporary discussion is whether or not Christians could hold certain offices “without sin,” as it is worded in the German text.⁴² The Lutheran point in this article is not that Christians will never be free from sin in the daily exercise of such offices but that participating in an office is not in itself a sin—so that an office bearer does not sin simply by virtue of carrying out the tasks associated with the office. The article notes five main areas of concern:

- Administrative offices of magistrates and princes
- Juridical tasks, including passing death sentences
- Execution of punishment
- Participation in wars and
- Taking oaths.⁴³

On all of these points, both sixteenth-century Anabaptists and contemporary Mennonites would likely advocate teachings and practices that this article of the Augsburg Confession rejects.

On the general question of the Christian understanding of civil authority, both Anabaptists and Lutherans were challenged regarding how to interpret Christ’s commandment to nonresistant love (e.g., “But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer” [Mt 5:39]) in light of Paul’s apparent affirmation of the temporal sword of government (“For it [the governing authority] is

⁴¹ *BC*, op. cit. (note 20), Latin text, 49.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 48.

⁴³ Questions around oaths, less troublesome for contemporary churches than the use of force, are dealt with in *Healing Memories*, op. cit. (note 3), 79, in this publication, 82.

God’s servant for your good. But if you do what is wrong, you should be afraid, for the authority does not bear the sword in vain!” [Rom. 13:4]). In interpreting these texts, Anabaptists and Lutherans draw quite different distinctions and arrive at quite different conclusions.

In an early summary of Anabaptist shared convictions called “The Brotherly Union of 1527” (sometimes referred to as “The Schleitheim Confession”), Anabaptists in the Swiss and south German regions summarized their understandings of civil government in the following words:

The sword is an ordering of God outside the perfection of Christ. It punishes and kills the wicked, and guards and protects the good. In the law, the sword is established over the wicked for punishment and for death.... But within the perfection of Christ only the ban is used for the admonition and exclusion of the one who has sinned, without the death of the flesh.⁴⁴

Drawing heavily on the teachings and example of Christ, Article 6 of “The Brotherly Union” went on to reject: (1) the Christian’s use of the sword (“Christ teaches and commands us to learn from Him, for He is meek and lowly of heart”); (2) Christians serving as judges (“Christ did not wish to decide or pass judgment between brother and brother. So should we also do”); and (3) Christians acting as magistrates (“Christ was to be made king, but He fled and did not discern the ordinance of His Father. Thus we should also do as He did”). For the Anabaptists, the contrast between the fallen world and the gathered community of Christian believers hinged on these points: “The worldly are armed with steel and armor, but Christians are armed with the armor of God, with truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and with the Word of God.”⁴⁵

Contrary to their contemporaries’ fears, the Anabaptists did not call for resistance to government authority, even in the face of persecution. Since, in accordance with Romans 13, the temporal authorities were “an ordering” of God, they were prepared to obey these authorities as long as obedience was not inconsistent with the commands of Christ (like taking oaths, participating in wars, etc.). Thus, the Anabaptists were not anarchists who sought the destruction of the political order; indeed, they frequently tried to persuade magistrates that they were exemplary subjects in terms of their moral character. Yet, insofar as they questioned whether Christians could legitimately participate in civil society as soldiers, judges and magistrates, Anabaptists seemed to undermine the theological legitimacy of the political community. And the authorities (princes, magistrates and

⁴⁴ *Healing Memories*, op. cit. (note 3), 80, in this publication, 83.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 83, in this publication, 84.

theologians) clearly perceived that the Anabaptist position called their own Christian faith into question.

According to their own understanding of civil authority, the Lutheran reformers appealed to three, interrelated distinctions. God is understood as reigning over the world in two ways. With the left hand, God preserves the world from falling into chaos through continuing creation, thereby using the Law and the temporal authorities to maintain order and restrain sin. With the other hand, God reigns over the world through the gospel, using the preaching of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. By these means, God the Holy Spirit creates faith and brings people into communion with God and with one another. This rule of the right hand is related to the human being insofar as they are called to have a relation to God; the rule of the left is directed to individual human beings insofar as they relate to other human beings, to the world and to themselves. Concerning those persons whose cooperation God uses, there is a third distinction: a person may act for themselves, or—as an office bearer—for others or on behalf of others.

These three distinctions, first employed by Luther but used more generally during the Lutheran Reformation, never function separately, as unfortunately has sometimes been understood. It is one God who reigns in a twofold way, and it is the believer who lives under God in both realms simultaneously. This also means that there is an inner connection between both ways of reigning. Luther frequently stresses this connection. Concerning the apparent conflict between Matthew 5:39 and Romans 13, Luther uses the third distinction stating that as a private person a Christian has to suffer what an evildoer does to them; however, as an office bearer, the Christian has to resist the evildoer.

Mennonites worry that this distinction may result in a refusal to follow Christ's example and words in every aspect of one's life or an inability to recognize the inherent evil in certain walks of life. Lutherans would argue that the Christian practices love in both cases, but that this love takes on a different shape depending on the situation: if a Christian as a private person is hurt by another, they may suffer this and forgive the evildoer; but if a Christian as a judge encounters an offender, the judge has to act on behalf of all and care for the victim. Thus the judge will sentence and punish the evildoer. The judge—as an office bearer, acting not on their own behalf but on behalf of others—practices love of the victim and ensures the peace of the community by resisting the evildoer, whereas the Christian as a private person would be expected to suffer damage from others and to forgive. Thus the question is whether Christian love can take on different shapes, perhaps, in the case of the judicial process, even the opposite shape from what appears to be loving.

Over the past five centuries, Mennonite and Lutheran understandings regarding civil government have changed in light of new circumstances in the state and society. Thus, Lutherans today would not simply repeat CA XVI.

Mennonite thinking has also undergone changes that reflect the context of modern democracies. For example, some Mennonites have moved from a separatist understanding of political witness to a more engaged posture, expressed in active peacemaking, reconciliation, conflict resolution and peace education. Most Mennonites today assume that Christians can and should make an impact on the societies in which they live by working for a world with more justice and for the well-being of all people. Mennonites express political responsibility today in many different ways: in their professions; through the life and witness of the church; and, occasionally, by serving in various levels of political office. In all of this, Mennonites are prepared to work together with Christians of other denominations and with all people of good will.

Nevertheless, most Mennonites continue to define the limit of their involvement at the point of lethal force, whether this is within states (as members of the police force) or in conflicts between states (as members of the military). They believe taking the life of another human being to be contrary to the will of God. It violates the gift of life given by God to each person, is contrary to the teachings of Jesus and bears false witness to the triumph of the resurrection over the cross. Although many Mennonite attitudes have changed since the sixteenth century, most Mennonites still expect church members not to participate in acts of lethal violence or to support war in any active form, even if required to do so by their government. They do, however, have a calling to model reconciliation in their relations with others, to promote peace wherever possible and to offer material and spiritual support to victims of violence.

The “Shared Convictions,” accepted by the MWC General Council in 2006, include the following affirmations:

The spirit of Jesus empowers us to trust God in all areas of life so we become peacemakers who renounce violence, love our enemies, seek justice and share our possessions with those in need. (No. 5)

As a world-wide community of faith and life we transcend boundaries of nationality, race, class, gender and language and seek to live in the world without conforming to the powers of evil, witnessing to God’s grace by serving others, caring for creation and inviting all people to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (No. 7).⁴⁶

These two paragraphs express how Mennonites strive to live in the world, serving critically and constructively in its institutions, while also witnessing to God’s grace in Jesus Christ who loved us while we were still enemies

⁴⁶ www.mwc-cmm.org/sites/default/files/website_files/shared_convictions_en.pdf

(Rom 5), calls us to love our enemies (Mt 5) and enables us, through the resurrection, to face death without fear.

This contemporary development of the Mennonite tradition opens new possibilities for encounters between Mennonites and Lutherans, especially since Lutherans have learned in and from their history. They have recognized that Luther's "doctrine of the two realms"—the two ways in which God rules the world—has often been misunderstood, as if both ways could be separated, so that Lutheran churches too easily adapted to the political and social world in which they lived. Too often they regarded the political and social structures of this world as God-given, not asking whether they should engage in contradicting them and contribute to changing them according to the will of God. Furthermore, princes, kings and other temporal authorities in Germany and other countries exercised oversight of the Lutheran churches in their lands, not only in external matters but also in matters of doctrine (*cura religionis*). This sometimes impeded these churches' distinctive Christian teaching and witness vis-à-vis governmental authority. Due to changes in the constitutional structure of many modern states regarding religious freedom, this kind of church government no longer exists in most countries.

Especially concerning the participation of Christians in wars, Lutherans have tried to draw consequences from the terrible wars of the last century and the beginning of this century. The character of wars, especially their destructive power, has changed in the course of the last centuries. This, in turn, has had consequences for debates over whether a Christian could serve as a soldier "without sin," and whether Luther's distinctions between the office that is good and right and the person who may use it in a bad way (and thus make it a bad thing) are still tenable. Weapons technology continues to change rapidly and wars now wreak such damage that Lutherans have found it necessary to revisit the question of a "just war." In addition, it has become clear that wars have their own "logic" and that they create devastating effects that no one foresees or intends. Thus, even if a war in defense of innocent people against a cruel aggressor may seem "justified," soldiers may still bear some guilt, independently of their personal misconduct.

Nevertheless, Lutherans would ask Mennonites about the ethical consequences of failing to render assistance in an emergency. For example, in their refusal to use lethal violence in defense of innocent people, do they not also become guilty for not offering help to those who desperately need it—especially if, according to all available knowledge, this is the only way to save hostages or other victims from being killed?

Today, Lutheran churches hold a wide variety of opinions, especially concerning the participation of Christians in wars. Some of them may be closer to Mennonite teaching, even though the rationale may be expressed differently.

Thus, it is no longer possible for Lutherans to condemn other Christians outright for refusing to use lethal force, simply on the basis of CA XVI.

Different emphases (e.g., what is one position in Lutheran churches is the predominant position in Mennonite churches and regarded there as a matter of principle), thought structures, theological reasoning, use of the Bible, reference to Jesus Christ as example, etc., clearly still persist. Nonetheless, in this area it is no longer appropriate for Lutherans to express their church's relation to the doctrine of the other by using the word "condemnation," especially as that word was understood in the Augsburg Confession.

THE CONVERSATION CONTINUED

In this exchange, a Lutheran and a Mennonite dialogue partner pose each other questions that express long-standing reservations about the other's position. The two explore how, even in this important area of difference, the questions and the understanding of the other's position have changed since Reformation times. Furthermore, they examine how the remaining differences touch on deeply-held understandings of what discipleship demands. While speaking on the basis of the teachings of their own traditions, the conversation partners also speak personally, from their own understanding of call and commitment and their own contextual experience. Their example invites other Lutherans and Mennonites to engage in similarly searching conversations in their own settings. What, for example, might this discussion look like in a setting where both communities were living as vulnerable minorities under a hostile regime?

MICHAEL MARTIN (HEREAFTER MM) (LUTHERAN): We know that Lutherans and Anabaptist-Mennonites have often understood the Bible in different ways. It is important that we explore these interpretations together. Lutherans, for example, might ask Mennonites how they understand the many examples in the Bible of God's people using violence to carry out God's will.

JOHN ROTH (HEREAFTER JR) (MENNONITE): Yes, at various places in the Old Testament it appears that God sanctions—even demands—that the people of Israel use violence. One important example is the story of the Exodus; but the wars of conquest led by Joshua are also violent, sometimes extremely so. In most of these instances, however, success in these wars is clearly ascribed to God and explicitly not to human efforts. The victory song in Exodus 15, for example, celebrates God's actions, not those of a human hero. The people don't need weapons, because it is God who fights

for them. This is in sharp contrast to the societies around them who wanted the most advanced weapons and who celebrated their military heroes. As with the Israelites' demand for a king, war in the Old Testament is the secondary option—not God's first choice. The prophets' vision is always for a restoration of a peaceable kingdom, one known for its justice and mercy rather than military success.

Moreover, Christians recognize that the fullest expression of God's revelation to humanity is in the person of Jesus Christ. In the Messiah, Christians claim to have seen God's very character and Jesus never called on his followers to use lethal violence against their enemies. Indeed, his teachings and example consistently point us to an ethic of love for all human beings, even if it entails the sacrifice of our own life.

JR: Following that emphasis on the teachings of Jesus, a Mennonite would want to know how Lutherans today interpret the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

MM: Lutheran interpretations of this text vary greatly. We can go back to Luther who rejected the understanding that Jesus' teachings in this sermon only apply to Christians with a special calling to a more "perfect" form of Christian life such as monks or nuns. He taught that Jesus' teachings make us aware that we are sinners but do not provide new commandments for a Christian life. Some Lutheran interpretations look at this text in light of the doctrine of the two realms and Jesus' teaching distinctively interpreted for each one of the realms. In the private realm, one has to love one's neighbor and even one's enemy, and "if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also" (Mt 5:39). But if you have public responsibility, you have to punish the evildoer and to constrain those who are your enemies.

There are also Lutheran interpretations that insist that being salt of the earth and light of the world (Mt 5:13ff) implies not only promises but also duties. Moreover, the fact that Jesus didn't talk only to his disciples who were gathered around him, but to the whole crowd, the public (Mt 5:1), is crucial in order to understand and interpret Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. Therefore, the teachings of Jesus are important for all people, not only for the true believers or a special group of chosen ones. Jesus' teaching is important for everyone, providing good rules for living together, understanding one another and working for a just world. Could this be a theme where Lutherans and Mennonites might find some common ground?

MM: Clearly we could together pursue biblical interpretation at great length. But our conversation needs to focus on our worries regarding our respective position on the use of force. Isn't Christian pacifism naive and unrealistic?

JR: Yes, the argument that Christian pacifism is “unrealistic” seems compelling. It appeals to our most basic instincts (self-defense); it accords well with common-sense notions of justice (“an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”); and it seems to be borne out by the weight of history (appeasing aggressors only encourages more evil). What is not clear in the argument, however—and it is a crucial missing piece—is how this seemingly logical and commonsensical response to violence can be squared with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, arguments for the “just war” were first made by Cicero, the Roman statesman, who lived a full century before Christ. Christ did not teach his disciples that loving enemies was a “strategy” that would always guarantee a positive “outcome,” at least not in the short term. But he did teach that loving others, even in the face of persecution, pointed to a deeper reality than what the fallen world was able to comprehend—namely, that love is ultimately more powerful than hatred, and that in his resurrection Christ has already won the victory over the forces of sin and death. “For the message about the cross,” writes the apostle Paul, “is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God....For God’s foolishness is wiser than human’s wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human’s strength” (1 Cor 1:18–25).

JR: From an Anabaptist-Mennonite point of view, naiveté isn’t all on one side. Aren’t claims regarding just war naive? Have Christians ever stopped their nations from going to war on the basis of these criteria?

MM: You are pointing to a real problem. The original intent was that the criteria for a just war confined war and violence. But it never quite worked as had been hoped. The concept of a just war became an apology for a war which was going to be fought in any case. Therefore, today many Lutherans repudiate the idea of a just war and replace it with the idea of a just peace.⁴⁷ In Germany, for example, this change was described in the 2007 peace memorandum “Live from God’s Peace—Care for Just Peace.”⁴⁸ The title aptly describes this new direction: all peace work is based on the peace given by God, and the ethic of peace unfolds under the overall concept of “just peace.” For the first time, precedence was given to civil conflict resolution over military strategies and to prevention over (military) intervention.

According to this comprehensive understanding of peace, the primary focus is always the prevention of conflicts, whether they are social, economic

⁴⁷ See the LWF publication, Viggo Mortensen (ed.), *War, Confession and Conciliarity. What does “Just War” in the Augsburg Confession Mean Today?* (Hanover: Lutherisches Verlagshaus, 1993).

⁴⁸ *Live from God’s Peace—Care for Just Peace, A Memorandum of the Council of the Evangelical Church in Germany*, at www.ekd.de/english/live_from_gods_peace.html.

or of any other nature. Such a global peace order would require the structural support of a world legal system, “an international order established on a basis of cooperation rather than world government.”⁴⁹ The UN and other multilateral organizations would play a key role in this ethic of peace. Moreover, the linking up of governmental and nongovernmental bodies is important for the creation of an effective peace work, since it is all about finding a peaceful solution to the biggest problems facing humankind. This sort of advocacy is a result of the churches’ conviction that there is no more place for a just war in modern international law.⁵⁰ Neither the right to self-defense nor a *ius ad bellum*, a state’s sovereign right to wage war, can be established as a legitimate institutional reaction to conflict. Generally speaking, the solving of conflict will be placed under the umbrella of the global legal order. A law has to be enforceable and in a constitutional state this leads us to the question regarding the use of force. In the end, the use of force may be authorized only as “a kind of international police action under the rules of the UN Charter.”⁵¹ For such “police action”—e.g., conducted by UN blue helmets—the same general criteria of law preserving force will apply that render possible the exertion of the state’s monopoly of force: reason for permission, authorization and proportionality. With this kind of recognition, our churches have attempted to respond to the weaknesses in the execution of the just war teaching while recognizing a necessary police function, the need at times for the international community to act for the protection of those threatened by a situation of conflict.

MM: This discussion brings me to my key question. Do Christian pacifists suggest that we should look on passively when we encounter violence or genocide? Aren’t there circumstances where violence can only be stopped with coercion that is itself violent?

JR: Yes, sometimes Christian “pacifism” has been confused with “passivism”—a selfish disregard for the suffering of others. But, at their best, Christian pacifists have not only expressed their faith by saying “no” to violence, but also by saying “yes” to actions that promote the public good and actively to intervene on behalf of those who are suffering. Sometimes these actions have been relatively modest—a commitment to truth telling, for example, or to upholding just laws, or publically advocating in favor of those who are weak and vulnerable. At other times, it has taken the form of active service—sharing gifts of time, resources and talents with those in need. And still other times, defending those who are victims of violence has entailed suffering and even death. Christian pacifists

⁴⁹ Ibid., para. 86.

⁵⁰ Ibid., paras 98ff.

⁵¹ Ibid., para. 104.

do not pretend that they have the power to stop violence or genocide; but they also recognize their obligation to do all that is in their power—short of lethal violence—to bring an end to the suffering of others.

JR: Now to my own core question. If Christians use violence to stop violence, aren't we using the same methods that we condemn in our enemies? How does this witness to the Good News of the Gospel?

MM: Indeed, if Christians use violence to stop violence, this is a contradiction to Jesus' teaching, "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Mt 5:44). But is it always possible to avoid violence when acting for justice and peace? If you think about the tasks of the police, in some special cases there is no other option than to use violence against those who use violence themselves. This leads us to the question of whether it is permissible for a Christian to join the police force—and then to the important issue of who is allowed to use violence and when and how we can limit the use of violence against criminals in everyday life.

Another observation I would like to make in response to your question is that only too often and much too early we call for the use of lethal force in conflicts between states and different factions. This is what we experienced for instance during the war in Afghanistan. The Taliban's power could not be eliminated by lethal force. Christians are called to become peacemakers between enemies, to overcome differences and conflicts without weapons and lethal force and we have to be aware that as Christians we need to give preference to nonviolent means of overcoming conflict.

But, in very rare and special situations, if there is no other possibility, then I would say it is necessary—as a last resort—to help the victims of violence, even by using weapons and force. Nonetheless, if we are asked to send weapons to persecuted groups to defend themselves, we first have to assess if there are other possibilities to help those who are being hunted, imprisoned or threatened with death. For Christians the priority has to be nonviolent intervention—to help the persecuted without employing lethal force and to provide possibilities for them to live without killing others.

The main priority for Christians is to "overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21). But there is also a responsibility to protect victims, those who were attacked and threatened. Recently I worked with those whose lives were cruelly put at risk by the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, and I believe we cannot be idle in the face of their suffering. I cannot see a way that would protect the lives of the vulnerable entirely through negotiations and other peaceful means. I think we have a responsibility to help the victims of such horrific suffering—maybe also, in this special case, with lethal violence. We must leave room for such actions.

MM: How do Anabaptist-Mennonites today regard the state, especially its role in promoting social welfare and civic order?

JR: In Romans 13, a classic text for understanding the Christian's relation to the state, the apostle Paul offers both a general summary of the purpose of government and his specific counsel as to how the followers of Christ should relate to those in political authority. What basic themes emerge in this passage? (1) All authority comes from God. To the degree that the authority of the state contributes to order in a world filled with people who are inclined to do wrong, the state serves a useful function, one that Christians should support. (2) Christians are to "be subordinate" to the state, giving the state what it is due. But the actual substance of the Christian obligation to the state is not described in any detail here. The passage does not call on Christians to give full support to everything and anything that the state might demand. (3) Christians should have rather limited expectations of the state or the political process. God has established governing authorities because there are forces of disorder in the world. These authorities serve a useful function of restraining evil and protecting good. Beyond this, however, Paul has little to say about the role of the state. (4) The larger context of Romans 13 is a vision of Shalom in which the church, not the state, is the primary focus of God's activity in the world. And it is this body, the international community of believers who are committed to living in obedience to Jesus Christ, the source of our primary identity that claims our deepest allegiance. In Romans 12, immediately preceding his reflections on governing authorities, Paul instructs the Christians of Rome to a truly radical form of citizenship: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil," he writes. "No, if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink" (Rom 12:17, 20). This is an ethic for the Christian and the gathered body of believers.

Pacifist Christians might legitimately call the state to live up to its own highest principles—fairness, the rule of law, just war principles in times of war and so on. But they do this as informed, concerned citizens, appealing to criteria recognized by all citizens, not as the special pleading of a Christian minority.

JR: What has changed in Lutheran theology since the sixteenth century that makes the idea of a Christian state—in which Christian rulers use their power to promote Christian doctrine—unthinkable for Lutherans today?

MM: It is highly significant that there has not only been a change in Lutheran theology but also a change in the self-understanding and self-interpretation of the state. Nowadays we don't have a Christian state that promotes a state church and refuses all other religions besides Christianity.

Like others in our increasingly complicated interfaith settings, Lutherans have learned respectfully to live together with other religions as good neighbors. Furthermore, Lutherans recognize everybody, even nonbelievers, as the beloved children of God, who have a special dignity because they are all created in God's image. On the other hand, they recognize that preaching the gospel and proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ cannot be combined with the powers of the state. The state has to be neutral towards religious affairs. And it is the task of the Christians and their congregations to promote the Christian doctrine with love and empathy in word and deed.

MM: What are the biggest challenges in Anabaptist-Mennonite congregations today regarding these issues?

JR: The challenges for our congregations vary from country to country. In some settings—particularly those where Christians experience active persecution—the difficulty is to find strategies of survival while also praying that the hearts of their enemies be transformed by the love of Christ. In other settings, the challenges have more to do with integrating a commitment to peacemaking into the fabric of everyday life. This may include: resisting the subtle pressures of nationalism; pursuing habits of reconciliation in our homes and businesses; writing letters to our political representatives to support peaceful alternatives to conflicts; withholding a portion of our income tax in recognition of the fact that the military budget consumes an enormous portion of our national budget; contributing financially to causes promoting the peaceful reconciliation of conflicts; and modeling peacemaking in our families and congregations. However, as a recent survey of MWC congregations made clear, the biggest challenge facing all of our congregations is “the pervasive complexity in moving from what is desired and written on paper, to becoming a bedrock part of the life of the Christian life and community.”

MM: I am grateful for the things we can say together now in ways we were not able to in the sixteenth century.

We agree that Christians are called to strive for justice and peace in the societies in which they live, and there is much work to be done to attain this. Our traditions have come to this common affirmation from different directions but it unites them now in many fields of activity. While Lutherans may not rule out the use of force in all cases, like Christian pacifists they see many occasions where war has been used in ways that they cannot support and they seek to be active before, during and after times of conflict to alleviate suffering. While not all Anabaptists have been

actively engaged in the well-being of society at large, they have increasingly recognized the gifts of peacemaking. They bring and offer those gifts, even when there are aspects of the situation which they find troubling or incompatible with Christian discipleship. We Lutherans are grateful for these forms of collaboration. We are thankful also for the challenge which Anabaptists have brought to our thinking about just war and other uses of force; it has contributed to the changes experienced in our current thinking and practice.

JR: On our side also we give thanks for all the areas of common action that we have developed in recent years. Yet, we do not want to understate our remaining differences. For Christians in Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, the refusal to use lethal force, or to pursue forms of vocational life that might require such force, remains an important mark of following Christ. To use means incompatible with Jesus' teaching and example seems to us to put that discipleship at risk in ways that cannot simply be measured by outcomes. That is our major challenge which we would still want to put to Lutherans. You also take seriously the "theology of the cross"—but does not Jesus' way to the cross demand of us the suffering that can come from non-resistance to violent evil? This is a point I cannot relinquish—and our communities must continue to put these questions on the table when we talk with other Christians.

MM: We need to take this challenge seriously. But we also have a deep commitment that we would want to explore further with you. You speak of the need to accept suffering rather than to seek to overcome it by the use of lethal violence. Luther also speaks of the readiness to suffer for the sake of the gospel—and for Lutheran communities in hostile settings this teaching has been an important source of strength and nonviolent resistance. But what about others whose lives are threatened by this violence? Don't we have a responsibility for them and for the protection of a common life of security and peace—not only as citizens but also as Christians? This is a call on my own life, and the life of my church, from which I cannot turn away.

III. GOOD PRACTICES OF LUTHERAN- MENNONITE COOPERATION AND RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation does not only look at the past but, rather, it looks into a common future and the ways in which cooperation and mutual understanding can be further enhanced. In many places where Mennonites and Lutherans live together, they already recognized one another as Christian sisters and brothers prior to the Mennonite Action at the Eleventh Assembly through common service projects, joint worship services and eucharistic fellowship.

This action of reconciliation gave rise to new forms of cooperation and became a source of inspiration for further joint study, celebration, reconciliation services and joint diaconal projects. This chapter describes some of the processes and projects that were directly inspired by the Mennonite Action and have since then brought Lutherans and Mennonites closer together at the global and local levels. Hopefully these initiatives will serve as a source of inspiration for greater fellowship among Lutherans and Mennonites.

JOINT STUDY PROCESSES

“HEALING MEMORIES, RECONCILING IN CHRIST: A LUTHERAN–MENNONITE STUDY GUIDE FOR CONGREGATIONS”

In order to take seriously the commitments made at the Eleventh Assembly and to provide a solid foundation for nurturing the new relationship between Lutherans and Mennonites, reconciled through a common faith and commitment to Christ, the Mennonite Church Canada and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada jointly prepared the study guide, “Healing Memories, Reconciling in Christ.” The study guide, published in 2010, is designed for use in their respective congregations.

The guide, prepared by Allen Jorgenson, Lutheran pastor and seminary professor, and Margaret Loewen Reimer, Mennonite editor and writer, describes the historical relationship between Lutherans and Mennonites in a way acceptable to both churches. It illustrates how the differences between the two confessions arose and attempts to reconcile the misunderstandings. While prepared in Canada, the guide may well be suitable for use by congregations in other parts of the world.

Lutherans and Mennonites are encouraged together to work through the study guide wherever possible. Four one-hour sessions include material from the report of the Study Commission as well as questions, relevant Bible studies and prayers. Links to video clips are included.

The study guide outlines both churches' beginnings in the religious turmoil of the Reformation in Europe and uses this as a context for examining the condemnations against Anabaptists in the Augsburg Confession of 1530. Participants are invited to look at how events and differing understandings of the Bible have shaped the Lutheran and Anabaptist confessions of faith and their attitudes toward other Christians. Furthermore, it explores the meaning of forgiveness and what its significance might be for both churches at the present time. It is carried by the conviction that facing the blight of separation and condemnation in our past in a spirit of repentance can help us more meaningfully to celebrate the 500th anniversaries of the beginnings of Lutheran and Mennonite Reformations (1517 and 1525 respectively).

The material is available online at www.elcic.ca/Documents/Lutheran-MennoniteStudyGuidefinal_web.pdf

TRILATERAL DIALOGUE BETWEEN LUTHERANS, MENNONITES AND ROMAN CATHOLICS ON BAPTISM

Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ identified baptism as one of two major issues requiring further theological exploration between Lutherans and Mennonites. The same issue was raised in 2003 by the report of the bilateral dialogue between the MWC and the Catholic Church, *Called Together to be Peacemakers*. Thus, when the Pontifical Council approached the MWC to propose a dialogue on baptism, the MWC replied that this topic could be taken up by all three traditions together. The resulting international trilateral dialogue was an innovative process that was charged to continue on the path of increased mutual understanding and cooperation on which these communions have advanced in recent years by focusing on foundational matters concerning the understanding and practice of baptism.

The timeliness of the trilateral dialogue was further enhanced by the horizon of the two, above mentioned, upcoming half-millennial anniversaries. The church representatives commending the formation of such a dialogue body expressed the hope that, building on the progress toward healing of memories that had begun among their communions, the formation of a trilateral dialogue process would also be able to address the ignorance, misunderstandings and stereotypes of one another that still persist in respective churches. According to the proposal for a trilateral dialogue, the aim of this dialogue was identified as “to help one another

grow in faithfulness to Jesus Christ as we face the pastoral and missional challenge to the practice and understanding of baptism in our time.”⁵²

The first meeting of the trilateral dialogue commission between Catholics, Lutherans and Mennonites was held in Rome, 10–14 December 2012. Since then, the dialogue commission has been discussing the overall theme “Baptism and Incorporation into the Body of Christ, the Church,” exploring different aspects of how baptism is being understood in the respective churches. Next to academic presentations, Bible studies on relevant Scripture passages were carried out at each dialogue group meeting.

The discussions have so far concentrated on theology and the practice of baptism, especially as entry into the Church and into a life of discipleship. The mutually enriching conversations have helped to identify convergences as well as still existing differences in the understanding of baptism. While Mennonites continue to stress the age of accountability for a baptismal candidate, Lutherans and Catholics argue for paedobaptism on the grounds of faith and the concept of original sin. All three traditions accept that God is the actor in baptism, which is also the basis on which Catholics and Lutherans practice paedobaptism. There is also unanimity about discipleship and holy living as a mark of Christian identity and a strong convergence on the understanding that Christian discipleship includes advocacy for social justice.

The report of the trilateral dialogue commission will be finalized in 2017, marking the 500th anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation.

JOINT DIACONAL PROJECTS

The Mennonite Action at the Eleventh Assembly has been an impulse for a number of joint Lutheran–Mennonite diaconal initiatives at the global and local levels. In the following, two examples of such cooperation will be presented; the first of them is an example of global cooperation and the second of a local initiative.

MENNONITE SUPPORT TO DADAAB REFUGEE CAMP

In 2011, the Pennsylvania-based Mennonite Central Committee, a relief and development agency, pledged a contribution of USD 369,500 to the work of the LWF in Dadaab refugee camp in Kenya. This refugee camp is managed by the LWF on behalf of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and is home to almost half a million refugees fleeing war and famine in Somalia. Both Mennonites and Lutherans regarded this as a practical expression of the reconciliation that was celebrated in Stuttgart

⁵² Ibid.

in 2010. Rev. Eberhard Hitzler, at the time director of the LWF Department for World Service, said that this contribution meant much more than just financial assistance for the LWF as it was a symbol and an expression of the beauty that grows out of reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites.

The Mennonite contribution included such practical items as mosquito nets but the major part of the support was designated for education, specifically capacity building projects. The Mennonites had decided to support the LWF's plan to conduct capacity training for 300 teachers (refugees) over a period of three years (2012–2014), each year targeting 100 learners. During the first year, 108 learners, 90 refugee teachers and 18 teachers from the host community, were reached—8 persons more than initially planned. The aim was to enable teachers to acquire better teaching skills, including the ability to develop curricula.

One of the teachers who participated in the program described his experience as follows:

My name is Abdi Jere. I am 26 years old. I teach at Iftin Primary School in Hagera camp. I started teaching in 2009 after having attained grade C in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary School Education in 2008. I decided to teach in order to help my community and so to contribute back to the community.

I did not know much about teaching, except for imitating my former teachers. After one year of teaching without skills, I joined AVSI for a capacity building course which gave me basic teaching skills. I thank the LWF for giving me another opportunity to be trained. This course is superior to the capacity building I initially underwent. This one helps me to understand education issues better. For example, the aspects of educational psychology, particularly the concept of individual differences, makes me a better teacher. It gives me skills better to understand my pupils. I handle my pupils depending on their level of ability. The teaching methodologies and classroom observations are wonderful and this has made me a better teacher. I no longer harass my pupils but support them to understand what they learn. All this is because of the child-friendly methodologies that I have learnt through the LWF diploma program. At the end of the course, I believe I will be one of the celebrated professional teachers from the camp.⁵³

LUTHERANS AND MENNONITES GROW TOGETHER: A JOINT GARDEN PROJECT

Sometimes growing fruits and vegetables together can help to grow more closely together as communities. A joint Lutheran–Mennonite garden project was initiated in Harleysville, PA., USA, by Mennonites and Lutherans.

⁵³ See also, “Mennonites Support Lutheran Efforts in Horn of Africa,” in *Anglican Journal* (July 16, 2013).

The initial impulse for this joint project came from the Lutheran pastor Steve Godsall-Myers from Advent Lutheran Church. He used to ride past a one-acre community garden on the grounds of Salford Mennonite Church, not far from the congregation where he was serving. Impressed by this community garden and still having in mind the LWF Mennonite Action in Stuttgart, he was keen to establish a closer relationship with local Mennonite neighbors and to realize this reconciliation in his own context. Mutual trust was created between the two communities, and the Mennonites invited the Lutherans to join their garden project which had been brought to fruition six years earlier. The produce of the garden benefits those in need: local senior centers, a social service agency, a food pantry and soup kitchen and people living with hardship.

Every winter, a garden fundraiser dinner is held at Salford to pay for seed and supplies. A team of volunteers from Salford Mennonite Church and Advent Lutheran Church tend to the garden: they plant, weed, water and harvest. On Saturday mornings, the garden is open to neighbors and visitors from the community who can pick up a little produce for themselves, or help the garden team with their regular Saturday morning harvesting for distribution.⁵⁴

Christine Gross of Salford Mennonite describes the cooperation as follows:

To this day, the people of Salford Mennonite and Advent Lutheran continue to forge friendships as we serve the same God, side by side, on our knees, as we cultivate our community garden. There is a deep sense of mission and calling as both congregations develop a respect and love for each other and our common neighbors. When people from both faith communities gather to serve and worship together, we are truly one in Jesus Christ. Each Thanksgiving Eve, the congregations join together for a joint service of gratefulness to God for God's goodness to us. During this service, members of both congregations are encouraged to share how the Spirit has been at work among them.

JOINT CELEBRATIONS AND WORSHIP SERVICES

Since formal dialogues between Lutherans and Mennonites commenced more than thirty years ago, many local Lutheran and Mennonite groups have extended ecumenical hospitality to each other through shared worship

⁵⁴ See also Mark A. Staples, "Lutherans & Mennonites Grow Together. Garden Plants Seeds of Trust," in *The Lutheran* (April 2013), at www.salfordmc.org/church-garden.html.

services. The reconciliation service at the Eleventh Assembly has given the impulse for many local or regional reconciliation services and celebrations.

JOINT CELEBRATIONS: TREE PLANTING

Mennonite tree planting and a joint symposium in Wittenberg

The *Luthergarten* (Luther Garden)—an initiative of the German National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation, the LWF and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany—is a living memorial to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. On the grounds of the former fortifications, 500 trees are being planted by Lutheran churches from all over the world and their ecumenical partners. These trees are a living and vital symbol of the optimism so clearly expressed in the saying ascribed to Luther, “Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree.” The garden bears witness to the fact that the reform movement, which started 500 years ago, is still alive today and has become a global citizen. At the same time, the trees symbolize the connectivity and solidarity among the different denominations today.

At the center of the garden, trees have been planted by the LWF’s main ecumenical partners in the form of a Luther rose. The first “ecumenical” trees were “adopted” by the Anglican Communion, the World Methodist Council, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church already prior to the Eleventh Assembly. The Mennonites did not participate in this first round because it was considered to be better to wait for the “fullness of time” in the Lutheran-Mennonite process of reconciliation after the Assembly. Finally, on 1 October 2011, the time had come. Larry Miller, at the time general secretary of the MWC, planted a red maple tree in a prominent position in the Luther Garden, right next to the LWF tree. Those two adjacent trees are an impressive symbol of the extent to which relations between Lutherans and Anabaptists have changed since the Reformation. The trees are a visible reminder to all visitors to Wittenberg that both churches have gone through a process of healing memories and that they now live and work together fully reconciled. The second tree on behalf of the German Mennonites was planted by Frieder Boller, president of the Association of Mennonite Congregations in Germany.

The Mennonite tree planting in Wittenberg was accompanied by a Lutheran-Mennonite symposium on the topic, “Healing of Memories—Reconciliation in Christ,” which celebrated the reconciliation process and discussed new possibilities of cooperation in the future. In a joint lecture, Rainer Burkart and Michael Martin—a Mennonite and a Lutheran and both key figures in the German Mennonite-Lutheran dialogue—testified to their own ecumeni-

cal learning experience and embedded their own ecumenical journey in the history of persecution, pain and, finally, rapprochement between Lutheran and Mennonites in Germany. They highlighted the key points of the German and international dialogues between the two denominations. The discussions showed that while differences between the two churches (e.g., church–state relations, peace ethics) remain, these can be discussed today in an atmosphere of mutual friendship, appreciation and fellowship.

The day ended with a eucharistic service at the historic Stadtkirche in Wittenberg, where Martin Luther used to preach. The service acknowledged the divisions and the pain of the past and pointed out that by turning to the center of Scripture—Christ—a real transformation can take place on both sides. The Lord’s Supper was celebrated according to the Mennonite tradition. The Presiding Bishop of the United Evangelical Lutheran Church of Germany, Dr Johannes Friedrich, preached. Meditating on John’s account of Jesus washing his disciples feet, he said,

In Stuttgart we promised each other to journey together from now on, to accept each other more deeply and to serve each other because Christ has served us. In this mindset we came together today in Wittenberg. This morning the Mennonite World Conference planted a tree in the Luther Garden. This is so much more than a symbolic act. It is a sign that we are deeply committed to strengthen the ties between us and to make sure that our good intentions will be far more than just nice words. Rather, they have to be followed by deeds of love, because symbols can only unfold their power when they are grounded in reality. Otherwise symbolic actions would be utterly superfluous. Yet, we are convinced of their power and therefore it was a strong sign that Danisa Ndlovu presented the president of the LWF last year with a bucket and a towel and reminded us of how Jesus washed the feet of his disciples before his passion.⁵⁵

The planting of corresponding trees and festive events

Each church that adopts a tree in Wittenberg is invited to plant a corresponding tree in a place of significance to them.

In light of the commitment to plant a tree on Mennonite soil for each tree planted by a Mennonite in the Luther Garden, the MWC and the Dutch Mennonites planted a tree at the Mennorode conference center in connection with the recent Dutch Mennonite 200th anniversary celebrations. Another “Mennonite tree” was planted in Germany outside the *Mennokate* (Menno’s small cottage) in Bad Oldesloe, where Menno Simmons spent the last years of his life.

⁵⁵ Special thanks to OKR Dr Oliver Schuegraf for his report on the Mennonite tree planting and symposium held in Wittenberg.

Tree plantings followed elsewhere in the world. On 10 April 2012, a river birch tree with three trunks but one root system was planted outside of the Mennonite offices in Elkhart, Indiana, home of the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary and offices of the Mennonite Church USA. It was noted that the one root system symbolized the roots we share in God's love and grace, while the three trunks remind us that "as we grow in relationship we maintain our own identity even as Christ is always present with us as a third partner." The ceremony was part of a daylong event that commemorated several decades of Lutheran-Mennonite dialogue and marked the reconciliation between two communions.

RECONCILIATION SERVICE IN THE CHURCH ST BLASII IN ZELLA-MEHLIS IN GERMANY

The reconciliation service at the Eleventh Assembly of the LWF included the testimony of the Anabaptist martyr, Barbara Unger, who came from Zella-Mehlis in Germany.⁵⁶ Almost 500 years later, on 18 March 2012, a joint Lutheran-Mennonite reconciliation service, inspired by the "Mennonite Action" in Stuttgart, was celebrated in the church St Blasii in Zella-Mehlis together with representatives of the Mennonite congregation in Bad Königshofen in the neighboring Bavaria. The Mennonites were happy to accept the invitation, noting that although the way from Northern Bavaria to Thuringia is not a long one in terms of miles, it was a long one in terms of church history—leading through a barely known landscape, accompanied by ignorance and suspicion.⁵⁷

The commemoration of local Anabaptist martyrs helped to bring the Lutheran-Mennonite reconciliation process closer to the local Lutheran congregation. On the one hand, it helped to shed some light on the dark sides of the Reformation that had been largely forgotten by Lutherans. Days before the actual reconciliation service, a public seminar had been held at the congregation that provided some historical background to the persecution of the Anabaptists by the Lutheran authorities.

On the other hand, the service of reconciliation and the Anabaptist witness opened the way to many more questions and reflections with regard

⁵⁶ See Appendix I, 184.

⁵⁷ See also Hannelore Frank, "Demütig das Schweigen brechen, 26. 03. 2012," in *Glaube+Heimat. Mitteldeutsche Kirchenzeitung*, at www.glaube-und-heimat.de/2012/03/26/demutig-das-schweigen-brechen/; VELKD, *Heilung der Erinnerungen—Versöhnung in Christus. Lutheraner und Mennoniten auf dem Weg der Versöhnung*, Texte aus der VELKD, Nr. 163 (May 2012).

to the situation today. In the words of Frieder Boller from the Association of Mennonite Assemblies in Germany:

The witness of Anabaptist and other martyrs challenges us today—in our post-Christian or non-Christian societies—to live as the Body of Christ. They point us to Jesus. He exhorts and encourages us to live in the community of God's shalom, to speak prophetically in this world, to be non-violent in our actions, to serve others and to bring about reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

TAKING CARE THAT OUR ACTIONS MAY BEAR FRUIT

The actions taken in 2010—both by the LWF and the MWC in response—elicited great joy in perceiving the Spirit of God to be at work toward reconciliation. The work of this Task Force has been to respond to the commitments made at that moment, providing both resources and examples for moving forward, in the conviction that this work of the Spirit has not finished with our churches.

ON TEACHING THE LUTHERAN CONFESSIONS

This report has provided three kinds of resources for interpreting the Augsburg Confession. There is both detailed examination of problematic texts from this document and an interpretative framework to see the living authority of the confessions of the Lutheran churches as strengthened—not only not undermined but actually made stronger for our time—by interpreting them in the light of repentance and reconciliation with the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. These resources can help, especially in teaching the confessions. Therefore, this report will be distributed not only to member churches but also to networks of theologians and theological institutions.⁵⁸

In addition there is the matter of how the Augsburg Confession is presented in its published and online forms. Already before 2010, the Hymnal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria, Germany, had printed with the Augsburg Confession an annotation which concludes: “The doctrinal conversations between the different churches, which continue to this day, have resulted in a situation where these condemnations no longer reflect the current status of relations among churches and faith communities.” (See Appendix II.) Other churches might consider such a clarifying note, which could make explicit reference to the action of the Eleventh Assembly, in notes to texts of the confessions that they make available online or in other ways.

⁵⁸ As an example of how the MWC has encouraged Mennonite educational institutions to take up the commitments made in 2010uj, see Appendix III, 195ff.

ON EXPLORING UNRESOLVED ISSUES

The Study Commission producing *Healing Memories: Reconciled in Christ* identified two principal issues requiring theological reflection. Baptism had obvious urgency in the lives of local communities, and so it was made the focus of the innovative three-way dialogue concerning baptism, which brings together not only Mennonites and Lutherans but also Roman Catholics.

This report contains a brief conversation between a Mennonite and a Lutheran on a particular aspect of the relationship of Christians and the church to civil power. While lacking the breadth and authority of a dialogue convened by international bodies, this conversation illustrates the possibilities for respectful engagement and honest, mutual admonition in the context of warm relationships. Conversations in different contexts would undoubtedly identify the common challenges in different ways. What would such an encounter look like, for example, between people living in contexts of religious oppression? What challenge and encouragement could they offer to one another?

ON DEEPENING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH COMMON PRAYER AND BIBLE STUDY, SHARED HUMANITARIAN ENGAGEMENT AND COMMON WORK FOR PEACE

FROM 2010 TO 2017 AND BEYOND

Events preceding the Mennonite Action of the 2010 LWF Assembly began with the celebration of the 450th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession. This led to the discovery of unhealed wounds in the relations of Lutherans to their Anabaptist-Mennonite sisters and brothers. Finding ways forward demanded resources from all aspects of life: from relationships forged in collaborative work, through rigorous historical and theological inquiry, worship and prayer. In the repentance offered and forgiveness extended, Lutherans and Mennonites acted from the heart of their Christian faith.

Now a cluster of anniversaries present themselves. In 2017, Lutherans will commemorate the beginnings of their movement of reformation—to be followed by a host of 500th anniversaries for all Christian families shaped by the sixteenth century, including the Mennonites who celebrate the 500th anniversary in 2025. While the member churches of the LWF had addressed difficult and sinful aspects of their heritage before, notably in relation to anti-Jewish elements in their tradition, the experience of the Eleventh Assembly had a distinctive power in the clarity of the act of repentance and the immediacy of the Anabaptist-Mennonite response. Such an action proved an invaluable preparation for the spirit in which 2017 has been anticipated. Repentance for the shortcomings and even sinfulness of the sixteenth-century legacies do not compete with celebrating the power of “liberation by God’s grace”; rather, they emphasize that very grace and unleash that liberation.

Anniversaries point both to the past and to the future. They present opportunities for assessing one’s relation to the past. They also are occasions for new beginnings. In the relationship between Lutherans and Anabaptist-Mennonites both these aspects have been evident. Hard, even painful, work of reevaluating the past has opened the way for new relationships. Trees of hope have been planted. Now is the time to take care that the fruits continue to be nurtured and harvested.

APPENDIX I

SERVICE OF REPENTANCE AT THE LWF ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY IN STUTTGART, 22 JULY 2010

MARTYR BALLAD AND TESTIMONIES, ENGLISH

The Martyr Ballad will be sung in German; testimonies will be given in English, German and Spanish.

ANABAPTIST MARTYR BALLAD: ALS CHRISTUS MIT SEIN WAHREN LEHR

1. On gathering his little flock around him,
Christ said: "Carry the cross patiently, every day.
2. Loving followers, be of good courage at all times.
Love nothing on earth more than me and follow my teachings.

[3. The world will persecute, mock, and despise you.
It will doggedly pursue you, and call you Satan possessed.]
4. When you are disparaged and scorned, and because of me persecuted and
beaten,
Rejoice, for your reward is awaiting you before God's throne.
5. Look at me; I am the Son of God.
At all times I did what was right, and yet they killed me.
6. They said I had an evil spirit and called me a deceiver of people.
The world resisted my message of truth, and it will resist you too.
7. But do not fear those that can only kill the body.
Rather, fear the faithful God, who has condemned them.

[8. God tests you like gold, lovingly because you are his children.
And if you abide by God's teachings I will never forsake you.]

9. For I am yours and you are mine. So where I am, you will also be.
And whoever molests you also violates me. Woe to them on Judgment Day!

[10. Your misery, terror, fear, need and pain will be your great joy on that day!
Your shame will turn into glorious praise and honor before the heavenly host.”]

11. The Apostles accepted this and taught it to everyone,
so that whoever wants to follow the Lord Jesus, should be prepared for this.
12. Christ, help your people to follow you faithfully,
so that through Your bitter, painful death, we are saved from all distress.
13. Praise be to you O God, on Your throne and also to your beloved Son and
the Holy Spirit,
who will yet call many to His Kingdom.

Words by Michael Sattler († 1527), Translation by Galen A. Peters and John R. Peters

A. TESTIMONIES: THE COSTS OF PERSECUTION AND ITS LEGACIES⁵⁹

TESTIMONY I: FRIEDER BOLLER, CHAIR, ASSOCIATION OF MENNONITE ASSEMBLIES IN GERMANY

Barbara Unger was a young mother of four children. With others, she chose to be baptized in 1529. That was her YES to following Jesus and her YES to living with brothers and sisters in visible community. They wanted to be a community incarnating the Body of Christ – where daily life demonstrated the practical effects of justice, non-violence and love of their neighbor.

She and the others who were baptized were prepared for what might come.

“Anyone who wants to be a proper Christian must leave behind all they possess and suffer persecution until death” they were warned.

No, martyrdom was neither sought nor glorified at the time. It was only lived and accepted as the unavoidable consequence of their witness. That was rooted in the confidence: “What can separate us from the love of Christ...” (Rom 8:35)

⁵⁹ Op. cit. (note 1), 51ff.

Barbara Unger was executed, with others, in Reinhardtsbrunn, Thuringia, on 18 January 1530, barely 18 months after her baptism.

There is plenty of documentation that those persecuted had already forgiven their tormentors. They did so in the spirit of the Lord's Prayer and that Jesus had prayed, "Forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing".

And yet the blood witnesses in those times also remind us of Jesus's words: "Look, I send you out like sheep among wolves." (Mt 10:16)

Today we see ourselves seriously confronted with the awkward question, What would I be ready to die for?

What are we willing to give up—for heaven's sake? What do we live and work for to the last?

The witness of Anabaptist and other martyrs challenges us today—in our post-Christian or non-Christian societies—to live as the Body of Christ. They point us to Jesus.

He exhorts and encourages us to live in the community of God's shalom, to speak prophetically in this world, to be non-violent in our actions, to serve others and to bring about reconciliation.

And not least to invite others to join us and accompany them as we follow Jesus together.

Hymn 63: Senzenina – What have we done? (in Xhosa)

**TESTIMONY 2: THEODOR DIETER, DIRECTOR, INSTITUTE FOR
ECUMENICAL RESEARCH STRASBOURG, AND CO-SECRETARY OF THE
LUTHERAN-MENNONITE INTERNATIONAL STUDY COMMISSION**

Lutherans today recognize and deeply regret that Luther and Melancthon theologically supported the persecution and even execution of Anabaptists—against their own earlier insight that conflicts of true and false doctrine had to be overcome by the word of God, not by the sword. Lutheran reformers accused Anabaptists of being seditious since they denied that Christians could hold an office of temporal authority, even though most of the Anabaptists strictly refused to use violence. Moreover, Lutheran reformers regarded the Anabaptist understanding of baptism, especially their refusal to baptize infants, as blasphemy, which had to be punished by capital punishment according to the 1000-year-old law of the Roman Empire. For this Lutherans appealed to the Mosaic Law, even though Martin Luther had formerly declared a direct appeal to the Old Testament to be theologically illegitimate. The reformers did not have a precise and differentiated perception of Anabaptists; nevertheless, they drew sharp consequences from their limited understanding of the movement. In defending the gospel, the reformers in this case chose strategies that contradicted this very gospel. Therefore Lutherans who continue to adhere to

the foundational insights of Lutheran Reformation fittingly ask Mennonites for forgiveness for the Reformers' misperception, misjudgment and misrepresentation of the Anabaptists and all the harm that originated from them.

Hymn: Senzenina - What have we done? (in Xhosa)

**TESTIMONY 3: LARRY MILLER, GENERAL SECRETARY, MENNONITE
WORLD CONFERENCE, AND CO-SECRETARY OF THE LUTHERAN-
MENNONITE INTERNATIONAL STUDY COMMISSION**

From the beginning of the movement, as you have heard, Anabaptists interpreted their persecution as a confirmation of faithful Christian discipleship. Over the centuries and around the world, stories of faithful suffering became a vital shaper of Anabaptist-Mennonite identity.

In 1660 a Dutch Mennonite pastor compiled these accounts into this influential book, the *Martyrs Mirror*. Second only to Christ as example here is Dirk Willems. Imprisoned for his beliefs, Willems escaped and fled across an icy pond. A soldier chasing him fell through the ice and called out for help. Willems returned to rescue his drowning pursuer. His compassion allowed his recapture, and he was executed.

Yet even as we actively treasure these memories as models, we acknowledge that such remembering, through the centuries and into the present, has come with a price. In our conversations with you and others we have come to see the costs more clearly.

At times, our versions of martyr stories have reduced complex history to simple morality tales of good and evil, in which historical actors are either Christ-like or violent.

At times, we have remembered Lutheran reformers primarily for their arguments and actions against Anabaptists, thereby minimizing the broader theological contributions of these reformers to the Christian church and, indeed, to our own movement.

At times, we have claimed the martyr tradition as a badge of Christian superiority. We sometimes nurtured an identity rooted in victimization that could foster a sense of self-righteousness and arrogance, blinding us to the frailties and failures that are also deeply woven into our tradition.

We too are communities in need of healing and forgiveness. In this action between us there is, for Anabaptist-Mennonites also, the promise of release and renewal.

Lord, help us to remember rightly. Lord, inspire us to speak truthfully. Lord, enable us to walk humbly.

Hymn: Senzenina - What have we done? (in Xhosa)

B. TESTIMONIES: SEEDS OF RECONCILIATION AND PEACE

TESTIMONY 1: EDUARDO MARTÍNÉZ, PRESIDING BISHOP OF THE EVANGELICAL-LUTHERAN CHURCH IN COLOMBIA – IELCO

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

During the Regional Latin American and Caribbean LWF Pre-assembly we met with the Mennonite Church brothers and sisters in Colombia, and while we expressed our wish to ask them for forgiveness for the religious intolerance of Lutherans in the past, I realized the meaning of this act of reconciliation between churches in the context and situation we are living in our country.

Colombians have long suffered violence, largely due to the inability of many to tolerate ideological, political or religious differences.

The act of reconciliation of two churches which recognize the importance of healing wounds of the past in order to be able to live in peace in the present gives a message of vital importance to our society. In order to advance firmly in the construction of a sustainable peace, we need to reconcile ourselves departing from the recognition of the errors we have made as society in the past and in the present.

TESTIMONY 2: MICHAEL MARTIN, DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT “ECUMENICAL AFFAIRS AND CHURCH LIFE,” EVANGELICAL- LUTHERAN CHURCH IN BAVARIA, GERMANY

Mennonites and Lutherans held intensive conversations from 1989 to 1992. They came closer theologically and extended a mutual invitation to the Lord’s Supper. A further outcome of the dialogue was a statement by the United Evangelical Lutheran Churches of Germany (VELKD) that affirmed that the doctrinal condemnations of the Reformation period against the Anabaptists are not relevant to today’s Mennonite churches. They then confessed their guilt in two joint services, and asked for forgiveness—as we are doing here today in Stuttgart for our worldwide communion.

It was clear at the time that we could not simply alter the historical text of the Augsburg Confession of 1530. But the point was to state that the condemnations contained in the Augsburg Confession do not apply to today’s partners in dialogue.

This affected the inclusion of the Augsburg Confession when we were re-editing the hymnal of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria. The introduction to it now reads: “Thanks to the doctrinal dialogues held between the different churches up until the present, the condemnations no longer reflect the current state of relations among the churches and faith communities.”

We do not intend to play down the historical wrongdoing. However, this interpretative comment on our *Augsburg Confession* is meant to reflect the change in relations between our churches. In face of the suffering of the past, we can now go our way together in reconciliation—praising God and testifying to God’s good message of peace, hope and love.

**TESTIMONY 3: SUSAN C. JOHNSON, NATIONAL BISHOP,
EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH IN CANADA AND JANET
PLENERT, EXECUTIVE SECRETARY (WITNESS), MENNONITE
CHURCH CANADA, AND VICE PRESIDENT OF THE MENNONITE
WORLD CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Janet:

When I heard Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko speak in front of 7000 Mennonites at our global Assembly in Paraguay last summer, I knew this would be an important agenda for both our churches in the coming years.

Last year a \$3000 surplus in a small rural Canadian Mennonite congregation resulted in an invitation to the local Lutheran congregation to plant a field of grain together. The project grew, and received matching funding, and 130,000 Canadian dollars were donated collaboratively to help the hungry in the world, to share daily bread.

Susan:

Our churches have worked together for many years through ecumenical forums in the areas of advocacy for peace and justice and in relief and development. Now we feel a call to deepen this relationship.

In anticipation of this day, we have begun joint work on a congregational resource to be used by both our church families. This will help us learn about our shared history and this apology, and most importantly, begin to forge new ways of collaboration as a reconciled part of the body of Christ.

Janet:

In Canada, we will host a series of regional events for joint study and worship. The first will be hosted by Conrad Grebel University and Waterloo Lutheran Seminary this November.

God is giving us a new heart and a new spirit.

Susan:

We are confident that we will be blessed, and we pray that we may be a blessing to others.

Thanks be to God!

APPENDIX II

As Lutherans begin to read the Augsburg Confession in light of the Menno-nite Action taken in 2010 at the Eleventh Assembly of the LWF in Stuttgart, Germany, it may be helpful to provide additional aids for such study. Each church within the LWF communion of churches will need to determine how best to do this. The suggestions that follow are not meant to obscure the chief intent of the original drafters or signers of the Augsburg Confession or to undermine its authority, but simply to help today's readers with their continued reflection, given the events that took place in Stuttgart.

INTRODUCTION TO THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION⁶⁰

The Augsburg Diet, convened by Emperor Charles V in 1530, was to bring about a resolution to the increasingly pressing religious issues; a division within the Church seemed well-nigh inevitable. At other diets held during the preceding years, the different theological positions had already become clear (cf. the Speyer protestation of 1529). The object had been to highlight diverging understandings on specific points of practical belief but, in the end, a comprehensive exposition of the faith was presented at the Diet of Augsburg. In a first section, this contains the chief tenets of doctrine and, in a second section, statements regarding the abolition among the Protestants of particular ecclesial practices.

Originally, by setting out the articles of the Augsburg Confession for the purpose of clarification, the reformers sought to reestablish common ground with the Catholic Church. In terms of its intention it is, therefore, an ecumenical confession. In point of fact, however, it became, in the course of events, the core creedal document of the Lutheran family of Protestant churches, and was not able to prevent schism.

The Augsburg Confession was drawn up by Philipp Melancthon, in Latin and German. The two versions differ in a number of places; the German version is no verbatim translation of the Latin. Yet, they both express, each in its own way, the core elements of Protestant conviction as it had been formed by 1530. Later, Melancthon's "Treatise on the Power and Primacy

⁶⁰ *Evangelisches Gesangbuch. Ausgabe für die Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirchen in Bayern und Thüringen* (Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Bayern; Evangelischer Presseverband für Bayern e.V), 1564–65.

of the Pope, 1537” was also included into the *Book of Concord*. A group of Protestant princes and imperial cities signed the *Confessio Augustana* (CA), which was presented to the Emperor on the occasion of the Diet. The Preface explicitly states the signatories’ willingness to discuss the issues at stake and the Conclusion reiterates the confession’s conformity with Scripture and with the creed of the early church.

The doctrinal condemnations found in the Augsburg Confession are rooted in the sixteenth century. Today, for the most part, they do not apply to the doctrines of the churches to which they refer. The doctrinal conversations between the different churches, which continue to this day, have resulted in a situation where these condemnations no longer reflect the current status of relations among churches and faith communities.

NOTES ON THE AUGSBURG CONFESSION IN LIGHT OF THE COMMITMENTS MADE BY THE LWF AT ITS ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY IN STUTTGART 2010⁶¹

Text⁶² (CA V, German): To obtain such faith, God instituted the office of preaching, giving the gospel and the sacraments. Through these, as through means, he gives the Holy Spirit who produces faith, where and when he wills, in those who hear the gospel. It teaches that we have a gracious God, not through our merit but through Christ’s merit, when we so believe. Condemned are the Anabaptists and others who teach that we obtain the Holy Spirit without the external word of the gospel through our own preparation, thoughts, and works.

COMMENT:⁶³ Throughout the Augsburg Confession, the term “Anabaptist” or, literally in the German, “Rebaptizer,” refers to those contemporaries of Martin Luther who rejected infant baptism in favor of an adult, “believers’ baptism.” Most Anabaptists, however, adhered to the authority of the “external word of the gospel,” as did Lutherans. Lutheran reformers did not distinguish clearly between Anabaptists and spiritualists, such as Sebastian Franck and Caspar Schwenckfeld, who in fact taught that one could receive the Holy Spirit without means. Thus, this article did not then apply to Anabaptists, strictly defined, and does not now apply to their heirs

⁶¹ Text by Timothy Wengert.

⁶² All texts are from the “Augsburg Confession,” in *BC*, op. cit. (note 20), 40–43, 45, 48–49. Unless there are substantial differences between the German and Latin texts, only the German will be used.

⁶³ A modification of the No. 48, in *ibid.*, 40.

in the faith. Like several other condemnations of Anabaptists in the Augsburg Confession, this one was as much designed to criticize the Lutherans' opponents in Augsburg ("and others") and to deflect their criticisms and misunderstandings of Lutheran positions as to condemn Anabaptists.

Text (CA IX, German): Concerning baptism it is taught that it is necessary, that grace is offered through it, and that one should also baptize children, who through such baptism are entrusted to God and become pleasing to him. Rejected, therefore, are the Anabaptists who teach that the baptism of children is not right.

Text (CA IX, Latin): Concerning baptism they [the Evangelical preachers] teach that it is necessary for salvation, that the grace of God is offered through baptism, and that children should be baptized. They are received into the grace of God when they are offered to God through baptism. They condemn the Anabaptists who disapprove of the baptism of children and assert that children are saved without baptism.

COMMENT: The German text accurately describes the continuing divide between the theological heirs of the Anabaptists and Lutherans. There have been some shifts in practice, so that some congregations that trace their roots to the Anabaptists no longer require believers' baptism of new members who were baptized as children, but allow each individual to decide the validity of that action for themselves. While Lutherans have always accepted valid baptism of any person, regardless of age, a few Lutheran congregations now encourage delaying baptism where they fear that infant baptism has become more a social convention than a means of grace. The Mennonite Action in Stuttgart rejects condemnation in the Augsburg Confession of a specific group ("they condemn *the Anabaptists*") and shifts these divisive matters to continuing ecumenical conversations over the nature of baptism itself. The question that is being explored is thus whether baptisms are chiefly signs of commitment to a Christian community and lifestyle or also "signs and testimonies of God's will toward us, in order thereby to awaken and strengthen our faith."⁶⁴ Moreover, the Stuttgart action rejects and repents of any persecution of other Christians on the basis of such differences in theology and practice.

Text (CA XII, Latin): Concerning repentance they [the Evangelical preachers] teach that those who have fallen after baptism can receive forgiveness of sins whenever they are brought to repentance and that the church should impart absolution to those who return to repentance. Now, properly speaking, repentance consists

⁶⁴ CA XIII.1 (German), in *ibid.*, 46.

of two parts: one is contrition or the terrors that strike the conscience when sin is recognized; the other is faith, which is brought to life by the gospel or absolution. This faith believes that sins are forgiven on account of Christ, consoles the consciences, and liberates it from terrors. Thereupon, good works, which are the fruit of repentance, should follow. They condemn both the Anabaptists, who deny that those who have once been justified can lose the Holy Spirit, and also those who contend that some may attain perfection in this life that they cannot sin.

COMMENT: Although the Lutheran reformers were familiar to some extent with the teachings of the Anabaptist Hans Denck (along with the spiritualist, Caspar Schwenckfeld), this by no means accurately characterizes the position of the vast majority of Anabaptists then or their heirs now, all of whom acknowledge that people indeed can fall away from God's grace after baptism.

Text (CA XVI, German): Concerning public order and secular government it is taught that all political authority, orderly government, laws, and good order in the world are created and instituted by God and that Christians may without sin exercise political authority; be princes and judges, pass sentences and administer justice according to imperial and other existing laws; punish evildoers with the sword; wage just wars; serve as soldiers; buy and sell; take required oaths; possess property; be married, etc. Condemned here are the Anabaptists who teach that none of the things indicated above is Christian.

COMMENT: Even when it was first composed, the condemnation of Anabaptists in the German version was far too broad. The Latin reads, "They [the Evangelical teachers] condemn the Anabaptists who prohibit Christians from assuming such civil responsibilities." Most Anabaptists and their heirs teach that the order in the world, which may include things like peaceful relations among peoples, buying and selling, marriage and the like, is a gift of God for use in this world by Christians and non-Christians alike.⁶⁵ The question of Christian involvement directly in government and for promoting human rights and the rights of citizens, and in the coercion that such involvement implies, however, remains a matter of disagreement between Lutherans and the heirs of the Anabaptists. CA XXVII.55 indirectly criticizes the Anabaptist position stating, "Still others think that revenge is not right for Christians at all, even on the part of political authority."⁶⁶ During the early stages in their history, many (though not all) Lutheran

⁶⁵ Groups like the Hutterites, however, did practice a community of goods and services and thus rejected certain forms of individual property.

⁶⁶ *BC*, op. cit. (note 20), 90.

theologians used this involvement in government by Christians to justify the persecution of Anabaptists on religious grounds. When, in 2010, the LWF formally asked the MWC for forgiveness it rejected these actions and the theological arguments that supported them once and for all.

Text (CA XVII, German): It is also taught that our Lord Jesus Christ will return on the Last Day to judge, to raise all the dead, to give eternal life and eternal joy to those who believe and are elect, but to condemn the ungodly and the devils to hell and eternal punishment. Rejected, therefore, are the Anabaptists who teach that the devils and condemned human beings will not suffer eternal torture and torment.

A few Anabaptist teachers, including Hans Denck and Melchior Rinck, taught that everyone would be saved in the end.⁶⁷ However, this condemnation did not accurately characterize most Anabaptists of that time and does not correspond to the teaching of the heirs of the Anabaptists today.

⁶⁷ See *ibid.*, 92. The Lutherans associated the Anabaptist view with the teaching of the third-century theologian, Origen of Alexandria, whose position was later condemned by the ancient church.

APPENDIX III

A letter sent by the Mennonite World Conference to Mennonite colleges, universities, seminaries, information centers, and local/regional historical societies

January 6, 2014

To: Mennonite colleges, universities, seminaries, information centers and local/regional historical societies

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings in the name of the Prince of Peace—the Savior of the world who makes all things new and gives us new beginnings through his ministry of reconciliation.

In this season of new beginnings, as we recall the journey that the wise men from the East took to Jerusalem, I want to call your attention to another journey that the Mennonite World Conference has been traveling toward reconciliation and hope.

As you know, the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition was born nearly five centuries ago in the context of a painful church division—a division that included mutual condemnations and, in the case of many Anabaptists, the reality of imprisonment, torture and even execution. Even though our churches today have moved beyond these violent ways of relating to each other, memories of those conflicts have persisted in various forms. The Lutheran Augsburg Confession of Faith, for example, continues to “condemn” the Anabaptists; and some Anabaptist-Mennonites have kept alive a strong identity of themselves as a persecuted people.

In 2002—building on the work of earlier dialogues in France, Germany, and the United States—the Lutheran World Federation and Mennonite World Conference agreed to form an International Study Commission to review the theological differences that separated us in the sixteenth century and to explore possible paths toward reconciliation.

The Study Commission concluded that on several points—specifically our understandings of baptism, pacifism, and the Christian view of the state—important differences between our two churches still remain.

But the Study Commission also made remarkable progress in a journey towards reconciliation. At the heart of their work was an effort to retell the history of our

beginnings—as Lutherans and Anabaptists—in such a way that both sides could affirm. That commitment to “right remembering” resulted in a new account of the sixteenth-century Reformation called *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ*.

At a worship service of reconciliation, held on July 22, 2010 as part of the LWF Eleventh Assembly in Stuttgart, Germany, representatives of the LWF formally asked for forgiveness for the violence against the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century and “for forgetting or ignoring this persecution in the intervening centuries” Representatives of the MWC responded by offering forgiveness and acknowledging our own role in perpetuating memories of hostility.

In response to the Lutheran action, the MWC also made the following commitments:

- We commit ourselves to promote interpretations of the Lutheran-Anabaptist story which take seriously the jointly described history found in the Lutheran-Mennonite International Study Commission report
- We commit ourselves to take care that your initiative for reconciliation is known and honored in Anabaptist-Mennonite teaching about Lutherans
- We commit ourselves to continue with you in deliberation on the unresolved issues between our two traditions, in a spirit of mutual vulnerability and openness to the movement of the Spirit
- We commit ourselves to encourage our member churches, their local congregations, and their institutions to seek fuller relations and greater cooperation with Lutherans in service to the world.

Which brings us to the heart of our letter to you today.

As educators and historians, you play a crucial role in shaping the faith and identity of our global Anabaptist-Mennonite church. As you reflect on the ways in which you tell the story of Anabaptist history and relate to Lutherans in your setting today, we want to encourage you to take seriously this new reality in our relationship with the Lutheran church.

Here are four specific ways that you can do so:

Take time to read and to share with your faculty/colleagues the document *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ*. The document is easily available in English, Spanish and French on the MWC Faith and Life Commission website at www.mwc-cmm.org/article/interchurch-dialogue

Actively review the way in which you are currently representing Lutherans or the story of Anabaptist beginnings in your teaching. Might there be some things that you need to revise in light of these new understandings and commitments?

Integrate this story of Mennonite-Lutheran reconciliation in your teaching. In some ways, our history took a new turn in July 2010 ... and this needs to become part of how we tell our story. (For a much fuller account of the reconciliation service—including the LWF Action and the Mennonite response—see www.lwf-assembly.org/experience/mennonite-action/)

Consider inviting representatives of a local Lutheran church or school for public conversations about Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ. Use this material as an opportunity for building bridges with the broader Christian church. One very helpful resource to assist in these conversations can be found at www.mennoniteusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/four-session_StudyGuide2010.pdf

Thank you for your significant ministry within the larger Anabaptist-Mennonite community of churches, and the global body of Christ. And thank you for giving these suggestions your careful consideration in this New Year!

Blessings to you during this season of Epiphany,

Cesar Garcia
MWC General Secretary

Alfred Neufeld
MWC Faith and Life
Commission Chair

John Roth
MWC Faith and Life
Commission Secretary

MEMBERS OF THE TASK FORCE

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PHOTO GALLERY

Anointing with oil as a symbol of peace and reconciliation, reconciliation service during the “Mennonite Action,” Eleventh Assembly of The Lutheran World Federation, 2010.



Photo: LWF/Erick Coll

Dr Larry Miller, General Secretary, Mennonite World Conference, planting a red maple tree on behalf of the MWC in the Luther garden, Wittenberg, Germany, 1 October 2011.



Photo: Fernando Enns

Dean Frauke Eiben, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northern Germany, planting a corresponding tree at the Mennokate museum, Bad Oldesloe, Germany, on behalf of the LWF, 16 September 2012.



Photo: Fernando Enns

A member of the LWF Task Force on Mennonite Action, Bishop emer. Dr Musawenkosi Biyela, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Southern Africa, with Joe Wingard, Jr. of the Amish community during an encounter in Shipshewana, USA.



Photo: Ivo Huber

Ron Ratzlaff, Mennonite Central Committee in Nairobi, meets with a special needs teacher and students in Dadaab, Kenya, the largest refugee camp operated by the LWF.



Photo: LWF/Melany Markham

Members of the LWF Task Force on Mennonite Action participating at the Mennonite Sunday service in Goshen, USA.



Photo: Ivo Huber

The Task Force and its consultants at their meeting in Goshen, USA.
From left to right: KR Ivo Huber; Rev. Selma Chen; Prof. emer. Dr Timothy Wengert; Rev. Anne Burghardt; OKR Michael Martin; Bishop emer. Dr Musawenkosi Biyela; Prof. Dr Kathryn Johnson; Prof. Dr John Roth.



Photo: Michael Martin

Meeting in Stuttgart, Germany, in 2010, the Eleventh Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) asked for forgiveness from members of the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition for the wrongs going back to the beginnings of the Lutheran movement in the sixteenth century that had led to painful divisions between the two Christian families. The Mennonites accepted this apology and both communities committed themselves to move toward reconciliation.

On the threshold of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, this publication brings together two reports: *Healing Memories: Reconciling in Christ* by the Lutheran–Mennonite International Study Commission and *Bearing Fruit—Implications of the 2010 Reconciliation between Lutherans and Mennonites/Anabaptists* by the LWF Task Force on Mennonite Action.



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