



Towards Unity in Baptism: Exploring the Current State and Future Possibilities of Ecumenical Recognition

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Abstract

This study discusses the current state of ecumenical discussions on the mutual recognition of baptism and the possibilities for progress. Baptism is considered the basic sacrament of unity in Christianity, yet mutual baptismal confession is still not a reality among all Christian Churches and communities. This research also tries to answer questions about the lack of faith in infant baptism and the differences in understanding of the sacrament, especially in the relationship between Orthodox and Protestants. The method used in this study is a systematic analysis of the most relevant ecumenical theological sources of baptism. Understanding the relationship between baptism and faith is the main focus of this study, including an understanding of the ontological and epistemological dimensions of faith and being a Christian from a theological perspective. The results of the analysis are also integrated into the framework of Christian life in general and ecclesiology. One of the important findings in this study is the seventh canon of the second ecumenical council in Constantinople in 381 which states that any baptism performed with water and in the name of the Trinity should be considered a valid Christian baptism. Although the recognition of baptism does not directly entail full ecclesiastical union or eucharistic intercommunion, it does provide hope and encouragement to work harder in promoting common Christian witness and ministry. This research is also relevant in resolving the dilemma between infant baptism and the baptism of believers. In conclusion, the study proposes possible paths to take this discussion forward, in the hope of achieving a wider mutual recognition of baptism among different Churches and Christian communities.

Keywords: Baptism; ecumenism; recognition; sacraments; unity.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas keadaan terkini dari diskusi ekumenikal mengenai saling pengakuan baptisan dan kemungkinan-kemungkinan kemajuan yang dapat dicapai. Baptisan dianggap sebagai sakramen dasar persatuan dalam kekristenan, namun saling pengakuan baptisan masih belum menjadi kenyataan di antara semua Gereja dan komunitas Kristen. Penelitian ini juga mencoba menjawab pertanyaan tentang kekurangan iman dalam baptisan bayi dan perbedaan pemahaman dalam sakramen, terutama dalam hubungan antara Ortodoks dan Protestan. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah analisis sistematis terhadap sumber-sumber teologi baptisan ekumenikal yang paling relevan. Pemahaman mengenai hubungan antara baptisan dan iman menjadi fokus utama dalam penelitian ini, termasuk pemahaman tentang dimensi ontologis dan epistemologis iman dan menjadi seorang Kristen dari perspektif teologis. Hasil analisis tersebut juga diintegrasikan ke dalam kerangka kehidupan Kristen secara umum dan eklesiologi. Salah satu temuan penting dalam penelitian ini adalah kanon ketujuh dari konsili ekumenikal kedua di Konstantinopel pada tahun 381 yang menyatakan bahwa setiap baptisan yang dilakukan dengan air dan atas nama Tritunggal harus dianggap sebagai baptisan Kristen yang sah. Meskipun pengakuan baptisan tidak secara langsung mencakup persatuan eklesiastikal yang penuh atau interkomuni ekaristi, namun hal ini memberikan harapan dan mendorong untuk bekerja lebih keras dalam mempromosikan kesaksian dan pelayanan Kristen bersama. Penelitian ini juga relevan dalam menyelesaikan dilema antara baptisan bayi dan baptisan orang yang sudah beriman. Dalam kesimpulannya, penelitian ini mengusulkan kemungkinan jalur untuk memajukan diskusi ini, dengan harapan dapat mencapai saling pengakuan baptisan yang lebih luas di antara berbagai Gereja dan komunitas Kristen.

Kata Kunci: Pembaptisan; ekumenisme; pengakuan; sakramen; kesatuan.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the main goals of the ecumenical movement is to achieve stronger unity among different Churches and Christian communities (Loane, 2016). Baptism, as a fundamental sacrament, has long been recognised as a sign of Christian unity and identity (Heller, 1998; Koopman, 2008; Schmid, 2019). However, unfortunately, mutual recognition of baptism is still not a reality among all Christian Churches and communities. There are still different understandings and views regarding the validity of baptisms performed by different Churches. This has become an important challenge in the endeavour to achieve broader ecclesiastical unity and strengthen Christian witness together.

Baptism is the foundational sacrament of unity (Krentz, 1996; Schmid, 2019). It is fundamental for fellowship with God and among Christians (Eph. 4:2–6). The recognition of baptism is crucial for ecclesiology and other Christian doctrines in this context. From a Lutheran perspective, which is my tradition, this is the case especially because of its soteriological significance. Faith, baptism, and baptismal education are parts of the same whole: being and living as a Christian.

The doctrine of baptism is intimately connected with the basic truths of faith: the Trinity; Christology; ecclesiology; soteriology; sacramentology; the understanding of the word of God, creation, and the structure of faith; and the entire life of the Christian from birth to grave, from time to eternity. It is important to understand that although the importance of baptism as an instrument of grace is widely recognised in the historical Christian traditions, it is not an abstract act, but a sacrament of the Christian life. Martin Luther underlined that the life of a Christian was daily repentance based on baptismal grace.

The recognition of baptism is the recognition of the other as a Christian if it is believed and taught that it is the basis of church membership and belonging to a local parish or congregation as part of the universal Church of Christ, the body of Christ. In Lutheran understanding baptism integrates the baptised into a concrete local congregation, which is not a Platonic idea, because the church is the body of Christ, incarnated, crucified, and resurrected. Christ is present in his Church through the Holy Spirit in this created world, serving it through word, sacraments, and ministry. The mystery of baptism is a sacrament of faith and incarnation. At the same time, it is based on the work of the Holy Spirit through the word of God in a hidden but real and effective way. Through faith in Christ's presence in us and through the word in the Spirit Christians receive the gifts of salvation, and above all Christ himself, in a holistic way. He is the basis of the new birth as Christians, disciples of Christ, who are sent into the world and nourished by the word, prayer, and eucharist within the Christian fellowship, in the Church as the body of Christ.

As is well known, from an ecumenical perspective, significant points of debate regarding the understanding of baptism are especially the following two:

- 1) the dilemma between understanding baptism as no less an instrument of grace for infants and the understanding of baptism as possible only for those who can themselves deliberately make a conscious decision based on their personal faith in Jesus to receive the water of baptism in a spiritually meaningful way. In addition to the question concerning the *deficiency of faith* in the baptism of infants, some ecclesiological understandings seem to identify
- 2) a *deficiency in sacraments*, sometimes including baptism. This question especially concerns the relationship between Eastern Orthodox and non-Orthodox churches (Beintker, Ionita, & Kramm, 2011). For example, the usual practice in Finland is that Lutheran Christians are received into the Finnish Orthodox Church through the sacrament of chrismation, without new baptism. Yet questions remain regarding the recognition of baptism in general between Eastern Orthodox and non-Orthodox churches, though the theological basis for mutual recognition is fundamentally laid on the Nicene synodical tradition.

One of the main issues affecting the mutual recognition of baptism is the difference in theological understanding and practice of baptism. Some of the issues that have been a source of debate between Churches are the question of the lack of faith in infant baptism (Pfeiffer, 1998; Redmond, 1969), as well as differences in understanding regarding the relationship between baptism and faith (Beasley-Murray, 1980; Russell, 1980; Wood, 1987). In some ecumenical relationships, especially between Orthodox and Protestant Churches, there is a view that the sacraments, including baptism, may not be recognised as fully valid or perfect.

The *research question* of this article is what the current state of discussion is around the mutual recognition of baptism and what could a plausible way forward look like. To answer to this question, systematic analysis is used as the *method* of textual analysis regarding the most relevant sources of ecumenical baptismal theology. This means that the concepts, arguments, the presented results in the ecumenical discussion so far and their presuppositions, especially in the European context, are analysed. In the conclusion part reflections are presented regarding the realistic possibilities for future steps in the mutual recognition of baptism in the light of the ecumenical discussion and results so far.

In this context, this study aims to investigate the current state of the ecumenical discussion on the mutual recognition of baptism and to explore the possible progress that can be made. By systematically analysing relevant theological sources, it seeks to understand the roots of the different understandings that underlie this debate. In this regard, the understanding of the relationship between baptism and faith and its implications for Christian life in general and ecclesiology will be the focus of the research. It is hoped that this research can contribute to promoting more meaningful ecumenical dialogue and strengthening efforts towards wider mutual recognition of baptism among Churches and Christian communities.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used is a textual analysis (Aitken, 2013; Byrne, 2001) of the most relevant sources of ecumenical baptismal theology. This approach enables the researcher to identify and analyze the concepts, arguments, and outcomes that have been presented in ecumenical discussions, as well as the underlying assumptions of those discussions, particularly within the European context.

A systematic analysis is conducted by taking into account relevant theological sources on baptism. These sources may include texts from different churches and Christian communities, official documents from ecumenical bodies, as well as theological works that have dealt with baptism in an ecumenical context. Through systematic analysis, the researcher identified the main themes, differences in understanding, and arguments that emerge in the ecumenical theological literature.

During the analysis, the researcher analyzed key concepts related to the mutual recognition of baptism, paying attention to the arguments that have been presented in ecumenical discussions so far. This includes an understanding of the relationship between baptism and faith, as well as an understanding of the ontological and epistemological dimensions of faith and being a Christian in a theological context.

In addition, in the conclusion section, the researcher will present reflections on realistic possibilities for next steps in the mutual recognition of baptism in light of the ecumenical discussions and the results achieved so far. In this section, the researcher will summarize the findings of the research, relate them to existing theological thinking and understanding, and provide an outlook on the progress that can be made in the mutual recognition of baptism in the future. By using this systematic method of analysis, the researcher hopes to make a meaningful contribution to understanding the different understandings and challenges that exist in the ecumenical discussion on the mutual recognition of baptism, as well as provide insight into possible steps to advance a more constructive ecumenical dialogue in the future.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Lima Document (BEM) and baptism

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry is the most significant document of multilateral ecumenism. It has stimulated discussion and progress in all three areas: baptism, eucharist, and ministry. It has decreased the number of re-baptisms, promoted an increasing convergence in the understanding of the eucharist, for example, in how to treat the eucharistic elements with integrity and the prayer of epiclesis, as well as in questions concerning ministry: the ministry of deacon, women's ordination, and episcopal ministry. For its part BEM made possible the creation of the Anglican-Lutheran Communion of Porvoo Churches.

BEM's key baptismal concept is participation in Christ. From the Christocentric perspective it challenges and focuses the fundamental ecumenical task as follows:

COMMENTARY (6) ... The need to recover baptismal unity is at the heart of the ecumenical task as it is central for the realization of genuine partnership within the Christian communities... (World Council of Churches, 1982, p. 3).

Concerning different understandings of baptism, BEM states:

COMMENTARY (12) ...the real distinction is between those who baptize people at any age and those who baptize only those able to make a confession of faith for themselves. The differences between infant and believers' baptism become less sharp when it is recognized that both forms of baptism embody God's own initiative in Christ and express a response of faith made within the believing community (World Council of Churches, 1982).

From the perspective of participation in Christ the fundamental question is therefore ontological: how do we become partakers in Christ, and what are the implications of this from the perspective of the fundamentals of Christian initiation? From this perspective the tradition of the mainline Christian traditions and the anabaptist understanding of baptism are the most challenging questions, related to the question of theological ontology and the role of conscious and explicable faith within it.

Steps towards convergence have been taken in the bilateral dialogues of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (ELCF), for example. The idea that baptism and faith are interconnected has been recognised in the bilateral dialogues of the ELCF with the Evangelical Free Church, Pentecostals and Baptists. In the theological dialogue with the Baptists in 2009, it was jointly stated:

Faith and baptism belong together. According to both traditions, they join to Christ and give a spiritual ability to function in a congregation. The common priesthood is carried out in the worship of everyday life, but also in the various congregational ministries (Karttunen, 2009).

Although some Christian traditions that participate in the work of the Faith and Order Commission do not practise water baptism– for example, the Quakers – BEM clearly represents the classical tradition in this respect:

17. Baptism is administered with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. 18. In the celebration of baptism the symbolic dimension of water should be taken seriously and not minimalized. The act of immersion can vividly express the reality that in baptism the Christian participates in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ...(World Council of Churches, 1982).

The document also takes a stand concerning the main features of the baptismal liturgy:

20. Within any comprehensive order of baptism at least the following elements should find a place: the proclamation of the scriptures referring to baptism; an invocation of the Holy Spirit; a renunciation of evil; a profession of faith in Christ and the Holy Trinity; the use of water; a

declaration that the persons baptized have acquired a new identity as sons and daughters of God, and as members of the Church, called to be witnesses of the Gospel. Some churches consider that Christian initiation is not complete without the sealing of the baptized with the gift of the Holy Spirit and participation in holy communion (World Council of Churches, 1982).

The Post-BEM Development

In the summer of 1988, a Faith and Order consultation was held in Turku in Finland, at which the churches' responses to the Lima document were elaborated. The analysis concluded that nine problem areas prevented agreement on baptism:

1. The activity of the Holy Spirit before and after baptism and at the moment of baptism; 2. the gift of God and the human response; 3. the terminology of 'infant baptism' and 'believers' baptism'; 4. alternative baptismal practices; 5. The admission of children to the eucharist; 6. the terminology of 'sign' and 'symbol' ('mystery'); 7. the primary agent of baptism; 8. sin and forgiveness in baptism; and 9. original sin (Salmi, 1990, p. 207).

Behind these factors seemed to lie the relationship with the sacraments in general in the life of the churches and Christian communities, and sacramentality in general. An indication of this is that in the responses of the churches a primary difficulty was the understanding of the relationship between baptism and faith (Salmi, 1990). The accusation that the thinking in BEM was too "sacramental" had already been addressed. There was much reflection on the problem of how there could be a response to the criticism of a thought model that emphasised the momentary influence of the sacrament, or "punctual sacramentalism". It is perhaps surprising that the ultimate example of a tradition that emphasises the influence of the sacrament of baptism in the responses is not the Catholic or Orthodox but the Lutheran tradition (Salmi, 1990).

The questions and criticism towards a too "punctual" understanding of the event of baptism presented to Lutherans have also attracted attention and consideration in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. The general ecumenical development has been followed and the idea of "daily baptism" or "daily repentance" as a return to the grace of baptism has been highlighted from the Lutheran tradition. For example, in *Partakers of Christ* (2010), the report of the theological dialogue with the Finnish Methodists, the idea of participation in Christ in Christian life is emphasised:

82... In Lutheran theology, the effect of baptism which is simultaneously instantaneous and lasting is described in terms of partaking of Christ. The grace granted by baptism is on the one hand absolute, because baptism joins that person with Christ's work of atonement. However, the effect of baptism must be executed in faith and life. From this perspective, growing in the grace of baptism is an on-going process. Because of its effect, the sacrament of baptism is not only an external sign but has an impact through God's own presence. In baptism, God's presence is the presence of God's Word, that is Christ, in the water of the baptism.¹

The idea of connecting baptism and Christian life is also a point of orientation for the Faith and Order document *One Baptism: Towards Mutual Recognition* (2011).

Towards Mutual Recognition of One Christian Baptism

The document *One Baptism* sets as its task to "...explore the close relation between baptism and the believer's life-long growth into Christ, as a basis for a greater mutual recognition of baptism. It also addresses issues in baptismal understanding and practice which cause difficulty within churches and

¹ Partakers in Christ, art. 82.

hinder the mutual recognition of baptism among churches today.” To accomplish this task, the document aims to 1) clarify the meaning of mutual recognition of baptism, 2) put the consequences of mutual recognition into practice, and 3) clarify issues which still prevent such recognition (World Council of Churches, 2011).

It is well known that encouraged especially by BEM there are local and national multilateral agreements on the recognition of baptism in the United States (2000), Poland (2000), Germany (2007), Portugal (2014), and Switzerland (2014), for example. In Finland the Evangelical Lutheran Church has ecumenical agreements with the churches of the Lutheran World Federation, the Anglicans of the Porvoo Communion, the Finnish Methodists, the churches in the German Evangelical Church, and the Church of Scotland which include the recognition of our Christian baptism. The Anglicans and Lutherans of the Porvoo Communion are treated as members of the own church based on the mutual communion. In 2022 the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland and the Finnish Orthodox Church signed bilaterally a joint declaration on the baptism which included mutual recognition of baptism: “No member of either church who decides to join the other is rebaptised. In this sense, the churches recognise the validity of each other’s baptism” (Joint Declaration on Baptism, 2022).

Our Christian baptism is also the basis of communion with the Roman Catholic Church, although we are yet to have an agreement that would make eucharistic communion possible, except in some critical situations of pastoral exception. The Finnish-Swedish Lutheran-Catholic dialogue report *Justification in the Life of the Church* (2010) jointly concludes:

Catholics and Lutherans recognize each other’s baptism, even though full and visible ecclesial communion is yet lacking. The remaining differences do not affect the full sacramental communion in baptism. That the liturgical forms may vary is legitimate and this depends on different traditions. The only thing necessary for a valid baptism is the act of baptism itself in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Here is a fundamental unity between Christians. Pope John Paul II could therefore say, at the ecumenical Service of Prayer at Turku on 5th June 1989, ‘Who am I? Just like all of you, I am a Christian, and in baptism I have received the grace that unites me with Jesus Christ, our Lord. Through baptism, I am your brother in Christ (Church of Sweden, 2010, sec. 179).

In Finland the practice that the Orthodox Church recognises the Christian baptism of Lutherans and Catholics has differing consequences depending on the respective tradition. This means that Catholics are not chrismated when entering the Orthodox Church; Lutherans are chrismated, mainly because Lutherans do not have the sacrament of confirmation with anointing with chrism blessed by the bishop as Catholics do. One Baptism affirms that it is increasingly recognised that Christian initiation is interconnected with the sacramental services in various phases of life: baptism, chrismation/confirmation, and eucharist. Based on the idea of interconnectedness, the differences in the understanding and in the practice of baptism are not as divisive as they used to be. There is more convergence, but perhaps not full recognition yet (Lutheran World Federation, 2021; World Council of Churches, 2011).

According to *One Baptism*, the rediscovery of the joint catechumenate, that is teaching before baptism that includes the ecumenical preparation of the baptised for baptism, is a sign of progress in multilateral ecumenism. Yet to my knowledge there is no systematic ecumenical cooperation in catechumenate teaching at least in Finland. In some Anglican and protestant churches the practice of immersion has been rediscovered, which makes the common ecumenical basis broader from a practical perspective. In Finland we have been somewhat cautious in this area in the Lutheran church, although we are open to immersion in principle. Common baptismal certificates as a sign of ecumenical interconnection

through baptism also exist in some contexts. There are examples of practical ecumenical cooperation in Christian adult education, but more could be done (World Council of Churches, 2011).

Concerning mutual recognition, *One Baptism* distinguishes three dimensions: 1) churches that recognise each other as churches, that is, as authentic expressions of the One Church of Jesus Christ; 2) churches that recognise the baptism of a person from one church who seeks to join another; and 3) people who recognise one another individually as Christians (World Council of Churches, 2011).

BEM emphasises that the mutual recognition of baptism is based on the recognition of the apostolicity of the other church. Apostolicity indicates continuity in faith, life, witness, and in the ministry of the apostolic community, chosen and sent by Christ. The recognition of baptism therefore presupposes: 1) the definition of the apostolicity of the baptismal service itself. Most but not all churches recognise that the heart of baptism is the use of water in the name of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; 2) the definition of apostolicity in the broader context of Christian initiation; 3) the definition of apostolicity in the life and witness of a church that baptises and teaches new Christians (World Council of Churches, 2011).

It seems that in international theological dialogues an essential step forward has been taken since BEM regarding the opposition of “sacrament” and “ordinance”. The terms cannot of themselves be seen as church dividing. *One Baptism* concludes:

30. Most traditions, whether they use the term ‘sacrament’ or ‘ordinance’, affirm that these events are both *instrumental* (in that God uses them to bring about a new reality), and *expressive* (of an already-existing reality). Some traditions emphasize the instrumental dimension, recognizing baptism as an action in which God transforms the life of the candidate as he or she is brought into the Christian community. Others emphasize the expressive dimension. They see in baptism a God-given and eloquent demonstration, within the Christian community, of the gospel and its saving power for the person who, being already a believer through his or her encounter and continuing relationship with Christ, is then baptized (World Council of Churches, 2011).

The understandings of baptism as a sacrament and as an ordinance can thus be seen as different approaches that are not mutually exclusive. According to *One Baptism* both approaches can be regarded as essential to the understanding of the full meaning of baptism.

A practical application of the intimate connection between baptism and Christian life is the custom of commemorating own’s own Christian baptism. For example, in the manual of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland there are instructions for this commemoration. The liturgical guidelines also emphasise that the use of the paschal candle in worship is a visible sign of baptism. Confirmation is also connected with lifelong growth in and into Christ, and thus with the apostolicity of the whole church. The eucharist is the culmination of Christian initiation, which leads to growth in and into Christ and his body. It can even be said: “64. Theologically and liturgically, membership appears to be ‘incomplete’ prior to admission to the eucharist ...” (World Council of Churches, 2011). The document rightly underlines that as a general rule, “...the historic order of reception of baptism before reception of the eucharist should be observed for the sake of the unity of the church” (World Council of Churches, 2011). However, this is not a self-evident practice in mainline churches for example in interfaith contexts.

The churches generally emphasise the primacy of God’s initiative in their baptismal theology. An approach which points to the cognitive or conscious nature of the faith can be seen as problematic for those who are either too young or whose disability means they can never articulate their faith (World Council of Churches, 2011). Yet the relationship between baptism and Christian life in practice is a problem for mainline churches.

Compared with BEM, *One Baptism* further develops the ecumenical endeavour to recognise one's Christian baptism by placing Christian initiation in baptism in the context of lifelong growth into Christ (World Council of Churches, 2011). Concerning rebaptism, the document concludes that if infant baptism is understood in the triple form of growing in faith, baptism, and Christian initiation and in the context of the lifelong growth of the believer into Christ, it can be asked: "Is it appropriate to require the baptism of those who, in their previous church, were numbered among the baptized?" and "Does the requirement for rebaptism take sufficient account of God's action in a person's life, from the time of their prior baptism until now?" (World Council of Churches, 2011).

Yet the key reason for differing understandings lies in the relationship between baptism and faith, in the understanding of the ontological and epistemic dimensions of faith and being a Christian from a theological perspective. This integrates the reflections into the broader framework of Christian life, which is intimately linked with ecclesiology. Accordingly, the emphasis of the work of the Faith and Order commission between 1993 and 2013 was focused on the ecclesiological project harvested in the convergence document *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2012). Based on this document, it is perhaps easier to see baptism in the light of God's salvific plan, in which the essential sign and instrument is the Church of the Triune God. *The Church* states: "3. God's plan to save the world ... is carried out through the sending of the Son and the Holy Spirit. This saving activity of the Holy Trinity is essential to an adequate understanding of the Church" (World Council of Churches, 2012).

The seventh canon of the second ecumenical council in Constantinople in 381 states that every baptism administered by water in the name of the Triune God should be regarded as a proper Christian baptism. This was further developed in the second canon of the sixth ecumenical council in Trullo, 691–692, and before that in the canons of Basil the Great (379) and the local synod in Laodicea (c. 363). The church can thus recognise baptism administered in the name of the Holy Trinity as genuine, even if it is administered outside the church. Those baptised in this way can be received into the Orthodox Church through repentance and chrismation (Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, n.d.). Coupled with the phrase from Ephesians "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4 :5) the agreements of the early church constitute a good basis for the traditional churches to work towards mutual recognition especially in Orthodox-Protestant dialogue.

The recognition of baptism does not entail full ecclesial communion and not necessarily even eucharistic intercommunion, but it gives hope and encourages to work more deliberately to promote shared Christian witness and service. This is especially relevant in resolving the dilemma between infant baptism and believers' baptism in the context of the Christian initiation as a whole. It means recognising each other as Christians and reflects a desire to act according to the Saviour's will "that they may all be one ... so that the world may believe" (John 17:21).

CONCLUSION

In this study, we looked at the current state of discussions around the mutual recognition of baptism and formulated a plausible picture for the future. Currently, there is increasing effort and agreement in recognising baptism respectfully between churches. Examples are multilateral agreements in several countries that recognise baptism together. However, there are still some obstacles in achieving full and universal recognition of baptism among churches. In view of a reasonable future, we believe that through continued dialogue and cooperation, further steps in mutual recognition of baptism can be taken. The findings of this study provide insight into the different understandings and challenges that exist in

ecumenical discussions on the mutual recognition of baptism, as well as providing insight into the progress that can be made in the mutual recognition of baptism in the future.

The limitations of this study need to be noted in order to interpret the results appropriately. Firstly, this study is limited to a textual analysis of relevant ecumenical theological sources. This means that practical aspects or actual experiences in the common confession of baptism may not be fully reflected. Secondly, the focus of this study is mainly on the European context, so generalisation of the findings to the global ecumenical context needs to be done with caution. Thirdly, this study did not involve the active participation of churches or individuals involved in such ecumenical discussions, so the direct views of stakeholders may not be fully represented. Recognising these limitations will help in understanding the limits and relevance of the findings of this study.

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