

Reception for the presentation of the convergence document  
“Learning from Each Other – Believing Together” on 20.04.2009 in  
the regional ecclesiastical church of the ELKiB in Munich

### **Foreword by Prof. Dr. Kim Strübind**

Dear Bishop Friedrich, dear General Secretary Claas, dear guests,  
dear sisters and brothers!

Our theological working group BALUBAG - with this rather apocryphal name, which is certainly in need of explanation - is delighted to be honoured with this reception. We, as members of this “Bavarian-Lutheran-Baptist-group”, are profoundly convinced that this is an occasion for celebration. It gives us the opportunity to apportion you a share in a truly exciting, fascinating and fruitful inter-church dialogue as representatives of our churches. We cordially request you to examine attentively this document, which holds the title “Learning from Each Other – Believing Together”, and to promote the necessary resulting steps within the framework of all concerned church committees. What these steps will be, no longer lies in the hands of our working group, which would like to regard their part of the work as accomplished - at least for the time being. It is our wish though, that the deepened perception of common ground, which find expression in the convergence document will bring our churches even closer. Especially in Bavaria we can refer to good and trusting relationships which have stood the test in the past. It will certainly not be possible to summarise a theologically sophisticated dialogue, which has been carried out over six years, in only a few words. Even a wide-ranging final document like the one presented with the title “Learning from Each Other – Believing Together” can only be an excerpt or rather a “concentrate” of an arduous and yet everything other than a troublesome path, which lies behind both our delegations. Maybe one could try and put in a nutshell the one or other aspect – let me give it a try from the view of the Baptist delegation.

We have grappled intensively with our traditions and the historically determined understanding of the gospel in our churches. Not everything has reached consensus between our churches; many times we have put different views and accents side by side and also left it at that. By all dissent we could not find anything that would necessarily be church-dividing.

So, we as representatives of the Baptist unions in Germany will remain good Baptists, even if we do not consider some of the identifiable narrow-minded opinions - which are held particularly in

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Germany and Eastern Europe - on the question of baptism as strictly Baptist or think of these as the one and only possible Baptist position. We can hereby point to a worldwide Baptist heritage that had a wide open heart in the question of baptism right from the beginning – and thanks be to God, still has.

In the Baptist community in Germany there are also signs of an internal differentiation concerning doctrine and practice in the question of the understanding of baptism in our congregations as well among the theological experts, with whose assistance ways can be found for a comprehension, even if not everyone might be willing at this point in time to accept them yet. More than once it became necessary in our discussion to set aside the fixed mindset that wanted to stick to the meta-theological pragmatism, knowing that the representatives of our churches occasionally here and there would refuse to follow our thinking. It was exactly then, that we allowed ourselves to be reminded of our tasks as theologians, namely that above all we have to reflect our received creed and the gospel attested Holy Script and not only the church in its present state. The church is neither *norma normans*, nor *norma normata*, but in the best case the implication of both. That is its being – at least from the inner protestant view. That is why we have found the courage again and again to break new ground. – From initial scepticism we were led lead to the conviction that even most different points of view concerning baptism do not have to end in ecumenical perplexity and speechlessness. That we succeeded in crossing the lines, which earlier dialogues thought to be insuperable, is among other insights we were able to gain, the particularly exciting part of the here-documented ecumenical learning process. Indeed it was about a mutual ecumenical *learning process!*

It can be formulated simply like this: many things we learned from each other we simply did not know before. We were particularly happy to recognize that we do not only identify ourselves by our respective affinities to a creed, but also by our respectful willingness to listen as disciples of Jesus Christ. For me this has become a valuable and important experience, which I not been able to make to such extent, and with such openness in our discussions, in any other previous ecumenical councils.

In any case, this mutual readiness to listen gave us the strength to remember not only to consider our individual strengths and the often occurring confessional “bragging”. We have been free enough to encounter the weaknesses and problems of our church traditions. More than once the suffering from our condition of our church (and what else can one suffer more from as Christians?) has been transformed into a kind of mutual “ecumenical curing of souls”. We succeeded, in spite of the substantial controversies, in seeing the good aspects in the respective other church, and in discovering – often hidden – even our own concern expressed in an unusual form.

As a representative of the Baptist delegation it is important for me to point out that the presented document “Learning from Each Other – Believing Together” reflects our common understanding of the gospel, the faith, the nature of the church and with it also the understanding of baptism. On behalf of the Baptist delegation I assure you that we have come to a deepened insight into the Lutheran traditions and that we countenance and support its contents in all its parts. We are aware of the consequences that the documented consensus has for both

churches and possibly painful changes will have to be undergone. We are deeply convinced that the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ calls for such changes and awakenings, because the unity of his church is at stake and our missionary testimony without inner unity would not only suffer great damage but would make us *coram mundo* time and time again into untrustworthy believers (John 17, 21-23).

Nobody will be able to predict the course of the reception process of this consensus document, but our Lutheran partners shall know that they have many Baptists at their side. And that we are ashamed at the arrogance of inexperienced Baptist representatives who sometimes claim in an overbearing manner that they alone would be following the biblical tradition.

We will distance ourselves from such biblicistic naivety and the lack of insight of these viewpoints, and confess that we neither approve such undifferentiated ways of talking nor think them to be appropriate or true. Moreover we clearly understand that we stand on common ground with the same Holy Script and that we strive for a correct interpretation.

May God help us to achieve that!

At the end of *our* BALUBAG path there is a new one ahead – not less exciting. Follow it, dear sisters and brothers, heartily and with the faith that our good Lord Jesus Christ is the good shepherd of our thoughts and point of views of his – and not our – gospel.



Prof. Dr. Kim Strübind