

Lutheran-Pentecostal Advisory Board in Finland on Christian Baptism: 16 April 2018.

The summary of the final document of the doctrinal conversations between the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and the Finnish Pentecostal Movement (1987–89) states: “Despite the broad common ground, great differences remain between the communities the parties represent, especially concerning ordinances, the sacraments, and the church and doctrine of the congregation. However, simply to list them is not to provide a genuine picture of the situation. There are two different traditions of Christian interpretation that understand God’s action in the world differently.”

The statement holds true. However, it is also evident that mutual understanding has strengthened over the last thirty years. Since our differences are traditionally crystallised in the concept of baptism, we need to continue the discussion of how we can strengthen a common Christian understanding of each other’s views. After all, baptism is central to the entire Christian faith and identity. This summary, which seeks to express the Lutheran and Pentecostal concepts of baptism more comprehensively on the basis of their current teaching, arises from the Advisory Board’s conversations between 2014 and 2017.

Lutheran and Pentecostal convergence on Christian baptism:

1) Salvation is based on God’s grace in Jesus Christ, which the human being receives through faith (PAF 7, AC 9).¹ The death and resurrection of the risen Christ is the basis of baptism.² Justification is a work of God in which the guilty human being is declared innocent through the work of Christ, and the holiness and righteousness of Christ are counted for the benefit of human beings. The human person receives this by faith, which is effected by God.³ Fruits are born of genuine faith. The nature of new life is especially to abide in Christ.⁴

For Lutherans baptism “...is necessary to salvation and ... through Baptism is offered the grace of God, and that children are to be baptized who, being offered to God through Baptism are received into God’s grace” (AC 9).

Pentecostals also view baptism as in essence related to the New Testament doctrine of salvation (PAF 7). God gives birth to the human person again after they have received the gospel in faith, after which they can and should be baptised (Acts 10). Pentecostals place more emphasis on human awareness in baptism than Lutherans, who baptise infants. According to both baptism takes place amidst the congregation and as authorised.

2) Baptism is an ordinance instituted by the risen Christ. (Matt. 28:18–20, Lutheran Catechism (Cat.) 34⁵, PAF 7).

For Lutherans baptism is one of the instruments of grace, which are the word of God and the sacraments. Baptism is an effective mediator of the gifts of salvation (1 Peter 3:21) through

¹ PAF = Finnish Pentecostal Articles of Faith 2014 (www.suomenhelluntaikirkko.fi/tunnustus_ja_opetus), AC = Augsburg Confession 1530 (<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/275/275-h/275-h.htm?fbclid=IwAR3oT5j1YeR7mhKhpHyrk96cyhcDAOkKSDBR9JnKY3zETsDGInTzcPVnU3A>).

² Final document. Official doctrinal discussions of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Finland and the Finnish Pentecostal Movement 1987–1989, 14 (www.sakasti.evl.fi/oppikeskustelut).

³ Final document 20

⁴ Final document 20

⁵ Cat. = The Catechism, the Christian teaching of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland 1999 (www.katekismus.fi).

the justifying faith, awakened by the Holy Spirit through the word and sacrament (AC 5). Baptism connects to the fellowship of Christ and his church.

For Pentecostals baptism “is in essence related to the New Testament doctrine of salvation and the congregation” and confirms the significance of the gifts of salvation. Salvation is accomplished by the word of God through faith, justification, and the participation of the Holy Spirit (PAF 7).

3) Christian baptism is administered once in a person’s lifetime, and there is no reason to repeat a properly administered baptism.⁶ Our traditions differ in their understanding of what constitutes a properly administered baptism.

4) *Baptism binds us to the Christian congregation, the body of Christ, and this is effected by God* (Cat. 35, PAF 7, Final document 14–15).

5) *Christian baptism should be administered with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit* (Cat. 34, PAF 7).

6) *Pentecostals administer baptism by full immersion* (PAF 7). *This is also possible for Lutherans, although baptism is usually administered by affusion.*

7) *Both emphasise the priority of the proclamation of the gospel at baptism.* Lutherans emphasise the efficacy of God’s word (Cat. 34), while Pentecostals emphasise the significance of the faith generated by the proclamation of the gospel (PAF 7).

8) *Faith and baptism belong together.*

For Pentecostals faith in this context means a personal relationship with God: “The fellowship with Christ born of faith and baptism are essentially connected ... baptism follows the person’s reception of the gift of faith” (PAF 7).

Lutherans emphasise that the individual’s faith and the common faith of the church belong together. Those baptised are baptised into the church’s faith in the Triune God as expressed in the Apostles’ Creed and God’s works of salvation, to which the baptised contribute: “The Holy Spirit regenerates us, imparting faith with which we grasp hold of the promises of Baptism” ... “The communal faith of the Church supports us even then when our own faith wavers” (Cat. 35, Cat. 12).

9) *When an adult is baptised, they are required to have a personal faith.*⁷

10) *Baptism concerns more than the single moment of the baptismal event; it should be understood as part of the whole of the Christian life, as part of Christian initiation that involves a Christian upbringing, teaching and proclamation, and the Holy Communion as part of living in the fellowship of the congregation.* The Christian is a member of the body of Christ and the people of God, and is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:2; 1 Pet. 2:9–10; 1 Cor. 6:19).

⁶ Final document, 14

⁷ Final document, 15

11) *The baptised are called to a life of following Christ and daily repentance.* Lutherans believe that “Baptism obligates us to put our trust in Christ alone and to live our lives following his example. ... When we take refuge in baptismal grace, we need not do penance in our own power. The Holy Spirit weeds selfishness from us daily, awakening new faith and love in us” (Cat. 36). Pentecostals state that “Baptism means to leave behind a sinful way of life, and participating in Christian striving and service” (PAF 7). For Pentecostals baptism is a proclamation of faith and a participation in the death of Christ as the burial of the old life and the stepping into a new life.

12) *As Lutherans and Pentecostals, we can recognise together the baptism of the previously unbaptised based on the profession of the Christian faith and administered by immersion in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.*

Remaining differences:

1) *Pentecostals do not accept infant baptism as true baptism; Lutherans do not accept the re-baptism of those baptised as children. Lutherans accept Christian baptism administered with water in the name of the Triune God, that is, the baptism administered by Pentecostals.*

Pentecostals do not recognise a baptism that has not been preceded by a conscious expression of faith, so they do not accept the baptism by affusion of infants in the Lutheran Church (PAF 7).

Lutherans attach importance to conscious faith in Jesus Christ, but emphasise that baptism and faith are the work of God, and that the covenant of baptism is available to all, including the newly born (Mark 10:13–16, Cat 35). Lutherans therefore also baptise young children into the Christian faith in accordance with the creed and the ownership of its promises in the fellowship of Christ and his church.

Lutherans interpret the “household” baptisms described in the Bible (Acts 16:15, 16:33, 1 Cor. 1:16) as meaning the baptism of the whole household, including infants. Lutherans hold to the general view that already in the early church small children still unable to speak for themselves were baptised with adult Christians. On the other hand, Pentecostals consider believers’ baptism to have been the prevailing practice in New Testament times and in early church history.

Pentecostals hold to the idea of the blessing of children found in the gospel (Mark 10:13–16): the gospels tell us that Jesus took children in his arms and blessed them. Following this example, congregational pastors or elders, for example, bless infants. Parents thus acknowledge that they need the church’s intercession and entrust the child to the hands of God.

2) *For Lutherans, baptism marks the beginning of living as a Christian in the fellowship of the church.* The faith by which those who are baptised can receive the gift of baptism is given to them: “awakening” and “new faith” are fruits of the grace of baptism (Cat. 35, 36).

Pentecostals believe that a personal faith effected by God should precede baptism. “Baptised believers are joined to the local community of believers, or the congregation” (PAF 7).

3) *Lutherans believe that baptism washes sins away; it is a sacrament, or instrument of grace, and is essential to salvation (Cat. 35, AC 9).*

According to Pentecostals forgiveness and justification are connected with the faith initiated by the word of God, which precedes baptism. "...baptism itself does not save, but serves as testimony to the faith that has been born" (PAF 7).

4) *In the Lutheran view the human being is passive and receptive in baptism; in the Pentecostal view the human being is activated by the Word and the Spirit: baptism is the human being's response to the work of God.*

5) *According to Lutherans the sacrament of baptism is regenerative (Cat. 35). For Pentecostals, the baptism instituted by Christ is the affirmation of the confession of Jesus (PAF 7).*

6) *In Lutheranism baptism is administered by a priest (Church Order 2:13) – except for emergency baptism, which can be administered by any member of the church (Church Order 2:14). In Pentecostalism baptism is administered by elders and pastors, or their delegates.*

7) From the Lutheran perspective baptism and faith belong together in the Christian life. The building of Christian fellowship in the Lutheran view therefore entails the quest *to recognise the baptism of another Christian*. We give thanks that common ground has increasingly been attained in our being able together to recognise here the baptism of those who confess their faith and are then baptised by immersion, having not previously been baptised.

From the Pentecostal perspective the goal has been to increase understanding. The mutual recognition of baptism is not the goal of the movement, which is part of the Anabaptist tradition, for the acceptance of infant baptism as full Christian baptism by Pentecostals would entail the abandonment of their theology of baptism. *However, from the Pentecostal perspective it is possible for a Lutheran baptised as an infant to be a genuine Christian*. Pentecostals consider becoming a Christian the gift of God's grace in response to believing in the proclamation of the gospel.