

Theme Year

21

daring! **living together**



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2021 daring! living together

The journey in remembrance of 500 years of the Anabaptist movement continues with the second issue (2021) entitled „daring! living together“ and this appears in the middle of the Corona pandemic. So much of what bind us together and what we as Christians are hoping for cannot not take place: for example, meetings and dialogue on the ecumenical level. For that reason it is of paramount importance to discover what churches can offer in these times, in order to further unity in our society and show how we as Christians can continue on a common path.

In this issue we wish to consider what churches and fellowships in the Anabaptist tradition can offer and what accents they desire to set. It is an invitation to delve into the texts, to seize on the impulses and to think about them, both as individuals and in groups. It presents ideas for church services, youth meetings and encounters between churches. When it is fully possible to travel without any restrictions, here are some suggestions to discover historical Anabaptist locations.

One final point: This issue offers a chance to discover the diversity of the Anabaptist movement. But „living together“ nevertheless is also thought-provoking and critical, since „living together“ is nor was by any means free of conflict, whether in individual churches or in the ecumenical context. For that reason this year's theme hopes to encourage and increase the joy of togetherness in the fellowship of all believers.

Reinhard Assmann, Bernd Densky, Andreas Liese, Astrid von Schlachta

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President of the German Bundestag

Dr. Wolfgang Schäuble

Ecclesia semper reformanda est – the Reformation, which in fact consisted of many important individual episodes of reform, began a continuing process of change. The church lives by renewal. This is the only way to fulfil its task: preaching the Gospel. Since it is a fact that men and women are subject to profound changes, as their environment and conditions, their aspirations and needs constantly alter, so the church must also undergo change if it wishes to be heard, sought and found.

But certain things do remain the same – for example the importance of baptism. Although more than one third of all Germans belong to no religious denomination, the majority in our country has been baptised and most of those pass their faith on to their children. Young people or adults, with or without any previous religious influence from their family, wish to confess their faith through baptism, this ritual is experienced as a powerful signal. That is the essence of believer's baptism: public confession, shared by Christians.

Those baptised – whatever their age – form a bond with their church and share responsibility before God and man. They see their faith as both a gift and a purpose in life, expressed in Christian discipleship. In our modern secular world this is by no means self-evident. For our society it is a blessing.

When the present-day successors of the Anabaptist movement chooses for 2021 the motto *Daring! The Common Life* in preparation for the major anniversary, it calls to mind 500 years` experience of practised diversity, both good and bad. In our pluralistic society tolerance and respect for others are the prerequisites for the common life. The Baptist movement stands for Christian values, its churches bear responsibility for the common good and are involved in the interreligious dialogue. Above all, it strengthens us in our determination to renew continually our vision for recognising what possibilities are offered by following Christ – through constant renewal!



President of the Conference of European Churches (CEC)

Rev. Christian Krieger



The Baptist movement began 500 years ago in a century of religious upheaval. Thanks to the new medium of the printing press, the academic debate initiated by the publication of Martin Luther's 95 Theses became a public debate and soon spread all over Europe. The theological disputation became one factor in the Reformation. From Wittenberg to Zürich, Strasbourg to Schaffhausen, in Schleithem and Münster, the Reformation had diverse forms and accents, including radicalisation. Dispute was not just fuelling the Reformation, it was also the source of its divisions.

500 years of history remembered, looking back and looking forward, offer reasons enough for gratitude for the life of the church and the testimony of the Gospel in the past, as given by God. Such retrospective thoughts demand that we also point out the excesses, extremes and errors with the intention of removing those elements which are valueless for the future.

I am thankful for the image of the church painted by the Anabaptist movement: a church which is perceived as a fellowship of Christians who have made the conscious decision through their baptism to live their lives as followers of Christ; a church fully dedicated to the testimony of the Gospel; a church with minimal hierarchy, that does not see itself as an institution; a church which values equality in its local congregation; a church which prefers to be seen as an association of confessing fellowships.

With regret I recall the mechanisms to marginalise, that resulted from this ecclesiology. The Reformation was unable to discern the challenge presented by the universality of the church. So we can be all the more grateful that today the heirs of the Anabaptists are open to ecumenism in varying degrees or at least to a limited extent.

The theme for 2021 is 'Daring! The Common Life!' I believe this subject means two things. It has relevance for the church. Christianity must remove divisions, in order to fulfil its calling and testimony in unity. The ecumenical challenge remains, that we rediscover Jesus Christ together and the basic unity given through Him.

This theme is also relevant for our society. The present times are turbulent, caused by fear of the future due to climate change, the Corona pandemic and the economic crisis which follows in its wake. And then the political aspects: international disorder and tensions, resurgence of populist governments and the inability to find a humane answer to the migration crisis. Our pluralistic western societies, weakened by increased individualism and secularisation, desperately need to rediscover those qualities which unite us. Only when

we are conscious of a common good can we find the necessary basis for our life together.

My hope is that by reflecting on this year's theme we draw closer to unity and strengthen the Christian testimony in the world. I also hope that it furthers the hospitality and open-mindedness of the churches in interacting with society and in this way contributes to the common life.

Because: *You are the salt of the earth, you are the light of the world!* (Matthew 5, 13-14)



Blessing of bread in the sending service of the CEC Assembly in Novi Sad on June 5th, 2018

Andrea Strübind

The Church of Brothers and Sisters

In 1955 the church historian Fritz Blanke drew the following conclusion: 'Zollikon on Lake Zürich was the place where in Protestant history the attempt was first made to bring to fruition a Christian fellowship free from the state and based on voluntary membership. Such an experiment inevitably failed at the first attempt and the only 'mistake' that the men and women in Zollikon could be reproached for, was that they did this too soon, so before the time was ripe for their project. But in fact that was not blameworthy; rather, a great achievement. People prepared to aim for new objectives and move towards a new day despite the prevailing zeitgeist are always needed. The 'Brethren in Christ' in Zollikon were such a vanguard. Their daring feat was not in vain.'

In Zürich and St. Gallen 'Bible circles' were formed at an early period of the Reformation, where the initiative came from non-theologians, who were positive towards the Reformation. Most of them were artisans and met together to read the Bible and learn from those well-versed in the subject-matter, mostly those who had taught themselves and were called 'readers'. They organised themselves in Bible circles and this was of great importance for the development of the early Anabaptist movement and the formation of their ecclesiology. The main intention of these meetings was to study the Biblical texts and thus to gain theological competence. These non-theologians recognised the importance of Bible study independent of traditional church institutions. As a reaction to reformatory preaching they implemented and organised their own style of meeting together. This included electing their teachers and those present taking part in the discussion. This led to a 'Bible School of the ordinary man' (Heinold Fast). The Reformers' proclamation of the authority of Holy Scripture and the principle of 'the priesthood of all believers' found a new structure in these Bible circles. The ecclesiology of the Baptist movement was profoundly influenced by these egalitarian experiences in the Bible circles.

The starting-point was the experiences gained in the Bible circles, but as the situation had become life-threatening through the Council in Zürich, which had prescribed the death penalty for so-called 'rebaptism', Zwingli's erstwhile supporters decided in 1525 to take the initiative in reforming the church according to their rigorous interpretation of the Scriptures. The first 'believer's baptism' took place on 21st January 1525 in Zürich. The ius reformandi was now the responsibility of the congregation of believers and the gifts of those called to serve in obedience to Biblical commands.

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The Swiss Anabaptists and the many later renewal movements of similar ilk propagated and practised equal rights for believers, a ritualised reductionism derived from the Bible and a spiritual form of religious practice, based on experience. Anabaptists met in houses and private rooms where they also administered the sacraments of baptism and holy communion.

If we take Bern as an example: in a house search of the first Anabaptist fellowship in 1527 the Schleithem Confession and the 'Statutes for a Church Confessing Believer's Baptism' were found. The motive for these statutes was the unity and love in a church of brothers and sisters. The first article of shared consensus stated that the brothers and sisters should meet three or four times a week to 'engage in the teaching of Christ and of His disciples, to warmly encourage each other in the Lord, as they promised to do constantly.' From this the standard for intensive fellowship can be deduced, to which the members (through baptism) have clearly committed themselves. The ideal of the primitive church found in Acts 2 is recognisable as the archetype in this text. Moreover, the egalitarian tendency of the gatherings is further enhanced by the explicit referral to 'sisters and brothers', something exceptionally unusual at the time. The statutes depict a church of brothers and sisters, which is founded on the intensive fellowship of the early church and stands the test of ethical obedience and solidarity in caring for one another, even including the readiness to lose one's own life for the community.

This new concept of Christian fellowship revolutionised the traditional role of the church and how the church worked in practice. Church 'took place' in 'peoples' parlours', through studying the Bible together, sharing bread and wine and in encouraging and helping each other in the daily vicissitudes of life.

This Anabaptist vision, which is of a church fellowship consisting of brothers and sisters who obey the Holy Scriptures and are independent of dictates from higher political or religious hierarchies, has on many occasions through the centuries been fulfilled in dissenting and non-conformist movements. At the same time the increasingly dualistic understanding of the world and the exclusive view of 'church', which was progressively strengthened by legalistic social control (church discipline), led to the social isolation of the Anabaptist movement. The danger grew that the liberating message of the Gospel would be reserved for an elite of 'true believers'.

But 'Their daring feat was not in vain' (Fritz Blanke). It re-echoed and re-echoes in many free congregationalist churches worldwide, which have great potential for inculturation, for calling people to faith and for empowering men and women from every walk of life.

¹ Fritz Blanke: *Brüder in Christo. Die Geschichte der ältesten Täufergemeinde (Zollikon 1525)*, Zürich 1955, 82.

² Vgl. Andrea Strübind: *Eifriger als Zwingli. Die frühe Täuferbewegung in der Schweiz*, Berlin 2003, 129–146.

³ Vgl. Hans Rudolf Lavater: *Die Berner Täufer in ihrem schweizerischen Umfeld II: Theologie und Bekenntnis*, in: Rudolf Dellsperger/Hans Rudolf Lavater (Hg.): *Die Wahrheit ist untödlich. Berner Täufer in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, Bern 2007, 29–70, hier: 34; Martin Haas (Hg.): *Quellen zur Geschichte der Täufer in der Schweiz, Band 3: Kantone Aargau, Bern, Solothurn, Zürich 1974*, Nr. 1049, 487–88.

⁴ Ebd.

Astrid von Schlachta

Mennonites and Baptists – Forgotten and Fluctuating Episodes of a Common History

The common history of Mennonites and Baptists is often reduced to two episodes. On the one hand the contacts between the English religious refugees to the Doopsgezinden in Amsterdam at the beginning of the 17th century, and on the other hand the influence of Johann Gerhard Oncken on the Mennonites from southern Russia, which led to the founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church. There was more; like the first cross-church gathering of the Palatine Mennonites in 1824 at the Spitalhof in Neustadt on the Weinstrasse. The incentive came from the Baptist preacher William Henry Angas, who was a guest speaker there. In the report about this meeting we read: 'We would like to affirm in particular that this gathering only transpired because an Englishman, Mr Angas, a Baptist preacher from London, appealed to us to do so and his visit had the sole aim of extending God's Kingdom amongst those of a Baptist persuasion and amongst the poor heathen themselves.'

For the Baptist missionary Angas the churches in the Palatinate were just one stopping place on his journey. Before he arrived in Neustadt he had visited the Doopsgezinden in the Netherlands, the Mennonites in Hamburg, in West Prussia, in Switzerland and in the Alsace. He wrote down his impressions in a diary and often observed a gloomy picture of the spiritual situation in the churches. So he portrays the West and East Prussian Mennonites as having a 'deep and simple faith', but a faith which was not truly alive. He assumed this came from their practice of baptising young people 'indiscriminately' without making sure that God's grace was really at work in their lives. Their preachers, so Angas continues, are 'often illiterate men, and ignorant of the grace of God'.

The Baptist Angas was not the only one to utter this criticism. When we review the first Baptist churches in West Prussia we find many Mennonite names. These people obviously did not expect revival in their own church. In Angas' opinion even the Palatine Mennonites had gone astray. He wrote: 'they had sadly fallen astern of late years', 'arising from the defective system of their ministry, which has always been lay; but even of lay preachers there is a great lack'. According to reports from the Palatinate he deduced that the churches were in danger of disappearing.

This did not happen – possibly the revivalist perspective of Angas judged the Mennonite potential for renewal too negatively. It is also possible, due to the growing interest for mission, that positive impulses for the life of the church indeed evolved.

Angas' campaign to gain support for the mission work proved advantageous. In 1855 the Mennonite preacher Johannes van der Smissen wrote in retrospect that 'the missionary zeal' in many churches had become very vigorous. In the Netherlands the Doopsgezinden founded their own benefit society, that supported the Baptist Missionary Society, and the Mennonite churches in Germany also affiliated. But as the Baptist Mission gave too little aid to the Dutch colonies the Mennonites withdrew again in increasing numbers in the 1840s. For that reason the idea was floated of founding their own missionary society with the intention of being active in Dutch East Indies (for the most part modern Indonesia). This was the birth of missionary work in Java.

Carl Harder, the Mennonite preacher in Königsberg (modern Kaliningrad) in the middle of the 19th century, betrays a crucial distance from the Baptists. He reflected in 1848 on the Baptist practice of only baptising those bearing 'unmistakable signs' of being 'spiritually born again', which he considered to be 'hierarchical arrogance'. The decision whether a baptised person truly shares 'spiritual fellowship' with a church cannot be made by man, but it is a decision made by God alone and the baptised person him- or herself. Such judgmental procedures show that Baptists have created new outward forms, although they themselves claim to have rejected all outward forms.

Uncritical regarding conversion and disrupting public order summarises Harder's criticism, although this may have been fed by irritation due to the success of Baptist mission work in the East and West Prussian Mennonite churches. He then gave a typical appeal to his own church members: Baptists can only win members from the Mennonites if these do not begin to think for themselves. A similar motivation is behind P.H.C. Hege's (Frankfurt) admonition to his fellow-Mennonites in 1893, calling on them not to let 'the itinerant preachers and their propoganda win the race for more spiritual sustenance'. He felt that the Baptist

and Methodist preachers knew that 'the Mennonites would be an easy prey for them, unless they were met with energetic spiritual resistance'.

So the relationship between Mennonites and Baptists was very eventful and by no means free from rivalry, even with regard to the historical legacy. In 1928 the Baptists planned a memorial service in Vienna to commemorate the death of Balthasar Hubmaier 400 years before, but the Mennonites asked whether this was at all legitimate, because there was no direct connection between Hubmaier and the Baptists. Emil Händiges, a Mennonite preacher from Elbing (Polish; Elblag) asked: 'Who does Hubmaier belong to?' His Solomonic answer declared the Anabaptist to be a forerunner of both Mennonites and Baptists.

Together the representatives of the Mennonite World Conference and the Baptist World Alliance in their dialogues between 1989 and 1992 focussed on history and the present but with the main emphasis on the situation in North America. The report on the dialogues suggested eleven recommendations for the future of the relationship between the Mennonites and the Baptists. One recommendation reads: 'Communication at every level'. An obligation for the path to the commemoration in the year 2025 ...

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¹ Gutbefinden einer kleinen Kirchenversammlung der Mennoniten-Gemeinen, 1824, Vorwort.

² F.A. Cox: *Memoirs of the Rev. William Henry Angas*, London 1834, 82 f.

³ Ebd., 94.

⁴ Carl Harder: *Das Leben Menno Symon's, Königsberg 1846*, 24; Carl Harder: *Die Baptisten*, in: *Mittheilungen aus dem religiösen Leben*, Dezember 1848, 7.

⁵ *Mennonitische Blätter* 11 (1893), 94.

Literaturtipp

► Fernando Enns (Hg.): *Heilung der Erinnerungen – befreit zur gemeinsamen Zukunft. Mennoniten im Dialog. Berichte und Texte ökumenischer Gespräche auf nationaler und internationaler Ebene*, Frankfurt/Main und Paderborn 2008.



Martin Rothkegel

„Each Church must have Control over its own Affairs“ – Christocracy and Democracy in the Baptist Tradition

In Amsterdam a church of English refugees introduced believer's baptism in 1609 and is considered to have founded the first Baptist church. In 1612 a majority in the church requested membership of the Mennonite Waterland Association. The English were prepared to submit to the authority of the Mennonite elders, who were elected for life. But a minority in the church refused to join the Mennonites and under the leadership of Thomas Helwys they returned to England. In this way the first Baptist church on English soil was founded. Only about 30 years later a politically influential movement with tens of thousands of baptised members had grown out of these modest beginnings.

In Helwys' eyes (and he was not shy of polemics) the Mennonite style of church leadership through eldership was a relapse into hierarchical structures, such as were found in the Catholic and Anglican Churches. Helwys insisted that each church must have control over its own affairs. Baptists argued that the Lord and Head of a church is Christ alone and because Christ is spiritually present even in the smallest fellowship (Matthew 18, 20) there can be no authority beyond the congregation, no bishops nor hierarchy. The elected elders and preachers (exclusively men) were responsible to the church assembly, and all members (including the women) took part in the consultations and votes. The Christocracy (Lordship of Christ) is revealed, when every member of the 'Body of Christ' is involved in all essential decisions.

The Baptists practised 'spiritual democracy' long before democratic forms of government were viewed as a political possibility. An anecdote that appeared in an American newspaper in 1826 informs us: about eight or ten years before the American Declaration of Independence (1776) the future President of the USA Thomas Jefferson told the Baptist preacher Andrew Tribble in private that he was impressed how the Baptist churches governed themselves. He felt that they were the only true democracy existing in the world at that time and the system of government in the colonies should be organised accordingly. Whether this conversation actually took place is uncertain.

Prof. Dr. Martin Rothkegel

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Theologischen Hochschule Elstal



Since the 1830s Baptist churches have been founded in Germany, in a society that had had no experience with democracy. Although the churches tried to follow the example of the church statutes of their English and American fellow-Christians, they were too ready to confer upon their preachers and elders more authority than actually corresponded to their ideal of 'spiritual democracy'. But at least the Baptist Julius Köbner published his 'Manifesto' in the Year of Revolution (1848) and presented it to the deputies of the National Assembly in Frankfurt. He wrote somewhat provocatively:

'The Church of Jesus Christ can accept no prince or lawmakers over it, except the One who thrones in heaven. Such Christians can share no sympathy for aristocratic principles, nor for Absolutism. [...] A majority vote decides in every case. [...] In the general meetings the church does not wish to be a silent listener to a privileged speaker, but every person present may express his or her opinion freely and vote accordingly. Indeed, the members of Christ's Church are by no means nonentities, whose only value is their support for the minister and his opinion. [...]

Very soon after the Revolution of 1848 had been quelled, the Baptists took on an apolitical stance. Considered suspicious, they were under observation from the State Churches and authorities and subject to

arbitrary police action in many places, so they sought to be seen as obedient citizens and not as dangerous democrats. This subservient attitude, which had become the guiding principle for decades, resulted in many Baptists holding fast to an authoritarian concept of the state, even during the Weimar Republic. This correlated to the fact that in many churches the 'church leaders' set the tone. This ultimately led to the attempt in 1933 to introduce the 'Führer-principle' of the National Socialists into the Baptist Union, by creating the office of a 'Federation Elder', a form of bishop; however, this office was abolished just three years later.

Nowadays the principle of 'spiritual democracy' is under criticism from some Baptists. Due to the influence of 'spiritual leadership' as stressed by charismatic theology or the Calvinist concept of the 'spiritual office', the question is asked, whether a democratic church structure is derived from the Bible or has been adopted from worldly politics. Historically the question has a simple answer: the early Baptists developed their democratic structures from the Bible, long before democratic ideas in politics began to take effect in the western world. Still, it is true that a democratically structured church will go astray, if Christocracy, orientation on Jesus, is no longer the central purpose and aim in all consultations and decision-making processes of the church.

From the Schleithem Confession

In February 1527 various Anabaptists met in the Swiss town of Schleithem. On the occasion of this meeting, Michael Sattler (c. 1490–1527) compiled important principles of the early Anabaptist movement. In connection with the annual theme “daring! living together” the following three articles from this confession:

Concerning the ban

II. We have been united as follows concerning the ban. The ban shall be employed with all those who have given themselves over to the Lord, to walk after Him in His commandments; those who have been baptized into the one body of Christ, and let themselves be called brothers or sisters, and still somehow slip and fall into error and sin, being inadvertently overtaken. The same shall be warned twice privately and the third time be publicly admonished before the entire congregation according to the command of Christ (Matthew 18:15 ff). But this shall be done according to the ordering of the Spirit of God before the breaking of bread. so that we may all in one spirit and in one love break and eat from one bread and drink from one cup.

Concerning the breaking of bread

III. Concerning the breaking of bread, we have become one and agree thus: all those who desire to break the one bread in remembrance of the broken body of Christ and all those who wish to drink of one drink in remembrance of the shed blood of Christ, they must beforehand be united in the one body of Christ, that is the congregation of God, whose head is Christ, and that by baptism. For as Paul indicates [1 Corinthians 10:21], we cannot be partakers at the same time of the table of the Lord and the table of devils. Nor can we at the same time partake and drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils. That is: all those who have fellowship with the dead works of darkness have no part in the light. Thus all those who follow the devil and the world, have no part with those who have been called out of the world unto God. All those who lie in evil have no part in the good.

So it shall and must be, that whoever does not share the calling of the one God to one faith, to one baptism, to one spirit, to one body together with all the children of God, may not be made one loaf together with them, as must be true if one wishes truly to break bread according to the command of Christ.

Concerning the separation

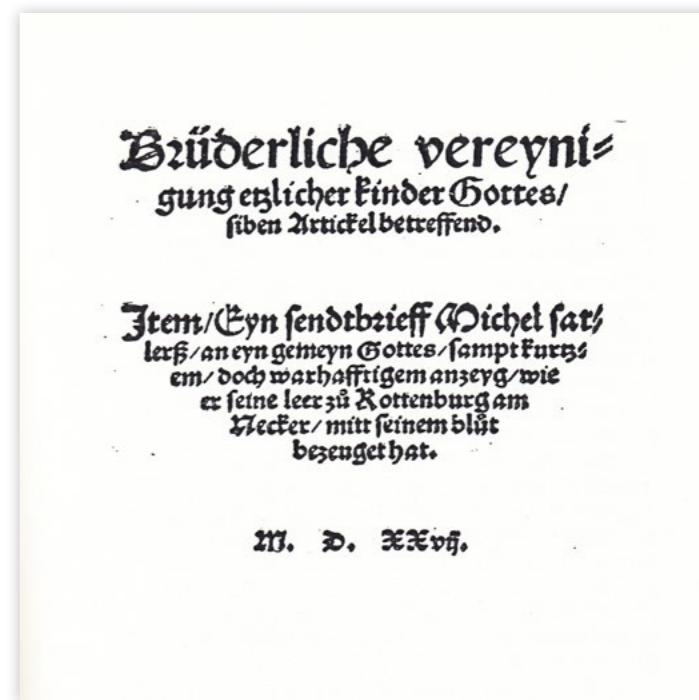
IV. We have been united concerning the separation that shall take place from the evil and the wickedness which the devil has planted in the world, simply in this; that we have no fellowship with them, and do not run with them in the confusion of their abominations. So it is; since all who have not entered into the obedience of faith and have not united themselves with God so that they will to do His will, are a great abomination before God, therefore nothing else can or really will grow or spring forth from them than abominable things. Now there is nothing else in the world and all creation than good or evil, believing and unbelieving, darkness and light, the world and those who are [come] out of the world, God’s temple and idols. Christ and Belial, and none will have part with the other.

To us, then, the commandment of the Lord is also obvious, whereby He orders us to be and to become separated from the evil one, and thus He will be our God and we shall be His sons and daughters [2 Corinthians 6:17 f].

Further, He admonishes us therefore to go out from Babylon and from the earthly Egypt, that we may not be partakers in their torment and suffering, which the Lord will bring upon them.

From all this we should learn that everything which has not been united with our God in Christ is nothing but an abomination which we should shun. By this are meant all popish and repopish works and idolatry, gatherings, church attendance, winehouses, guarantees and commitments of unbelief, and other things of the kind, which the world regards highly, and yet which are carnal or flatly counter to the command of God, after the pattern of all the iniquity which is in the world. From all this we shall be separated and have no part with such, for they are nothing but abominations, which cause us to be hated before our Christ Jesus, who has freed us from the servitude of the flesh and fitted us for the service of God and the Spirit whom He has given us.

Thereby shall also fall away from us the diabolical weapons of violence – such as sword, armor, and the like, and all of their use to protect friends or against enemies – by virtue of the word of Christ: „you shall not resist evil“ [Matthew 5:39].



Title of the Schleithem Confession

Jürgen Moltmann

Reformation 'By Faith Alone' – The Anabaptists¹

Who were the Anabaptists and why were they so cruelly persecuted by Catholics and Protestants? Luther called them 'fanatics', historians refer to the 'left wing of the Reformation'. I believe they were the only Reformation movement truly following the principle 'by faith alone'. They gave themselves the epithet 'God's children'. Here I mean of course the peaceful Anabaptists, not those involved in the struggle for Münster in 1534.

Why was there a Reformation? After the reform-oriented sermons and the approval of the people the magistrates of the towns or the princes of the area implemented the reformation of the churches and schools and claimed authority over the church. This reformation took place within the framework of the laws and traditions of the 'Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation'.

Christianity is the religion of the Empire and the Sacrum Imperium is the 'Millenium Kingdom' of Christ. The Reformers remained in this tradition of the Corpus Christianum. Only the Anabaptists rejected the basic principles of the Christian State religion: infant baptism and military service, because 'Jesus prohibits the violence of the sword'. They were opposed to taking an oath, 'because Jesus rejects swearing oaths'. They themselves would not participate in public offices, because 'it cannot be right for Christians to be in authority'. These references to Jesus and to the Sermon on the Mount can be found in the Schleithem Confession of 1527, which Michael Sattler drew up as the 'Seven Articles of the Fraternal Union of God's Children'. In this way the Anabaptists were against Christianity as state religion and the 'Holy Empire'. They were persecuted by Catholic and Protestant authorities according to Imperial law and deemed heretics and enemies of the state. When Michael Sattler stated in the interrogation in Rottenburg: 'When the Turk comes, do not offer any resistance, because the Word tells us Thou shalt not kill, the danger emanating from the peace-loving Anabaptists became public, since they had a strong following among ordinary people. For that reason Michael Sattler's execution in Rottenburg was in public and particularly barbaric: they cut out his tongue, nailed him onto a cart, tore out chunks of his flesh with burning tongs and burnt him on the gallows outside the town on the 20th May 1527. His wife Margaretha withstood all attempts to save her and she was drowned a few days later in the River Neckar.

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¹ Vgl. H. Fast (Hg.): *Der linke Flügel der Reformation*, Bremen 1962.

Michael Sattler had been the prior of the famous monastery of St. Peter in the Black Forest. He was a well-educated theologian and humanist. In 1525 he was among the insurgent peasants in Memmingen and in 1525 he joined the Anabaptists in Zürich and did missionary work in Upper Swabia. In and around Horb he won many followers and baptised them in the Neckar. His dictum was:

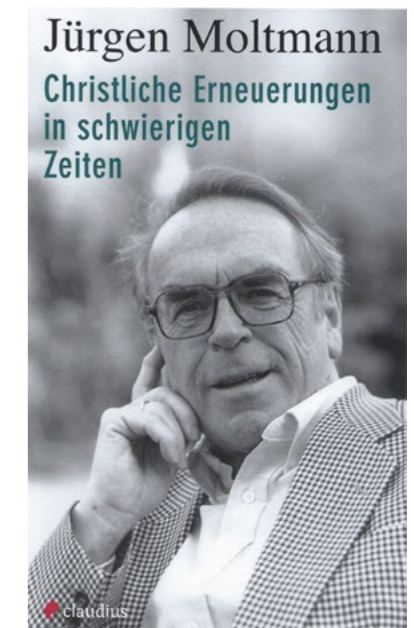
*Christians remain calm
And trust in their Father in heaven
With no outward, worldly armour.*

The Anabaptists (like Michael Sattler) were the martyrs of the Reformation period. One of their hymns begins: 'How beautiful is the death of the Saints ...' Menno Simons and the Mennonites have carried on this reformatory movement and still do so up to the present.

Some comments in this respect: firstly, the Lutheran World Federation asked the Mennonites a few years ago for forgiveness for all the condemnation and persecution in the Reformation period. This gesture must lead to certain consequences. The Confessio Augustana, Article 16 of 1530 must be revised or end it with a comment that we no longer consider the condemnation to be valid. Otherwise, no Lutheran candidate at his or her ordination could take the oath on the Augsburg Confession. Of course we no longer refer to them as 'fanatics', but historically as 'Churches of Peace'!

Secondly, it is also written in Isaiah 2, 4: 'And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their swords into pruninghooks: no nation shall lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.'

The Lutherans turned the swords into 'Christian swords', in order to 'wage legitimate war' (Confessio Augustana Article 16). The Anabaptists withdrew into their Bruderhof Communities and desired to concentrate on their 'ploughshares'. So who manufactures ploughshares out of swords? The war industry is transformed into a peace industry and turns steel helmets into saucepans as we did in 1945. The Kingdom of Christ is not only a 'peaceable' kingdom, but primarily a 'peace-making' kingdom. Jesus does not call the 'peaceful people' blessed, but the peacemakers (eirenopoesis).



aus: Jürgen Moltmann: *Die unvollendete Reformation. Ungelöste Probleme – ökumenische Antworten*, Vortrag auf der Tagung der Gesellschaft für evangelische Theologie im Augustinerkloster Erfurt, 27.02.2017,

in: Jürgen Moltmann: *Christliche Erneuerungen in schwierigen Zeiten*, München 2019, 20–24 (Abdruck mit freundlicher Genehmigung des Claudius Verlags)

Kim Tan

Community Living

All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. (Acts 2:44-45)

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. There were no poor among them. (Acts 4:32, 34)

Pentecost is celebrated as the birth of the church when the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples. They were shaken both by the violent wind from heaven that filled the whole house as well as the tongues of fire that rested on each of them. And then they were amazed when they started to speak in languages that they had not learnt (Acts 2:1ff). Through the spiritual experience of the Holy Spirit, this tiny band of disillusioned, confused and frightened disciples emerged from hiding to boldly proclaim that God had raised Yeshua from the dead (Acts 2:24) and made him *both* Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36). In other words, if Yeshua is Messiah, he has also to be Lord of our lives. We cannot only claim Yeshua as our saviour and not have him as Lord of how we live.

This new boldness led the disciples in Acts to do four things: they *preached* (Peter and Stephen), they *healed* (Peter and the lame man), they *shared* (daily meals from house to house and their community of goods) and they *served* (feeding the widows). These are the characteristics of the new people of God. This was kingdom social holiness. And it is the fulfilment of the Jubilee instructions given at Sinai that if Israel lived as God had instructed them, the promise was that *'there would be no poor among them'* (Deut 15:4). It took the coming of the Spirit to enable the people of God to show such radical generosity to each other. Why? Because we who are born of the Spirit have the same heavenly Father and are therefore members of the same family.

And loving one another always expresses itself in acts of generosity. They learnt this from the Lord himself. The Jesus community shared a common purse for three years and one would see that *'there were no poor among them'*.

It was this radical way of living among the early churches in the first three centuries that led to the explosive growth of the church. All the early churches had some form of economic sharing and care for the poor and the sick. Among them, one could say *'there were no poor among them'*. Later on, among some of the monastic movements and the radical groups like the Waldensians and the Hutterites who practiced some form of community of goods, it could also be said of them, *'there were no poor among them.'*

My personal experience of community living took place whilst I was a student at Surrey University in the UK during the 1970's and 80's. Our group had no formal name but became known as the 'Denzil Road family'. At its peak, there were about 40 of us living in 12 houses, most of which we owned. In line with our understanding of private ownership and Jubilee, we assisted each other to buy their own houses. We gifted each other with sums of money for the deposit with the balance financed through a housing loan. We did not have a trust or a centralised holding entity for these properties; they were all privately owned, in contrast to other earlier communities. The Jubilee is based on the private ownership of land. The Christians in Acts owned their own houses and land. Acts of generosity were voluntary. So their community of goods was not based on a centralised trust or foundation, but on individuals owning their own properties and assets. This is important because when wealth is centralised it can be open to abuse.

Furthermore, instead of withdrawing to some remote countryside, we lived out our communal life in the town, just as the Acts community did. Like them we need to work out community of goods in a town/city and private ownership setting. Our community living lasted for eight years. For us community was not an end in itself. We saw it as an environment where discipleship could take place. It was an environment for God to deal with our material addiction. We chose to live a simpler lifestyle. We shared our material wealth (the little we had) with our extended family and friends. Surplus financial resources were released to help others. To paraphrase Tertullian 'we had all things in common except our wives and our books' (because Christians are not very good at returning borrowed books!), and we could also say 'there were no poor among us'.

During our time in community, we had a converted garden shed that acted as a storehouse. We had a centralised shopping system, buying in bulk to cut costs. Apart from using it for our own needs, food from the storehouse was also used to share with needy students. Every church should have a storehouse of food, clothes, household goods where the poor can come and take what they need.

Living in a community was both rewarding and challenging. The friendships we formed were deep and fulfilling and have lasted. We shared countless communal meals together talking about our faith and 'putting the world to rights'. Our experience in community stimulated our own personal growth and shaped our world-view. What was challenging was the sacrificial giving of our time and money, lack of private space, sharing rooms with three sometimes five others (!) whilst writing a PhD thesis. There was a daily challenge of 'feeding the multitudes', made all the more challenging because we never knew how many additional guests would be invited for dinner. And, because we believed everyone should be involved in hospitality regardless of their culinary skills, we ate some very 'interesting' meals!



But through it all, we learnt to love one another and accept each other's idiosyncrasies that we all brought from our different countries and backgrounds (my Dad called us a mini-United Nations). The community DNA was hard-wired into our lives and has endured over the years, even as we moved into the married and family lives phase. Some of us have continued living as extended families, with single young adults sharing our homes, epitomizing the ethos of a warm and open house that defined our community. Our community not only reflected different modes of ownership and generosity, but also helped us to live out social holiness. We were living out the 'new family' of the church and bringing shalom to those around us.

Dr. Kim Tan

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Jesse Hofer

Living Together as a Hutterite – The Challenges and Comforts of Giving and Receiving Counsel

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

(Philippians 2:1–3)

One of the questions that was commonly put to 16th-century Hutterite missionaries during interrogations was why they needed to live in separate communities in Moravia. Why couldn't they simply bloom where they were planted and stop drawing people away from their home territories? Claus Felbinger and Hans Schmidt responded to these accusations by insisting that to be a Christian entailed following the difficult teachings of Jesus and to have any hope of doing that, they needed the daily support, encouragement, and admonition found in a close-knit faith community. They realized that to live together as a community of faith was a daring venture, but to remain spiritually isolated was foolhardy.

One of the vows Hutterites make at baptism involves a commitment to give and receive brotherly counsel, to support, admonish, and encourage the brothers and sisters in the faith. Being a Hutterite means to grow into one's baptismal commitment to accept correction and discipline and to provide it – judiciously and charitably – to others.

Giving and receiving counsel in a way that truly encourages and consoles people and builds community is one of the most challenging aspects of daily life as a Hutterite. The need and opportunity to do so are frequent because the neighbour is encountered at every turn. You also happen to know her habits and temperament quite intimately. Often, there is pressure to respond immediately when somebody makes a mistake. But mutual correction can easily become just one more rule to follow, and when it is performed in a mechanical, legalistic manner it can be harmful and hurtful.

In what follows, I'd like to identify some challenges that stand in the way of giving and receiving counsel in a spirit of humility and compassion for Hutterites today:

- ▶ Our motivation matters. Can we remember that our life together is rooted in the gospel of grace offered through the person of Jesus Christ, so we can be freed to give and receive counsel in a spirit of vulnerability and mutual trust instead of fear, rigidity, and hostility?
- ▶ The best learning and teaching take place in a context of good/healthy relationship. Do we take the time and care to nurture deep/meaningful relationships, to build the necessary trust and space to make our words meaningful?
- ▶ Commitment and accountability to the community, i.e. brothers and sisters in faith, are often undermined by the spirit and ethos of individualism, which is exacerbated by the culture of technology. Can we find ways to use technology so it builds and benefits the community instead of undermining it?
- ▶ Learning to converse as a community is essential for building unity, exercising responsibility, and for mutual correction and encouragement. Do our leaders create sufficient space for all members' voices to be heard and respected, to cultivate a climate where challenging conversations can take place? Are our members willing to accept the responsibility that goes along with this?
- ▶ We don't have all the answers. Do we have the humility to learn from non-Hutterite voices and witnesses who might have been more attentive to God's Spirit in certain areas? Can we accept that there are many ways of living in community, and that our particular form can and may need to change to adapt to new realities?



Title copy of a pamphlet that denigrated the Hutterite community as living in a dovecote; on the poles are signs of those crafts that the Hutterites practiced.

The traditional Hutterite Lehr on Philippians 2 presents a lovely and fitting illustration of mutual support in Christian community: When a herd of deer cross a river, the strongest takes the lead of fighting against the current, and each animal in turn places its head on the back of the deer in front, to benefit from the strength of the herd as a whole. Nobody is left behind. When he is tired, the leading deer goes to the rear and lets others lead the way. This illustration underscores the fact that we need each other to survive the perilous pilgrimage of discipleship, and that the responsibility of care is shared by all. It reinforces the commitment found in the waters of baptism, where – taking our lead from

Jesse Hofer

Lehrer in der Silverwinds Hutterite Colony,
Canada

William Yoder

The Amish – A Church with a Past and a Future

The Amish, a subdivision of the South German and Swiss Mennonite churches dating back to 1693, know something about forgiveness. Their fame reached as far as China after an attack on a primary school in Nickel Mines/Pennsylvania in October 2006 when an assassin killed five girls and seriously injured five others before shooting himself. Immediately afterwards, the Amish themselves comforted the bitterly weeping father of the killer, invited the widow to the funerals and collected money for her and the children. The Amish were concerned for the welfare of all concerned. The film about this in 2010 was entitled „Amish Grace“; a Chinese version received major acclaim.

I myself am of Amish descent. About 20 years ago, the daughter of an Amish cousin went off the rails by becoming a drug addict. Later she managed to free herself; today she is an Amish wife and mother. Once a person has taken leave, he or she can still expect reinstatement if they repent.

Speaking of drugs: The Amish should by no means be confused with a small group of the „Old Colony“ involved in the drug business in Mexico. The Old Colony comes from the branch of North German and Dutch Mennonites which found its way to North America via Ukraine and Russia. Their dialect and surnames do not coincide with those of the Amish; neither do the two groups know much about each other. (Of course, the Amish also have black sheep.)

This brings us to the matter of ethnicity. Ben Goossen of Harvard University points out that in 1942 the Mennonites of Eastern Ukraine were particularly valued by the invading Nazis precisely because of their impeccable German origins. Ethnicity is nevertheless also a glue that holds families and communities together. Completely independent of the quality of sermons and the liveliness of its music, members can remain committed to a single congregation throughout their entire lives. One often remains a member through thick-and-thin. But ethnicity can outlast the spiritual – see Mexico.

„Strong fences make good neighbours“ is a phrase sometimes attributed to the Amish. There is truth in it. Like a religious order, one is either inside or outside; the transition is not fluid. Costume and culture are an indispensable foundation of the fence; the fence offers protection while clearly distinguishing between „within“ and „without“.

The Amish are clan- and family-oriented. If I come across a mid-Western Amish gentleman in California, Florida or anywhere in between, he will usually know some of my kin. Their newspaper, the „Budget“, which is distributed throughout the country, reports on who has visited whom, who has married or died, and who is currently in hospital. This creates identity: You know who you are and where you belong. In the vast USA, it happens repeatedly that an Amish family needs to get by without Social Security. Then, for example, a collection is made during a church service in Indiana for a sick person in Kansas.

A binding community cannot do without a strong sense of obedience. One is subject to the decisions of the bishops; they decide on the colour and cut of the horse-drawn carriage and whether one is allowed to work the fields with a tractor. (For young men, fast tractors with rubber tyres are the fitting substitute for a car.) Not submitting to the bishops' decrees is interpreted as disobedience, and disobedience is a sign of vanity. Years ago I overheard a „secular“ person ask an Amish woman if a certain relative had remained in the Amish church. Answer: „She remained faithful to her parents' heritage.“ So, yes.

It is probably a remnant of the European state church scene that an Amish couple is not allowed to choose between various local Amish congregations. An area is divided into fixed church regions; you need to attend the congregation in whose catchment area you live. If one cannot come to terms with the decisions of the bishops in that area, the only way out is to move away. My grandfather, also a William Yoder, lived on five farms spanning four states between 1937 and 1957. Though he had eleven children, he did not die in poverty.

The Amish resort of Pinecraft in sunny Sarasota/Florida is essentially one-of-a-kind. This is a church region with floating „canonical“ jurisdictions – no one bishop is constantly responsible. This leads to a kind of „special economic zone“ allowing electricity in houses and tricycles with electric motors out front. This adds to the attractiveness of the place: new freedoms without needing to depart from the fold. I sometimes call it the „Amish Las Vegas“ – without the usual vices. An aunt in Indiana speaks derisively of a special breed of the barely-Amish: the „Florida Amish“.



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William Yoder

The Amish – A Church With a Past and a Future

These tricycles are perfectly suited as an environmentally-friendly substitute for the automobile. The Amish are the ones who guide their theologically barely-defendable electric tricycles across Sarasota's massive, scorching and asphalted car parks. The world is a sphere and the Amish have fallen so far behind that they are now suddenly out in front. They do not write „ecology“ on their foreheads, but they are green nonetheless.

Despite all obedience to the bishops, there are also non-hierarchical traits among the Amish – a kind of priesthood-of-all-believers. The clergy are chosen by lot. One cannot apply for such an office – that would be egoistic. This essentially prevents the emergence of elitist clans. Increasing income disparity is gnawing away at this egalitarianism; they now have millionaire businessmen. They also own very expensive farmland. But even the millionaire is subject to the bishop, and the bishop cannot be bought.

Because of their industriousness and frugality, the Amish can no longer be called poor. At an auction among my relatives, we academics with our measly salaries were constantly being outbid by our Amish cousins.

Yet manual labour remains an honourable affair. The only real work that counts is the physical one. This is expected of everyone, even if they are millionaires. Due to the lack of arable land, only a minority of the Amish still earn a living from farming: Caravan building, furniture making, blacksmithing and boiler making are substitutes. Carriage building, bicycle repair and wood processing (sawmill work) also abound. They are enthusiastic about acquiring new manual skills. But none of them need a vocational school or apprenticeship: They obtain what they need from the bottom up at home.

The roles of husband and wife remain fixed. The woman needs to take care of the house and hearth. The man is solely responsible for bringing home the necessary small change. The old and the weak are cared for at home. Here one can see the unavoidable trade-off within closed communities: Personal freedom of choice – individualism – is exchanged for security. Both cannot be had simultaneously.

The best things in life are free – the Amish still understand something about the great, eternal values. I have Amish relatives with an interest in people and social issues which dwarfs that of the vast majority of US-Americans. They are not distracted by the usual electronic clutter; the mobile phone is often only available at work. There are now computers with limited functions specially screwed together for the Amish workplace. Their children still know something about creative play with basic elements.

The Amish are said to have a great future before them. Around 1900, there were only 6.000 Amish in the entire U.S.; currently, their number is 330.000. With six to nine children per family and a drop-out rate of only 20%, their numbers double every 21–22 years. According to an article on the “Daily Caller” website on 31 July 2019, the Amish will at these growth rates surpass the current US population (335 million) within 215 years (the year 2234). In the next centuries, the world will apparently be able to reckon with a much more humane US foreign policy!



Lydia Funck

The Common Life According to the New Testament – Personal Experiences

Since March 2020 the common life in Germany has suffered profound change and social contacts all over the world have been reduced to a minimum. COVID-19, the virus which can cause dangerous illnesses above all for the lungs, defines and limits both public and private life. But even in such times we somehow still live together, although this sometimes means we have to keep a physical distance from each other. As Christians we want to live the way Jesus showed us. But what does that really mean – The Common Life According to the New Testament?

I see it demonstrate in the form of a microcosm and a macrocosm: in shared accommodation, in the church and in the global community.

Loving my neighbour starts with me personally

After leaving senior school I spent six months at a discipleship training school in England. Apart from the thematic teaching I learned most from the life we were experiencing together. We were eight young women of six different nationalities sharing a room and we shared our bathroom with twenty women from even more nations. We quickly learned that each of us had her own priorities regarding our life together. I would have wanted things to be tidier and longed for the scheduled cleaning day, whereas the lady in the bunk bed beneath me felt it was more important to spend hours in conversation than to spend ten minutes bringing order into the piles of clothes beside our bunk bed. Different priorities taught me to recognise the needs of other people and to respect in a more relaxed way their way of doing things. I soon understood this to be a useful piece of wisdom for the common life in many different contexts. 'All men and women shall know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another'. (John 13, 35) That is timeless.

Together we are stronger

At the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles the disciples faced a new challenge, because they had to work out how to live in the future without Jesus' personal presence. They learned from their previous experiences, they encouraged each other and prayed together. This spiritual starting-point spurred them into action to witness to other people. Each Christian had his or her special gifts and sought to use them to everyone's benefit.

Lydia Funck

Generalsekretärin des europäischen ökumenischen Netzwerkes „Church and Peace“



Demonstration One Europe for All! Your voice against nationalism! May 19th, 2019 in Berlin

For me this is an important aspect of the common life: talking with others, sometimes controversially, and discussing and debating my own personal encounter with Jesus and what I have learned through reading the Bible. Then prayer fellowship, planning and carrying out joint activities enable us to practise what we feel to be important. Every individual gift is important, for I am only too conscious that I have my own limitations and am grateful when others make use of their own gifts and perhaps even point to gifts that I have, but have not yet discovered.

Everything Hunky-dory

Of course, life is never without conflict and injustice. The global pandemic has made this fact even more painfully obvious. My question is, what should I do when I recognise conflict and injustice. In my youth the slogan was: What would Jesus do? And still today I am often reminded of those typical neon-coloured bracelets which bore this question.

Since I began working for the European Ecumenical Network Church and Peace I have got to know many inspiring projects and fellowships. These have often been motivated by Jesus' example of non-violence. They are actively involved in actions for peace and justice like neighbourhood aid, helping refugees, encouraging reconciliation in the Balkans, working for a world without (nuclear) weapons or trying out sustainable life-styles.

This does not mean that everything must be hunky-dory, but is a costly and arduous commitment for marginalised people, for human rights, environmental protection and reconciliation. Time and time again I have been impressed by the readiness to incur hardship shown by so many people who want to serve others. It reminds me, too, that I could use my own privileges more effectively, in order to promote justice.

The principles of the common life in the New Testament continually challenge us. They move boundaries both in society and in our heads and are paradigms of radical love and solidarity. These texts inspire me to work constantly for the common life as part of the global family.

Ralf Dziewas

Congregationalism and Power

The historical experiences of Congregationalism led it to form its own specific church structure, based on the autonomy of the local church. After persecution from political and church authorities because of their differing theological convictions the congregationalist churches refused to give their leaders the authority to control them in any theological, financial or organisational aspect or to allow sanctions against those who hold any particular point of view. They were convinced that the power of theological argument, the exemplary moral life of the members and the intense search for unity should be sufficient to lead all the churches to a consensus on controversial issues.

Congregationalist churches are nevertheless not power-free spaces. To implement theological positions and ethical convictions Congregationalism uses informal means and cultural expectations. In Congregationalism no binding resolutions specify denominational convictions as to baptism, holy communion or liturgy. Instead, normative expectations are formulated. These are relevant when the expectations remain unfulfilled. As the local churches are independent and it is not possible to avoid deviating conduct, basic normative expectations are formulated in such a way that sanctions are not necessary, although violations of the rules do at least prompt discussion.

In general, the churches expect that common theological stances are passed on, signs of confessional identity fostered or specific ethical behaviour patterns practised. These are not protected by hierarchical or judicial power structures; rather, they demand continuous normative discussion about what is considered possible and acceptable in their own denomination. This discussion begins with an established normality and to depart from that there must be well-founded reasons. But this normality can alter at any time, either by discussion or through changing conditions in society, without needing an official pronouncement by church authorities.

When individual churches start offering holy communion to Christians of other denominations, ordaining women as ministers, or welcoming as new members believers who have not been baptised on confession of their faith, they are introducing exceptions, which go beyond the normally accepted standards and therefore have to be justified. If the theological justification and the pragmatic arguments are accepted as satisfactory in practice after discussions have taken place between several churches, then the unifying strength of the original expectations is clearly inadequate to give a basis for the identity of the whole denomination.

Open communion, the call of women to the ministry, or the inclusion of non-baptized believers as members may become an accepted alternative and new normality; so a new and stable structure becomes the accepted horizon of expectation. Then other churches have at some stage to justify their practice up to that point, why only members receive bread and wine, no woman is allowed in the pulpit, or membership is refused to those who have not received believer's baptism.

Such a process of change is also affected by the exercise of power in Congregationalist church federations. Individuals and churches need courage to dare to initiate changes in normally accepted standards and to defend them with theological arguments, before they can become a new normality. Disputes usually take a long while, because no problems can be solved from above or once and for all. The power of church authorities is merely to pool the discussions that take place, to slow things down or accelerate them, to make information available and to organise the discourse through meetings and conferences, so that the full diversity of the churches is kept in view and as many participants as possible can be involved.

Similarly, this corresponds to the interest in all the churches in actively taking part in the current controversial issues. A matter which forms a possible exception in a church does not automatically call into question the expected normality in every other church in the denomination. But in nearly every church there are people who view the new ideas as progress, as well as those who view them as dangerous for denominational identity. From that point of view what happens in one church is not irrelevant to the other churches in a federation. A single exception, which is not hindered from outside, although possibly an object of criticism, might become the future normality, which replaces the present norm. For that reason basic changes in individual congregations must be discussed in other congregations.

It is part of the dynamics of theological and ethical discourse in Congregationalist churches that often the intensive discussions about a process of renewal present the issue to a wider public, thus making it interesting and worthy of further thought in other churches. Processes of change sometimes gain momentum by discourse, rather than being held back. When the previously existing normality can no longer be defended theologically at the grass roots of the churches, change is inevitable. But nevertheless there is no ultimate winner of the discourse, since the battle for power between different convictions is always an ongoing process in Congregationalism.

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Volker Spangenberg

Church Discipline - Baptists Question Themselves

In my 50 years of membership in various German Baptist Churches did I ever hear the expression *church discipline*? And when did I ever experience anybody being subject to church discipline and being excluded from a church, that is a person being *excommunicated*? I cannot really remember. And I suspect that many free church Christians would confirm my experience. And not just because the somewhat old-fashioned word discipline has become difficult to understand, but rather because the practice of church discipline, which used to play an important role in Baptist churches has become a source of considerable uncertainty. For this reason free churches with their Anabaptist tradition face the challenge to reflect on the reasons for church discipline and ponder anew the burden of their own heritage.

The main justification in the New Testament for what the Christian church practised right from the beginning is the sanctity of the church. As the church is the exclusive property of a holy God, each church member is called upon to live according to the values of the fellowship and its confession of faith; and their personal conduct should demonstrate that they truly belong to the church. This insight is the basis for free-church ecclesiology in general. God Himself, holy and ready to forgive, moulds the church into a fellowship of saints. Free churches clearly recognise this and teach it. But sanctification has often been misunderstood and has increasingly become a matter of man's own efforts. This led in many cases to a strict and legalistic understanding of church discipline. This was often accompanied by a spirit of harshness and arrogance towards individual Christians in their own personal situations. It was forgotten that church discipline always aims to help people find their way back to the fellowship of the saints. Happily, the current Confession of the German-speaking Baptists (1977–1978) states that a church can only excommunicate a member as a last resort 'in humble recognition that our faith was not strong enough and our love not deep enough, and in the hope that the excommunicated member may find grace with God and return to the fellowship of the church'.

It is an article of faith in all Christian traditions that the church is a fellowship of saints. Free churches in the Baptist tradition have always understood that their fellowship is an 'alternative society' and must be seen as such by those around. But almost inevitably they frequently succumbed to the surrounding culture and prevailing ethical conceptions. Instead of 'an alternative society' in contrast to 'the world' they stood paradoxically in danger of becoming themselves part of the morally overbearing (bourgeois) world. Church discipline, when not founded on the gospel, could be falsely understood as a latent intention to maintain purity within the churches,

indeed to purify them. Thus it threatened to contradict their vital desire to further the voluntary and spontaneous expression of a deep personal faith and active church life.

Baptist churches, at least those in Germany, have more recently become increasingly aware of the deficits of church discipline as practised. The statistics appear annually and show clearly very low numbers of excommunicated members. Other factors play a part too; less awareness of denominational identity in conjunction with the many possibilities of leaving one church for a different one, increased appreciation of the variety in interpreting Biblical texts, but also more sensitivity in caring for others spiritually, which is also a fruit of research in the social sciences.

So it is all the more important for free churches at the present time to gain an adequate comprehension of 'church discipline'. A modest attempt is the differentiation made between the act of formal excommunication and the act of 'deletion from the church records' for those members who no longer take part in the life of the church. Deletion, which is basically an administrative act, leaves the question open, to what extent the fundamental principle of church discipline is

still valid, as it surely has the intention of helping people return to the fellowship of those who are reconciled with God.

This uncertainty is beneficial, is still relevant now and needs intense reflection. For the necessary discussion two requirements must be fulfilled and agreed on; the criterion for 'church discipline' can only be to help people remain in or return to the fellowship of the saints. Secondly, not the separation of the fellowship of the 'sinless' from the world can be the aim of 'church discipline', as, on the contrary, that discipline is always per se service to the world. How can objective and contemporary 'church discipline' be developed from these principles in the church? The church as the body of Christ and belonging to a holy God dare not water down a clear confession of faith in its words and deeds. For free churches this is still an open question.



Burkhard Neumann

A Catholic view of the Anabaptists

When the question is asked how we Catholics view the Anabaptist churches then the answers will probably be as varied and differentiated as the answers would be if the same question were asked regarding the Catholic church and its members. For that reason I can only give a few personal impressions and experiences and I do not claim to address every aspect.

Most members of the Catholic Church, especially the middle-aged and the older generation, have little or no knowledge of Anabaptist churches. The 'Anabaptists' or 'Baptists' only appear in the media when, for example, certain churches refuse to allow their children to take part in sexual education in schools, or when their services become a hotspot for the Corona virus. As a rule that is all unfortunately that Catholics associate with 'Baptists' and thus they are felt to be strange and alien in Catholic eyes.

Few know that there are quite different Anabaptist fellowships and churches, except those who are involved in a local or above all regional ecumenical context. Those who participate in regional settings meet Christians from different free churches, often from an Anabaptist background, and gain a new insight into these fellowships. But even then it sometimes takes a while for a Catholic to realise that these churches do not see themselves as 'rebaptisers', but as those who practise believer's baptism, when a Catholic who had been baptised as an infant desires baptism and wishes to become a church member. When this hurdle is overcome, one can intensely and fruitfully discuss the challenges and limits of the differing teachings and customs of baptism. Perhaps Catholics may also cast a glance into their family register and ask themselves when they were actually baptised and what that day really means to them. And those Catholics who consider their personal infant baptism to be very important can be glad that there are churches practising believer's baptism, yet who respect this infant baptism when these Catholics want to become members of an Anabaptist church. That, too, is an aid for both positions to think anew about baptism.

The younger generation, at least those for whom the Christian faith is important, has in my experience fewer inhibitions in their relationship to churches practising believer's baptism. Most of them seek rather a form of church life derived from the free churches as well as preferring a more open and less 'strict' liturgy.

For that reason they are generally open and have less fear of encountering different forms of church life and worship. On the other hand the teaching about and the meaning of baptism are less important and it is indeed questionable how far they see baptism as a special characteristic of churches practising believer's baptism.

The unifying element for both sides nowadays is the understanding that nobody can be forced to believe, as faith is a voluntary choice and carries with it responsibility. Only at the Second Vatican Council did the Catholic church officially commit itself to freedom of religion, a right understood today as self-evident. It would certainly be of value if Catholicism were to discover the role of Anabaptist churches in church history, so helping Catholic Christians reach a common Christian conviction. This could and would encourage us all to work together more closely and learn from each other.

ANABAPTIST TEXTS ABOUT „FELLOWSHIP“

Love to my people and to the whole Christian Church

Johannes Deknatel on the Church, 1746

“The Love to my people alone truly driveth me and this little book is destined for Christianity in general, but above all for my Mennonite brethren. I have love for all people and believe in one universal Christian Church; but I must confess that I bear my Mennonite kindred especially in my heart, and above all my own Mennonite congregation, to which I belonged from my youth and whose teacher I am and it is my deepest bliss to seek its advancement.”

*Johannes Deknatel: Introduction to the Christian Faith,
Worms 1807, Preamble*



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Baptists and Ecumenism

In the Christmas story we learn that a census of the 'whole inhabited earth' (Greek: *oikoumene*) was taken. The word took on a new meaning from the 4th century, when the unity of the church and the unity of the Roman Empire were major issues. The Emperor Constantine convened an Imperial Synod in 325 a.d. in the city of Nicaea, which was interpreted as the first 'ecumenical' Council. The Ecumenical Patriarch who resided in Constantinople, the Ecumenical Confessions and the seven Ecumenical Councils guaranteed the unity of the Church.

The new churches that were formed from the Reformation period onwards attacked each other with downright hostility. Both theological and non-theological factors prepared the way for the churches to draw nearer to each other: the 20th century is considered to be the 'ecumenical' century, as indicated by the following points:

1. Forerunners for the 'ecumenical century' are a) the Evangelical Alliance. English Baptists were decisively involved in its formation; the German Baptists Johann Gerhard Oncken, Julius Köbner and Gottfried Wilhelm Lehmann were present at the founding meeting in 1846; b) Youth and Student Organisations (YMCA/YWCA in 1855, German: CVJM); Christian Student World Federation in 1895; c) World Federation for Friendship of Churches, which had its beginning in the 'Journey for Peace' to England in 1908. Its official start was in 1914 with active participation by Baptists. The Methodist historian Karl Heinz Voigt sees here 'the primary cell of German ecumenism'.

2. In addition there were worldwide confessional alliances, for example in 1905 the Baptist World Alliance, whose first president was the English pastor John Clifford. He had organised in 1892 the National Congress of Free Churches in England. This led to the formation of the National Council of Free Churches.

3. The Baptist William Carey was one of the pioneers of Protestant world mission and he suggested that every ten years a conference of missionary societies should take place. Symbolically the first conference was planned for 1810 at the Cape of Good Hope. Exactly 100 years later the World Missions Conference assembled in Edinburgh, the chairman being the Methodist John R. Mott. This led to the founding of the World Mission Council in 1921.

4. The First World War had devastating consequences: the so-called 'Christian' nations sacrificed their young men on the battlefields of Europe. This discredited Christianity in the eyes of the Chinese, Indians and Japanese among others. How could churches that preach love to one's neighbours and to one's enemies allow such carnage? What failings did churches exhibit with respect to peace and social responsibility? The American-German Baptist Walter Rauschenbusch developed the idea of the Social Gospel for true Christian discipleship. The Swedish Lutheran Archbishop Nathan Söderblom organised a conference in 1925 on the theme of 'Practical Christianity'.

5. By analogy with the League of Nations the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople suggested a Federation of Churches.

6. This was not possible unless controversial matters were also being considered: the Anglican Bishop Charles Brent desired church unity on the basis of a common faith. In 1927 the Conference for Faith and Church Constitution met to find common ground in ecclesiology. The four Movements Mission, Practical Christianity, Faith and Church Constitution and also the 'World Council for Christian Education' came together at the foundation of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Amsterdam on 23rd August 1948. In each of these areas Baptists from different countries were actively involved and several national Baptist Federations were founding members of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The German Baptists, however, were absent, which is surprising, since they were involved in the Missions Conferences in 1925 and 1927, as well as those that followed in Oxford and Edinburgh in 1937 as a matter of course. The director of the German Baptist Union Paul Schmidt in going to Oxford was following the instructions of the Nazi-government, but he was present at the establishment of the WCC as representative of the Association of Christian Churches (ACK), which had been formed in Kassel in March 1948. The President of the German Protestant Church Martin Niemöller, who was chairman of the ACK, had made that possible. Thus the Baptists were founding members of the ACK but not of the WCC. After the union with parts of the Brethren movement, to form the Union of Evangelical Free Churches (Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden) in 1941/1942 conservative groups were sceptical about the WCC, above all because of the rumour that a 'Superchurch' was being created, which would undermine the autonomy of the local church.



Baptist World Alliance

Niemöller's successor as chairman of the ACK from 1961 to 1966 was the director of the Baptist Seminary Dr. Hans Luckey. Baptists were always represented in the central office of the ACK and in the German Ecumenical Study Committee (Deutscher Ökumenischer Studienausschuss, DÖSTA). Dr. Uwe Swarat, Professor of Systematic Theology at the Theological Institute in Elstal (near Berlin), was the chairman of DÖSTA from 2006 to 2015. Ecumenism in Germany is inconceivable without Baptist participation, and this is also true on a regional and local level. Baptists are members of the Conference of European Churches (KEK) and the European Baptist Federation has formed close bonds through dialogues with the Fellowship of Protestant Churches in Europe.

The Baptist World Alliance has been in dialogue with Reformed Churches, Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Anglicans, Mennonites and Methodists. Within Germany there has been consultations with representatives of the Union of Evangelical Churches (EKD, which consists of Lutheran, Reformed and United Protestant Churches) In Bavaria a Lutheran-Baptist working committee reached some degree of agreement in the controversial matter of baptism. Baptists seek a vibrant diversity and clear relationship with other churches, based on comprehensive freedom of religion. They regret that German Ecumenism gives the impression in public that it is bilateral (EKD and the – Roman Catholic – German Bishops' Conference) and that the ACK, which represents a multilateral ecumenism, is relegated to a niche role. The Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation demonstrates the importance of multilateral consultations.

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Gyburg Beschnidt

The Common Life in Justice and Peace – Bible Study on Titus 2, 11–14

Titus 2, 11–14 (NIV):

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.

¹² It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age,

¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Basis of the Common Life – the Bible

Martin Luther probably began to translate the New Testament from Greek into German in December 1521. He used the Greek New Testament that Erasmus of Rotterdam had published in 1516. This was the first complete Greek text of the New Testament to be printed, prepared with the help of newly discovered manuscripts that refugees from Constantinople had brought with them. Only 70 years beforehand Johannes Gutenberg had invented the printing press.

Luther used the time he spent hiding as Junker Jörg in the Wartburg Castle in translating the New Testament. In March 1522 he brought the completed manuscript to Wittenberg. It was printed secretly. The name of the translator was not mentioned. The first copies were sold at the Leipzig Book Fair in September 1522. Andreas Castelberger sold printed copies to people in Zürich, including Huldrych Zwingli, who read the Bible in the group that met in his house from 1522. Konrad Grebel and Felix Manz also belonged to this group. Within three years Luther’s translation led to the beginning of the Anabaptist movement. The issue that then arose was not merely to criticise the church as had been the case in Wittenberg, but the additional questions how Christians should live and how church life and fellowship in Jesus Christ should be practised on the basis of the Bible and especially of the New Testament.

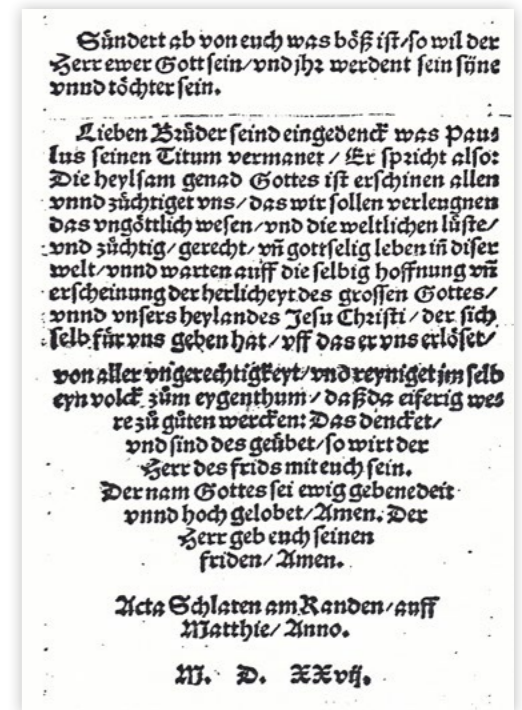
Justice as the aim of the Common Life

The translation of the Bible into the contemporary language provoked thought on how to best implement the new insights. On the basis of the Bible the Anabaptists formulated seven articles on 24th February 1527 in Schleitheim, Switzerland. In them they laid the emphasis on the common life, lived in justice and peace. The Bible text Titus 2, 11–14 is placed at the end of the Schleitheim Articles and is a summary of the conclusions reached by the *Brotherly Unity of many Children of God*.

Titus 2, 11-14 can be divided into three parts:

1. Verses 11 and 12 – *God’s Grace appeared so that we may live as considerate and righteous people.*
2. Verse 13 – *God’s Glory will appear, so that our hope is fulfilled.*
3. Verse 14 – *Jesus Christ has redeemed His people, so that they may do what is good.*

The Schleitheim Articles are rules for church life, but not a ‘Creed’, as the expression is otherwise used in Protestant churches. The Anabaptist movement wanted to live according to these rules, not proclaim them in their services. The fellowship was committed to pursuing justice. God’s justice was understood as Shalom, peace for fellow-humans and responsibility for God’s creation.



Schluss des Schleitheimer Bekenntnisses
Vgl. www.museum-schleitheim.ch/geschichte/taeuferbekennntnis_3.htm

Gyburg Beschmidt

The Common Life in Justice and Peace – Bible Study on Titus 2, 11–14

Projects of the Common Life – Doing Good

An example from the Reformation period of altruism and doing good is the Anabaptist Anna Jansz (see: de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Jansz), when she wrote in her will for her son: ‘My child, fight for justice even unto death (...). Be a faithful disciple of Christ (...). Honour the Lord through the work of your hands. Let the light of the Gospel shine through you. Love your neighbour. With a generous, fiery heart share your bread with the hungry, clothe the naked and do not wait until things get doubly worse.’

In their society, in which they were persecuted, the Anabaptists scarcely had any possibility to pursue justice openly. But their convictions did not cease and right up to the present they are visible in large and small projects:

- ▶ Martin Luther King – peaceful protest for the rights of Afro-Americans
- ▶ Edna Ruth Byler – initiator of the Fairtrade campaign
- ▶ Megan Fox unlocked and Lindsay Kirkland – YouTuber for a Mennonite Lifestyle
- ▶ ...

Projects that differ greatly, but all share the same concern, and perhaps you might like to add a project of your own to this list.

Questions for Discussion in a Group:

- ▶ Jesus Christ is mentioned several times in the text and His work described; make a list. To what extent is He the ‘cornerstone’ of the church and of the common life?
- ▶ Which translation of the Bible motivates you best of all to think about the common life? Find information about the different translations.
- ▶ In January 2021 a new translation of the Bible was published by the German Bible Society. It is the first translation which was translated in a way that makes it easier to read the text on a display or screen. What could be the consequences of such a translation (compared to the translation of Luther for the Anabaptist movement)?
- ▶ Seven Articles were agreed upon in Schleithem. What rules are important for the common life in your own church? Are there themes that can also be found in the Schleithem Confession? Or are there different ones?
- ▶ What other projects for justice and doing good do you know? In what projects for justice and doing good is your church involved?

Milina Reichardt-Hahn

The Brother that Luther Hated Dies in the Castle

Luther was marooned in the Wartburg Castle for eleven months. The Anabaptist Fritz Erbe was incarcerated here for eight years until his death.



Memorial plaque on the Wartburg

All around him everything is dark. The atmosphere is dank and chilly. But Heiner Strohmann is not afraid. He has descended into the dungeon in the southern tower of the Wartburg securely attached. He knows he will be pulled up again. That is the difference between him and the Anabaptist Fritz Erbe. He is looking for traces of this man. The dungeon is ten metres deep and its walls are two and a half metres thick. Strohmann is filled with horror, but not due to fear, but over 33 years later he admits today that the whole experience was uncanny.

In any case it was a mad idea of his to descend into the only dungeon of the castle. Strohmann says that nobody had been down there for years. Meanwhile the Wartburg offers its museum tours by night, when such remote parts of the fortress can be visited. The archivist of the castle Petra Schall relates that people nowadays queue up to descend into the dungeon, such is the interest. On 29th June 1984 Heiner Strohmann was not concerned about the spine-chilling feeling in descending to the dungeon; he wanted something from there – a copy of the letters that the prisoner Fritz Erbe had scratched on the wall about 450 years ago.

The custodian of the castle Hermann Nebe had found these letters in the 1920s, while excavating the dungeon in the southern tower. This had been documented. But Strohmann wanted to see the inscription with his own eyes and if possible to make it available to others. As a member of the Evangelical Free Church (Baptists) he considered Fritz Erbe to be one of the religious forefathers.

Erbe was a farmer from Herda near Gerstungen (Thuringia) who was imprisoned because he refused to baptise his child. His opinion, and that of his fellow Anabaptists, was that a baby is unable to understand the meaning of the ritual. The historian Thomas T. Müller, who is the director of the museums in Mühlhausen (Thuringia), calls Erbe's point of view 'courageous and consistent'. But for Luther the Anabaptists were 'a kind of protestant heretics'. He fought just as violently against them as against the 'alternative reformers' as they are referred to by Müller: Thomas Müntzer, Karlstadt and Jakob Strauss from Eisenach.

So that these fellow-reformers no longer stand in Luther's shadow in the anniversary year of the Reformation (2017) the museums in Mühlhausen present them as 'Luther's unloved brothers' in a special exhibition. Fritz Erbe's mortal remains can also be viewed there. They were excavated from the Elisabethplan, an archeological site on the slopes of the Wartburg. A plaque has been placed there in memory of the imprisoned Anabaptist. That was where Heiner Strohmann and the archivist Petra Schall met and she symbolically received from him a replica of the copy of the letters scratched on the wall.

Milina Reichardt-Hahn

Evangelische Pfarrerin in Fambach/Thüringen

Strohmann, former head of department in the East German Free Church, was responsible for accompanying foreign guests to this historic site as he was in close contact with the Wartburg administrators. When the Free Church celebrated '150 Years – Baptists in Europe' in 1984 Strohmann remembered Fritz Erbe. He had heard the story at the Theological Seminary in Buckow. (At that time Buckow, a town near Berlin, hosted the Baptist Seminary in the German Democratic Republic.) The interrogation records from 1531 were exhibited there. That was the year in which Erbe was first taken prisoner. He and others from the same area had been baptised as believers – 'for conscience sake', as Erbe later stated.

In Luther's opinion, and his supporters were also of like mind, this was a fatal decision. In the prison in Eisenach these 'sinners' were 'beaten, crushed, humiliated and threatened [...] not arbitrarily, but according to standard systematic principles', as Andreas Müller wrote in his booklet about Erbe's fate. Müller was the Lutheran Superintendent of nearby Bad Salzungen-Dermbach when he wrote this booklet. The punishment meted out to the prisoners in 1533 was to send them to various rulers in the border country between Thuringia and Hesse. The Landgrave Philipp I set his prisoners free, presumably because they publicly recanted their second baptism. The others were executed on order of Johann, Elector of Saxony. He demanded an expert opinion from the theologians in Wittenberg. In this document Philipp Melancthon also endorsed the executions. One year later Fritz Erbe was again taken prisoner, because he refused to baptise his newborn child and had sheltered a fugitive Anabaptist.

He was imprisoned for seven years in the Stork Tower on the town walls of Eisenach and became for many people a symbol of resistance to state and church. Two of his supporters, who were caught talking with him on the walls, were killed, others sent to prison. Then in 1540 he was incarcerated in the dungeon in complete darkness. In the same castle where Luther had sought refuge 20 years previously and which had inspired him to write his hymn *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* (A mighty fortress is our God). Fritz suffered isolation, increasing infliction and death. He died, a captive in this hole, in 1548. Up to his death he adamantly refused, despite several offers he received, to recant his faith and held fast to his rejection of any form of violence.

Over 460 years later, in July 2010, the Lutheran World Federation apologised to the Mennonites for the persecution they suffered over the centuries. Heinrich Strohmann points to another symbol of reconciliation: side by side in peaceful co-existence in the Centre for Baptism in the Church of St. Peter and St. Paul in Eisleben are a baptismal font for infant baptism and a baptistry for believer's baptism. What would Martin Luther say about that? After all, he himself was baptised in this church, as an infant of course.

First published unabridged in *Freies Wort/Südthüringer Zeitung* July 13th, 2017.



South tower of the Wartburg

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The Theme Years:

2020: *daring! living responsibly*
Baptism – Voluntariness – Religious Freedom

2021: *daring! living together*
Equality – Responsibility – Autonomy

2022: *daring! living consistently*
Orientation on Jesus – Nonconformity – Confession of Faith – Martyrdom

2023: *daring! living non-violently*
Church of Peace – Resistance – Reconciliation

2024: *daring! living in hope*
The Kingdom of God – Utopia – Renewal

2025: *Anniversary celebration*
In 2025, commemorative events will take place, jointly organized by various institutions and networks of Anabaptist churches (including Mennonite World Conference, Baptist World Alliance).



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