

CALLED TOGETHER TO BE PEACEMAKERS

Report of the International Dialogue
between the Catholic Church
and Mennonite World Conference

1998 – 2003

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PREFACE

1. In the spirit of friendship and reconciliation, a dialogue between Catholics and Mennonites took place over a five-year period, from 1998-2003. The dialogue partners met five times in plenary session, a week at a time. At the first four sessions, at least two papers were presented by each delegation as the joint commission explored their respective understandings of key theological themes and of significant aspects of the history of the church. At the fifth session the partners worked together on a common report.

2. This was a new process of reconciliation. The two dialogue partners had had no official dialogue previous to this, and therefore started afresh. Our purpose was to assist Mennonites and Catholics to overcome the consequences of almost five centuries of mutual isolation and hostility. We wanted to explore whether it is now possible to create a new atmosphere in which to meet each other. After all, despite all that may still divide us, the ultimate identity of both is rooted in Jesus Christ.

3. This report is a synthesis of the five-year Catholic-Mennonite dialogue. The Introduction describes the origins of the dialogue within the contemporary inter-church framework, including other bilateral dialogues in which Catholics and Mennonites have participated in recent decades. It identifies specific factors that led up to this particular dialogue. The Introduction then states the purpose and scope of the dialogue, names the participants, and conveys something of the spirit in which the dialogue was conducted. It concludes by naming the locations at which each of the annual dialogue sessions took place, and states the themes that were discussed at each session.

4. Three chapters follow the Introduction. The first of these, “Considering History Together”, summarizes the results of our common study of three crucial eras (and related events) of history that have shaped our respective traditions and have yielded distinctive interpretations. These are 1) the rupture of the sixteenth century, 2) the Constantinian era, and 3) the Middle Ages as such. The aim of our study was to re-read history together for the purpose of comparing and refining our interpretations. Chapter I reports on our agreed-upon evaluations as well as some differing perspectives on the historical eras and events that were selected and examined.

5. In the second chapter, “Considering Theology Together”, we report on our common and differing understandings of the Church, of Baptism, of the Eucharist or the Lord’s Supper, and of peace. In each case, we state the historic theological perspectives of the Catholic Church and of the Mennonite Churches.¹ This is followed by a summary of our discussion on major convergences and divergences on each theme. Of particular significance is our theological study and comparison of our respective peace teachings. The Mennonites are one of the “Historic Peace Churches”², which means that the commitment to peace is essential to their self-definition. The Catholic Church takes the promotion of unity — and accordingly peace — as “belonging to the innermost nature of the Church”.³ Is it possible, therefore, that these two communities can give witness together to the Gospel which calls us to be peacemakers in today’s often violent world?

6. Chapter III is entitled “Toward a Healing of Memories”. In a sense, every interchurch dialogue in which the partners are seeking to overcome centuries of hostility or isolation is aimed at healing bitter memories that have made reconciliation between them difficult. The third chapter identifies four components that, we hope, can help to foster a healing of memories between Mennonites and Catholics.

7. The members of this dialogue offer this report, the results of our work, to the sponsoring bodies in the hope that it can be used by Mennonites and Catholics not only within their respective communities but also as they meet together, to promote reconciliation between them for the sake of the Gospel.

¹ The words “church” is used in this report to reflect the self-understandings of the participating churches, without intending to resolve all the ecclesiological issues related to this term. Mennonites and Catholics do not share a common understanding of the Church.

² The term “Historic Peace Churches”, in use since about 1935, refers to Mennonites, Quakers (Society of Friends), and Church of the Brethren. For an orientation to the Historic Peace Churches, see Donald Durnbaugh, ed., *On Earth Peace: Discussions on War/Peace issues between Friends, Mennonites, Brethren and European Churches 1935-1975* (Elgin: The Brethren Press, 1978).

³ “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World”, *Gaudium et spes*, 42.

INTRODUCTION

THE ORIGIN OF THESE CONVERSATIONS

8. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, separated Christian communions have come into closer contact, seeking reconciliation with each other. Despite ongoing divisions, they have started to cooperate with one another to their mutual benefit and often to the benefit of the societies in which they give witness to the Gospel. They have engaged in theological dialogue, exploring the reasons for their original divisions. In doing so, they have often discovered that, despite centuries of mutual isolation, they continue to share much of the Christian heritage which is rooted in the Gospel. They have also been able to clarify serious differences that exist between and among them in regard to various aspects of the Christian faith. In short, in modern times we have witnessed the emergence of a movement of reconciliation among separated Christians, bringing with it new openness to one another and, on the part of many, a commitment to strive for the unity of the followers of Jesus Christ.

9. Many factors have contributed to this contemporary movement. Among them are conditions and changes in the modern world. For example, the destructive power of modern weapons in a nuclear age has challenged Christians everywhere to reflect on the question of peace in a totally new way — and even to do so together. But the basic inspiration for dialogue between separated Christians has been the realization that conflict between them impedes the preaching of the Gospel and damages their credibility. Indeed, conflict between Christians is a major obstacle to the mission given by Jesus Christ to his disciples. It is difficult to announce the good news of salvation “so that the world may believe” (*Jn 17:21*) if those bearing the good news have basic disagreements among themselves.

10. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Catholic Church has been engaged in a wide variety of ecumenical activities, including a number of international bilateral dialogues. There has been dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Malankara Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, the Anglican Communion, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Methodist Council, the Baptist World Alliance, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Pentecostals, and the Evangelicals. There have been consultations with the World Evangelical Alliance and Seventh Day Adventists. Also, since 1968 Catholic theologians have participated as full voting members of the multilateral Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches.

11. Mennonite World Conference (MWC) has previously held international bilateral dialogues with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and with the Baptist World Alliance. Also, together with the Lutheran World Federation and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, MWC sponsors the multilateral dialogue on the “First, Second and Radical Reformations”, also known as the “Prague Consultations”. MWC and the Lutheran World Federation have agreed to international conversation beginning in 2004. Mennonite World Conference member churches in France, in Germany, and in the United States have held bilateral dialogues with Lutheran churches in those countries.

12. Though Mennonites and Catholics have lived in isolation or in tension for centuries, they too have had increasing contact with each other in recent times. On the international level, they have met each other consistently in a number of interchurch organizations. For example, representatives of the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) meet annually at the meeting of the Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions (CS/CWC), a forum which has for more than forty years brought together the general secretaries of world communions for informal contacts and discussion. There have been numerous other contacts on national and local levels.

13. More recently some Catholics and Mennonites have begun to invite one another to meetings or events each has sponsored. On the international level, Pope John Paul II invited Christian World Communions, including the Mennonite World Conference, to participate in the Assisi Day of Prayer for Peace, held in October 1986. The MWC Executive Secretary, Paul Kraybill, attended that meeting. The MWC invited the PCPCU to send an observer to its world assembly in Calcutta in January of 1997. Msgr. John Mutiso Mbinda attended on behalf of the PCPCU and brought a message from its President, Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, in which the Cardinal expressed the “sincere hope that there will be other contacts between the Mennonite World Conference and the Catholic Church”. After the international Mennonite-Catholic Dialogue began in 1998, MWC was among those Pope John Paul II invited to send representatives to events in Rome related to the Jubilee Year 2000. The Mennonite co-chairman of this dialogue, Dr. Helmut Harder, attended a jubilee event at the Vatican in 1999 on the subject of inter-religious dialogue. More recently, accepting the invitation of Pope John Paul II to leaders of Christian World Communions, Dr. Mesach Krisetya, president of the MWC, participated in the Assisi Day of Prayer for Peace, January 24, 2002. Moreover, to name one example from a national context, the National Conference of Catholic Bishops

in the USA,⁴ in the course of writing its pastoral statement on peace in 1993, sought the expertise of persons from outside the Catholic Church, including that of Mennonite theologian John H. Yoder.

14. The possibility and desirability of an international Catholic-Mennonite dialogue came into view in the context of informal contacts during meetings of the CS/CWC. The question was first raised in the early 1990s in a conversation between Dr. Larry Miller, Executive Secretary of the MWC, Bishop Pierre Duprey, Secretary of the PCPCU, and Msgr. John A. Radano, also of the PCPCU. During ensuing annual CS/CWC meetings, Msgr. Radano and Dr. Miller continued to informally discuss the possibility of an international dialogue. Two particularly compelling reasons for dialogue were the awareness that contemporary historical studies point to medieval sources of spirituality which Catholics and Mennonites share, and the conviction that both believe peace to be at the heart of the Gospel. There was also a sense that, as in other relationships between separated Christians, there is need for a healing of memories between Mennonites and Catholics. In 1997 the leaders of both communions responded positively to a proposal that a Mennonite-Catholic dialogue should take place on the international level. The dialogue, envisioned initially for a five-year period, began the following year, organized on the Catholic side by the PCPCU and on the Mennonite side by the MWC.

PURPOSE, SCOPE, AND PARTICIPANTS

15. The general purpose of the dialogue was to learn to know one another better, to promote better understanding of the positions on Christian faith held by Catholics and Mennonites, and to contribute to the overcoming of prejudices that have long existed between them.

16. In light of this purpose, two tracks were followed during each of the annual meetings. A contemporary component explored the positions of each side on a selected key theological issue. A historical track examined the interpretation of each dialogue partner with reference to a particular historical event or historical development that caused or represented separation from one another in the course of the history of the Church.

17. In order to implement the study of these two tracks, MWC and PCPCU called on papers from participants who brought historical or theological expertise and understanding to the events, the themes, and the issues that effect relationships between Catholics and Mennonites.

18. Mennonite delegation members were Dr. Helmut Harder (co-chairman, Canada), systematic theologian and co-editor of "A Confession of Faith in Mennonite Perspective"; Dr. Neal Blough (USA/France), specialist in Anabaptist history and theology; Rev. Mario Higueros (Guatemala), head of the Central American Mennonite seminary with advanced theological studies at the Salamanca Pontifical University in Spain and numerous contacts with Catholics in Latin America; Rev. Andrea Lange (Germany), Mennonite pastor and teacher, especially on themes related to peace church theology and practice; Dr. Howard J. Loewen (USA), Mennonite Brethren theologian and expert in the confessional history of Anabaptist/Mennonites; Dr. Nzash Lumeya (D.R. Congo/USA), missiologist and Old Testament specialist; and Dr. Larry Miller (co-secretary, USA/France), New Testament scholar and Mennonite World Conference Executive Secretary. Dr. Alan Kreider (USA), historian of the early church, joined the group for the annual session of the dialogue in the year 2000.

19. On the Catholic side, participants included the Most Reverend Joseph Martino, (co-chairman, USA), a church historian and Auxiliary Bishop of Philadelphia, located in an area which includes many communities of the Anabaptist tradition; Rev. Dr. James Puglisi, SA (USA/Italy), Director of the Centro Pro Unione and specialist in liturgy and sacraments; Dr. Peter Nissen (The Netherlands), church historian and authority on relations between Catholics and Anabaptists in the sixteenth century; Msgr. John Mutiso Mbinda (Kenya/Vatican City), PCPCU staff member who participated in the 1997 MWC world assembly meeting in Calcutta and whose work brings him into regular contact with international Christian organizations where Mennonites participate at times; Dr. Joan Patricia Back (United Kingdom/Italy), on the staff of Centro Uno, ecumenical secretariat of the Focolare Movement, whose communities around the world have contacts with many Christian groups, including Mennonites; Rev. Dr. Andrew Christiansen, SJ (USA), an expert in social ethics whose work in matters of peace both on the academic and the practical levels have brought him into contact and conversation with Mennonite scholars; and Msgr. Dr. John A. Radano (co-secretary, USA/Vatican City), Head of the Western Section of the PCPCU who has participated in various international dialogues.

20. The atmosphere in the meetings was most cordial. Each side presented its views on the theological issues as clearly and forcefully as possible, seeking to foster an honest and fruitful dialogue. As the conversation partners heard the other's views clearly stated, it was possible to begin to see which parts of the Christian heritage are held in common by both Mennonites and Catholics, and where they have strong differences. In presenting their respective views on history, dialogue members did not refrain from allowing one another to see clearly the criticism each communion has traditionally raised against the other. At the

⁴ Now called the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

same time, dialogue participants did this with the kind of self-criticism that is needed if an authentic search for truth is to take place. The constant hope was that clarifications in both areas of study, historical and theological, might contribute to a healing of memories between Catholics and Mennonites.

21. Prayer sustained and accompanied the dialogue. Every day of each meeting began and ended with prayer and worship, led by members of the delegations. On Sundays, dialogue participants attended services in a Mennonite or a Catholic congregation, depending on which side was hosting the meeting that year. During the week, the host side arranged a field trip to sites associated with its tradition. These services and trips contributed to the dialogue by helping each partner to know the other better.

LOCATIONS AND THEMES OF ANNUAL MEETINGS

22. The first meeting took place in Strasbourg, France, October 14-18, 1998. Each delegation made presentations in response to the question, "Who are we today?" A second set of papers helped to shed light on the reasons for reactions to each other in the sixteenth century. At the second meeting, held in Venice, Italy, October 12-18, 1999, the discussion in the theological sessions focussed on the way each communion understands the church today. The historical track explored the Anabaptist idea of the restitution of the early church, as well as the medieval roots of the Mennonite tradition of faith and spirituality. At the third meeting, November 24-30, 2000, held at the Thomashof, near Karlsruhe, Germany, the contemporary discussion turned to an area of possible cooperation between Mennonites and Catholics today, with the theme formulated as a question: "What is a Peace Church?" In the historical sessions, each presented an interpretation of the impact of the "Constantinian shift" on the church. In the fourth meeting, at Assisi, Italy, November 27 to December 3, 2001, each delegation presented its views on Baptism and the Eucharist or Lord's Supper. The historical part of that meeting focussed on the view of each on the relationship between church and state in the Middle Ages. At the fifth meeting, October 25-31, 2002, in Akron, Pennsylvania, members worked on the final report of the dialogue. Drafting meetings in March, May and June, 2003 provided occasions to refine the report in preparation for its submission.

Note: A list of the papers presented at the dialogue sessions, together with their authors, appears as an *Appendix* at the end of this report.

CONSIDERING HISTORY TOGETHER

A. INTRODUCTION: A SHARED HERMENEUTICS OR RE-READING OF CHURCH HISTORY

23. A common re-reading of the history of the church has proven to be fruitful in recent inter-church dialogues.⁵ The same is true for our dialogue. Mennonites and Catholics have lived through more than 475 years of separation. Over the centuries they developed separate views of the history of the Christian tradition. By studying history together, we discovered that our interpretations of the past were often incomplete and limited. Sharing our insights and our assessments of the past helped us gain a broader view of the history of the church.

24. First of all, we recognized that both our traditions have developed interpretations of aspects of church history that were influenced by negative images of the other, though in different ways and to different degrees. Reciprocal hostile images were fostered and continued to be present in our respective communities and in our representations of each other in history. Our relationship, or better the lack of it, began in a context of rupture and separation. Since then, from the sixteenth century to the present, theological polemics have persistently nourished negative images and narrow stereotypes of each other.

25. Secondly, both our traditions have had their selective ways of looking at history. Two examples readily come to mind: the interplay of church and state in the Middle Ages, and the use of violence by Christians. We sometimes restricted our views of the history of Christianity to those aspects that seemed to be most in agreement with the self-definition of our respective ecclesial communities. Our focus was often determined by specific perspectives of our traditions, which frequently led to a way of studying the past in which the results of our research were already influenced by our ecclesiological starting-points.

26. The experience of studying the history of the church together and of re-reading it in an atmosphere of openness has been invaluable. It has helped us gain a broader view of the history of the Christian tradition. We have been reminded that we share at least fifteen centuries of common Christian history. The early church and the church of the Middle Ages were, and continue to be, the common ground for both our traditions. We have also discovered that the subsequent centuries of separation have spelled a loss to both of us. Re-reading the past together helps us to regain and restore certain aspects of our ecclesial experience that we may have undervalued or even discounted due to centuries of separation and antagonism.

27. Our common re-reading of the history of the church will hopefully contribute to the development of a common interpretation of the past. This can lead to a shared new memory and understanding. In turn, a shared new memory can free us from the prison of the past. On this basis both Catholics and Mennonites hear the challenge to become architects of a future more in conformity with Christ's instructions when he said: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (*Jn* 13:34-35). Given this commandment, Christians can take responsibility for the past. They can name the errors in their history, repent of them, and work to correct them. Mennonite theologian John Howard Yoder has written: "It is a specific element in the Christian message that there is a remedy for a bad record. If the element of repentance is not acted out in interfaith contact, we are not sharing the whole gospel witness".⁶

28. Such acts of repentance contribute to the purification of memory, which was one of the goals enunciated by Pope John Paul II during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000. The purification of memory aims at liberating our personal and communal consciences from all forms of resentment and violence that are the legacy of past faults. Jesus asks us, his disciples, to prepare for this act of purification by seeking personal forgiveness as well as extending forgiveness to others. This he did by teaching his disciples the Lord's Prayer whereby we implore: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" (*Mt.* 6:12). The purification of one's own memory, individually and as church communities, is a first step toward the mutual healing of memories in our inter-church dialogues and in our relationships (cf. Chapter III).

⁵ Cf. the following samples from bilateral dialogues: 1) "Towards a Common Understanding of the Church: Reformed/Roman Catholic International Dialogue, Second Phase (1984-1990)", chapter 1, "Toward a Reconciliation of Memories", and chapter 3, "The Church We Confess and our Divisions in History", *Information Service* 74 (1990/III), pp. 93-102, pp. 106-115; 2) *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church (1999), *Information Service* 103 (2000/I-II), pp. 3-6; 3) "Les entretiens luthéro-mennonites (1981-1984)", *Cahiers de Christ Seul*, No. 16 (1984); 4) *Bericht vom Dialog VELKD/Mennoniten: 1989 bis 1992*, Texte aus der VELKD, 53 (Hannover: Lutherisches Kirchenamt der VELKD, 1993).

⁶ JOHN HOWARD YODER, "The Disavowal of Constantine: An Alternative Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue", in: *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 242-261, esp. p. 251.

29. To begin the process of the healing of memories requires rigorous historical analysis and renewed historical evaluation. It is no small task to enter into

“a historical-critical investigation that aims at using all of the information available, with a view to a reconstruction of the environment, of the ways of thinking, of the conditions and the living dynamic in which those events and those words were placed in order in such a way to ascertain the contents and the challenges that — precisely in their diversity — they propose to our present time”.⁷

Proceeding carefully in this way, a common re-reading of history may help us in purifying our understanding of the past as a step toward healing the often-painful memories of our respective communities.

B. A PROFILE OF THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION OF WESTERN EUROPE ON THE EVE OF THE REFORMATION

30. On the eve of the Reformation, Christian Europe entered a time of change, which marked the transition from the medieval to the early modern period.⁸ Up to 1500, the Church had been the focal point of unity and the dominant institution of European society. But at the dawn of the early modern period its authority was challenged by the growing power of the first modern states. They consolidated and centralised their political authority and sovereignty over particular geographical areas. They tried to strengthen their power over their subjects in many aspects of human life. For centuries, secular rulers considered themselves responsible for religion in their states. But now they had new means at their disposal to consolidate such authority. This sometimes brought them into conflict with the Church, for instance in the area of ecclesiastical appointments, legal jurisdiction, and taxes.

31. The rise of the early modern states led to a decline of the consciousness of Christian unity. The ideal of a unified Christendom (*christianitas*) that reached its climax in the period of the Crusades was crumbling. This process had been stimulated already by the events of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. At that time there was the so-called Babylonian Captivity of the papacy (1309-1377), when the residence of the Popes was in Avignon (in present day south-eastern France). Then followed the so-called Great Western Schism (1378-1417), when the papal office was claimed by two or even three rival Popes.

32. At the same time, a divided Europe was experiencing massive social and economic changes. The sixteenth century was a period of enormous population growth. Historians estimate that the European population grew from 55 million in 1450 to 100 million in 1650. This growth was of course prominent in the urban settlements, although the majority of the population still lived in rural areas. Population growth was also accompanied by economic expansion, which mainly benefited the urban middle classes. They became the main carriers of ecclesiastical developments in the sixteenth century, both in the Reformation and in the Catholic renewal. But at the same time economic expansion was accompanied by a growing gap between rich and poor, especially in the cities but also in rural areas. Social unrest and upheaval became a familiar phenomenon in urban society, as peasant rebellions were in rural villages. To some extent this social unrest also contributed to the soil for the Radical Reformation.⁹

33. During this period, the cultural elite of Europe witnessed a process of intellectual and cultural renewal, identified by the words “Renaissance” and “Humanism”. This process showed a variety of faces throughout Europe. For instance, in Italy it had a more ‘pagan’ profile than in northern Europe, where ‘biblical humanists’ such as Erasmus and Thomas More used humanist techniques to further piety and biblical studies. Meanwhile in France Humanism was mainly supported by a revival of legal thought. The core spirit of the Renaissance, which took its roots in Italy in the fourteenth century, is well expressed in the famous words of the historian Jacob Burckhardt as ‘the discovery of the world and of humankind’. These words indicate a new appreciation for the world surrounding humanity. They also herald a new self-consciousness characterized by recognition of the unique value and character of the individual human person. Humanism can be considered as the main intellectual manifestation of the Renaissance. It developed the study of the ancient classical literature, both Latin and Greek. But it also fostered the desire to return to

⁷ *Memory and Reconciliation: the Church and Faults of the Past*, 4.1, International Theological Commission, Vatican City, December, 1999.

⁸ For paragraph 30 and following, cf. THOMAS BRADY, Jr., HEIKO A. OBERMAN, and JAMES D. TRACY, eds., *Handbook of European History, 1400-1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation* (Leiden/NY/Cologne: E.J. Brill, 1994), 2 vols., reprinted Grand Rapids, 1996; JOHN BOSSY, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); JOHN W. O’MALLEY, ed., *Catholicism in Early Modern Europe* (St. Louis: Center for Reformation Research, 1988); ROBERT BIRELEY, *The Refashioning of Catholicism, 1450-1700: A Reassessment of the Counter Reformation* (New York/London: Macmillan, 1999).

⁹ The term, “Radical Reformation”, was introduced by the historian George Hunston Williams in his famous book of the same title, *The Radical Reformation*, 3rd edition (Kirksville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1992). By “Radical Reformation” we mean that sixteenth century movement which rebelled not only against the Catholic Church at that time but also against the classical Reformers. It consisted of varied groups such as the leaders of the Great Peasants’ War (1524-1525), the Anabaptists, the Spiritualists, Evangelical Rationalists, Unitarians and Schwenckfelders. Others label these groups as the ‘Left Wing of the Reformation.’

the roots of European civilization, back to the sources (*ad fontes*) and to their values. Within Christianity, this led to an in-depth study of Scripture in its original languages (Hebrew and Greek), of the Church Fathers, and of other sources of knowledge about the early church. It led as well to the exploration of other sources of knowledge about the early church. Humanism also entailed an educational program, which mainly reached the expanding urban middle classes. It fostered their self-consciousness, preparing them to participate in government and administration and to take on certain responsibilities and duties in church life and in ecclesiastical organization.

34. On the eve of the Reformation, church life and piety were flourishing. For a long time both Catholic and Protestant Church historians have described religious life at the end of the Middle Ages in terms of crisis and decline. But today the awareness is growing that these terms reflect a retrospective assessment of the situation of the Middle Ages that was determined by inadequate criteria. There is a growing tendency, both among Catholic and Protestant historians, to give a more positive evaluation of religious life around the year 1500.¹⁰ Many consider this period now to be an age of religious vitality, a period of ‘booming’ religiosity. They perceive the Reformation and the Catholic Reform not only as a reaction against late medieval religious life, but also and principally as the result and the fruit of this religious vitality. Certainly there were abuses among the clergy, among the hierarchy and the papacy, and among the friars. There were abuses in popular religion, in the ecclesiastical tax system, and in the system of pastoral care and administration. Absenteeism of parish priests and bishops and the accumulation of benefices were among the indicators of the problem.

35. Yet this was hardly the whole story. Religious life was at the same time characterized by a renewed emphasis on good preaching and on religious education, especially among the urban middle classes. There was a strong desire for a more profound faith. Translations of the Bible appeared in the major European vernacular languages and spread through the recently invented printing press. Religious books dominated the book market. The many confraternities that were founded on the eve of the Reformation propagated a lay spirituality. These confraternities served the social and religious needs of lay people by organizing processions and devotions, by offering prayer services and sermons, and by propagating vernacular devotional books. They also provided care and help for the sick and the dying, and for people caught in other kinds of hardships. Zealous lay movements like the so-called *Devotio Moderna*¹¹ as well as preachers and writers from several religious orders propagated a spirituality of discipleship and of the ‘imitation of Christ.’ Many of the religious orders themselves witnessed reform movements in the fifteenth century, which led to the formation of observant branches. These groups desired to observe their religious rule in the strict and original way in which their founder intended it to be followed.

36. The Church in general also witnessed reform movements whose goal was to free the Christian community from worldliness. From simple believers to the highest church authorities, Christians were called to return to the simplicity of New Testament Christianity. These reforms, which affected people at every level of society and church, criticized the pomp of the church hierarchy, spoke against absenteeism among pastors, noted the lack of good and regular preaching, and called into question the eagerness of church leaders to purchase church offices. These late medieval reform movements envisioned ideals that a century or two later would become common in the Protestant Reformation, the Radical Reformation, and the Catholic Reform as well.

37. Of course, a certain externalism and even materialism and superstition were also present in late medieval popular piety. These were in evidence especially in the many devotions, in processions and pilgrimages, and in the veneration of saints and relics. But at the same time the performance of these many forms of religious behaviour reflects a strong desire for salvation, for religious experience, and a zeal for the sacred. In the sixteenth century, the Protestant Reformation, the Radical Reformation, as well as the Catholic Reform benefited significantly from these yearnings for a higher spirituality.

C. THE RUPTURE BETWEEN CATHOLICS AND ANABAPTISTS

¹⁰ For instance, see BERND MOELLER’S famous article “*Frömmigkeit in Deutschland um 1500*”, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 56 (1965), pp. 5-30, translated several times, for example, as “Piety in Germany Around 1500”, in: STEVEN E. OZMENT, ed., *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), pp. 50-75. See also EAMON DUFFY, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1992).

¹¹ *Devotio Moderna* or ‘Modern (= New, Contemporary) Devotion’ is the name of a movement of spiritual renewal that laid great emphasis on the inner life of the individual and on the imitation of Christ. It was inspired by the deacon Geert Grote (1340-1384), and had its origins in the Low Countries, but during the fifteenth century it was spread all over Western Europe. See R.R. POST, *The Modern Devotion* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968); G. EPINAY-BURGARD, *Gérard Grote (1340-1384) et les débuts de la dévotion moderne* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1970); JOHN VAN ENGEN, *Devotio Moderna: Basic Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988).

Origins

38. The separation of the Anabaptists from the established Church in the sixteenth century is to be understood in the larger context of the first manifestations of the Reformation. The respective Anabaptist groups had varied origins within diverse political, social, and religious circumstances.¹² Anabaptist movements first originated within the Lutheran and Zwinglian reformations in Southern Germany and Switzerland during the 1520's. In the 1530's, Anabaptist (Mennonite) movements in the Netherlands broke more directly with the Catholic Church. These ruptures had to do with understandings of baptism, ecclesiology, church-state relationships and social ethics. The latter included the rejection of violence, the rejection of oath taking, and in some cases the rejection of private property. For all at that time, but especially for the leaders in church and state, this must have been a very confusing situation. There were diverse and sometimes conflicting currents within the Anabaptist movement and within the Radical Reformation, for instance concerning the use of the sword. Nevertheless, all the Anabaptist movements, contrary to the main reformers such as Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin, agreed on the conviction that, since infants are not able to make a conscious commitment to Christ, only adults can be baptized after having repented of their sins and having confessed their faith. Since Anabaptists did not consider infant baptism valid, those Christians who were baptized as infants needed to be baptized again as adults. Anabaptist groups shared other convictions with related streams of the Radical Reformation. While the first Anabaptists often saw themselves in harmony with the ideals and theology of Luther and Zwingli, their rejection of infant baptism and other theological or ethical positions led both Protestants and Catholics to condemn them.

39. These condemnations should also be understood in relation to the disasters of the Peasants' War (1524-25) and the "kingdom of Münster" in Westphalia (1534-35). For Catholic rulers, the Peasants' movement was a clear sign of the subversive nature of Luther's break with Rome. To defend himself against such accusations, Luther (and other reformers) blamed the Peasants' War on people called "Enthusiasts" or "Anabaptists". It is difficult to sort out historically the origins of Anabaptism in the context of the popular movement commonly designated as the "Peasants' War". The early years of the Reformation were quite fluid, and historians now recognize that movements or churches designated as "Lutheran", "Zwinglian", or "Anabaptist", were not always clearly recognizable or distinct from each other, especially up until the tragic events of 1524-1525. Nevertheless, the radical experiment of the kingdom of Münster, where in 1534-35 the so called Melchiorites (followers of the Anabaptist lay preacher Melchior Hoffman) established a violent and dictatorial regime in order to bring about the "Day of the Lord", confirmed both Catholic and Protestant authorities in their fear of the Anabaptist movement as a serious threat to church and society. Whereas many Anabaptist groups were faithful to their principles of non-violence and pacifism, some groups nevertheless allowed the use of the sword in the establishment of the Kingdom of God.¹³ As a result, the term "Anabaptist", employed in both Catholic and Protestant polemics, came to connote rebellion and anarchy. Often it was deemed that Anabaptist groups who claimed to be non-violent were only so because they lacked power. Rulers thought that if the occasion arose, violence would once again be used by Anabaptists.

40. Given the close relationship between church and state, the practice of rebaptizing those who were already baptized as infants had an extremely provocative effect in the sixteenth century. For the Catholic Church and the emerging Protestant Churches, it could only be considered heretical. The practice of rebaptism had already been condemned in the early fifth century as reflected in Augustine's polemics against the Donatists, a separatist movement in North Africa, who rebaptized all recruits from the established Church.¹⁴ For the state, a law of the Roman emperors Honorius and Theodosius of 413 determined severe penalties for the practice of rebaptism. In 529, the emperor Justinian I, in reproducing the Theodosian edict in his revision of the Roman law, specified the penalty as capital punishment.¹⁵ On the basis of this ancient imperial law against the Donatists, the Diet of Speyer in 1529 proclaimed the death penalty for all acts of "rebaptism".

Images of Each Other

41. Mennonites and Catholics have harboured negative images of each other ever since the sixteenth century. Such negative images must of course be put into the context of early modern Catholic and Protestant polemical theology. Nevertheless both Catholics and Protestants condemned and persecuted the Anabaptists, and the Anabaptists considered the Protestant Reformers to be as reprehensible as the Catholic Church they had left.

42. Anabaptists shared many of the common Reformation images of the Catholic Church. Along with other Protestant reformers, Anabaptists accused Catholics of works righteousness and of sacramental

¹² Cf. JAMES M. STAYER, WERNER O. PACKULL, and Klaus Deppermann, "From Monogenesis to Polygenesis: The Historical Discussion of Anabaptist Origins", *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 49 (1975), pp. 83-122.

¹³ Cf. JAMES M. STAYER, *Anabaptists and the Sword*, 2nd edition (Lawrence, KS: Coronado Press, 1976).

¹⁴ Cf. WILLIAM H.C. FREND, *The Donatist Church: A Movement of Protest in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952).

¹⁵ Cf. *Code of Justinian*, book I, tit. 6,2.

idolatry. They saw the Reformation as a prelude to the end of time, and viewed the Pope as the Antichrist. Anabaptists soon left the Reformation camp, criticizing both Catholics and Protestants for what they saw as very unhealthy relationships with political power. They considered the Church to be fallen. This fall was associated with the Emperors Constantine and Theodosius and the fact that Christianity was officially proclaimed as the only religion of the Roman Empire. They saw infant baptism as the culminating sign of a religion that forced people to be Christians independent of any faith commitment. In the eyes of the Anabaptists, such Christianity could not be ethically serious nor produce the fruits of discipleship. Persecution and execution of Anabaptists increased the level of polemics and fostered negative images. Anabaptists saw Catholic religion as being based on ceremonies, works, tradition and superstition. Priests were characterized as ignorant, lazy and evil. The *Martyrs' Mirror*, compiled by a Dutch Mennonite in the seventeenth century, tells the stories of many Anabaptist martyrs. It puts them in the context of the faithful church throughout the centuries. Through narrative and engravings, this very important book for Mennonites portrays Catholics and Protestants as persecutors, torturers and executioners. As the centuries went on, Mennonites often lacked direct knowledge about the Catholic Church and her history, but they retained their earlier views.

43. For Catholics, Anabaptists represented the logical outcome of Protestant heresy and schism. When Luther left the Catholic Church, he rejected the only legitimate Christian authority of the time. This opened up the door to numerous and contradictory readings of Scripture as well as to political subversion. Alongside traditional Catholic objections to "Protestantism", the rejection of infant baptism and the practice of rebaptizing dominated the early Catholic theological reaction against Anabaptism. Catholics saw Anabaptists as ignorant people whose theologians did not know Latin. For example, they charged that the Anabaptist theologian, Dr. Balthasar Hubmaier, was an agitator, an enemy of government and an immoral person. For a long time, even into the twentieth century, Catholic writers associated the most peaceful followers of Menno Simons with the radical Melchiorites of Münster. In fact, Catholic theologians had limited knowledge of the history of Anabaptism. They saw Anabaptists as restoring old heresies that had been condemned long ago. All this was complicated by the fact that during the sixteenth century, Catholic theologians were writing against people whom the state, at the request of both Catholic and Protestant princes, had already condemned to death at the Diet of Speyer (see para. 40 above), and who therefore lived outside the protection of the law.

An Ecclesiology of Restitution

44. The question of the apostolic nature of the church created a major ecclesiological divide between Anabaptists and Catholics during the sixteenth century. From the early centuries on, Christians of both East and West had understood apostolic succession via the office of bishops as ensuring the transmission of the faith and therefore the transmission of the apostolic nature of the church throughout the ages. Sixteenth century Anabaptists, on the contrary, rejected the idea of an apostolic continuity guaranteed by the institutional Church. They began to speak of the "fall" of the Church and described it as a sign of her unfaithfulness. This unfaithfulness implied the necessity of a restitution of the "apostolic" church. The Catholics and most of the magisterial reformers considered infant baptism to be an apostolic tradition, practised from the beginning of the church. Anabaptists, on the contrary, saw the general acceptance of infant baptism, together with the close political ties between church and empire (Constantine and Theodosius), as the major signs of apostasy from the apostolic vision of the faithful church and therefore as evidence of the "fall". For the Anabaptists, correspondence with the New Testament writings on ethical and doctrinal issues became the test for measuring apostolic Christianity. Faithfulness was defined not as maintaining institutional continuity, but as restitution of the New Testament faith. In their view, the restoration and preservation of the apostolic church required them to break away from the institutional church of their day. Continuity was sought not through the succession of bishops, but rather through faithfulness to the apostolic witness of Scripture and by identification with people and movements. For example, the Waldensians and the Franciscans were considered by the Anabaptists as faithful representatives of true Christianity throughout the course of their long history.¹⁶

Persecution and Martyrdom

45. One of the results of the division among Christians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, given the approach to judicial matters and punishment at that time, was persecution and martyrdom.¹⁷ Given the close relationship between religion and society, the establishment of the principle *cuius regio, eius religio* (the religion of the ruler is to be the established religion of a region or a state) at the Peace of Augsburg in

¹⁶ Extended efforts to describe this continuity can be found in *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren*, translated and edited by the Hutterian Brethren (Rifton, NY: Plough Publishing, 1987); and in THIELEMAN J. VAN BRAGHT, *Bloody Theater or Martyrs' Mirror*, translated from the Dutch Edition of 1660 by Joseph Sohm, 5th English edition (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1950).

¹⁷ BRAD S. GREGORY, *Salvation at Stake. Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University, 1999), esp. chapter 6 on Anabaptists and Martyrdom and chapter 7 on Roman Catholics and Martyrdom.

1555 contributed to the already strongly negative sentiments between separated Christians. It introduced a type of society where one specific Christian confession (Catholic, Lutheran, and later Reformed) became the established religion of a given territory. This type of society, the so-called confessional state, was characterized by intolerance towards persons of other Christian confessions. Due to this specific and particular political situation, martyrdom became a common experience for Christians of all confessions, be it Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican or Anabaptist.

46. Mennonites suffered greatly in this period, both in Protestant and in Catholic states. Many governments did not tolerate Radical Reformation dissidents, including pacifist Anabaptists. According to recent estimations, approximately 5,000 persons were executed for their religious beliefs in the course of the sixteenth century. Of these, between 2,000 and 2,500 were Anabaptist and Mennonite men and women, the majority of them in Catholic territories, who were convicted of heresy.¹⁸ Anabaptists could hardly find any stable political haven in sixteenth century Europe. In some countries the persecution of Mennonites would last for centuries. In some states they were discriminated against and subjected to social and political restrictions even into the twentieth century, especially because of their principled attitude of conscientious objection.

47. For Anabaptists and Mennonites, discipleship indeed implied the openness to oppression, persecution, and violent death. The danger of persecution and martyrdom became a part of the Mennonite identity. As the Mennonite scholar Cornelius Dyck has written, “the possibility of martyrdom had a radical impact on all who joined the group — on their priorities, status and self-consciousness”.¹⁹ Mennonites held their martyrs in highest regard. They sang of their faithful testimony and celebrated their memory by collecting their stories in martyrologies, such as *Het Offer des Heeren* (The Sacrifice unto the Lord) and Thieleman Jans van Braght’s *Martelaers Spiegel* (*Martyrs’ Mirror*), which is still read today within the global Mennonite church.

48. Catholics never suffered any persecution at the hands of Mennonites.²⁰ Nevertheless, in the consideration of the Anabaptist and Mennonite experience of martyrdom and persecution, it is important to note that, in their post-medieval history, Catholics have also known this experience. In some territories where the Reformed and Lutheran confession was established, and also in England after the establishment of the Church of England, Catholics were subject to persecution and to the death penalty. A number of them, especially priests, monks and nuns, were brutally martyred for their faith. Persecution of Catholics and violation of religious freedom continued in some countries for centuries. For a long while, the practice of the Catholic faith was not allowed publicly in England and in several Lutheran countries such as in Scandinavia and in the Dutch Republic. Catholics were able to practice their faith openly in these countries only by the end of the eighteenth or the beginning of the nineteenth century. In some cases discrimination against the Catholics lasted into the twentieth century. During those restrictive years, both Catholics and Mennonites in several countries were constrained to live a hidden life.

Areas of Future Study

49. When conflict occurs within an institution and separation ensues, discourse easily takes on the nature of self-justification. As Mennonites and Catholics begin discussion after centuries of separate institutional existence, we need to be aware that we have developed significant aspects of our self-understandings and theologies in contexts where we have often tried to prove that we are right and they are wrong. We need tools of historical research that help us to see both what we have in common as well as to responsibly address the differences that separate us. Mennonites now have almost five centuries of accumulated history to deal with, along with a growing experience of integration into the established society. Catholics, on the other hand, increasingly find themselves in situations of disestablishment where they are faced with the same questions as Mennonites were facing as a minority church in an earlier era. These facts could help both traditions to be more open to the concerns of the other, and to look more carefully at the fifteen centuries of commonly shared history as well as the different paths each has taken since the sixteenth century. Our shared history of fifteen centuries, built upon the foundation of the patristic period, reminds us of the debt

¹⁸ JAMES M. STAYER, “Numbers in Anabaptist Research”, in C. ARNOLD SNYDER, ed., *Commoners and Community: Essays in Honour of Werner O. Packull* (Waterloo: Herald Press, 2002), pp. 51-73, esp. pp. 58-59. Anabaptist and Mennonite martyrs then constituted about 40 to 50 percent of all the religious martyrs of the sixteenth century.

¹⁹ CORNELIUS J. DYCK, “The Suffering Church in Anabaptism”, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 59 (1985), p. 5.

²⁰ Cf. BRAD S. GREGORY, *op. cit.*, p. 319. While there are no known instances of Mennonites persecuting or executing Catholics in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, Catholic soldiers may have been victims of the violence of the siege of Münster in Westphalia (1534-1535). Whether or not this is an instance of Anabaptist persecution of Catholics is an unresolved question of our discussions. For Catholics, this incident raises the possibility of Catholic deaths at the hands of Anabaptists. For Mennonites, both the Schleithem confession (1527) and Menno Simons’ critiques during and after these events have founded a consistent Mennonite rejection, from that time until the present, of what happened at Münster and all efforts at theologically justifying such actions.

that Western Christianity owes to the East, as well as of the rich and varied theological, cultural, spiritual and artistic traditions that flourished in the Middle Ages.

50. Contemporary historical scholarship speaks of the “Left Wing of the Reformation” or of the “Radical Reformation”. Less polemical and less confessional historical perspectives demonstrate that there were many different theologies and approaches among the Reformation dissidents. Not only were there Anabaptists, Spiritualists, and Rationalists among those called “Enthusiasts” or “Schwärmer”. There were also different kinds of Anabaptists and Spiritualists. Present day Mennonites find their origins in the non-violent Anabaptist groups of Switzerland, southern Germany and the Netherlands. Both Catholic and Mennonite scholars now have become aware of the complicated situation of the sixteenth century rupture within Christianity. They also acknowledge that the rupture between the Catholic Church and the Anabaptist groups should be studied and understood within the broader framework of the social, political and religious conflicts of the sixteenth century. The oppression and persecution of Anabaptists and Mennonites need to be perceived and evaluated within the framework of a society that resorted to violent ‘solutions’ rather than to dialogue.

51. Further joint studies by Catholic and Mennonite historians would deepen our knowledge and awareness of the complexity of our histories. Catholics would do well to acquaint themselves with the history of the extreme diversity of the radical movements. This would help prevent continual historical misrepresentations of Mennonites. At the same time, Mennonites need to rethink how difficult it must have been in the sixteenth century to sort out the differences among those who had rejected both Rome and Luther. Those who now call themselves Mennonites came to a doctrinal understanding of non-violence only after the Peasants’ War (1527 at Schleithem in the case of the Swiss Anabaptists) and after Münster (1534-1535 in the case of the Dutch Anabaptists).

52. The common experience of martyrdom and persecution could help both Catholics and Mennonites to reach a renewed understanding of the meaning of martyrdom in the painful division of the Christian church in the early modern period, given the close relationship between religion and society at that time. A common study of the history of sixteenth century martyrdom and persecution can help Catholics to appreciate and esteem the Mennonite experience of martyrdom and its impact on Mennonite spirituality and identity. Mennonites could benefit from a study of the Catholic Church’s minority status in many countries since the Reformation period and from the knowledge that Catholics have also had the experience of being persecuted over the centuries.

D. THE CONSTANTINIAN ERA

53. After having studied the sixteenth century together, it became clear to our dialogue group that further joint historical work was necessary on two other periods. In the Reformation period conflicting understandings of these periods of history were a major reason for separation. The following sections reflect our consideration of both the Constantinian era and the later medieval period.

A Joint Reading of Events and Changes

54. By ‘Constantinian era,’ ‘change’ and ‘shift,’ we refer to the important developments that took place from the beginning of the fourth century onward. Mennonites and other radical reformers often refer to these changes as the ‘Constantinian Fall’.²¹ In 313, the Roman emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan which allowed Christianity to exist without persecution alongside other religions. He also required all buildings, cemeteries, and other properties taken in earlier persecutions to be returned to the church. In 380, the emperor Theodosius I decreed Christianity as the official religion of the Empire by raising the Nicene Creed to imperial law. At this point, religions other than Christianity no longer had legal status in the Roman Empire, and they often became the objects of persecution. Due to these changes, the Church developed from a suppressed church (*ecclesia pressa*) to a tolerated church (*ecclesia tolerata*), and then to a triumphant church (*ecclesia vincens*) within the Roman Empire.²²

55. In the fourth and fifth centuries, Christianity became a respected religion, with greater freedom to fulfill its mission in the world. Churches were built and worship took place without fear of persecution. The

²¹ Cf. WALTER KLAASSEN, “The Anabaptist Critique of Constantinian Christendom”, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 55 (1981), pp. 218-230.

²² Cf. GERHARD RUHBACH, ed., *Die Kirche angesichts der Konstantinischen Wende* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1976); ROBIN LANE FOX, *Pagans and Christians* (New York/London: Knopf, 1987); JOCHEN BLEICKEN, *Constantin der Große und die Christen* (München: Oldenbourg, 1992); MICHAEL GRANT, *Constantine the Great. The Man and his Times* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1994); T.G. ELLIOTT, *The Christianity of Constantine the Great* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997).

Gospel was preached throughout the world with the intention of evangelising culture and society under favourable political circumstances. But during the same period, civil rulers sometimes exercised authority over the Church and often asserted the right to control ecclesiastical affairs. And, in some instances, though not without resistance from the Church, they convened synods and councils and controlled various kinds of ecclesiastical appointments, especially those of the bishops in the main cities of the empire. The Church accepted the favours and the benevolent treatment by the state. The power of the state was used to enforce Christian doctrines. To some extent Christians even accepted the use of violence, for instance in the defence of orthodoxy and in the struggle against paganism although some did resist this use of violence. In the ensuing centuries of the Middle Ages, this arrangement led in some cases to forced conversion of large numbers of people, to coercion in matters of faith, and to the application of the death penalty against ‘heretics’.²³ Together we repudiate those aspects of the Constantinian era that were departures from some characteristic Christian practices and deviations from the Gospel ethic. We acknowledge the Church’s failure when she justified the use of force in evangelism, sought to create and to maintain a unitary Christian society by coercive means, and persecuted religious minorities.

56. A common rereading of the history of the early Church by Mennonites and Catholics has been fostered by at least two recent developments. First of all, the social environment and societal position of both the Catholic Church and the Mennonite churches have changed. In many parts of the world Mennonite churches have left their position of isolation that was often imposed by others. Thus Mennonites are experiencing the challenges of taking up responsibilities within society. At the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the Catholic Church 1) affirmed freedom of religion and conscience for all, 2) opposed coercion in matters of religion, and 3) sought from the state for itself and all communities of believers only freedom for individuals and for communities in matters of religion.²⁴ The Catholic Church thus renounced any desire to have a predominant position in society and to be recognized as a state church.²⁵ In the following decades, the Catholic Church strenuously defended the principle of religious freedom and of the separation of church and state. In his encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991), Pope John Paul II stated that religious freedom is the “source and synthesis” of other human rights. Secondly, the 1999 document, “Memory and Reconciliation”, published by the International Theological Commission, challenges us to study the history of the Church, and to recognize the faults of the past, as a means of facilitating the reconciliation of memories and the healing of wounds.

57. Both our traditions regret certain aspects of the Constantinian era, but we also recognize that some developments of the fourth and fifth centuries had roots in the early history of the church, and were in legitimate continuity with it. Mennonites have a strong negative interpretation of the Constantinian change. Catholics have a strong sense of the continuity of the Church during that period and through the ages. But both of us also recognise that past eras were very different from the present, and we also need to be careful about judging historical events according to contemporary standards.

Areas of Future Study

58. We can agree that through a reading together of sources of the early church, we are discovering ways of overcoming some of the stereotypes that we have had of each other. The *ressourcement* (return to the sources) that the Catholic church engaged in when preparing for the Second Vatican Council, enriched Catholicism, and a parallel movement is beginning in contemporary Anabaptism.²⁶ With the use of early Christian sources we can affirm new ways of understanding the question of continuity and of renewal in history. We can both agree that the study of the Constantinian era is significant for us in that it raises important questions regarding the mission of the church to the world and its methods of evangelisation.

59. Various aspects of post-Constantinian Christendom have different meanings in our respective traditions. Catholics would see matters such as the generalization of infant baptism, the evolution of the meaning of conversion, as well as Christian attitudes toward military service and oath taking as examples of

²³ Cf. RAMSEY MACMULLEN, “Christianity Shaped through its Mission”, in: ALAN KREIDER, ed., *The Origins of Christendom in the West* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), pp. 97-117; GILBERT DAGRON, PIERRE RICHÉ and ANDRÉ VAUCHEZ, eds., *Évêques moines et empereurs (610-1054)*, *Histoire du christianisme*, vol. 4 (Paris: Desclée, 1993), p. 637; MICHEL ROUCHE, *Clovis* (Paris: Fayard, 1996), p. 143; W.R. CANNON, *Histoire du christianisme au Moyen Âge: de la chute de Rome à la chute de Constantinople* (Paris: Éditions Payot, 1961), p. 8; JACQUES LE GOFF and RENÉ RÉMOND, eds., *Histoire de la France religieuse*, vol. 1 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1988), p. 179.

²⁴ See Vatican Council’s “Declaration on Religious Freedom”, *Dignitatis humanae*, especially 6-7, 12-13, also 2, 4, 9 and *Gaudium et spes*, 41 and 42.

²⁵ Cf. *Gaudium et spes* 76 which states: “The Church, by reason of her role and competence, is not identified in any way with the political community nor bound to any political system ... The Church and the political community in their own fields are autonomous and independent from each other”.

²⁶ ALAN KREIDER, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Harrisburg: 1999); IDEM, *The Origins of Christendom*, *op. cit.*

legitimate theological developments. Mennonites consider the same phenomena as unfortunate changes of earlier Christian practice and as unfaithfulness to the way of Jesus. Catholics understand the establishment of a Christian society during the Middle Ages, which attempted to bring all social, political, and economic structures into harmony with the Gospel, to have been a worthy goal. Mennonites remain opposed to the theological justification of such an endeavour, and are critical of its results in practice. Mennonites also tend to identify and locate the continuity of the church during this period, in people and in movements that were sometimes rejected as heretical by the Catholic Church. To be sure, they also see continuity in reform movements within the medieval church.

60. Mennonites can affirm the position on religious liberty that was adopted in the Second Vatican Council's "Declaration on Religious Freedom" (*Dignitatis humanae*) in 1965. A key quote from the "Declaration" reads as follows:

"This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups or of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits" (*Dignitatis humanae*, 2).

This quotation and the entire text reflects in many ways the position that was taken by sixteenth century Anabaptists. Such Anabaptists as Balthasar Hubmaier²⁷ or Pilgram Marpeck^{28,28} questioned the use of coercion in relation to religious pluralism and criticised the use of political means against those who believe differently or who have no religious beliefs at all. This same declaration signifies that the Catholic Church renounces the claim to be a "state" church in any and every context. Protestants are no longer addressed as heretics, but as separated sisters and brothers in Christ, even while there are continuing disagreements, and while visible unity has not yet been achieved. It was this "Declaration" as well as other important documents of the Second Vatican Council that contributed significantly to dialogues such as this one. In light of these changes, new possibilities for relating to one another are becoming possible.

61. Catholics affirm that the "Declaration on Religious Freedom" represents a development in doctrine that has strong foundations in Scripture and tradition.²⁹ The "Declaration" states that:

"In the life of the People of God, as it has made its pilgrim way through the vicissitudes of human history, there has at times appeared a way of acting that was hardly in accord with the spirit of the Gospel, or even opposed to it. Nevertheless, the doctrine of the Church that no one is to be coerced into faith has always stood firm".³⁰

Mennonite readings of medieval history doubt such a claim. They state that major theologians, Popes, ecumenical councils, emperors and kings justified persecution theologically. They supported the punishment of heretics by the state, and in some instances, from Theodosius onward, the Church forced the 'christianisation' of large numbers of people. The continuity of the tradition and the differing interpretations of the development of doctrine in this respect, as well as the different ways of evangelisation, need further joint study. Nonetheless, the contemporary Catholic position on this question allows for significant progress in dialogue, and for mutual comprehension and collaboration.

62. Catholics and Mennonites have different interpretations of the historical development of the practice of infant baptism in Christianity. Catholics understand the baptism of children as a long-held tradition of the Church in the East and in the West, going back to the first centuries of Christianity. They refer to the fact that liturgical documents, such as "The Apostolic Tradition" (ca. 220) and Church Fathers such as Origen and Cyprian of Carthage, speak about infant baptism as an ancient and apostolic tradition. Mennonites, on the other hand, consider the introduction of the practice of infant baptism as a later development and they see its generalization as the result of changes in the concept of conversion during the Constantinian era. The historical development of the practice of baptism in relation to the changing position of the Christian Church in culture and society needs to be studied together more thoroughly by both Catholic and Mennonite scholars.

²⁷ "But a Turk or heretic cannot be overcome by our own doing, neither by sword nor by fire, but alone with patience and supplication, whereby we patiently await divine judgment", Balthasar Hubmaier, "On Heretics and Those Who Burn Them", in: H. WAYNE PIPKIN and JOHN HOWARD YODER, eds., *Balthasar Hubmaier: Theologian of Anabaptism*, Classics of the Radical Reformation, 5 (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1989), p. 62.

²⁸ "All external things including life and limb are subjected to external authority. But no one may coerce or compel true faith in Christ...", Pilgram Marpeck, "Exposé of the Babylonian Whore", in: WALTER KLAASSEN, WERNER PACKULL, and JOHN REMPEL, *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck and his Circle*, vol. I (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1999), p. 27.

²⁹ Cf. WALTER KASPER, "The Theological Foundations of Human Rights", *The Jurist* 50 (1990), p. 153.

³⁰ *Dignitatis humanae*, 12.

E. TOWARD A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF THE MIDDLE AGES

Reviewing our Respective Images of the Middle Ages

63. In looking repeatedly at church history in the Middle Ages, both Catholic and Mennonite historians are becoming aware of the fact that their images of the medieval church may be one-sided, incomplete, and often biased. These images need careful revision and amplification in the light of modern scholarship. To Catholic historians it is becoming clear that the Middle Ages were not as deeply christianised as the nineteenth century image of the 'Catholic Middle Ages' wanted to see them.³¹ To Mennonite historians it is becoming clear that the Middle Ages were not as barbaric and decayed as their restitutionist view depicted them. The period between the early church and the Reformation era is considered now to be much more complex, varied, many-voiced and many-coloured than the denominational images of this period wanted us to believe.

64. Therefore, for both our traditions, it is important to see the 'other' Middle Ages, namely those aspects of the period that are often lacking in the image that is popular and widespread in our respective religious communities. For Catholics, besides the positive aspects of the Christian civilization of the Middle Ages, it is important to see the elements of violence, of conversion by force, of the links between the church and secular power, and of the dire effects of feudalism in medieval Christendom. For Mennonites, besides the negative aspects, it is important to see that Christian faith also served as a basis for criticizing secular powers and violence in the Middle Ages. Several reform movements, led by monasteries (for example, Cluny), but also by the Popes (notably, the Gregorian Reform), tried to free the Church from secular influences and political dominance.³² Unfortunately, they succeeded only to a very limited extent. Other movements, often led by monks and ascetics, but also by Popes and bishops, tried to restrict the use of violence in medieval Christianity, and sought to protect the innocent, the weak and the defenceless. Again, their efforts were met with very limited success. Nevertheless, within the often-violent society of medieval Christendom there was an uninterrupted tradition of ecclesiastical peace movements.³³ All these movements and initiatives reminded the medieval church of her vocation and her mission: to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to promote peace and justice. Their pursuit of the freedom of the Church from secular domination was also a pursuit of the purity of the Church. Similar concerns took shape in the Free Churches of the sixteenth century.

Medieval Traditions of Spirituality and Discipleship and the Roots of Anabaptist-Mennonite Identity

65. Moreover, the medieval church reveals an ongoing tradition of Christian spirituality, of discipleship (*Nachfolge*), and of the imitation of Christ. From the early monastic tradition up to the mendicant friars of the High Middle Ages, and from the movements of itinerant preachers up to the houses of Sisters and Brethren of the Common Life, medieval Christians were in search of what the challenge of the Gospel might mean for their way of living.³⁴ They tried to discover how their personal relationship with Jesus might change their lives. The concept of conversion gained a new and real meaning to them. They were not Christians merely out of habit or by birth.

66. Both Catholic and Mennonite historians have recently made clear that at least a part of the spiritual roots of the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition is to be found in this medieval tradition of discipleship.³⁵ Key concepts of the Anabaptist-Mennonite identity, such as yieldedness (*Gelassenheit*), discipleship (*Nachfolge*), repentance (*Bussfertigkeit*), and conversion were developed through the Middle Ages in all kinds of spiritual

³¹ JOHN VAN ENGEN, "The Christian Middle Ages as an Historiographical Problem", *American Historical Review* 91 (1986), pp. 519-552.

³² CHRISTOPHER M. BELLITTO, *Renewing Christianity. A History of Church Reform from Day One to Vatican II* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001).

³³ RONALD G. MUSTO, *The Catholic Peace Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986).

³⁴ BERNARD MCGINN, et al., *Christian Spirituality* (New York: Crossroad, 1985-1989), 3 vols.

³⁵ KENNETH RONALD DAVIS, *Anabaptism and Asceticism: A Study in Intellectual Origins* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998); C. ARNOLD SNYDER, "The Monastic Origins of Swiss Anabaptist Sectarianism", *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 57 (1983), pp. 5-26; C. Arnold Snyder, *The Life and Thought of Michael Sattler* (Scottsdale/Kitchener: Herald Press, 1984); PETER NISSEN, "De Moderne Devotie en het Nederlands-Westfaalse Doperdom: op zoek naar relaties en invloeden", in: P. BANGE a.o. eds., *De Doorwerking van de Moderne Devotie. Windesheim 1387-1987* (Hilversum: Verloren, 1988), pp. 95-118; DENNIS D. MARTIN, "Monks, Mendicants and Anabaptist: Michael Sattler and the Benedictines reconsidered", *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 60 (1986), pp. 139-164; DENNIS D. MARTIN, "Catholic Spirituality and Anabaptist and Mennonite Discipleship", *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 62 (1988), pp. 5-25.

traditions. They are found in the Benedictine and the Franciscan tradition, in the tradition of German mysticism, and in that of the “Modern Devotion”. Medieval and post-medieval Catholic spirituality, on the one hand, and Anabaptist and Mennonite spirituality, on the other, are essentially in harmony, with respect to their common objective: holy living in word and deed.

67. Recent scholarship has also shown that the early Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, as well as others such as the Lutheran tradition, used the same catechetical basis as did medieval Christianity. Both traditions considered the Lord’s Prayer, the Apostles’ Creed and the Ten Commandments to express and represent the essence of Christian faith and doctrine. In this sense, early Anabaptist sources stood in a clearly identifiable medieval tradition. As their medieval predecessors had done, Anabaptist leaders considered these three texts to be essential elements of Christian knowledge. They accepted conventional catechetical presuppositions of the medieval tradition and used them as a prerequisite and a preparation for baptism.³⁶

Areas of Future Study

68. Mennonites and Catholics share the need for a fuller appreciation of the variety of medieval Christianity. They are both engaged in (re-)discovering unknown aspects of their common past, the ‘other’ Middle Ages. Nevertheless, they still have a differing appreciation of their common medieval background. Mennonites might tend to evaluate certain spiritual movements in the Middle Ages as rare exceptions that prove the rule, whereas Catholics might be inclined to consider them as the normal pattern of medieval Christianity. Mennonites and Catholics might reach a deeper understanding of their common background by reading and studying the history of medieval Christian spirituality together. Finally, further scholarly research is important in the field of the relationship between medieval traditions of discipleship and the early Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition. Can Anabaptist-Mennonite piety indeed be understood as a non-sacramental and communitarian transformation of medieval spirituality and asceticism?

³⁶ RUSSELL SNYDER-PENNER, “The Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles’ Creed as Early Anabaptist Texts”, *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 68 (1994), pp. 318-335.

II CONSIDERING THEOLOGY TOGETHER

69. In addition to the foregoing historical considerations, we presented the respective beliefs that Catholics and Mennonites hold on several common themes, and we sought to ascertain the extent to which our theological points of view converge and diverge. Our theological dialogue was motivated by the commonly acknowledged biblical mandate, which calls for believers in Christ to be one so that the world may believe in the unity of the Father and the Son (*Jn 17:20-23*), and for the Church to pursue the goal of “speaking the truth in love” (*Eph 4:16*) and “building itself up in love” (*Eph 4:17*). In the course of five years of dialogue, we identified and discussed several theological topics: the nature of the Church; our understandings of baptism; of the Eucharist and the Lord’s Supper; and our theologies of peace. Our dialogue has been deep and wide ranging, and yet we were not able in this brief period to cover all aspects of the chosen topics or to identify all the issues that require careful consideration. Nonetheless we believe that our mutual consideration of theological issues was significant. We hope that our method of engaging one another can provide a model for the future of dialogue together wherever Catholics and Mennonites engage one another around the world.

A. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

70. The decision to discuss the nature of the Church came quite naturally. The Catholic-Mennonite dialogue is a conversation between officially nominated representatives of the Catholic Church and the Mennonite World Conference, which is the world communion of Mennonite related churches. Since appropriate dialogue begins with personal introductions, it seemed right that each of us should introduce ourselves in terms of our identity as church bodies. Fortunately, over the years both have given major attention to their respective understandings of the Church. It also seemed right to us that if we were to dialogue fruitfully with each other, we should attempt to define the relationship between us in terms of the common ground we occupy as well as the theological issues that separate us. This could set the stage for drawing conclusions, and for dialogue at some future time on outstanding issues.

A Catholic Understanding of the Church

71. For Catholics, “the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race”.³⁷ The Church comprises both “a divine and a human element”.³⁸ A variety of Biblical images have been employed to express the reality of the Church (for example, church as servant, as spouse, as community of the reconciled, as communion, and so forth).

72. From among this variety, three images in particular come to the fore. First the Church is understood to be the people of God, namely a people God planned to assemble in the holy Church who would believe in Christ. “Already from the beginning of the world the foreshadowing of the Church took place. It was prepared in a remarkable way through the history of the people of Israel and by means of the Old Covenant”.³⁹ The Church is therefore seen to be in continuity with the Chosen People who were assembled on Mount Sinai and received the Law and were established by God as his holy people (*Ex 19*). Nonetheless a new and culminating point in salvation history comes about with the saving death and resurrection of Christ and with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Those who follow Christ are, as stated in 1 Pet 2:9ff., “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that they may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people”. Thus the Church is given the vocation of participating in God’s plan for all peoples to bring the light of salvation which is Christ to the ends of the earth.

73. A second image associated with the Church is that she is the body of Christ in and for the world. Perhaps the most profound expression of this reality is to be found in the Pauline use of the image of the body where the term *ekklesia* is realised in the Eucharistic assembly, being the body of Christ for the world (*1 Cor 11*). Once again there is a clear continuity with the idea of the universal mission of Israel carried out through the presence of Christians who belong to the body of Christ in the world. Paul reminds us that Christ reconciled the world to God, thereby bringing about a new creation whereby all who are in Christ are ambassadors for Christ, “since God is making his appeal through us... be reconciled to God” (*2 Cor 5:20*).

74. A third image is that of the Church as the temple of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Eph 2:19-22; 1 Cor 3:16; Rom 8:9; 1 Pet 2:5; 1 Jn 2:27; 3:24*). The Church is seen as the temple of the Spirit because she is to be the

³⁷ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, 1.

³⁸ *Lumen gentium*, 8.

³⁹ *Lumen gentium*, 2.

place of perpetual worship of God. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the Church renders continual praise and adoration of God. Christians through their baptism become living stones in the edifice of the Temple of the Holy Spirit. According to the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church”,

“...the Church prays and likewise labours so that into the People of God, the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the Holy Spirit, may pass the fullness of the whole world, and that in Christ, the head of all things, all honour and glory may be rendered to the Creator, the Father of the universe”⁴⁰

Just as the Trinity is one, in the diversity of persons, so too is the Church one though many members. For Catholics this unity is expressed above all in the sacrament of the Eucharist (*1 Cor* 10:17), where the realization of the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace is actualized. As is said in the letter to the Ephesians:

“There is one body and one Spirit ... but each has been given a grace according to the measure of Christ and...the gifts were given... to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of full stature of Christ” (cf. *Eph* 4:4-13).

75. Catholics express the mystery of the Church in terms of the inner relation that is found in the life of the Trinity, namely *koinonia* or communion. Communion with God is at the heart of our new relationship with God. This has been described as “peace or communion” and is the reconciliation of the world to God in Jesus Christ (*2 Cor* 5:19).⁴¹ This gift of peace/communion is given to us through the one unique mediator between God and humanity, Jesus Christ. This makes Jesus Christ the paradigm of communion. He is the cornerstone upon which rests the edifice of the Church; he alone is the head of the body and we the members. This edifice is constructed as the “household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone” (*Eph* 2:20).

76. One is truly incorporated into Christ and into the Church through the sacrament of baptism, and fully integrated into the economy of salvation by receiving confirmation and Eucharist.⁴² Through these sacraments, new members are received into the body of Christ and assume co-responsibility for the life and mission of the Church shared with their brothers and sisters.

77. Catholics likewise believe that the apostles, in showing their solicitude for that which they had received from the Lord, have chosen worthy men to carry on this task of transmitting the faithful witness of Christ down through the ages. Thus the apostolic continuity of the Church is served by the apostolic succession of ministers whose task is to preach the Word of God both “in season and out”, (*2 Tim* 4:2), to teach with sound teaching and to preside over the building up of the body of Christ in love. The “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation”, *Dei verbum* states clearly the value of the revealed Word of God for believers when it says that “by divine Revelation God wished to manifest and communicate both himself and the eternal decrees of his will concerning the salvation of mankind”.⁴³ Vatican II further recognizes the role of the apostles in this transmission⁴⁴ and the role of the faithful people of God in the truthful transmission of the faith when it says that

“the whole body of the faithful who have an anointing that comes from the holy one (cf. *1 Jn* 2:20, 27) cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people, when ‘from bishops to the last faithful’ they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals”⁴⁵.

78. Furthermore, Catholics believe that sacred Scripture and sacred Tradition make up a single deposit of the Word of God. This single deposit has been entrusted to the Church. The “task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church.... Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ”.⁴⁶ The “teaching office” (Magisterium) is exercised by the bishops in communion with the Bishop of Rome, the Pope. Since the Magisterium is not

⁴⁰ *Lumen gentium* 17. Cf. *Rom* 12

⁴¹ Cf. Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, *Ad gentes*, 3.

⁴² Cf. The Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio*, 22 and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, “Directory for the Application of the Principles and Norms of Ecumenism” (March, 1993), 92.

⁴³ Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei verbum*, 6.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Dei verbum*, 7.

⁴⁵ *Lumen gentium*, 12.

⁴⁶ *Dei verbum*, 10.

superior to the Word of God,⁴⁷ the teaching office of the Pope and bishops is at the service of the Word of God and forms a unity with Tradition and Scripture and teaches only that which has been handed down to it. In his encyclical on the Catholic Church's commitment to ecumenism, *Ut unum sint*, John Paul II identified this point as one of the five areas for further discussion:

“It is already possible to identify the areas in need of fuller study before a true consensus of faith can be achieved: 1) the relationship between Sacred Scripture, as the highest authority in matters of faith, and Sacred Tradition, as indispensable to the interpretation of the Word of God...”⁴⁸

79. The Bishop of Rome has the office of ensuring the communion of all the Churches and hence is the first servant of unity. This primacy is exercised on various levels, including vigilance over the handing down of the Word, the celebration of the Liturgy and the Sacraments, the Church's mission, discipline and the Christian life. He also has the duty and responsibility to speak in the name of all the pastors in communion with him. He can also — under very specific conditions clearly laid down by the First Vatican Council — declare *ex cathedra* that a certain doctrine belongs to the deposit of faith. Furthermore,

“religious submission of mind and will must be shown in a special way to the authentic magisterium of the Roman Pontiff, even when he is not speaking *ex cathedra*; that is, it must be shown in such a way that his supreme magisterium is acknowledged with reverence, the judgments made by him are sincerely adhered to, according to his manifest mind and will”.⁴⁹

By thus bearing witness to the truth, he serves unity.⁵⁰

80. The Church (the faithful and the ordained) therefore has the obligation to be a faithful witness of that which she has received in word (teaching/preaching) and deed (holy living). This is possible through the anointing that has been received by the Holy Spirit. (*1 Jn 2:20f.*) The Church lives then under the Word of God because she is sanctified in truth by that same word (cf. *Jn 17:17*), and being made holy she may then sanctify the world in truth. The Catholic Church confesses that the Church is indeed holy because she is purified by her Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and she has been given the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, to plead the just cause of God before the nations. The followers of Jesus must conquer the spirit of this world with the Spirit of the beatitudes. This is the continuation of Jesus' mission to “prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment” (*Jn 16:8ff.*). This is possible only with the aid of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate.

81. When Catholics speak of the one Church of God, they understand her to be realized “in and formed out of particular Churches”⁵¹ and that she is concretely real in the Catholic Church.⁵² For the ecclesiology of Vatican II, the universal Church is the body of particular churches from which (*in et ex quibus*) the one and only Catholic Church comes into being,⁵³ but the local churches also exist in and out of the one Church,⁵⁴ shaped in its image.⁵⁵ The mutual relationship between the communion of particular churches and the one church, just described, means that the one Church and the diversity of particular churches are simultaneous. They are interior to each other (perichoretic). Within this perichoresis the unity of the Church has priority over the diversity of the local churches, and over all particular interests as is really very obvious in the New Testament (*1 Cor. 1:10ff.*). “For the Bible, the one Church corresponds to the one God, the one Christ, the

⁴⁷ Cf. *Dei verbum*, 10.

⁴⁸ The other points are: “2) the Eucharist, as the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, an offering of praise to the Father, the sacrificial memorial and Real Presence of Christ and the sanctifying outpouring of the Holy Spirit; 3) Ordination, as a Sacrament, to the three-fold ministry of the episcopate, presbyterate and diaconate; 4) the Magisterium of the Church, entrusted to the Pope and the Bishops in communion with him, understood as a responsibility and an authority exercised in the name of Christ for teaching and safeguarding the faith; 5) the Virgin Mary, as Mother of God and Icon of the Church, the spiritual Mother who intercedes for Christ's disciples and for all humanity” (*Ut unum sint*, 79).

⁴⁹ *Lumen gentium*, 25.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Ut unum sint*, 94.2.

⁵¹ *Lumen gentium*, 23.1.

⁵² Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 8.

⁵³ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 23, 2; see also, Decree on the Ministry of Bishops, *Christus dominus*, 11 and CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, in “Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion”, *Communio notio*, pp. 7f.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Communio notio*, 9.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 23.

one Spirit, the one baptism (cf. Eph 4:5f.) and lives according to the model of the early community of Jerusalem (Acts 2:42).⁵⁶

82. A particular church is that portion of the people of God that is united around the bishop whose mission is to proclaim the Gospel and to construct the Church through the sacraments — in particular through baptism and the Eucharist.⁵⁷ The communion of particular churches is presided over by the Bishop of Rome, the successor of Peter to whom was entrusted the care for confirming and strengthening the faith of his brothers. Together with the bishops, the Pope governs the Catholic Church in its mission to proclaim the Good News of the kingdom of God and the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ that God offers freely to all of humanity.

83. In the past “catholicity” was understood to mean: extending over the whole world. While this aspect is true, there is a deeper meaning that indicates, in spite of the diversity of expression, there is the fullness of the faith, respect for the gifts of the Spirit in their diversity, communion with other apostolic Churches and faithful representation to human cultures.⁵⁸ “Driven by the inner necessity of her own catholicity”, the Church’s universal mission “strives ever to proclaim the Gospel to all” and demands the particularity of the churches. Hence the Church is to speak all languages and embrace all cultures.⁵⁹ In addition the Church is to imitate the incarnation of Christ who linked himself to certain social and cultural conditions of those human beings among whom he dwelt.⁶⁰ In this context catholicity of the Church is a call to embrace all legitimate human particularities.⁶¹ The catholicity of the Church therefore consists in the recognition of the same apostolic faith that has been incarnated in diverse cultures and places throughout the world. In spite of the diversity of its expressions and practices in its celebration, the Catholic faith is understood to be the same faith contained in the Scriptures, handed on by the apostles, and confessed in the creeds today.

A Mennonite Understanding of the Church

84. In Anabaptist-Mennonite theology the Church is understood as the community of faith endowed with the Spirit of God and shaped by its response to the grace of God in Christ. Three biblical images of the Church are basic to a Mennonite perspective. First, the Church is the new *people of God*.⁶² While the concept of peoplehood indicates the continuity of the Church with the people of faith of the Old Testament (*Gal 2:15-21*), the initiative of God in Jesus Christ marks a new beginning. In Christ, God called “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people...out of darkness into his marvellous light” (*1 Pet 2:9*). The life, death and resurrection of Christ established the good news that people of all races and classes and genders are invited through the grace of God to belong to the people of God (*Gal 3:28*). The Church, as a family or household of faith (*Gal 6:10; Eph 2:19*), adds to its characterization as people of God. Hospitality is a mark of the household of faith, as members of the household welcome all who join the family, care for one another, and together share their spiritual and material resources with those in need (*Jas 2:14-17*).

85. Secondly, the *body of Christ* is an important biblical image for an Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of the Church.⁶³ Reference to Christ in this figure points to the foundation (*1 Cor 3:11*) and head (*Col 1:18*) of the Church. Members of the Church are incorporated as a body into Christ. The image of the body has its background in the Hebrew concept of corporate personality. Corporate personality implies commitment to Christ as a body of believers (*Rom 12:15; Eph 4:1-16*), which in turn implies a commitment to one another as members of the Church. Members of the body are called to be holy as Christ is holy: “The

⁵⁶ WALTER Cardinal KASPER, “Present Situation and Future of the Ecumenical Movement”, prolusio of the plenary meeting of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Information Service* 109 (2002/1-II), p. 18.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Christus dominus*, 11.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 13.3 and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity’s “Directory for the Application of the Principles and Norms of Ecumenism” (March 25, 1993), 16.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Ad gentes*, 1, 4.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Ad gentes*, 10.

⁶¹ Cf. *Ad gentes*, 22.

⁶² Cf. HAROLD S. BENDER, *These Are My People: The New Testament Church* (Scottsdale/Kitchener: Herald Press, 1962), pp. 1ff.

⁶³ Cf. BENDER, *ibid.*, p. 23ff.

church, the body of Christ, is called to become ever more like Christ, its head, in its worship, ministry, witness, mutual love and care, and the ordering of its common life”.⁶⁴

86. A third image of the Church, important for Anabaptist-Mennonites, is the *community of the Holy Spirit*.⁶⁵ A defining moment occurred when the risen Christ “breathed on [the disciples] and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained’” (*Jn* 20:22-22). The endowment of the disciples with the Holy Spirit mandated his followers to become a forgiving community. A further step in the formation of the apostolic community took place when, after the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, the first converts “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and *koinonia* (fellowship, community), to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (*Acts* 2:42). The early church understood itself as the “new Messianic community in which the main feature is the Holy Spirit’s renewed presence with God’s people”.⁶⁶ As such, the Spirit plays a crucial role in the functioning of the body of Christ, as the giver of spiritual gifts to its members (*I Cor* 12:4-11) and as the creator of the oneness of the body (*I Cor* 12:12ff). Given the multi-faceted composition of the Church, it is a formidable task for the community to “maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (*Eph* 4:3) The Spirit provides the power to vie for the Church’s oneness and to maintain its ethical focus on the “more excellent way” (*I Cor* 12:31; cf. *I Cor* 13; *I Pet* 1:2) of love.

87. Besides these three images which follow the trinitarian formula, a Mennonite understanding of the Church is illuminated by various descriptions. The first of these is *fellowship of believers*. The Anabaptist movement established the idea that the Church is comprised of all who, by their own free will, believe in Jesus Christ and obey the Gospel. Submission to Christ implies mutual accountability to one another in congregational life (*I Cor* 12:25; *Jas* 2:14-17; *1 Jn* 3:16). This includes the task of reproving and forgiving as well as guiding and affirming one another in accordance with the biblical mandate to engage in “binding and loosing” on behalf of Christ (*Mt* 16:19; 18:15-22; *Jn* 20:19-23).⁶⁷ Further, the Mennonite concept of the Church requires the separation of church and state, with the clear understanding that the Christian’s primary loyalty is to Jesus Christ. For example, in matters of warfare, allegiance to the Christ as Lord takes precedence over the demands of the state. Important to the original impetus of the Anabaptist movement was the idea of “a covenantal people” called out from among the nations to be a reconciling community internally⁶⁸ as well as “salt and light” in the world (*Mt* 5:13-16). Mennonites depict themselves as being ‘in the world but not of the world’ (*Jn* 17:15-17).

88. Mennonites understand the Church as a *community of disciples*. As was the case for New Testament believers, the acceptance of salvation made visible in baptism and in identification with the people of “the Way” (*Acts* 9:2), marks their resolute intention to be instructed in the way of Jesus of Nazareth, and to seek to follow the Master as his first disciples had done. Discipleship (*Nachfolge*) is integral to the Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding of faith, as exemplified in a quote from the Anabaptist Hans Denck (1526): “The medium is Christ whom no one can truly know unless he follow him in his life, and no one may follow him unless he has first known him”.⁶⁹ Mennonite historians and theologians have identified discipleship as one of the most important legacies of the Anabaptist movement for the continuing Mennonite vision of the Church and the vocation of its members. A recent confession of faith states: “The church is the new community of disciples sent into the world to proclaim the reign of God and to provide a foretaste of the church’s glorious hope”.⁷⁰

89. Mennonites understand the Church as a *people in mission*. The Anabaptists took seriously Christ’s commission to “be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth” (*Acts* 1:8).⁷¹ Following a period of self-preservation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the latter nineteenth century brought with it a renewal of the missionary spirit. Today the Church understands its very being as missional. That is, the call to proclaim the Gospel and to be a sign of the kingdom of God characterizes the Church and includes every

⁶⁴ *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, 9 (Scottsdale/Waterloo: Herald Press, 1995), p. 39.

⁶⁵ Cf. NORMAN KRAUS, *The Community of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974); BENDER, *op. cit.*, pp. 42ff. Bender’s terminology, “The Holy Community”, is practically interchangeable with the image of the “community of the Holy Spirit”.

⁶⁶ KRAUS, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

⁶⁷ Cf. JOHN HOWARD YODER, *Body Politics* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1997), ch. 1.

⁶⁸ Cf. F.H. LITTELL, *The Anabaptist View of the Church : A Study in the Origins of Sectarian Protestantism*, second edition, revised and enlarged (Boston: Beacon Press/Starr King Press, 1958), pp. 37ff.

⁶⁹ WALTER KLAASSEN, ed., *Anabaptism in Outline* (Scottsdale/Kitchener: Herald Press, 1981), p. 87.

⁷⁰ *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, 9, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁷¹ Cf. R. FRIEDMANN, *The Theology of Anabaptism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1973), pp. 149ff.

member of it. Mission activity is carried out in a peaceful manner without coercion, and includes the ministries of evangelism, social service, and advocacy for peace and justice among all people.

90. The Mennonite Church is a *peace church*. Peace is essential to the meaning and message of the Gospel and thus to the Church's self-understanding. The Church submits to the Prince of Peace, who calls for the way of peace, justice and non-resistance, and who exemplifies the way of non-violence and reconciliation among all people and for all God's creation. The peace church advocates the way of peace for all Christian churches. One important correlate of the Church's identity as a peace church is the Church's claim to be a 'free' church. Mennonites believe that freedom is an essential gift of the Spirit to the Church (2 *Cor* 3:17). Church membership entails a free and voluntary act whereby the person makes a free and uncoerced commitment to faith. The separation of church and state along with the refusal to engage in violence against enemies is an implication of freedom of conscience and of the liberating power of the Gospel.

91. Mennonites understand the Church as a *servant community*. Jesus came to serve, and he taught his disciples the way of servanthood (*Mk* 10:43-45). In Anabaptist-Mennonite theology, the Sermon on the Mount (*Mt* 5-7) is taken seriously as the operative ethical agenda for all who confess Christ as Saviour and Lord. The Spirit endows believers with varieties of gifts for building up the body of Christ and sharing its message in the world (1 *Cor* 12). In the Church some, both men and women, are called to serve in leadership ministries. These may include offices such as pastors, deacons and elders, as well as evangelists, missionaries, teachers and overseers. Patterns of leadership vary from place to place and from time to time as they already did in the apostolic Church (*Acts* 6:1-6; *Eph* 4:11; 1 *Tim* 3:1-13). The "priesthood of all believers" is understood to encourage all believers as "priests" to lead a holy life and to give honour to God by serving one another in the Church and in a needy world.

92. The Church is a *communion of saints*. In Anabaptist-Mennonite thought, reference to "saints" includes all who believe in Jesus Christ and seek to follow him in holy living. The Church in its particular setting shares the calling to sainthood "together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours" (1 *Cor* 1:2; cf. also *Rom* 15:26; 1 *Cor* 14:33; *Heb* 14:24; *Rev* 22:21). The communion of saints includes the "cloud of witnesses" (*Heb* 12:1) of the past who have endured faithfully to the end. Sainthood is not based on ethical merit, but is accorded those who have persevered to the end, "looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (*Heb* 12:2). Anabaptists already claimed the depiction of the Church as a fellowship of saints of 'catholic' or 'universal' nature in the early stages of the movement. The Anabaptist theologian, Balthasar Hubmaier, made this explicit in "A Christian Catechism" of 1526, where he wrote that

"through this baptism for the forgiveness of sins the person, in open confession of his faith, makes his first entry and beginning in the holy, catholic, Christian Church (outside of which there is no salvation)... and is at that time admitted and accepted into the community of the saints".⁷²

Much later, in the twentieth century, we find a similar standpoint as, for example, in the *Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith* of 1902, which states:

"Although the members of [the Church of Jesus Christ] belong to all nations and ranks scattered here and there throughout the world and are divided in denominations, yet they all are one and among one another brethren and members and exist as one body in Christ their head, who is the Lord, Chief, Shepherd, Prophet, Priest and King of the church".⁷³

Convergences

93. *Nature of the Church*. Catholics and Mennonites agree on conceiving of the Church as the people of God, the body of Christ, and the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit, images that flow from the Scriptures. Catholics and Mennonites agree that the Church is called into being, is sustained, and is guided by the triune God who nourishes her in "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit" (2 *Cor* 13:13).

94. *Foundation of the Church*. We agree that the Church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone" (*Eph* 2:20. cf. 1 *Cor* 3:11). Catholics and Mennonites agree and teach that the faith of the Church is founded on the authority of the Scriptures, which bear witness to Jesus Christ, and is expressed in the early creeds of the Church, such as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene-

⁷² DENIS JANZ, *Three Reformation Catechisms: Catholic, Anabaptist, Lutheran* (New York/Toronto: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1982), p. 134.

⁷³ HOWARD J. LOEWEN, *One Lord, One Church, One Hope, and One God: Mennonite Confessions of Faith* (Elkhart, IN: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1985), p. 166.

Constantinopolitan Creed.⁷⁴ Both Catholics and Mennonites affirm the Scriptures as the highest authority for the faith and life of the Church.⁷⁵ Both affirm the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the formation of the Scriptures. Catholics speak of such divinely revealed realities as are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture as having been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁶ Mennonites speak similarly of the Scripture as God's word written.⁷⁷

95. *Incorporation into the body of Christ.* We agree that the invitation to be God's faithful people is offered to all in the name of Jesus Christ. Through baptism we become members of the Church, the body of Christ.⁷⁸ The generous gifts of the Spirit, given to the community of faith, enable each member to grow in a lifelong process of Christlikeness. The Eucharist and the Lord's Supper respectively draw believers together in the Church by nurturing their communion with the triune God and with one another.

96. *Mission of the Church.* Mennonites and Catholics agree that mission is essential to the nature of the Church. Empowered and equipped by the Holy Spirit, whose coming was promised by Jesus Christ, it is the mission of the Church to bring the Good News of salvation to all nations by proclaiming the Gospel in word and in deed to the ends of the earth (cf. *Is* 2:1-4; *Mt* 28:16-20; *Eph* 4:11f.). The 1995 *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* states: "We believe that the church is called to proclaim and to be a sign of the kingdom of God".⁷⁹ We also agree that the Church's mission is carried out in the world through every follower of Jesus Christ, both leadership and laity.⁸⁰ A dimension of the mission of the Church is realized when the Church is present among people of all nations. Thereby the divinely destined unity of humanity as one people of faith is called into being from peoples of many tongues and nations (*Eph* 4:4-6; *Phil* 2:11).⁸¹ Mission requires that Christians seek to become "one" for the sake of their witness to Jesus Christ and to the Father (*Jn* 17:20-21), and that they make "every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (*Eph* 4:3).⁸² It belongs to the mission of the Church to present Jesus Christ to the world and to extend the work of Christ on earth.

97. *Visibility of the Church.* We agree that the Church is a visible community of believers originating in God's call to be a faithful people in time and place. The visible Church was prefigured by the formation of the Old Testament people of God, and was renewed and expanded as the one new humanity, through the blood of Christ (*Gen* 12:1-3; *Eph* 2:13-15; *1 Pet* 2:9-10). Together we value the Biblical image of the Church as "the light of the world" and as "a city built on a hill" (*Mt* 5:14). Accordingly, the visibility of the Church is evidenced when, in word and deed, its members give public witness to faith in Christ.⁸³

98. *Oneness of the Church.* Together with other disciples of Christ, Catholics and Mennonites take seriously the Scripture texts that call Christians to be one in Christ. We confess that our witness to the revelation of God in Christ is weakened when we live in disunity (*Jn* 17:20-23). Together we hear the call to "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (*Eph* 4:3). Together we ask: What does it mean for

⁷⁴ Cf. *Dei verbum*, 10-20; *Confession of Faith of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches*, 2 (Winnipeg/Hillsboro: Kindred Productions, 1999); *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, 4, *op. cit.*, p. 21. According to Rainer W. Burkart, secretary of the MWC Faith and Life Council, "statements of faith from the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ tradition often borrow language that can be found in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, and some view the Apostles' Creed as a foundational text for understanding the essentials of the faith. Many Mennonite and Brethren in Christ confessions follow the traditional creedal order..." , *COURIER, A Quarterly Publication of the Mennonite World Conference* 12, 4 (1997), p. 3.

⁷⁵ Although for Catholics this is never without relationship to "Sacred Tradition as indispensable to the interpretation of the Word of God", *Ut unum sint*, 79.

⁷⁶ Cf. *Dei verbum*, 11.

⁷⁷ For example, JOHN C. WENGER, *God's Word Written* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1966); *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, 4, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁷⁸ On the relationship between incorporation into the Church and baptism, see para. 76 and 115-116 for the Catholic position and para. 92 and 121-124 for the Mennonite position.

⁷⁹ *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, *op. cit.*, 4, p. 28.

⁸⁰ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 17, 33; "Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity", *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 2-4; *Dordrecht Confession (1632)*, Art. V, Loewen, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

⁸¹ Cf. *Unitatis redintegratio*, 7.

⁸² *Unitatis redintegratio*, 12.

⁸³ Cf. KLAASSEN, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

the churches to confess “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (*Eph* 4:5-6)? Together we pray the Lord’s Prayer, imploring God to increase his kingdom among us.

99. *Church as Presence and Promise of Salvation.* Catholics and Mennonites agree that the Church is a chosen sign of God’s presence and promise of salvation for all creation. Catholics speak of this by affirming that the Church is “the universal sacrament of salvation at once manifesting and actualizing the mystery of God’s love for humanity”.⁸⁴ Mennonites express the promissory character of the Church by proclaiming that “in God’s people the world’s renewal has begun”,⁸⁵ and that “the church is the new community of disciples sent into the world to proclaim the reign of God and to provide a foretaste of the church’s glorious hope”.⁸⁶ We agree that the Church is still underway toward its heavenly goal, and we believe that God will sustain the faithful Church unto the realization of its glorious hope.⁸⁷ Here and now the Church manifests signs of its eschatological character and thus provides a foretaste of the glory yet to come.

100. *Ministry of the Church.* We agree that ministry belongs to the whole Church, and that there are varieties of gifts of ministry given for the good of all. We also agree that chosen leaders, ordained and lay,⁸⁸ are essentially servants of God’s people, called “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (*Eph* 4:12).

101. *Holiness and Discipleship.* Catholics and Mennonites have a common zeal for the Christian life of holiness, motivated by devotion to Jesus Christ and the word of God, and actualized in a spirituality of discipleship and obedience (*Mt* 5-7; *Rom* 12; *Eph* 2:6-10).⁸⁹ The gift of faith freely received provides the motivation for Christian works offered to the world as thanksgiving for the abundant grace we have been given by God. The life of discipleship and holiness is referred to and expressed variously in terms of “following Christ” (*Nachfolge Christi*), “imitation of Christ” (*imitatio Christi*), Christlikeness, and devotion to Christ.

102. *Education and Formation.* Together we affirm the necessity of Christian formation by which individuals come to an understanding and acceptance of their faith and take responsibility for its implementation in life and witness (*Phil* 2:12ff.). In Mennonite churches, Christian education is fostered in many ways: Scripture reading, preaching, pre-baptismal instruction, Sunday school for all ages, marriage preparation, study groups, day schools for children and youth, discipleship programs, Bible schools, college and seminary programs, and voluntary service assignments at home and abroad. In Catholic communities, formation takes place in preparation for the sacraments of initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) including the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults and prebaptismal preparation for parents and sponsors, in homilies, in marriage preparation, in catechesis, adult education, college and seminary programs, and for some in voluntary service programs. Special formation is encouraged for the laity, and for those who become pastoral workers in the Church.⁹⁰

Divergences

103. *Church and the Authority of Tradition.* Catholics and Mennonites differ in their understanding of the relationship of Scripture and Tradition/tradition⁹¹ and in their view of the authority of Tradition/tradition. Catholics speak of Scripture and Tradition as forming one sacred deposit of the Word of God, committed to the Church.⁹² Sacred Tradition, coming from the Apostles, is the means by which the Church comes to know the full Canon of Sacred Scripture and understands the content of Divine Revelation. Tradition transmits in its entirety the Word of God entrusted to the apostles by Christ and the Holy Spirit. Sacred Tradition, Sacred Scripture and the teaching authority of the Church, in accord with God’s most wise design, are so linked and joined together that one cannot stand without the others, and that all together and each in its own way under the action of the one Holy

⁸⁴ *Gaudium et spes*, 45.

⁸⁵ Cf. DOUGLAS GWYN *et al.*, *A Declaration on Peace* (Scottsdale/Waterloo: Herald Press, 1991).

⁸⁶ *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, 9, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

⁸⁷ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 48-49.

⁸⁸ For explanation of the difference between ordained and lay ministry in Catholic teaching, see para. 106.

⁸⁹ Cf. BENDER, “The Anabaptist Vision”, *op. cit.*, 13-17; *Lumen gentium*, 39-42.

⁹⁰ Cf. *Apostolicam actuositatem*, 28-32.

⁹¹ When Catholics capitalize Tradition they acknowledge the close bond that exists between Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture as “forming one sacred deposit of the Word of God” (*Dei verbum*), 10) and not various human traditions that may develop in the course of the history of the Church.

⁹² Cf. *Dei verbum*, 10.

Spirit contribute effectively to the salvation of souls.⁹³ Mennonites view tradition as the post-Biblical development of Christian doctrine and practice. The Church needs constantly to test and correct its doctrine and practice in the light of Scripture itself. Tradition is valued, yet it can be altered or even reversed, since it is subject to the critique of Scripture.

104. *Incorporation into the Church.* Mennonites and Catholics differ in their understanding of who may be incorporated into the Church, and by what means. For Catholics,

“by the sacrament of baptism a person is truly incorporated into Christ and into his church and so is reborn to a sharing of the divine life. Baptism, therefore, constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who through it are reborn. Baptism, of itself, is the beginning, for it is directed toward the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ.”⁹⁴

which takes place in the celebration of confirmation and the reception of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the summit of initiation because it is through participation in Christ’s eucharistic body that one is fully incorporated into the ecclesial body. The fact that infants cannot yet profess personal faith does not prevent the Church from conferring baptism on them, since in reality it is by and in her own faith that the Church baptizes them. For Mennonites, membership in the Church follows upon adult baptism, while children are committed to the care of God and the grace of Christ until such a time as they freely request to be baptized and are received into church membership.

105. *Structure of the Church.* For Catholics the visible Church of Christ consists of particular churches united around their bishops in communion with one another and with the Bishop of Rome as the successor of Saint Peter. For Mennonites, the primary manifestation of the Church is the local congregation and the various grouping of congregations variously named conferences, church bodies, and/or denominations.

106. *Ministry, Authority, and Leadership.* In the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, ministerial leaders, both men and women, are chosen and authorized by the congregation and/or by regional groups of congregations. In some Mennonite churches it is the practice to ordain leaders for life. In others, ordination is for a set period of time. Mennonites do not have a hierarchical priesthood. As ‘priests of God,’ all believers have access to God through faith.⁹⁵ While Catholics affirm the “common priesthood of the faithful”,⁹⁶ they hold to a ministerial, hierarchical priesthood, differing from the former “not only in degree but also in essence”,⁹⁷ that has roots in, and takes its authority from Christ’s priesthood. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the laying on of hands, the Sacrament of Orders confers on bishops, priests, and deacons gifts for the service of the Church. Both laity and clergy share in the fundamental equality of the baptized in the one people of God and in the one priesthood of Jesus Christ.⁹⁸ The differentiation of offices and roles within the Catholic Church reflects the variety of gifts given by one Spirit to the one body of Christ for the good of all (cf. *1 Cor 12*).⁹⁹

Areas of Future Study

107. *Church and Tradition.* Further discussion is needed on our respective understandings of the relationship between Scripture as the highest authority in matters of faith, and Tradition/tradition as indispensable to the interpretation of the Word of God.¹⁰⁰ It is recognized that the Catholic Church has a developed understanding of Tradition in God’s revelation. While Mennonites may have an implicit understanding of the role of tradition, little attention has been given to the role of tradition relative to Scripture and to the development of doctrine and ethics.

⁹³ Cf. *Dei verbum*, 7-10

⁹⁴ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, “Directory for the Application”, *op. cit.*, 91.

⁹⁵ Cf. MARLIN MILLER, “Priesthood of all Believers”, *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, vol. V (Scottsdale/Waterloo: Herald Press, 1990), pp. 721-722. For Mennonites, the Reformation’s emphasis on the ‘priesthood of all believers’ did not become a point of doctrine. The expression was used by some Anabaptists to support the New Testament’s teaching that all believers corporately are a ‘kingdom of priests,’ a ‘royal priesthood.’

⁹⁶ *Lumen gentium*, 10.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 10, 34.

⁹⁹ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 12.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Ut unum sint*, 79.

108. *Catholicity of the Church.* We agree that further study and discussion is needed on the question of the definition and implications of our respective understandings of the catholicity and universality of the Church. Mennonites believe that all who truly confess Christ as Lord, who are baptized, and follow him in life, are members of the Church universal. For Catholics, catholicity properly means the fullness of the confession of faith, respect for the gifts of the Spirit in their diversity, communion with other churches, and witnessing in all human cultures to the mystery of Christ in fidelity to the Apostolic Tradition.

109. *The Church Visible and Invisible.* Agreement among us on the visibility of the Church raises the question of the meaning of visible and invisible aspects of the Church, suggested in such expressions as “cloud of witnesses” (*Heb 12:1*) and “communion of saints” as stated in the *Apostles’ Creed*.

110. *Ministry.* A comparative study of ministry, ordination, authority, and leadership in our two traditions is needed.

B. SACRAMENTS AND ORDINANCES

111. Since differences of interpretation with respect to two traditional church practices, baptism and the Mass, triggered the rupture between Anabaptists and Catholics in the sixteenth century, it seemed right to both Catholic and Mennonite members of the dialogue that we should present our respective current understandings of these practices, and upon that basis enter into a consideration of historic points of agreement and disagreement. Below is a synopsis of what we presented to each other, and of what we identified as convergences, divergences, and areas for future study. As the discussion proceeded, we were challenged by words from Ephesians: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (*Eph 4:4-6*).

A Catholic Understanding of Sacraments

112. *Sacrament* is an important concept for Catholics. This concept has been expressed in many ways throughout the long history of the life of the Church and especially with two words: *mysterion* and *sacramentum*. *Mysterion* and *sacramentum* refer to the mysterious manner in which God has used the elements of his creation for his self-communication. The Scriptures, especially the New Testament, reveal that for the Christian the place of fundamental encounter with God is Jesus Christ. Catholicism has traditionally understood that God’s relationship to us is not to be understood solely in an individual way but also in a communal or corporate manner. This is basically a way of expressing the Pauline understanding of all having fallen in Adam and all having been raised (saved/justified) to new life in Christ (cf. *Rom 5:19*; *2 Cor 5:14f.*; *Acts 17:26ff.*). Linked to the notion of corporate personality is that of the ecclesial dimension of the mysteries/sacraments, in that sacraments appear as the symbolic expression of the eschatological embodiment of God through the Spirit, first in Christ (the “source-sacrament”) then in the Church (the “fundamental-sacrament” of Christ). This dimension is important for the Catholic understanding of the sacraments since it is the Church, as body of Christ, which is the fundamental sacrament of God’s promise and deliverance of the kingdom.¹⁰¹ Just as Christ is the sacrament of the encounter with God, so the Church is the sacrament of encounter with Christ, and hence, ultimately with God.

113. The Second Vatican Council speaks of the sacrament as a reality to be lived especially as the life of the Christian is linked to the Paschal mystery:

“Thus, for well-disposed members of the faithful the liturgy of the sacraments...sanctifies almost every event of their lives with the divine grace which flows from the paschal mystery of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ. From this source all sacraments... draw their power. There is scarcely any proper use of material things, which cannot thus be directed toward sanctification of men and the praise of God”¹⁰².

The whole sacramental system in the Catholic Church evolves from the understanding of the centrality of the Paschal mystery. The Paschal mystery is the place where God reveals and grants salvation in symbolic acts and words. The Church in turn worships God through Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit through the active participation of the faithful in word and symbolic action. Sacraments as the Council teaches are

¹⁰¹ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 48; *Phil 2:12*. In talking about the relationship of Israel to the Church, *Lumen gentium*, 9 describes the sacramental nature of the Church in this way: “Israel according to the flesh, which wandered as an exile in the desert, was already called the Church of God (*2 Esdr 13:1*; cf. *Deut 23:1ff.*; *Num 20:4*). So likewise the new Israel, which while living in this present age goes in search of a future and abiding city (Cf. *Heb 13:14*), is called the Church of Christ (cf. *Mt 16:18*). For he has bought it for himself with his blood (cf. *Acts 20:28*), has filled it with his Spirit and provided it with those means which befit it as a visible and social union. God gathered together as one all those who in faith look upon Jesus as the author of salvation and the source of unity and peace, and established them as the Church that for each and all it may be the visible sacrament of this saving unity”.

¹⁰² “Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy”, *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 61.

“sacraments of faith”.¹⁰³ They are so in four ways: sacraments presuppose faith, nourish faith, fortify faith and express faith.

114. Vatican II offers four points of reference for sacraments which are important for their comprehension: 1) Sacraments are liturgical. As such they are located within the Liturgy of the Word¹⁰⁴ and within the action of the Spirit.¹⁰⁵ 2) Sacraments are linked to God, which means that they are the place of divine action. 3) They are linked to the Church, since the Church is where the sacraments are celebrated thanks to the priestly reality of the whole body¹⁰⁶ and because the Church is edified by them. The sacraments are constitutive of the very reality of the Church, and are seen as institutional elements building up the body of Christ.¹⁰⁷ 4) Lastly, sacraments are linked to the whole of the Christian life, since there is a strong link between the sacramental celebration and the ethic of Christian living. Hence a link is made between the Word of God proclaimed, the Word of God celebrated and the Word of God lived that engages each Christian in their daily life.

115. *Baptism* for Catholics is above all the sacrament of that faith by which, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we respond to the Gospel of Christ. Through baptism one is incorporated into the Church and is built up in the Spirit into a house where God lives. Baptism is the cleansing with water by the power of the living word that washes away every stain of sin and makes us sharers in God’s own life. Those who are baptized are united to Christ in a life like his (*Col 2:12*; cf. *Rom 6:4f.*). Catholic teaching regarding baptism may be put in six points: 1) baptism is the beginning of the Christian life and the door to other sacraments; 2) it is the basis of the whole Christian life; 3) the principle effects of baptism are purification and new birth; 4) through baptism we become Christ’s members and are incorporated into his Church and made sharers in its mission; 5) confirmation that completes baptism deepens the baptismal identity and strengthens us for service; and 6) lastly, as true witnesses of Christ the confirmed are more strictly obligated to spread and defend the faith by word and deed. In addition, the “Decree on Ecumenism” of the Second Vatican Council adds: “Baptism, therefore, constitutes a sacramental bond of unity linking all who have been reborn by means of it”.¹⁰⁸

116. Both in the churches of the East and of the West, the baptizing of infants is considered a practice of ancient tradition.¹⁰⁹ The oldest known ritual, describing at the start of the third century the *Apostolic Tradition*, contains the following rule: “First baptize the children. Those of them who can speak for themselves should do so. The parents or someone of their family should speak for the others”.¹¹⁰ The Catholic Church baptizes adults, infants and children. In each of these cases, faith is an important element. In the context of adults and children the individuals themselves make their profession of faith. In the context of infants the Church has always understood that the one baptized is baptized into the faith of the Church. It is the Church that with her faith envelopes a child who cannot now make a personal confession of faith. At the basis of this reflection is the double solidarity found in the Pauline writings, namely the solidarity in Adam and the solidarity in Christ (*Rom 5*). It is stated in the introduction to the rite of baptism of infants that

“to fulfill the true meaning of the sacrament; children must later be formed in the faith in which they have been baptized. The foundation of this formation will be the sacrament itself, which they have already received. Christian formation, which is their due, seeks to lead them gradually to learn God’s

¹⁰³ *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 59; *Lumen gentium*, 40.1; *Gaudium et spes*, 38.2.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 7.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 8.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 11.1.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 41.2.

¹⁰⁸ *Unitatis redintegratio*, 22. “Directory for the Application...”, *op. cit.*, footnote 41.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. ORIGEN, *In Romanis*, V, 9; PG 14, 1047; Cf. ST. AUGUSTINE, *De Genesi ad litteram*, X, 23, 39; PL 34, 426; *De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum ad Marcellinum*, I, 26, 39; PL 44, 131. In fact, three passages of the Acts of the Apostles (16:15, 16:33, 18:81) speak of the baptism of a whole household or family. See also IRENAEUS, *Adv. Haereses* II, 22, 4; PG 7, 784; Harvey I, 330. Many inscriptions from as early as the second century give little children the title of “children of God”, a title given only to the baptized, or explicitly mention that they were baptized: Cf., for example, *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 9727, 9801, 9817; E. DIEHL, ed., *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1961), nos. 1523 (3), 4429 A. For a comprehensive study of the question of the baptism of infants within the context of the rites of Christian initiation, see MAXWELL E. JOHNSON, *The Rites of Christian Initiation: Their Evolution and Interpretation* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1999).

¹¹⁰ HIPPLYTUS OF ROME, *Apostolic Tradition*, 21.

plan in Christ, so that they may ultimately accept for themselves the faith in which they have been baptized".¹¹¹

117. *The Eucharist* is not simply one of the sacraments but it is the pre-eminent one. Vatican II states that the Eucharist is the source and the summit of the whole life of the Church.¹¹² Through the activity of the Holy Spirit, the atoning work of Jesus Christ is made universal and brings all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, Jesus Christ (*Eph* 1:10). The sacramental basis of this *koinonia* or communion is the one baptism through which we are baptized in the one body of Christ (*1 Cor* 12:12f.; cf. *Rom* 12:4f.; *Eph* 4:3f.) through baptism we are one in Christ (*Gal* 3:26-28). The summit of this communion is found in the Eucharist where the many become one through the participation in the one loaf and one cup (*1 Cor* 10:16f.). Therefore the *koinonia/communion* in the one Eucharistic bread is the source and sign of the *koinonia/communion* in the one body of the Church. In the Eucharist we are united to the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life when God will be all in all. The Eucharist, wherein Christ is really and substantially present, sacramentally represents the sacrifice of Christ made on the cross once and for all. It is a *memorial* of his passion, death and resurrection.¹¹³ There is a richness in understandings of what the Eucharist is for Catholics. By taking these together, we can have a fuller understanding of the meaning of the Eucharist. For example, the Eucharist is understood as a meal that realizes and manifests the unity of the community; in addition this meal is understood in relationship to the unrepeatable death of Christ on the cross. In the Eucharistic sacrifice, the whole of creation loved by God is presented to the Father through the death and resurrection of Christ. Through Christ the Church can offer the sacrifice of praise in thanksgiving for all that God has made good, beautiful, and just in creation and in humanity.¹¹⁴

118. Even though the eucharistic celebration consists of several parts, it is conceived of as a single act of worship. The eucharistic table is the table of both the Word of God and the body of the Lord. Vatican II taught that Christ is present in several ways in the celebration of the Eucharist. First, in the presence of the minister who gathers the Church in the name of the Lord and greets them in his Spirit; second, in the proclamation of the Word; third, in the assembly gathered in God's name; and fourth, in a special way under the eucharistic elements.¹¹⁵ The faithful are invited to share in the celebration of the liturgy in an active way by means of hymns, prayers and especially the reception of the eucharistic body and blood of the Risen Lord. The faithful commune at the table of the Lord by receiving both the eucharistic bread and the cup.

119. Lastly we can affirm that the Church makes a link between what is celebrated and what is lived. Therefore as St. Augustine taught, we are to become more fully that which we receive, namely the body of Christ. This means that as Paul taught First Corinthians, we must live coherently the reality that we are (cf. *1 Cor* 11:17ff.), hence the link between the Eucharist and justice, peace and reconciliation. Catholics are committed, because of this eucharistic reality, to become a living sign of Christ's peace and reconciliation for the world.

A Mennonite Understanding of Ordinances

¹¹¹ *Rite of Baptism for Children*, introduction. See also the instruction by the "Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith", *Pastoralis actio* (October 20, 1980), 14 which states: "The fact that infants cannot yet profess personal faith does not prevent the Church from conferring this sacrament on them, since in reality it is in her own faith that she baptizes them. This point of doctrine was clearly defined by Saint Augustine: "When children are presented to be given spiritual grace", he wrote, "it is not so much those holding them in their arms who present them – although, if these people are good Christians, they are included among those who present the children – as the whole company of saints and faithful Christians... It is done by the whole of Mother Church which is in the saints, since it is as a whole that she give birth to each and every one of them" (*Epist.* 98, 5; *PL* 33, 362; Cf. *Sermo* 176, 2, 2; *PL* 38, 950). This teaching is repeated by St. Thomas Aquinas and all the theologians after him: the child who is baptized believes not on its own account, by a personal act, but through others, "through the Church's faith communicated to it" (in *Summa Theologica*, IIIa, q. 69, a. 5, ad 3, cf. q. 68, a. 9, ad 3). This same teaching is also expressed in the new Rite of Baptism, when the celebrant asks the parents and godparents to profess the faith of the Church, the faith in which the children are baptized (*Ordo baptismi parvulorum, Praenotanda*, 2: cf. 56).

¹¹² Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 11.

¹¹³ The term memorial (*zikkaron* in Hebrew *anamnesis* in Greek) is a technical term which is not merely the recollection of past events but the proclamation of the mighty works (*mirabilia Dei*) wrought by God for us (Ex 13:3). In liturgical celebrations these events become in a certain way present and real.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. rev. in accordance with the official Latin text (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000), n. 1359.

¹¹⁵ Cf. *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 7.

120. The term ordinance is used instead of ‘sacrament’ in Anabaptist-Mennonite theology.¹¹⁶ To speak of baptism and the Lord’s Supper as ordinances emphasizes that the Church began and continues these practices because Christ ordained (instituted) them (*Mt* 26:26-29; *1 Cor* 11:23-26). Two ordinances are common to all Mennonite churches, namely baptism and the Lord’s Supper. A third, foot washing, is practiced by some (cf. *Jn* 13:3-17).¹¹⁷ On another matter of terminology, Mennonites do not use the term ‘Eucharist’, but refer to the meal as the ‘Lord’s Supper’, and sometimes as ‘Holy Communion’. It has become common in theological and confessional writing to refer to the ordinances and to the elements of water, bread and wine, as symbols or signs. By this is meant that the ordinances and the elements point beyond themselves to their spiritual significance, and also, in the case of the Lord’s Supper, to its historic memory. This report will limit itself to the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, since these were the focus of the Mennonite-Catholic dialogue.

Baptism

121. In Anabaptist-Mennonite understanding, *baptism* derives its meaning from the biblical accounts of baptisms — the baptism of Jesus (*Mt* 3:13-17; *Mk* 1:9-11; *Lk* 3:21-22; *Jn* 1:29-34) and of those baptized in Jesus’ name (for example, *Acts* 2:41) — as well as biblical references to the meaning of baptism (for example, *Rom* 6:3-4; *Col* 2:12; *1 Jn* 5:7-8). Consideration of these texts leads to an understanding of water baptism as a sign that points to three interrelated dimensions of Christian initiation and formation¹¹⁸: 1) In baptism the individual bears witness before the congregation that he/she has repented of sin, has received the grace of God, and has been cleansed of all unrighteousness (*Ezek* 36:25; *Acts* 2:38). Baptism is thus the sign of a good conscience before God and the Church. 2) Water baptism signifies the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian (*Acts* 2:17, 33). Baptism is thus an acknowledgement on the part of the one being baptized, of the presence of the Spirit in his/her life of faith. 3) Baptism provides a public sign to the congregation of the person’s desire to walk in the way of Christ. Such a walk is sometimes referred to in Anabaptist writings as “walking in the resurrection”.¹¹⁹

122. The baptismal commitment to faith and faithfulness is not an individualistic action, as baptism and church membership are inseparable. The person is “baptized into one body” (*1 Cor* 12:13), the body of Christ, the Church. The baptismal candidate’s affirmation of faith is an affirmation of the faith of the Church, and an affirmation made in the context of the community of believers to which the baptized person is joined as a responsible member. The new church member declares a willingness to give and receive care and counsel and to participate in the church’s life and mission. The individual relates to the Trinitarian God in a deeply personal way, and also together in and with the community of believers where grace is experienced and faith is affirmed in and with the people of God.

123. Mennonite confessional statements as well as centuries of practice suggest that baptism is understood not only as a sign that points beyond the baptismal ritual to its historic and spiritual significance, but that in and through baptism the individual and the community of faith undergo effectual change. For example, the *Dordrecht Confession* (1632) says that all penitent believers are to be baptized with water “to the burying of their sins, and thus to become incorporated into the communion of the saints”.¹²⁰ Here participation in the baptismal act appears to *effect* the putting away of sins. A statement on baptism in the *Ris Confession* (1766) speaks of baptism as a *means* of spiritual blessing, regeneration and renewal: “If Christian baptism is thus devoutly desired, administered, and received, we hold it in high esteem as a means of communicating and receiving spiritual blessing, nothing less than a washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”.¹²¹ More recent Mennonite confessional statements on baptism also reveal the

¹¹⁶ Mennonites shied away from the use of the term ‘sacrament’ because they feared what they called ‘sacramentalism,’ the temptation to attribute miraculous power to the ritual and its elements as such. Even then, the designation ‘sacrament’ was used at times, as for example in Art. 26 of the *Ris Confession* (1766) which states: “That the Lord instituted this *sacrament* (italics added) with the intention that it is to be observed by His disciples in His church in all time, is plainly seen” (LOEWEN, *op. cit.*, p. 98).

¹¹⁷ A recent outline of Anabaptist ordinances adds ‘church discipline,’ although it is not commonly recognized as such. Church discipline replaced the sacrament of penance by following the New Testament pattern (*Mt* 18:15-18) of offering the sinner an opportunity for repentance, forgiveness, and readmission into the fellowship of the church. See C.A. SNYDER, *From Anabaptist Seed* (Kitchener/Scottsdale: Pandora Press/Herald Press, 1999), pp. 28ff.

¹¹⁸ Another way of outlining the meaning of baptism would be to follow an early scheme developed by the Anabaptists on the basis of *1 Jn* 5:7-8, which is understood as a reference to a three-fold outline: baptism of the Holy Spirit, baptism of water, and baptism of blood. Cf. “Confession of Faith According to the Holy Word of God” (ca 1600), 21, in THIELEMANN J. van BRAGHT, *Martyrs Mirror, op. cit.*, pp. 396ff.

¹¹⁹ H.S. BENDER, “Walking in the Resurrection”, *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 35 (April, 1961), pp. 11-25.

¹²⁰ *Dordrecht Confession*, Art 7, LOEWEN, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹²¹ *Ris Confession*, Art. 25, LOEWEN, *ibid.*, p. 97.

expectation of *transformation* due to participation in the ordinance. The *Confession of Faith of the Mennonites in Canada* (1930), states:

“Baptism is an incorporation (*Einverleibung*) in Christ and his church and the covenant of a good conscience with God. It signifies the burial of our old life in the death of Christ and binds the baptized to unity with Christ in a new obedient life, to follow him in his footsteps and to do what he has commanded them to do”.¹²²

While there is the recognition in Mennonite theology and in Mennonite confessions that ‘something happens’ in the very act of baptism, baptismal transformation in and through the ritual is conceivable only if and when it is verified in the faith and life of the individual undergoing baptism and of the baptizing community.

124. Mennonites practice adult baptism, sometimes referred to as ‘believers baptism.’ Baptism is reserved for youth and adults who freely request it on the basis that they have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour and Lord. This presupposes, on the part of the one being baptized, the ability to reason and to take personal accountability for faith, and to become a responsible participant in the life of the Church. Baptism is administered “according to the command and doctrine of Christ, and the example and custom of the apostles”.¹²³ The person is baptized with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Mennonites understand baptism to include instruction in the Word of God and in the way of discipleship (*Mt* 28:19f.). The mode of baptism is either by effusion of water upon the individual (pouring or sprinkling) or by immersion of the person in water.¹²⁴

125. The Mennonite Church observes the *Lord’s Supper* in accordance with Jesus’ institution of the Supper and with the teachings of the New Testament concerning its meaning: 1) The Lord’s Supper is a meal of remembrance whereby participants thankfully recall that Jesus suffered, died, and was raised on behalf of all people, sacrificing his body and shedding his blood for the forgiveness of sins (*Mt* 26:28; *1 Cor* 11:23-25). 2) The meal is a sign bearing witness to the new covenant established in and by the death and resurrection of Christ, and thus an invitation to participants to renew their covenant with Christ (*Jer* 31:33-35; *Mk* 14:24; *1 Cor* 11:25). 3) The Lord’s Supper is a sign of the Church’s corporate sharing in the body and blood of Christ, recognition that the Church is sustained by Christ, the bread of life, and thus an invitation for members of the Church to be one (*Lk* 22:19f.; *1 Cor* 10:16f.). 4) The meal is a proclamation of the Lord’s death, a joyous celebration of hope in his coming again, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet of the redeemed, and an occasion for hearing anew the call to serve the Lord in sacrificial living until his return (*Lk* 22:28-30; *1 Cor* 11:26).

126. While throughout the Mennonite confessional tradition there runs a persistent emphasis on the Lord’s Supper as a memorial and a sign, Mennonite confessions of faith do not dismiss the effectual power of the ordinance to bring change to the participants and to the community of faith. The *Schleitheim Confession* (1527) depicts the congregation of true believers as being “made one loaf together with all the children of God”.¹²⁵ This suggests that in a spiritual sense the community becomes the loaf, the bread. Something of this power associated with the sharing of the bread itself, is felt and known when brothers and sisters claim a spiritual closeness during the communion service, and when they leave the service ‘changed.’ In its statement on the Lord’s Supper, the *Ris Confession* identifies the presence of this spiritual power when it states: “On the part of God and Christ [the Lord’s Supper] serves as a means to confirm and seal unto us in the most emphatic manner the great blessings comprehended in the gospel”.¹²⁶ The *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995) states: “As we partake of the communion of the bread and the cup, the gathered body of believers shares in the body and blood of Christ and recognizes again that it’s life is sustained by Christ, the bread of life”.¹²⁷ The key lies not in the elements as such, but in the context as a whole, including the communion of the gathered congregation, the prayerful aspiration of each individual, and the spiritual presence that is suggested and re-presented with the aid of appropriate symbols and liturgy.¹²⁸

¹²² LOEWEN, *ibid.*, Art. 9, p. 306.

¹²³ *Dordrecht Confession*, Art. 7, LOEWEN, *ibid.*, p. 65.

¹²⁴ Cf. *Ris Confession*, Art. 25, LOEWEN, *ibid.*, pp. 97f.

¹²⁵ *Schleitheim Confession*, Art. 3, LOEWEN, *ibid.*, p. 80.

¹²⁶ *Ris Confession*, Art. 26, LOEWEN, *ibid.*, p. 98.

¹²⁷ *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, 12, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

¹²⁸ Cf. JOHN D. REMPEL, *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism* (Scottsdale/Waterloo: Herald Press, 1993). Rempel says that the Anabaptists “made the church as a community the agent of the breaking of bread. There is still a presider who symbolizes the community’s order and authority. But it is the congregation that does the action. The Spirit is present in their action, transforming them so that they are reconstituted as the body of Christ. The life of the congregation, consecrated in its faith and love, consecrates the elements” (p. 34).

127. The invitation to take part in the Lord's Supper is open to all baptized believers who are in right fellowship with the Lord and with their congregation, and who by the grace of God seek to live in accordance with the example and teachings of Christ. From the beginning of the Anabaptist — Mennonite movement, the unity of the body of believers was seen as a desired prerequisite for coming to the table of the Lord.¹²⁹ How can there be participation, it is asked, if there is not a striving for the unity of the one body of Christ? The emphasis upon preparing for the Lord's Supper by ensuring that members are in 'right' relationship with brothers and sisters in the Church is a distinctive mark of the Mennonite practice of Holy Communion.

Convergences

128. The Catholic Church and the Mennonite Church agree that baptism and the Lord's Supper have their origin and point of reference in Jesus Christ and in the teachings of Scripture. Both regard the celebration of these sacraments/ordinances as extraordinary occasions of encounter with God's offer of grace revealed in Jesus Christ. They are important moments in the believers' commitment to the body of Christ and to the Christian way of life. Catholics and Mennonites see the sacraments/ordinances as acts of the Church.

129. Mennonites and Catholics are agreed on the basic meaning and import of baptism as a dying and rising with Christ, so that "just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (*Rom* 6:4). We both also emphasize that baptism signifies the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the promised presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer and the Church.

130. Catholics and Mennonites agree that baptism is a public witness to the faith of the Church, and the occasion for the incorporation of new believers into Christ and the Church. Both hold that baptism is an unrepeatable act.

131. For Mennonites and Catholics a public profession of faith is required at the time of baptism. Mennonite churches baptize upon the candidate's own confession of faith. This is also the case in the Catholic rite of adult baptism. In the case of infant baptism in the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church, it is the Church, along with the parents and the godparents, that makes the profession of faith on behalf of the child. This profession becomes personal when the child is able to reason and to affirm the faith. This is done solemnly at confirmation. In the Eastern Rite, all three sacraments are celebrated together and the sense of confirmation is the inserting of the candidate into the public witness of Christ and the reception of the grace proper to this public witness.

132. Mennonites and Catholics practice the rite of baptism as a public celebration in the congregation. Both practice baptism by effusion of water or immersion in water; and they baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as Jesus instructed (cf. *Mt* 28:19). In Mennonite churches, an ordained minister of the congregation administers baptism. In the Catholic Church, it is ordinarily a bishop, a priest, or a deacon who administers baptism.

133. Mennonites and Catholics agree on significant aspects of the meaning of the Lord's Supper or Eucharist: 1) Both hold that the celebration of the Eucharist/Lord's Supper is rooted in God's marvellous gift of grace made available to all people by virtue of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. 2) We agree that the Lord's Supper/Eucharist recalls the suffering, the death, and the resurrection of Christ. 3) We agree that the meal provides an important occasion for the acknowledgement of our sinfulness and for receiving grace and forgiveness. 4) Both celebrate the Eucharist/Lord's Supper for the nourishing of Christian life; for the strengthening of the church's sense of mission; and for the conforming of our communities to the body of Christ in order to be ministers of reconciliation, peace and justice for the world (cf. *1 Cor* 11:17-32; *2 Cor* 5:16-21). 5) Both celebrate the Lord's Supper/Eucharist in the spirit of Christian hope, as a foretaste of the heavenly banquet anticipated in the coming kingdom of God.

134. Catholics and Mennonites agree that the risen Christ is present at the celebration of the Eucharist/Lord's Supper. Christ is the one who invites to the meal; he is present in the faithful who are gathered in his name; and he is present in the proclaimed Word.

Divergences

135. Both Mennonites and Catholics view sacraments and ordinances as outward signs instituted by Christ, but we have differing understandings of the power of signs. For Mennonites, ordinances as signs point to the salvific work of Christ and invite participation in the life of Christ. For Catholics, in addition to

¹²⁹ Cf. *Schleitheim Confession*, 3, LOEWEN, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

participating in the life of Christ, signs also communicate to those who receive them, the grace proper to each sacrament.

136. The Catholic Church advocates both infant baptism and adult baptism, and accepts Mennonite baptism, which is done with water and in the name of the Trinity, as valid. In the Mennonite Church, baptism is for those who understand its significance and who freely request it on the basis of their personally owned faith in Jesus Christ.

137. Mennonites and Catholics differ in part in their understanding of the role of a personal confession of faith as it pertains to baptism. Both agree to the necessity of the profession of faith. However, in the Catholic practice of infant baptism, a profession of faith is made on behalf of the child by the parents, the godparents, and the whole assembly. In the Mennonite churches, which do not practice infant baptism, it is required that a profession of faith and a baptismal commitment be made personally by the individual being baptized. In the Mennonite churches, the practice of making a profession of faith on behalf of a person being baptized who does not at the moment of baptism realize the basic meaning and implications of his or her baptism, is not acceptable.

138. Catholics and Mennonites diverge in their understanding of how Christ is present in the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper. For Mennonites, the Lord's Supper is primarily a sign or symbol that points to Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection, and that keeps this memory alive until His return. For Catholics, the Eucharist is the source and the summit of the whole life of the Church in which the sacrifice, made once and for all on the cross, is made really present under the species of the consecrated bread and wine, and presented to the Father as an act of thanksgiving and praise for the wonderful work of salvation offered to humanity.

139. Mennonites and Catholics diverge in their understanding of the presence of Christ at the Eucharist/Lord's Supper. The Anabaptists rejected the idea that there was a real bodily presence of Christ in the elements of bread and wine. Mennonites today view the elements as signs or symbols that recall the significance of the death of Christ for the forgiveness of sin and for the Christian's commitment to love and discipleship. In Catholic understanding, in the sacrament of the Eucharist "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained",¹³⁰ under the species of bread and wine which have been consecrated by an ordained bishop or presbyter.

140. With respect to participation in the Lord's Supper, most Mennonite churches extend an open invitation for all believers to partake, who are baptized, who are in good standing in their church, and who are in right relationship with the Lord and with one another. In Catholic understanding, the ecclesial dimension of the Eucharist has consequences for the question of who may be admitted to the Eucharistic communion, since the Eucharist as the sacrament of unity presumes our being in full ecclesial communion.¹³¹ Therefore the ecclesial dimension of the Eucharist must be taken into consideration in the question of who is admitted to the Eucharist.

Areas of Future Study

141. Discussion is needed concerning our divergent views on the role of the faith of the Church as it bears on the status of infants and children. This would include a comparative study of the theology of sin and salvation, of the spiritual status of children, and of baptism.

142. The question of recognizing or not recognizing one another's baptism requires further study.

143. It is necessary to study, together, the history of the origin and development of the theology and practice of baptism for the purpose of ascertaining the origin of infant baptism, assessing the changes brought about with the Constantinian shift, the development of the doctrine of original sin, and other matters.

144. It would be fruitful to have additional discussions of the relationship between the Catholic understanding of sacraments and the Mennonite understanding of ordinances, to further ascertain where additional significant convergences and divergences may lie.

C. OUR COMMITMENT TO PEACE

"Blessed are the peacemakers,

¹³⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1374 citing the Council of Trent (1551), DS 1651.

¹³¹ Communion with the local bishop and with the Bishop of Rome is understood as a sign and service of the unity of the Church.

for they shall be called the children of God” (Mt 5:8).

145. Through our dialogue, we have come to understand that Catholics and Mennonites share a common commitment to peacemaking. That commitment is rooted in our communion with “the God of Peace” (Rom 15:33) and in the church’s response to Jesus’ proclamation of “the gospel of peace” (Eph 6:15). Christ has entrusted to us the ministry of reconciliation. As “ambassadors of Christ” (2 Cor 5:20) we are called to be reconciled to God and to one another. Moved by the Spirit, we want to share with our brothers and sisters in faith, and with a wider world, our call to be instruments of God’s peace.

146. We present the results of our dialogue on the question of commitment to peace in four parts: (1) a survey of distinctive aspects of our respective views of peacemaking and related Christian doctrines; (2) points of convergence; (3) points of divergence; and (4) issues requiring further exploration.

Catholic Perspectives on Peace

147. *The Church’s Social Vision.* The primary way in which the Church contributes to the reconciliation of the human family is the Church’s own universality.¹³² Understanding itself as “a sacrament of intimate union with God and of the unity of mankind”,¹³³ the Catholic Church takes the promotion of unity, and accordingly peace, “as belonging to the innermost nature of the Church”.¹³⁴ For this reason it fosters solidarity among peoples, and calls peoples and nations to sacrifices of advantages of power and wealth for the sake of solidarity of the human family.¹³⁵ The Eucharist, which strengthens the bonds of charity, nourishes such solidarity. The Eucharist, in turn, is an expression of the charity which binds members of the community in Christ (1 Cor 11:17-34).¹³⁶

148. The Church views the human vocation as essentially communitarian, that is, all human relations are ordered to unity and love, an order of love confirmed by the life and teaching of Jesus and the Spirit-filled life of the Church (cf. Lk 22:14-27; Jn 13:1-20; 15:1-17; 17:20-24).¹³⁷ This order of love is manifest in the lives of the faithful and in the community of the Church, but is not restricted to them. In fact, by virtue of creation and redemption, it is found at all levels of human society.

149. God created the human family for unity, and in Christ confirmed the law of love (Acts 17:26; Rom 13:10). Accordingly, the Church sees the growth of interdependence across the world, though not without problems due to sin, a force that can contribute to peace.¹³⁸ Thus, Pope John Paul II has written: “The goal of peace, so desired by everyone, will certainly be achieved through the putting into effect of social and international justice, but also through the practice of virtues which favour togetherness, and which teach us to live in unity...”¹³⁹

150. *The Call to Holiness.* All Christians share in God’s call to holiness (1 Thess 4:3; Eph 1:4).¹⁴⁰ This is a sanctity “cultivated by all who under God’s spirit and, obeying the Father’s voice ... , follow Christ, poor, humble and cross bearing...”¹⁴¹ As God’s own people, living in the inauguration of the kingdom, we are to be “peacemakers” who “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Mt 5:6) and “are persecuted for righteousness’ sake” (Mt 5:11). We are to love one another, forgive one another, and live humbly in imitation of Jesus, who though he was “in the form of God ... humbled himself becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (cf. Phil 2:6, 8). We are to be generous and forgiving with everyone, as God is generous with us (Lk

¹³² Cf. Acts 2; *Lumen gentium*, 1, 9, and especially 13; *Gaudium et spes*, 42.

¹³³ *Lumen gentium*, 1, 4, 9, 13.

¹³⁴ *Gaudium et spes*, 42.

¹³⁵ Cf. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 38-40, 45; *Centesimus annus*, 52.

¹³⁶ Cf. *Sacrosanctum concilium*, 9-10; *Lumen gentium*, 3, 7; *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 48.

¹³⁷ Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 24-25, 32.

¹³⁸ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 1; *Gaudium et spes*, 4, 6, 24-25; *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 45.

¹³⁹ *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 39. Cf. *Jas* 3:18.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *Lumen gentium*, 39.

¹⁴¹ *Lumen Gentium*, 41.

6:37f.). In a word, as disciples of Jesus, we are instructed to “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (*Mt* 5:48).

151. All the commandments, as Saint Paul teaches, are summed up in the saying, “Love your neighbour as yourself” (*Rom* 13:9; cf. *Jas* 2:8; *1 Jn* 4:11f.). For Catholics, love of neighbour takes special form in love and service of the poor and marginalized; indeed, in “a preferential option for the poor”. The ministry of love to the neighbour is promoted through personal and corporate works of mercy, in organized charities, as well as in advocacy on behalf of justice, human rights and peace. Lay people, bishops and Church agencies engage in such initiatives.¹⁴² The love command likewise entails reverence and love for enemies (*Mt* 5:43; *1 Jn* 3:16).¹⁴³ Like our heavenly Father, who “makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous” (*Mt* 5:45), we are to love our enemies, bless them, pray for them, not retaliate, and share our possessions with those who would take things from us (*Lk* 6:27-35). Furthermore, we must be prepared to establish just relations with them, for true peace is the fruit of justice, and “because justice is always fragile and imperfect, it must include and, as it were be completed by the forgiveness which heals and rebuilds troubled human relations from their foundations”.¹⁴⁴ Finally, in the midst of conflict, the Lord gives us his peace that we may have courage under persecution (*Jn* 16:33; 20:21).

152. Nonviolence, in Catholic eyes, is both a Christian and a human virtue. For Christians, nonviolence takes on special meaning in the suffering of Christ who was “led as a sheep to the slaughter” (*Is* 53:7; *Acts* 8:32). “Making up the sufferings lacking in Christ” (*Col* 1:34), the nonviolent witness of Christians contributes to the building up of peace in a way that force cannot, discerning the difference “between the cowardice which gives into evil and the violence which under the illusion of fighting evil, only makes it worse”.¹⁴⁵ In the Catholic view, nonviolence ought to be implemented in public policies and through public institutions as well as in personal and church practice.¹⁴⁶ Both in pastoral practice and through Vatican diplomacy, the Church insists, in the face of conflict, that “peace is possible”.¹⁴⁷ The Church also attempts to nourish a culture of peace in civil society, and encourages the establishment of institutions for the practice of non-violence in public life.¹⁴⁸

153. *Peacemaking*. On the pastoral level, the Catholic theology of peace takes a positive stance. It focuses on resolving the causes of conflict and building the conditions for lasting peace. It entails four primary components: (1) promotion and protection of human rights, (2) advancing integral human development, (3) supporting international law and international organizations, and (4) building solidarity between peoples and nations.¹⁴⁹ This vision of peace is articulated in the whole body of contemporary Catholic social teaching beginning with Pope John XXIII’s *Pacem in terris* (“Peace on Earth”) forty years ago and continuing through Pope John Paul II’s *Tertio millennio ineunte* (“The Third Millennium”) in 2000.¹⁵⁰

154. The Catholic Church’s work for peace is carried out in many ways. Since the Second Vatican Council, it has largely been carried out through a network of national and diocesan justice and peace commissions and through the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. Their work has been especially influential in the struggle for human rights in Asia, Latin America, and some parts of Africa. Catholic human rights offices, like the Vicarate for Solidarity in Chile, Tutela Legal in El Salvador, Batolomeo Casas in Mexico, the Archdiocesan Office in Guatemala City, and the Society of Saint Yves in Jerusalem have been models for active defence of the rights of the poor, of indigenous people, and of those under occupation. Catholic relief and development agencies, especially *Caritas Internationalis* and the *Caritas*

¹⁴² Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 43, 88-91; *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 42-43, 47; *Centesimus annus*, 58; POPE JOHN PAUL II, World Day of Peace Message, 1993, “If You Want Peace, Reach Out to the Poor”. Cf. *Mt* 25: 41-36; *Lk* 14:15-24; *Jas* 2:1-7.

¹⁴³ Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 28; *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 40; *Evangelium vitae*, 41.

¹⁴⁴ POPE JOHN PAUL II, “No Peace Without Justice, No Justice Without Forgiveness”, World Day of Peace Message, 2000.

¹⁴⁵ *Centesimus annus*, 23, 25.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 88-93; *Centesimus annus*, 52.

¹⁴⁷ POPE PAUL VI, “Peace is Possible”, World Day of Peace Message, 1973.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. *Centesimus annus*, 51-52.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 44, 64-65, 83-90, 32.

¹⁵⁰ This constructive approach to peace (that is, Pope Paul VI: “If you want peace, work for justice”) is a complement to the contemporary practice of Mennonites in conflict resolution, conflict transformation and technical peace-building. It also is supportive of broader conceptions of peace-building now being promoted in both Mennonite and Catholic circles.

network, provide relief, development, refugee assistance and post-conflict reconstruction for divided societies. In many places, individual bishops have also played an important role in national conciliation efforts; and one, Bishop Felipe Ximenes Belo of E. Timor, won the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts.

155. The Holy See¹⁵¹ exercises “a diplomacy of conscience” through the Vatican diplomatic corps and other special representatives. This diplomatic activity consists of advocacy on behalf of peace, human rights, development and humanitarian issues. It also contributes to international peacemaking indirectly through initiatives of Catholic groups, like the Community of Sant’Egidio, and various bishops’ conferences. Above all, the pope exercises a unique ministry for peace through his teaching and public statements, in his meetings with world figures, through his pilgrimages across the world, and through special events like the Assisi Days of Prayer and the Great Jubilee Year 2000.

156. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has sought to view war “with a whole new attitude”.¹⁵² In the encyclical letter, *Evangelium vitae* (“The Gospel of Life”), Pope John Paul II identified war as part of the culture of death, and he found a positive sign of the times in “*a new sensitivity ever more opposed to war* as an instrument of the resolution of conflict between people, and increasingly oriented to finding effective but ‘nonviolent’ means to counter the armed aggressor”.¹⁵³

157. The Catholic tradition today upholds both a strong presumption against the use of force and an obligation to resist the denial of rights and other grave public evils by active nonviolence, if at all possible (cf. *Rom* 12:14-21; *1 Thess* 5:14f.). All Catholics bear a general obligation to actively resist grave public evil.¹⁵⁴ Catholic teaching has increasingly endorsed the superiority of non-violent means and is suspect of the use of force in a culture of death.¹⁵⁵ Nonetheless, the Catholic tradition also continues to maintain the possibility of a limited use of force as a last resort (the Just War), particularly when whole populations are at risk as in cases of genocide or ethnic cleansing.¹⁵⁶ As in the days before the U.S. war against Iraq (2003), Pope John Paul II as well as Vatican officials and bishops’ conferences around the world have urged the international community to employ nonviolent alternatives to the use of force. At the same time, they have employed just-war criteria to prevent war and to promote the limitation of force and to criticize both potential and actual uses of force by governments.

158. Just-war reasoning, however, is not a simple moral calculus. Following the notion of ‘right reason,’ valid application of the just-war criteria depends on possessing a virtuous character. Such virtues as moderation, restraint, and respect for life are intrinsic to sound application of just-war criteria, as are Christian virtues such as humility, gentleness, forgiveness and love of enemy. Accordingly, Church teaching and application of the Just War criteria have grown more stringent in recent years, insisting that the function of the Just War Tradition is to prevent and limit war, not just legitimate it.¹⁵⁷

159. The Just War today should be understood as part of a broad Catholic theology of peace applicable only to exceptional cases. War, as Pope John Paul II has said, “is never just another means that one can choose to employ for settling differences between nations”.¹⁵⁸ The Pope’s overall assessment of the evils of war made at the end of the 1991 Gulf War remains valid today:

“No, never again war, which destroys the lives of innocent people, teaches how to kill, throws into upheaval even the lives of those who do the killing, and leaves behind a trail of resentment and hatred, thus making it all the more difficult to find a just solution of the very problems which provoked the war”.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵¹ The Holy See is the title the Catholic Church employs in international affairs.

¹⁵² *Gaudium et spes*, 80.

¹⁵³ *Evangelium vitae*, 27; cf. 10-12, 39-41.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 78.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. *Centesimus annus*, 23, 25, 52.

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2313; POPE JOHN PAUL II, “Address to the International Conference on Nutrition”, 1992.

¹⁵⁷ Cf. World Day of Peace Message, 2002; *Evangelium vitae*, 41; National Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Harvest of Justice Is Sown in Peace”.

¹⁵⁸ POPE JOHN PAUL II, “Address to the Diplomatic Corps”, January 12, 2003, (making reference to the conflict then developing between the United States and the United Kingdom with Iraq).

¹⁵⁹ *Centesimus annus*, 52; *Evangelium vitae*, 10, 12.

160. *Religious Freedom*. Jesus proclaimed the time “when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him (*Jn* 4:26)”. Meek and humble of heart, Jesus “did not wish to be a political Messiah who would dominate by force but preferred to call himself the Son of Man who came to serve, and to give his life as ‘a ransom for many’”.¹⁶⁰ Today the Catholic Church repudiates the use of force in the name of the Gospel and upholds freedom of conscience in matters of religion. In accord with Vatican II’s “Declaration on Religious Liberty” (*Dignitatis humanae*), Catholics affirm freedom of religion for all and repudiate the use of coercion in the spread of the Gospel.¹⁶¹ The Catholic Church also repents of offenses committed “in the name of Truth” in past centuries by officials’ use of the civil arm to suppress religious dissent, and she begs God’s forgiveness for these violations.¹⁶²

161. *History, Eschatology and Human Achievement*. Catholics believe that human achievement of every sort, particularly the achievements of a political society that contributes to a greater measure of justice and peace in the world, prepares humanity “to share in the fullness which ‘dwells in the Lord’”.¹⁶³

“For after we have obeyed the Lord, and in his Spirit have nurtured on earth the values of human dignity, brotherhood and freedom . . . we will find them again, but free of stain, burnished and transfigured. This will be so when Christ hands over to the Father a kingdom eternal and universal: ‘a kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace’”.¹⁶⁴

At the same time sin, which is always attempting to trap us and which jeopardizes our human achievements, is conquered and redeemed by the reconciliation accomplished by Christ (cf. *Col* 1:20).¹⁶⁵

Mennonite Perspectives on Peace

162. *Christological Basis of Our Peace Commitment*. For the Mennonite Church, peace has its basis in the love of God as revealed in creation, in God’s story with his people, and in the life and message of Jesus Christ. The biblical word *shalom* expresses well-being, wholeness, and the harmony and rightness of relationships. Justice is the inseparable companion of peace, as the prophets testify: “and the effect of justice will be peace and the result of righteousness quietness and trust forever” (*Is* 32:17).

163. God’s peaceable kingdom is expressed definitively in Jesus Christ, for “he is our peace, who has made us both [Gentile and Jew] one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility” (*Eph* 2:14). In Christ we see that God’s love is radical, loving even the enemy. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the ultimate sign of the victory of the way of Jesus. Salvation and ethics are based on and permeated by this way of Jesus.

164. *What is a Peace Church?* A peace church is a church called to bear witness to the gospel of peace grounded in Jesus Christ. The peace church places this conviction at the centre of its faith and life, its teaching, worship, ministry and practice, calling Jesus Lord and following him in his nonresistant and nonviolent way. A peace church is nothing other than the Church, the body of Christ. Every Church is called to be a peace church.¹⁶⁶

165. The earliest Swiss Anabaptists, forerunners of the Mennonites, saw the necessity of separating the church from its allegiance to the state. Only in this way could they follow the nonviolent way of Jesus and uphold their confession of Jesus as Lord, in accordance with the early Christians of the apostolic era. Their stance of nonresistance and conscientious objection to war was a choice of faith (*Mt* 5:38-41). Within this frame of thinking, “just war” considerations had no place, and the church must distance itself from the state. For this reason, a peace church says farewell to Constantinianism, the liaison of church and state. Even more, the Church resists the captivity of the church in regard to her theological thinking.¹⁶⁷ For Mennonites, traditional Christology is often seen to have been weakened by “Constantinianism” with the result that the normative character of the teachings of Jesus is too often depreciated in ethics and ecclesiology. In addition, theology too tightly tied to state structures has

¹⁶⁰ *Dignitatis humanae*, 11. Cf. *Lk* 22:21-27; *Mk* 10:45.

¹⁶¹ Cf. *Dignitatis humanae*, 7.

¹⁶² Cf. Day of Pardon, para. 200-202 below.

¹⁶³ *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 31, 48.

¹⁶⁴ *Gaudium et spes*, 39.

¹⁶⁵ *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 31.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. FERNANDO ENNS, *Friedenskirche in der Ökumene. Mennonitische Wurzeln einer Ethik der Gewaltfreiheit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003).

¹⁶⁷ Cf. F. ENNS, *Friedenskirche*, op. cit., and John Howard Yoder, “Peace without Eschatology” in: *The Royal Priesthood*, op. cit.

often formulated social ethics from a top down perspective, looking to political leaders for articulation of what is possible rather than focusing on what Jesus taught his disciples and how that can concretely be lived out by the body of Christ in the world.

166. *Discipleship and Peacemaking*. The teachings and the example of Christ give orientation for our theology and teaching on peace. The concept of discipleship, of following Christ in life, is central for Mennonite theology. Mennonites insist that confessing Jesus Christ as Lord means that the humanity of Christ has ethical relevance. Though the decisions he made and the steps he took leading to his crucifixion must be interpreted in the context of his times, they reveal the love of God for his followers.¹⁶⁸ Christian love includes love of enemy, the message of forgiveness as a gift for everybody, the concern for those at the margins of society, and the call for a new community.

167. An ultimate theological challenge is to spell out the consequences of the cross for our teaching on peace and war. The atonement is the foundation of our peace with God and with one another. Reconciliation and nonviolence belong to the heart of the Gospel. Therefore an ethic of nonresistance, nonviolence, and active peacemaking corresponds to our faith in God. God revealed his love for humanity in Jesus Christ, who was willing to die on the cross as a consequence of his message of the Kingdom of God. Thus the cross is the sign of God's love of his enemies (*Rom* 5:10f.). In the resurrection God confirms the way of Jesus and establishes new life. The conviction that 'love is stronger than death' sustains Christians where their faith leads to suffering.

168. What kinds of attitudes and activities are the marks of a peace church? At the heart of its worship is the celebration of God's presence. Witnessing to the presence of God in this world, the Church is a community of those being reconciled. In a "Believer's Church", reconciliation is reflected in all aspects of the church's life. Its discipline orients members to reconciliation and conflict resolution. In accordance with *Mt* 18:15-22, it applies "binding and loosing" to biblical interpretation and ethical decisions. The disciples' witness to the kingdom of God includes nonviolence, active peacemaking, and the confrontation of injustice. Resistance to violence means not only refusing to take part in it, but also serving victims and confronting aggressors. The peace church seeks to love the enemy while at the same time confronting evil and oppression. It advocates justice for all. It expresses conscientious objection to war and conscientious participation in state and society.

169. Mennonites engage in peace groups in congregations, participate on peace committees on the national level, and promote international peace networks via Mennonite World Conference and Mennonite Central Committee. The conviction that peace has to be built in many steps has led Mennonites to foster voluntary service on different levels: as relief work and disaster service, as educational work and the promotion of human rights. Methods of conflict transformation and mediation have been worked out and improved. Christian Peacemaker Teams are an initiative of Mennonites and other Historic Peace Churches to intervene in situations of armed conflict and protect threatened people by being present with them and putting themselves on the line.

170. Mennonites in all parts of the world grapple with peace issues and consider such a struggle to be a core practice of the Church. For some, 'nonresistance' would describe best their stance of faith in the sense of refusing to take part in war, shunning all forms of violence and even refusing service of any kind to government. For others, nonresistance no longer characterizes their conviction; and a faith-based pacifism would be a more accurate term. In some places in the world, Mennonites are moving in their theology and praxis from 'nonresistance' to active nonviolence and to a position of just peacemaking.¹⁶⁹ This includes the prophetic denunciation of violence through active criticism of government politics, as for example during the Balkan War.

171. Another dimension of peace understood biblically is protecting the integrity of creation. A lifestyle of simplicity and of responsible use of the world's limited resources has been a typical stance for Mennonites for a long time.

"As stewards of God's earth, we are called to care for the earth and to bring rest and renewal to the land and everything that lives on it. As stewards of money and possessions, we are to live simply, practice mutual aid within the church, uphold economic justice, and give generously and cheerfully."¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Cf. JOHN HOWARD YODER, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd rev. ed., (Grand Rapids/Carlisle: Wm. B. Eerdmans/Paternoster, 1994).

¹⁶⁹ Cf. GLENN STASSEN, ed., *Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1998); DUANE K. FRIESEN, *Christian Peacemaking and International Conflict: A Realist Pacifist Perspective* (Scottsdale/Waterloo: Herald Press, 1986).

¹⁷⁰ *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, op. cit., 21. Cf. also H. S. BENDER et al., "Simplicity" in *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, IV, op. cit., pp. 529-530.

Convergences

172. *Creation and Peace.* Mennonites and Catholics can agree that God, “who from one man has created the whole human race and made them live all over the face of the earth” (*Acts* 17:26) has destined humanity for one and the same goal, namely, communion with God’s own self. Likewise, created in the image and likeness of God, human beings are called to unity with one another, through reciprocal self-giving (cf. *Gen* 1:26; *Jn* 17:21f.).¹⁷¹ Redemption, moreover, has restored to creation the peace lost by sin (*Gen* 9:1-17; *Col* 1:19f.; *Rev* 21:5). As God’s new creation, Christians are called to live a new life in peace with one another and with all humankind (*2 Cor* 13:11; *Rom* 12:18).

173. We also agree that the biblical vision of peace as *shalom* entails protecting the integrity of creation (*Gen* 1:26-31; 2:5-15; 9:7-17; *Ps* 104).¹⁷² The Church is called to witness, in the spirit of stewardship, that people may live as caretakers and not exploiters of the earth.

174. *Christology and Peace.* The peace witness of both Mennonites and Catholics is rooted in Jesus Christ “who is our peace, who has made us both one... making peace that he might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross” (*Eph* 2:14-16). We understand peace through the teachings, life and death of Jesus Christ. In his mission of reconciliation he remained faithful unto death on the cross, and his fidelity was confirmed in the resurrection. The cross is the sign of God’s love of enemies.¹⁷³

175. *Ecclesiology and Peace.* The Church is called to be a peace church, a peacemaking church. This is based on a conviction that we hold in common. We hold that the Church, founded by Christ, is called to be a living sign and an effective instrument of peace, overcoming every form of enmity and reconciling all peoples in the peace of Christ (*Eph* 4:1-3).¹⁷⁴ We affirm that Christ, in his Church, through baptism, overcomes the differences between peoples (*Gal* 3:28). By virtue of their baptism into Christ, all Christians are called to be peacemakers. All forms of ethnic and inter-religious hatred and violence are incompatible with the gospel, and the Church has a special role in overcoming ethnic and religious differences and in building international peace.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, we agree that it is a tragedy when Christians kill one another.

176. Catholics and Mennonites share an appreciation of the Church as different from simply human organizations, and together we stand for religious freedom and the independence of the Church. The freedom of the Church from state intervention enables her to offer witness to the wider society. In virtue of their dignity as children of God, moreover, all men and women possess the right to freedom of religion and conscience. No one should be forced to act contrary to conscience, particularly in matters of religion.

177. *Peace and Justice.* We affirm together that peace, in the sense of the biblical word *shalom*, consists of well being, wholeness, the harmony and rightness of relationships. As inheritors of this biblical tradition, we believe that justice, understood as right relationships, is the inseparable companion of peace. As the

¹⁷¹ For Catholics, the model for a vision of the union of humans with one another is based theologically on the union of the Trinity (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 24).

¹⁷² Cf. *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, op. cit., 21. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 26, 29-30, esp. 34; POPE JOHN PAUL II, “Peace with God, Peace with All Creation”, World Day of Peace Message, 1990.

¹⁷³ A quote from Menno Simons expresses the close theological bond in Christology between the peaceful nature of Jesus Christ and our lives: “Christ is everywhere represented to us as humble, meek, merciful, just, holy, wise, spiritual, long-suffering, patient, peaceable, lovely, obedient, and good, as the perfection of all things; for in him there is an upright nature. Behold, this is the image of God, of Christ as to the Spirit which we have as an example until we become like it in nature and reveal it by our walk” (MENNO SIMONS, “The Spiritual Resurrection” (c. 1536), in J.C. WENGER, ed., *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1956), pp. 55f. Catholic teaching on the link between peace and the redemptive work of the Lord is best seen in *Gaudium et spes*, 38: “Undergoing death itself for all of us sinners (cf. *Jn* 3:16; *Rom* 5:8), he taught us by example that we too must shoulder that cross which the world and the flesh inflict upon those who search after peace and justice”. See also *Gaudium et spes*; 28 and 32.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, 22, op. cit., 22; *Gaudium et spes*, 42 and 78.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, “To Build Peace, Respect Minorities”, World Day of Peace Message, 1989; *Gaudium et spes*, 42. A widely accepted Mennonite standpoint with respect to all conflict, including international conflict, is expressed in *A Declaration on Peace: In God’s People the World’s Renewal Has Begun*, co-authored by Douglas Gwyn, George Hunsinger, Eugene F. Roop, John Howard Yoder (Scottsdale/Waterloo: Herald Press, 1991), which states in part: “The church’s most effective witness and action against war ... consists simply in the stand she takes in and through her members in the face of war. Unless the church, trusting the power of God in whose hand the destinies of the nations lie, is willing to ‘fall into the ground and die,’ to renounce war absolutely, whatever sacrifice of freedoms, advantages, or possessions this might entail, even to the point of counseling a nation not to resist foreign conquest and occupation, she can give no prophetic message for the world of nations” (pp. 74f.).

prophets testify, “the effect of justice will be peace and the result of righteousness quietness and trust forever” (*Is* 32:17; cf. *Ps* 85:10, 13).¹⁷⁶

178. We agree that the Gospel’s vision of peace includes active non-violence for the defence of human life and human rights, for the promotion of economic justice for the poor, and in the interest of fostering solidarity among peoples. Likewise, peace is the realization of the fundamental right to live a life in dignity, and so have access to all means to accomplish this: land, work, health, and education. For this reason, the Church is called to stand in solidarity with the poor and to be an advocate for the oppressed. A peace built on oppression is a false peace.

179. We hold the conviction in common that reconciliation, nonviolence, and active peacemaking belong to the heart of the Gospel (*Mt* 5:9; *Rom* 12:14-21; *Eph* 6:15). Christian peacemaking embraces active nonviolence in the resolution of conflict both in domestic disputes and in international ones,¹⁷⁷ and for resolving conflict situations. We believe that the availability of such practices to individual groups and governments reduces the temptation to turn to arms, even as a last resort.

180. *Discipleship and Peace*. Both agree that discipleship, understood as following Christ in life in accordance with the teaching and example of Jesus, is basic to the Christian life. The earthly existence of Jesus is normative for human well being (*Jn* 13:1-17; *Phil* 2:1-11).¹⁷⁸ The decisions Jesus made and the steps he took leading to his crucifixion reveal the centrality of love, including love of enemy, in human life (*Mt* 5:38-48). They also include the message of forgiveness as a gift for everybody, the concern for those at the margins of society, and the call for a new community. Love of neighbour is the fulfilment of the law, and love of our enemies is the perfection of love (*Rm* 13:8; *Mt* 5:43-48).¹⁷⁹

181. Christian peace witness belongs integrally to our walk as followers of Christ and to the life of the Church as “the household of God” and “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (*Eph* 2:19, 22). Christian communities have the responsibility to discern the signs of the times and to respond to developments and events with appropriate peace initiatives based on the life and teaching of Jesus (*Lk* 19:41-44).¹⁸⁰ The Mennonite Church tends to initiate its witness in and through the discerning congregation:

“Led by the Spirit, and beginning in the church, we witness to all people that violence is not the will of God... We give our ultimate loyalty to the God of grace and peace, who guides the church daily in overcoming evil with good, who empowers us to do justice, and who sustains us in the glorious hope of the peaceable reign of God”.¹⁸¹

In the Catholic Church, peace initiatives come in many forms: from parishes, communities of faith and religious movements, from justice and peace or human rights commissions, from individual bishops and conferences of bishops, from the Holy Father and various offices of the Holy See.¹⁸²

182. God revealed his love for humanity in Jesus Christ, who was willing to die on the cross as a consequence of his message of the Kingdom of God. The cross is the sign of God’s love of his enemies (*Rom* 5:10f.). For both Catholics and Mennonites the ultimate personal and ecclesial challenge is to spell out the consequences of the cross for our teaching on peace and war. We acknowledge suffering as a possible consequence of our witness to the Gospel of peace. We note with joy that we have a common appreciation for martyrs, “the great cloud of witnesses” (*Heb* 12:1), who have given their lives in witness to truth.¹⁸³ Together we hold that “God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength” (*1 Cor* 1:25).

¹⁷⁶ Cf. *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, 22, *op. cit.*, *Populorum progressio*, 76-80; *Centesimus annus*, 52.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, 22, *op. cit.*; *Centesimus annus*, 23.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, 17, *op. cit.*; *Gaudium et spes*, 32.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, 22, *op. cit.*; *Gaudium et spes*, 28.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. *Octogesima adveniens*, 4.

¹⁸¹ *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective*, 22, *op. cit.*

¹⁸² Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 89-90.

¹⁸³ For Mennonites, see *Martyrs Mirror*, *op. cit.*; for Catholics, in addition to the long liturgical tradition of commemorating martyrs and other witnesses to the faith in the course of the centuries, during the celebration of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, there was an ecumenical commemoration of “recent witnesses and martyrs”. See also Robert Royal, *The Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Crossroads, 2000).

183. Mennonites and Catholics live with the expectation that discipleship entails suffering. Jesus challenges us: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (*Mk* 8:34). Love is stronger than death – this faith sustains Christians where their faith leads to suffering. Catholics affirm with Pope John Paul II:

“It is by uniting his own sufferings for the sake of truth and freedom to the sufferings of Christ on the Cross that man is able to accomplish the miracle of peace and is in a position to discern the often narrow path between the cowardice which gives in to evil and the violence which, under the illusion of fighting evil, only makes it worse”.¹⁸⁴

Both Mennonites and Catholics take their inspiration from Gospel texts such as Mark 10:35-45 and Luke 22:24-27, where Jesus invites his followers to offer up their lives as servants.

184. Both our communities endeavour to foster the peaceable virtues: forgiveness, love of enemies, respect for the life and dignity of others, restraint, gentleness, mercy, and the spirit of self-sacrifice. We also attempt to impart the spiritual resources for peacemaking to our members. The mission of the Church has an eschatological dimension. It anticipates the kingdom of God. The Church lives in the tension between “already now” and “not yet”. Already now the Messianic time has come. But the past age has not yet come to an end; its rules and values continue to exist. In this parallel existence of the old and the new the Church has the decisive function: to foster peace and to incarnate the new order of the kingdom of God by helping its members to orient themselves according to the rules of the kingdom.

185. Mennonites and Catholics share the common conviction that worship and prayer belong to the core of Christian peace work. We celebrate what we have received from God. We cry out to God and we plead for peace. In prayer, we are renewed and by prayer we receive orientation. When we meet for ecumenical prayer services, we overcome existing divisions between us, and we experience communion with God and with one another in faith.

Divergences

186. CHURCH AND SOCIETY. While Catholics and Mennonites regard political authority as part of the God-given moral order of the universe, they tend to diverge on the question of participation in government. Catholics understand the social nature of humanity to be blessed by Christ’s life and teaching.¹⁸⁵ Participation in government is honoured and encouraged as a contribution to the common good, and military service is respected.¹⁸⁶ At the same time, nonviolent action, conscientious objection, and resistance to immoral orders are strongly endorsed.¹⁸⁷ Because of their long history of persecution and discrimination, Mennonites have tended to mistrust the state. They still tend to be critical of Christian involvement in government because of the use of violence involved and the possible corruption of power.

187. *Nonviolence and Just War*. Mennonites include nonviolence as an essential component of discipleship in the sense that in principle they refuse to use violence in all situations. In situations of conflict, however, both Catholics and some Mennonites acknowledge that when all recourse to nonviolent means has failed, the state or international authorities may use force in defence of the innocent. For Mennonites, however, Christians should not participate in this kind of action.¹⁸⁸ For Catholics, Christians ought to be committed “as far as possible, to live in peace with everyone” (*Rom* 12:18) and to encourage their governments to resolve disputes peacefully, but Christians may take up arms under legitimate authority in exceptional circumstances for the defence of the innocent. Service in the military may be virtuous, but conscientious objection to military service is also respected. The Just War position provides tools for the prevention and limitation of conflict as well as for warranting force by political authorities. The principle of “right intention” requires that force be used only to restore the peace and to protect the innocent and not in a spirit of vengeance, a quest for domination, or out of other motives inconsistent with love of enemy.

188. Mennonites and Catholics have somewhat different views on non-resistance. Mennonites hold to non-resistance on principle without exception, while Catholics affirm non-resistance, but allow for

¹⁸⁴ *Centesimus annus*, 25.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 32.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 74, 79.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 78-79.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. *Schleitheim Confession*, 1527, VI., in LOEWEN, *op. cit.*, pp. 80f.

exceptions. For Mennonites, non-resistance is part of the new way of Jesus (*Mt* 5:38-41). There is an expectation that Christians are called to adhere to the principles of ethics implied in the ‘new way,’ and that through the power of the Holy Spirit and the encouraging support of the Christian community, it is possible to walk the way faithfully. For Catholics, non-resistance is “a counsel of perfection”, and Catholics, as well as all people of goodwill, are required to resist grave public evil nonviolently, if at all possible, but in exceptional circumstance by limited use of force exercised by public authorities.¹⁸⁹

Areas of Future Study

189. Many questions remain to be explored. Among these are the following: 1) What is the relationship of the different Christian peace positions to the apostolic faith? 2) What place do initiatives for conflict resolution and non-violent direct action have in a Catholic theology of peace? 3) What is the relation of human rights and justice to the non-violent resolution of conflict in contemporary Mennonite theology? 4) How can we meet the challenge of developing common theological perspectives on peace that reflect the diverse voices of men and women from different contexts world wide? 5) What is the role of the Church in promoting a culture of peace in civil society and establishing institutions for the practice of non-violence in public life? 6) What is the relationship between peace, peace witness, the call to Christian unity and the unity of the human family? 7) How is ethical discernment — interpreting the signs of the times in regard to a unified and concerted Christian peace witness — carried out in Mennonite and Catholic communities on the local and global levels?

¹⁸⁹ Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 78; *Evangelium vitae*, 41; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2267.

III TOWARD A HEALING OF MEMORIES

190. Bitter memories have resulted from past conflicts and divisions between Christians and from the sufferings they have produced over ensuing centuries. Mutual hostility and negative images have persisted between separated Christians of the Catholic and Reformation traditions from the time of the divisions of the sixteenth century until today. It has therefore been the intention and hope from the beginning of this dialogue between Mennonites and Catholics that our conversations would contribute to a healing of memories.

191. The healing of memories involves several aspects. It requires a purification of memories so that both groups can share a picture of the past that is historically accurate. This calls for a spirit of repentance — a penitential spirit — on both sides for the harm that the conflicts have done to the body of Christ, to the proclamation of the Gospel, and to one another. Healing the memories of divided Christians also entails the recognition that, despite conflict, and though still separated, they continue to hold in common much of the Christian faith. In this sense they remain linked to one another. Moreover a healing of memories involves the openness to move beyond the isolation of the past, and to consider concrete steps toward new relations. Together, these factors can contribute to reconciliation between divided Christians.

A. THE PURIFICATION OF MEMORIES

192. The healing of memories requires, first of all, a purification of memories. This involves facing those difficult events of the past that give rise to divergent interpretations of what happened and why. Past events and their circumstances need to be reconstructed as precisely as possible. We need to understand the mentalities, the conditions, and the living dynamics in which these events took place. A purification of memory includes an effort to purge “from personal and collective conscience all forms of resentment or violence left by the inheritance of the past on the basis of a new and rigorous historical-theological judgment, which becomes the foundation for a renewed moral way of acting”.¹⁹⁰ On this basis, both Catholics and Mennonites have the possibility of embarking on a sure and trustworthy way of thinking about and relating to each other that is in accordance with Christian love (cf. *1 Cor* 13).

193. Our effort to re-read church history together as Catholics and Mennonites (Chapter I) helped us begin to reconcile our divergent memories of the past. We saw that “our relationship, or better the lack of it, began in a context of rupture and separation. Since then, from the sixteenth century to the present, theological polemics have persistently nourished negative images and narrow stereotypes of each other”.¹⁹¹ Because of these dynamics, we have “sometimes restricted our views of the history of Christianity to those aspects that seemed to be most in agreement with the self-definition of our respective ecclesial communities”.¹⁹²

194. In our study of history we began to assess together, and in a fresh way, events or periods of history that Mennonites and Catholics have traditionally interpreted very differently from one another. For example, we have seen a more nuanced and complex picture of the Middle Ages, including the so-called “Constantinian era”, than either side typically saw when explanations of those centuries were heavily influenced by post-Reformation polemics. In considering the era of the sixteenth century Reformation, we saw that although there were serious abuses and problems within the Catholic Church at that time, there were also efforts to reform the church from within. Recent studies have indicated that Christian piety was flourishing in many ways on the eve of the Reformation and that it is too simplistic to describe the Christianity of that day as in a state of crisis or decline. Recent historical studies illustrating these factors call us to continue our study of that period, and to look for fresh evaluations of the circumstances that led to the separation of Christians at the time.

195. On the question of Christian witness to peace and non-violence based on the Gospel, our study of history suggested points of reference that could open the door to mutual support and cooperative efforts between Catholics and Mennonites. For example, we observed that within the often-violent society of the Middle Ages there was, as part of the heritage of the Catholic Church, an uninterrupted tradition of ecclesiastical peace movements.¹⁹³ We saw also that even though some Anabaptist-related groups allowed

¹⁹⁰ *Memory and Reconciliation*, 5.1.

¹⁹¹ Para. 24 above.

¹⁹² Para. 25 above.

¹⁹³ Cf. para. 64 above.

the use of the sword in the establishment of the kingdom of God, many were faithful to principles of pacifism and non-violence from the beginning, and soon these positions were accepted doctrinally and held consistently by Anabaptists and Mennonites.¹⁹⁴ Purifying our memory on these points means that both Catholics and Mennonites need to continually struggle to maintain the Gospel's perspective on questions of peace and non-violence. And both can find resources in the earlier history of the church to assist us in shaping a Christian witness to peace in today's violent world.

196. Briefly, we believe not only that reconciliation and purification of historical memories must continue in our communities, but also that this process may lead Catholics and Mennonites to new cooperation in witnessing to the Gospel of peace.

197. On the Catholic side, statements of the Second Vatican Council reflect a purification of memory. Unlike in the past when others were blamed for ruptures that took place, the Council acknowledged the culpability of Catholics too. The Council made the admission with reference to past ruptures that "at times, men of both sides were to blame"¹⁹⁵ for what happened. Furthermore, in an open spirit inviting dialogue, the Council further acknowledged — and this reflects a Catholic attitude toward Mennonites today — that "one cannot impute the sin of separation to those who at present are born into these communities and are instilled therein with Christ's faith. The Catholic Church accepts them respect and affection as brothers".¹⁹⁶ In a similar open spirit supporting dialogue, a recent statement of the Executive Committee of Mennonite World Conference has said: "We see Christian unity not as an option we might choose or as an outcome we could create, but as an urgent imperative to be obeyed".¹⁹⁷

B. A SPIRIT OF REPENTANCE, A PENITENTIAL SPIRIT

198. A healing of memories involves also a spirit of repentance, a penitential spirit. When Christians are divided and live with hostility towards one another, it is the proclamation of the Gospel that often suffers. The integrity and power of the Gospel is severely diminished in the mind of the hearer, when Christians witness to it in divergent and contradictory ways. Therefore, Christians separated from one another, including Catholics and Mennonites, have reason to ask God's forgiveness as well as forgiveness from each other. In doing so, they do not modify their convictions about the Christian faith. On the contrary, a penitential spirit can be another incentive to resolve, through dialogue, any theological divergences that prevent them from sharing together "the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (*Jude* 1:3).

Catholic Delegation Statement

199. While a penitential spirit with respect to Christian divisions was reflected in the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church took a further step during the Jubilee year 2000, on March 12, the "Day of Pardon". In the Catholic tradition the Holy Year is a time of purification. Thus, "in order to reawaken consciences, enabling Christians to enter the third millennium with greater openness to God and his plan of love",¹⁹⁸ during the mass of the first Sunday of Lent, Pope John Paul led the Catholic Church in a universal prayer including a confession of sins committed by members of the Church during the past millennium, and a plea to God for forgiveness. He stated that, while "the Church is holy because Christ is her head and her spouse [and] the Spirit is her life-giving soul..., [nonetheless] the children of the Church know the experience of sin.... For this reason the Church does not cease to implore God's forgiveness for the sins of her members".¹⁹⁹ Two of the seven categories of sins identified as having been committed during the previous millennium, and consequently confessed that day, were "sins which have harmed the unity of the Church" and "sins committed in the service of truth".²⁰⁰ At that Lenten mass, these categories of sins were presented in a generic way, without mentioning specific cases or situations.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. para. 39 above.

¹⁹⁵ *Unitatis redintegratio*, 3.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ "God Calls Us to Christian Unity", a statement adopted by the executive of Mennonite World Conference, Goshen, Indiana, July, 1998.

¹⁹⁸ POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Angelus*, March 12, 2000.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ "Universal Prayer for Forgiveness", March 12, 2000 in *Information Service* 103 (2000/I-II), p. 56.

200. During the ceremony, there was confession of “sins which have rent the unity of the body of Christ and wounded fraternal charity”. On behalf of the Catholic Church, the Pope beseeched God the Father that while “on the night before his Passion, your son prayed for the unity of those who believe in him. . . . [nonetheless] believers have opposed one another, becoming divided, and have mutually condemned one another and fought against one another”. Therefore, he concluded, we “urgently implore your forgiveness and we beseech the gift of a repentant heart, so that all Christians, reconciled with you and with one another, will be able, in one body and in one spirit, to experience anew the joy of full communion”.²⁰¹

201. In regard to the “confession of sins committed in the service of truth”, the introductory prayer asked that each one of us recognize “that even men of the Church, in the name of faith and morals, have sometimes used methods not in keeping with the Gospel in the solemn duty of defending the truth”. The prayer then recited by the Pope recalled that “in certain periods of history Christians have at times given in to intolerance and have not been faithful to the great commandment of love, sullyng in this way the face of the Church, your Spouse”. He then prayed, “Have mercy on your sinful children and accept our resolve to seek and promote truth in the gentleness of charity, in the firm knowledge that truth can prevail only in virtue of truth itself”.²⁰²

202. Catholics today are encouraged to look at the conflicts and divisions among Christians in general and, in the present context, at the conflicts between Mennonites and Catholics, in light of this call for repentance expressed during the “Day of Pardon”. For their part, in the spirit of the “Day of Pardon”, Catholics acknowledge that even the consideration of mitigating factors, such as cultural conditioning in previous centuries, which frequently converged to create assumptions which justified intolerance, “does not exonerate the Church from the obligation to express profound regret for the weaknesses of so many of her sons and daughters”.²⁰³ Without compromising truth, Catholics in this dialogue can apply this spirit of repentance to the conflicts between Catholics and Mennonites in the sixteenth century, and can express a penitential spirit, asking forgiveness for any sins which were committed against Mennonites, asking God’s mercy for that, and God’s blessing for a new relationship with Mennonites today. We join our sentiments to those expressed by Walter Cardinal Kasper when he addressed the Mennonite World Conference representatives of the Catholic-Mennonite dialogue group on the occasion of their visit to Rome in November, 2001:

“Is it not the case that we, Catholics and Mennonites, have mutually condemned one another? Each saw the other as deviating from the apostolic faith. Let us forgive and ask forgiveness. The authorities in centuries past often resolved problems in society by severe means, punishing with imprisonment or death those who were seen as undermining society. Especially, in the sixteenth century, the Anabaptists were among those who suffered greatly in this regard. I surely regret those instances when this took place in Catholic societies”.

Mennonite Delegation Statement

203. The statement of the Executive Committee of Mennonite World Conference, “God Calls Us to Christian Unity”, invites a spirit of repentance on the part of the MWC community of churches in relations to other Christians, including Catholics. The statement says, in part:

“As Mennonites and Brethren in Christ, we give thanks to God for brothers and sisters of other traditions around the globe who accept the claims of Scripture and seek to live as followers of our Lord. We confess that we have not done all we could to follow God’s call to relate in love and mutual counsel to other brothers and sisters who confess the name of Jesus Christ as Lord and seek to follow him. We have seen peacemaking and reconciliation as callings of all Christian disciples, but confess that we have not done all we could to overcome divisions within our circles and to work toward unity with other brothers and sisters”.²⁰⁴

In regard to the sixteenth century rupture, we recognize that as the Anabaptists sought to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ, they called into question the established churches and societies. We acknowledge that there were diverse and sometimes divergent currents within the Anabaptist movement. We believe that it was initially difficult for contemporaries to distinguish between the Anabaptists we claim as our spiritual forebears — those committed to Biblical pacifism, ready to suffer martyrdom for the cause of Christ — and those who took the sword, thinking that they were doing God’s will in preparing the way for the return of Jesus. We regret Anabaptist words and deeds that contributed to fracturing the body of Christ.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 1994, 35.

²⁰⁴ See footnote 197 above.

204. We confess also that in spite of a commitment to follow Jesus Christ in daily life, we and others in our family of faith have frequently failed to demonstrate love towards Catholics. Too often, from the sixteenth century to the present, we have thoughtlessly perpetuated hostile images and false stereotypes of Catholics and of the Catholic Church. For this, we express our regret and ask forgiveness.

Common Statement

205. Together we, Catholic and Mennonite delegations, recognize and regret that sixteenth century Christians, including Catholics and Anabaptists, were unable to resolve the problems of the church of that time in such way as to prevent divisions in the body of Christ that have lasted to the present day.

206. Together we acknowledge and regret that indifference, tension, and hostility between Catholics and Mennonites exist in some places today, and this for a variety of historical or contemporary reasons. Together we reject the use of any physical coercion or verbal abuse in situations of disagreement and we call on all Christians to do likewise. We commit ourselves to self-examination, dialogue, and interaction that manifest Jesus Christ's reconciling love, and we encourage our brothers and sisters everywhere to join us in this commitment.

C. ASCERTAINING A SHARED CHRISTIAN FAITH

207. Theological dialogue can contribute to healing of memories by assisting the dialogue partners to ascertain the degree to which they have continued to share the Christian faith despite centuries of separation. Mennonites and Catholics in this dialogue explained their own traditions to one another. This contributed to a deeper mutual understanding and to the discovery that we hold in common many basic aspects of the Christian faith and heritage. These shared elements, along with unresolved questions and disagreements, are outlined in Chapter II.

208. Catholics and Mennonites are convinced that the first responsibility of a Christian is the praise of God and that all aspects of Christian life must be rooted in prayer. Therefore in the course of the five years of this dialogue, we started and ended each day with prayer together. Together we read and reflected on the Scriptures and sang hymns. Each year we worshipped in each other's churches on Sunday in order to deepen mutual understanding of our traditions.

209. Among the important aspects of the Christian life that Catholics and Mennonites hold in common, are faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour (fully divine and fully human), the Trinitarian faith as expressed in the Apostles Creed, and numerous perspectives on the church. There is also much that we can agree on concerning baptism and the Lord's Supper as fundamental grace-filled celebrations of God's saving acts in Christ. We share a great deal in regard to the role of the church on matters of mission and evangelism, peace and justice, and life of discipleship. Moreover, Mennonites and Catholics both face the challenge of how to communicate the faith in an increasingly secular world, and both struggle with the complexities of the relationship between church and society.

210. While recognizing that we hold basic convictions of faith in common, we have also identified significant differences that continue to divide us and thus require further dialogue. Nonetheless, and although we are not in full unity with one another, the substantial amount of the Apostolic faith which we realize today that we share, allows us as members of the Catholic and Mennonite delegations to see one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. We hope that others may have similar experiences, and that these may contribute to a healing of memories.

D. IMPROVING OUR RELATIONSHIPS

211. We believe that another fundamental part of the healing of memories is the call to foster new relationships. The significant elements of our common understanding of basic Christian faith ascertained in this dialogue may provide a sufficient theological foundation on which to build. Our experience of re-reading history conjointly suggests that looking together at those periods in which our conflicts initially took place may shed new light on the past and foster a climate for better relationships in the future. For centuries our communities lived with the memories generated from the conflicts of the sixteenth century and in isolation from one another. Can we not increase our efforts to create new relationships today so that future generations may look back to the twenty-first century with positive memories of a time in which Mennonites and Catholics began increasingly to serve Christ together?

212. Indeed, as the Introduction to this report already suggested, the building of improved relationships is beginning as Mennonites and Catholics talk to one another. On the international level, this dialogue is an important sign that the Catholic Church and the Mennonite World Conference are willing, for the sake of Christ, to strive for mutual understanding and better relationships. We believe that one should not underestimate the importance of what it means for our two families of Christians, separated for centuries, to enter into conversation.

213. Locally as well, in several parts of the world, some Catholics and Mennonites already engaged with each other in theological dialogue and in practical cooperation. In various places collaboration between the Mennonite Central Committee and Caritas or Catholic Relief Services is taking place in humanitarian causes. We hear of Mennonites working with Catholics in the USA, in the Middle East, and in India, to name but a few examples. And even though numerous local Catholic-Mennonite initiatives are unofficial and personal, they serve the wider church by helping to overcome false caricatures about and mutual prejudices of each other.

214. In light of this situation, the dialogue members encourage Mennonites and Catholics to engage each other in joint study and cooperative service. Areas of interaction could include a review of history text books on each side, participation in the week of prayer for Christian unity, mutual engagement in missiological reflection, peace and justice initiatives, some programs of faith formation among our respective members, and 'get acquainted' visits between Catholic and Mennonite communities, locally and more widely.

CONCLUSION

215. After having worked with each other over these five years, we, Catholic and Mennonite members of this dialogue, want to testify together that our mutual love for Christ has united us and accompanied us in our discussions. Our dialogue has fortified the common conviction that it is possible to experience reconciliation and the healing of memories. Therefore we beseech God to bestow divine grace upon us for the healing of past relationships between Mennonites and Catholics, and we thank God for present commitments to reconciliation within the body of Christ. Together we pray that God may bless this new relationship between our two families of faith, and that the Holy Spirit may enlighten and enliven us in our common journey on the path forward.

APPENDIX A

BIBLIOGRAPHY OF DIALOGUE PAPERS AND THEIR AUTHORS

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- Howard John Loewen, "The Mennonite Tradition: An Interpretation".
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