

***Baptism:
A Dialogue with the Charismatic Movement in the
Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil***

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Introduction

The issue of baptism has been on the Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil [IECLB]¹ agenda since the 1980s and emerged with greater emphasis in the second half of the 1990s; controversy was raised by the practice of rebaptism in some communities under charismatic influence. Several church documents that were approved over the years condemn the practice of rebaptism and call on its practitioners to stop. In May 2004, in the “Unity Forum: Context and Identity of the IECLB,” the subject came up again. With the conviction that, in the current context, the IECLB has as its central challenge deepening its reflection and dialogue about confessional² identity and the unity of the church, the Presidency duly endorsed by the Church Council led a process of dialogue with representatives of the Charismatic Renewal Movement (CM).

This difficult but necessary dialogue became significantly more intense in 2004 and 2005. The main controversy revolved around the different theological understandings of the relationship between grace and faith, particularly regarding the understanding of baptism. Baptism is God’s offer of grace received in faith, but faith cannot be a condition for baptism. The practice of rebaptism therefore represents a self-exclusion from the confessional basis of the IECLB.

By promoting dialogue, there was hope that it could lead to a greater identification of the charismatic movement with the IECLB’s confessional basis, that the charismatic movement itself would curb extremism, and that we could together find alternative arrangements for the legitimate aspirations of the charismatic movement. This goal unfortunately did not materialize, in spite of efforts from both sides. The process resulted in church workers³ requesting dismissal and a limited number of the IECLB members leaving because of doctrinal differences. This is not the time to assign responsibility for that fact but to make the fact clear, and to do so with much regret, because “if one member suffers, all suffer together” (I Corinthians 12:26).⁴ However, there seems to be no doubt that there was a deep theological split between us.

¹ EDITOR’S NOTE: As in many languages, the word *evangélica* in Portuguese that translates as “evangelical” in English has several layers of meaning. Sometimes it refers to the gospel (Greek *euangelion*) as such, sometimes to Protestantism generally, sometimes to Lutheranism specifically. In American English usage, “evangelical” is often confused with nondenominational Protestant communities. In this document, the Portuguese word will be translated according to what fits the context and is least likely to cause confusion to an English-language reader.

² EDITOR’S NOTE: As with “evangelical,” “confession” can have multiple meanings in English. Here, generally, “confessional” and “confessionality” refer to the theological standards of the IECLB, which themselves derive from the Lutheran Confessions, principally Luther’s Catechisms and the Augsburg Confession.

³ TRANSLATOR’S NOTE: “Church workers” in this English edition translates *obreiros*, which in the IECLB encompasses all persons with some spiritual function in the IECLB like pastors, deacons, evangelists, missionaries, and professors of theology. In this book it most often means ministers or pastors.

⁴ EDITOR’S NOTE: All biblical citations are taken from the English Standard Version.

The diversity of spirituality in the IECLB is, in principle, beautiful and enriching to the church. Many people feel attracted to the IECLB or appreciate it particularly because it offers very much room to develop in very specific manners the experience of faith, community building, and missionary projects. However, diversity has its limits, which are overridden precisely when the pillars of the Lutheran Confessions are somehow affected and/or community life is taken over by a divisive spirit that is incompatible with the understanding of the church as the body of Christ, in which the different members cooperate with each other, for their edification.

With this compilation we are making available the main written communications between the Presidency and leadership of the charismatic movement in the years 2004 and 2005, in chronological order. Likewise, we have included in the Appendix to this edition other related texts that were published in different sectors of the church. Thus, we aimed to make more widely available the contents of this dialog. We do this also because we see in the IECLB a growing awareness of its confessional identity. It is essential that members of the IECLB know why, in a context of great religious pluralism, we are of the Lutheran confession, particularly in issues as central as baptism. We want to continue growing as a church in understanding and in a communitarian commitment to a responsible practice of baptism.

Pr. Dr. Walter Altmann, Presiding Pastor
Porto Alegre, 29 September 2006

Chronology of the Dialogue with the Charismatic Movement

The subject of baptism and rebaptism, including charismata, has occupied the IECLB on various occasions since the 1980s. In this chronology are listed some of the more significant moments, decisions, and/or documents, with special emphasis on developments since 2004.

1997 and 1998—Dialogue meetings of the Presidency of the IECLB with representatives of movements, including the Charismatic Movement [CM], seeking a clear position and consensus on the subject.

August 18, 1997—Pastoral Letter from the IECLB Presidency stating, *inter alia*, “The IECLB recognizes all Baptisms done in the name of the Triune God, and does not rebaptize people entering the IECLB from a different Church. As a consequence, whoever nevertheless practices rebaptism takes a confessional stance outside the IECLB and attacks the church’s ecumenicity.”

November 1999—The IECLB issues the document, *A IECLB às Portas do Novo Milênio* (“The IECLB Facing the New Millennium”). It states, among other things: “Since there is only one Christian baptism (Ephesians 4:5), the IECLB cannot accept a second baptism or so-called rebaptism. Whoever still practices it is moving away from the biblical foundation and from the Lutheran Confessions, and should question himself or herself and allow to be questioned whether he or she is still a part of the IECLB.”

17–19 March 2000—The Church Council declares, “For acts like rebaptism there must be disciplinary proceedings.”

Pentecost 2000—The IECLB issues the document “The IECLB in Religious Pluralism” and classifies rebaptism as a case of “confessional incompatibility.” It also states, among other things, “Because of the unconditional love of God and our biblical understanding, we must admit and practice the baptism of children and adults as well. We must not allow one of the two ways to be made absolute, and rebaptism, as it has occurred within the IECLB, is completely unacceptable in a Lutheran church.”

19–22 October 2000—The 22nd Church Council in Cuiabá and Chapada dos Guimarães/MT, reinforces the document “The IECLB in Religious Pluralism,” emphasizing that it “is in place and must be effectively implemented.”

May 4–7 2004—National Unity Forum convened as the beginning of a process for the possible adoption of a “letter of identity and commitment” in the 24th Church Council. During the Forum the subject of baptism/rebaptism comes up again in a statement by P. Luiz Henrique Scheidt, representing the CM.

9 June 2004—The Presidency represented by W. Altmann and H. Pinto meet with Pr. L. H. Scheidt, who is accompanied by Pr. Arzemiro Hoffmann. The Presidency asks for a written statement about baptism (in addition to two other items) for submission to the Church Council.

24 June 2004—The CM sends the IECLB a manifest entitled “Dialogue on Congregational Issues.” On the subject of baptism, this paper proposes a “confirmation of baptism, by repeating the rite with water” and “conditional baptism.”

25 June 2004—Submission of the final document of the National Unity Forum to workers, synods, parishes, and institutions, announcing it will be forwarded to the Conference of the Synod Pastors⁵ and to the Church Council; it also asks for careful studies and theological opinions.

9–10 July 2004—The Church Council makes an assessment of the issue and asks for theological opinions on the statement received from the CM.

21 July and 3 August 2004—Opinions by P. Harald Malschitzky and P. Dr. Paul Butzke, highlighting positive points but also criticizing the manifest of the CM. The statement from the CM and opinions are referred to synods.

5 August 2004—The Church Council Board makes referrals to the Presidency and the synods, and instructs the Council on Liturgy to prepare “a proposal for a rite of reaffirmation of baptismal vows.”

17–19 September 2004—The Conference of Synod Pastors expresses its appreciation for the Final Document of the National Forum of Unity and makes suggestions for amendments to the Church Council.

13–17 October 2004—The Church Council appreciates and approves the document “Unity: Context and IECLB Identity.” It states, among other things, “The practice of rebaptism violates directly the core of the faith, the regulations and the guidance documents of the IECLB, and is therefore equivalent to opting out of the confessional basis of the IECLB.”

25 November 2004—Dialogue meeting of representatives of the IECLB governing body and representatives of the CM. Purpose of the meeting: to establish a dialogue agenda for 2005, preceded by an agreement about baptism. There are divergent views regarding baptism and a decision is made for an exchange of letters stating those views.

14 December 2004—Exchange of letters between the IECLB Presidency and the CM. The letter from the IECLB presents the biblical and confessional position about baptism and makes concrete proposals on how to deal with the matter, including a rite of reaffirmation of baptism and celebration of God’s faithfulness, while also challenging the CM to declare their compliance with the confessional basis and regulations of the IECLB. A letter from the CM expositis their understanding of baptism, referring to the Bible, Luther, and the IECLB theologians, justifying their baptismal practice on the basis of pastoral and missionary reasons, also taking into consideration the current religious context.

16 December 2004—The Church Council Board evaluates letters (the CM decides not to accept the invitation to attend the meeting) and sets January 28 as deadline for the CM to answer the letter from the IECLB, in particular §8 (the CM’s commitment to the IECLB’s confessional basis) and announces that on its part it will be studying the letter received from the CM.

28 January 2005—The CM sends a brief statement criticizing the IECLB leadership for not having answered its letter and stating that it would expect an answer as the “next step in continuing the dialogue.”

⁵ EDITOR’S NOTE: A Synod Pastor is the head of his/her respective synod.

3 February 2005—The Church Council Board expresses its appreciation for, amends, and approves a letter prepared by the Presidency in response to the CM Open Letter, containing comments and related issues raised by other comments from CM members or supporters. It also responds to the message received from the CM, leaving to its discretion whether and how to respond to the letter from the IECLB, stating that the Presidency remains open to dialogue and communicating the matter would be brought before the March meetings of Synod Pastors with the Presidency and the Church Council; further information would then be available.

8–11 March 2005—A Meeting of Synod Pastors assesses the situation, including correspondence received from other people or groups in the IECLB, and makes a proposal to the Church Council concerning the role of the Presidency and of the synods in this question.

14 March 2005—The CM sends correspondence to the Church Council replying to the letter from the IECLB of February 3 and repeats its stance as stated in the letter of December, without any mention of the letter from the IECLB of December 13, which continues unanswered.

18–19 March 2005—The Church Council examines and discusses the matter, then adopts a specific resolution on the liturgical rite, on a theological consultation to be convoked by the Presidency, on the synods' action for a survey of rebaptism cases, ruling that church workers practicing rebaptism must suspend their actions until final resolution of the conflict.

5–6 May 2005—The Consultation on Baptism and Rebaptism takes place, involving the Presidency, former presiding pastors, and representatives of the movements. In this consultation, in which each participant presents his/her position, the theological and confessional stance is strengthened, rejecting the practice of rebaptizing; it is also recommended that, with regard to so-called “conditional baptism,” the IECLB prepare criteria and guidelines or the examination of specific cases in which the correctness of previous baptisms were in doubt. The consultation also emphasizes that the intention is not to reject people who have been rebaptized, but [to reject] the practice of rebaptizing and that, therefore, a special responsibility rests on the IECLB's workers, according to their ordination vows.

10 May 2005—Letter from the Presidency to the synods, which communicates the Church Council Board's decision at its meeting on April 27 requesting a survey of church workers about their baptismal practice and whether or not there is any external interference within congregations, parishes, and/or synods not agreed on by workers and community leaders. For this query two standard procedures (see Appendix) were distributed.

9 July 2005—Letter from the Presidency on the present situation of the IECLB, in particular on the relationship with the CM, discussing the different stages of dialogue with the CM. The hope that this dialogue could lead to greater identification of the CM with the confessional basis of the IECLB did not materialize. The process resulted in workers leaving their church work and in divisions within the IECLB congregations due to doctrinal differences. This raises a number of questions about what can be learned from charismatic manifestations, a spiritual phenomenon of our time, and from internal dialogue within the IECLB.

5–6 August 2005—The Church Council meeting in São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul, adopted several resolutions: it regretted that church workers had left and the IECLB congregations had been divided because of practical and doctrinal differences; it reassured that there would be opportunities for dialogue and reconciliation without giving up the confessional basis, ensuring pastoral care to members of the IECLB remaining in communities that had suffered division; the process of developing criteria for granting or not so-called “conditional baptism” should be continued; synods would be asked to complete the survey on rebaptism in their area; they would also be asked for a copy of the legal registries of the IECLB congregations’ and parishes’ statutes.

29 March 2006—A letter from the Secretary General reporting on legal disputes with some charismatic groups that left the IECLB parishes and took the property with them. Lawsuits aim to ensure the rights of these the IECLB congregations/parishes, which are reorganizing their community life. The Church Council approved the creation of a Special Solidarity Fund to assist in the process of rebuilding them.

Letters and Documents from 2004

I. DIALOGUE ON CONGREGATIONAL ISSUES (Movement of Spiritual Renewal, June 2004)

“That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me... that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me...” —John 17:21, 23

The IECLB over the years has been marked by its diversity. It has been a democratic church, skillful in dealing with those who are different. This has earned it the merit of not having gone through any major splits throughout its history, although there were moments of great tension. This flexibility of the IECLB also has to do with the fact that from the beginnings different theological strands led to the formation of our denomination.

Today, in a time of extreme plurality, it would be surprising if there were no conflicts within the church. Moreover, pluralistic society has a profound influence on our church, which has been plural since its origin. And as an institution the IECLB is not an island and does not want to be one, so it is not immune to various influences. On the other hand, the IECLB as a church cannot refrain from dealing with conflicting issues arising within it. Therefore, as a renewal movement within the IECLB, we would like to reflect on three issues presented to us by the Presiding Pastor of the IECLB, Dr. Walter Altmann. We list them below in order of importance, following the Presiding Pastor himself, namely:

1. Dealing with baptismal issues;
2. Dealing with issues related to the interference of charismatic workers in the “domains” of other congregations, and
3. Dealing with tensions and conflicts within congregations with some form of charismatic expression.

We know that addressing these issues is not easy; on the issue of baptism, for example, conflicts have dragged on for centuries. Nevertheless, as stated earlier, we will not avoid the debate. Our intention is to be constructive and indicative in order to contribute to a negotiated solution for the deadlock within the church.

Dealing with baptismal issues:

We believe, as charismatic Lutherans, that baptism is a sacrament, and a sacrament must be dealt with responsibly. For many years people have debated within the IECLB about indiscriminate baptismal practice, where sacrament is offered only as a rite of passage, not as a sacrament. Thus we see a diffuse baptismal practice in the IECLB because there is a confused theology. If teaching on baptism is seen as *the great gift of God* according to *Nossa Fé—Nossa Vida* [“Our Faith—Our Life”], page 19, one should expect a priority for its theological understanding, and that practice should at least have the same emphasis. This, however, does not occur. In practice there are different theological understandings. Pastors who accept that what happens in baptism is justification by grace, redemption, calling for

priesthood, being received into the body of Christ, etc. will never refuse to baptize a child, even if its parents only register with the congregation in order to have the baptism performed. This practice is extremely common, especially in large cities. A cursory check of members in default proves it. (Remember that the guide *Nossa Fé—Nossa Vida* says verbatim: “In baptism the grace of God is offered to us in the name of the Triune God... this grace wants to be embraced in faith... later by the child,” pp. 19–20).

The irresponsible practice of this sacrament is due to the fact that many think that in baptism, as if by magic, we receive from God all he promises in his Word. Another example of bad practice resulting from this theological vision can be seen in the treatment provided to families of wealthy businessmen. Home baptism is offered to people who never participate in ecclesial life. This means: *ex opere operato*, everything happens in the rite. This baptismal vision established itself primarily together with the affirmation of Christianity as the official religion of the [Roman] empire [and was] consolidated with the Edict of Theodosius (380), according to which “Christianity is a prerequisite to live within the limits of the empire.” This theologically and biblically untenable practice has been questioned even by Roman Catholics parties, [like] in the words of Cardinal [Vicente] Scherer in the 1970s: “We baptize more children than we can evangelize.” This feeling is the result of the concept of faith infused in the child by the act of baptism coming from the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the Counter-Reformation council. Unfortunately, sometimes [this vision] has materialized also in our realm.

We know that the practice of rebaptism within the IECLB is much older than the Renewal Movement, and it is not exclusive to it. As it has been an isolated action by pastors, only gradually has it been discovered. There are pastors who, in order to avoid conflicts, send members who are not at peace with their infant baptism to an Assembly of God church to be baptized there and then return to the Lutheran communion.

Another fact showing that rebaptism is not the focus of confessional attention can be seen in the colloquy of pastors, ordained or not in other churches, requesting entry into the IECLB’s ministry. The Colloquium Committee appointed by the IECLB leadership didn’t [use to] investigate whether or not a candidate was rebaptized. Thus Baptist candidates were admitted, for example, Diemer Vilmar, who already was rebaptized. Thus it is clear that for the Colloquium Committee this was not a subject of major denominational concerns. As our brethren can see, the question of the diverse use of baptism did not begin with us and is not limited to our present practice.

Today we are being questioned by the clamor coming from the missionary fronts in which we work. Now the IECLB has ceased to be a rural church, being increasingly confronted with the reality of urban diversity. Increasingly we receive people whose faith is either quite secular or extremely involved with the occult. By conversion these people are embracing faith in the Lutheran church. Many of them have become congregational, parochial, and even synodical leaders. But their religious past hinders them. They have the desire to openly break with their old life, embracing their faith publicly and markedly. Ministers and leaders with pastoral concerns sought alternatives so that these people would receive pastoral help. The Directorate of the IECLB itself was concerned about these issues

and convened in 1997 a seminar on baptism, rebaptism, and charismatic phenomena, which continued in 1998. Texts were drafted, testimonies were given, and quite a lot was discussed. As requested, we reviewed this practice and *as a rule* we bow to the guidance of our church and do not baptize anyone already baptized correctly. Unfortunately, initiatives were not carried out to the full, so we still have a lot before us.

In our pastoral care, where we are constantly faced with these issues and seek to distance ourselves from the Tridentine understanding of baptism that shapes our Catholic context, as well as seeking the Lutheran view, that baptism is received in faith, and faith comes from hearing the Word. We propose two alternatives. As it happens, for a congregation evangelized in the Brazilian syncretistic medium, where other religions practice baptism, a distressing question comes up that needs to be treated with responsible pastoral care. We lack a *rite* that symbolizes the celebration of baptismal remembrance as has been started in other Lutheran communities, for example, Hosanna Lutheran Church in the USA.

We understand that the following two proposals do not offend our church's confession nor its ecumenicity.

1. The confirmation of baptism, by repeating the rite with water: *Caras Magazine*, in the December 17, 1999 issue, describes the experience of [TV host] Gugu Liberato. He had confirmed his baptism by immersion in the Jordan River, in a ceremony officiated by Father Marcelo Rossi [of equal fame]. He described the experience as something very special: "Generally, we are baptized at a few months old, but it is not us who chose to receive the sacrament. Now it was different: *I* wanted it. And it is much more intense and deep to any human being." Undoubtedly, the practice of baptismal confirmation by repeating the rite is doctrinally accepted by Roman Catholicism. And it surely can be a viable solution to help people who, having been baptized correctly, want to commit themselves to the Lord Jesus, and want to mark this decision conspicuously.

2. Conditional baptism: Conditional baptism is practiced in the Episcopal Church, which includes this liturgical rite in its [*Book of Common Prayer*], and in the Roman Catholic Church as well. We have oral witness that it was also practiced in the past within the Lutheran Church. Unfortunately we do not have written sources that can prove it. Conditional baptism is practiced when there is doubt about the right administration of the sacrament, or when there is no certainty that baptism really happened. It is interesting to note that in Europe "for the Catholic Church the validity of Protestant baptism lately became more questionable than before, and often conditional rebaptisms are performed in the case of conversions" (J. Beckmann, EKL, vol. 3, p. 1308). Unfortunately the Church's ecumenicity has not been taken into account by the Roman Catholics. This possibility of conditional baptism will be a good alternative for creating new congregations on missionary fronts, also because at those missionary frontiers we find many people lacking knowledge on baptism and its right administration.

Dealing with issues related to the interference of charismatic workers in the “domains” of other congregations:

The geographic vision called the parish is something that might work well in rural areas within the context of days long past. Nowadays, with urbanization, the variety of opportunities, and the more sensitive religious perception of our members, it is virtually impossible to restrict someone's involvement to a geographically defined parish. This practice of participating in parishes other than the member's home congregation is already well known. Proponents of this approach have the Brazilian Constitution on their side, which guarantees free practice of religion, restricting the jurisdiction of a religious community to the scope of their buildings. In this sense the geographical parish model is already overcome, and it is taken into consideration in our Constitution in its Article 8, single paragraph. On the other hand, what has been called “interference” we believe to be an initiative on our part that has helped the IECLB in maintaining its members. Some members would have left the church if workers from other parishes had not helped nurturing them in times of crisis.

Let us take the example of Indaiatuba, São Paulo. In the past, an “interference” took place there, which has resulted in a new field of pastoral work with an ordained the IECLB minister today. Usually “interference” has occurred in places where people are leaving the congregation. Our purpose has been to help them stay within the IECLB. It is worth mentioning that places where we do not “interfere” have ended up losing many Lutheran members, for example in the Parish of Três Coroas, Rio Grande do Sul, which has lost many members. Our activity outside our parishes seeks the good of the church, not its disruption; practice has shown that. Moreover, this prerogative of “interference” does not apply only to charismatics. We have examples like the parish of Guaíba, Rio Grande do Sul, which has members being served by the pastor of the parish nearby. We believe that this so-called “interference” is a service to the church itself.

With the above examples we try to show that we are ready to help the IECLB, in a more negotiated manner, when it comes to keeping within the church those members with a more charismatic form of expression. We know these extreme situations have become more frequent, and therefore we want to cooperate with the smooth running of the church. We have done our work within regimental the IECLB standards, just like other movements do: the events are public, anyone willing can join, Synodical and the IECLB governing bodies are always invited, we do nothing behind closed doors.

Dealing with tensions and conflicts within congregations with some form of charismatic expression:

We all know that tensions and conflicts are not unique in communities where there is some charismatic expression. Internal conflicts in the IECLB communities have existed for a long time. This is proven by the theological and confessional diversity of pastors and missionaries active in the 19th and 20th centuries (not to mention the serious conflicts caused by the presence of Nazi leaders and pastors in the 1930s).

The suspicion is that when such tensions occur in charismatic communities, more buzz is made around it. We think that internal tensions and disputes in a community have

positive and negative aspects. Whenever some leadership tries to innovate, conflict is likely to arise. Sometimes it is the reactionaries' opposition, sometimes those who insist on an ethno-Lutheranism; some don't want any change at all even if it comes by a decision from a Church Council or governing body; and you also have sheer tactlessness from pastors of whatever theological line.

There is indeed a lack of transparency in relation to conflicts. In general, pastors and leaders seek to give the impression that all is well and there are no conflicts. This has caused an evasion of members that has been felt in every statistic about the number of church members. What's worse is that even the secular statistics (see last IBGE figures [Brazilian Institute on Geography and Statistics]) are confirming what everyone already knew: our church is shrinking! This is also a demonstration of the deficit that we have in dealing with internal conflicts, and the lack of transparency and sincerity, when we say that what matters is the quality and not the quantity. We should ask ourselves: where is that highly touted quality, if quantity is dwindling?

In this sense our approach has been based on the recognition that in the urban community there is a wide variety of audiences. Never will a single program reach everyone. We kept worship and activities [such as] OASE⁶ in the molds as they were being practiced. However, we offer evangelization programs, worship at times differing [from the customary], programs with different emphases and styles for other audiences. Gradually we made worship go to the city outskirts, reaching people of other ethnicities, other cultures and social levels, mainly impoverished people and blacks. Some traditional members don't tolerate this course, insisting "these are not our people." There is no way to avoid this conflict. However, we have always had the full support of the Presbytery and/or Parish Council for any innovative initiative from our side. Decisions were always made after analysis and majority voting.

The result is that we cannot please all people. But our churches are well attended, and people are evangelized to contribute to the Kingdom of God and broaden its missionary horizons. We maintain a variety of programs and, as a rule, in times of difficulty we have sought the guidance of our ecclesiastical authorities in the synods and the IECLB governing body. Our intent is not to cause discord or confusion, but participate proactively so that PAMI [the IECLB's Missionary Action Plan] reaches the goals it set for itself.

We understand that it is necessary to create internal mechanisms in the congregations so we can overcome conflicts. We should give courses and further training on this topic to Synod Pastors and members of synod boards so that they could work more wisely in communities and parishes when requested. We should prepare our ordained workers so that they can deal with conflict situations. It will be important to put in place a system of suggestions and complaints in our churches, where members can express their ideas and feelings about the congregation, so complaints can be made with the proper identification of the whistleblower. In this case an ombudsman could be created in congregations, choosing a reputable person for this role, elected at a meeting. This ombudsman could also be created in

⁶ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: *Ordem Auxiliadora de Senhoras*, a women's organization within the congregation, inspired by the long-standing German *Frauenhilfe* model.

synods and in the IECLB itself as a whole. The ombudsman would be responsible for gathering complaints, suggestions, and denunciations, and semiannually submitting them to the presbytery, the Synod and Church Council, at each level. The Presbytery, Synod Board, and Church Council have the responsibility to listen, assess, and take appropriate action, accounting for their resolutions in their respective assemblies. These suggestions in the medium and long term would be crucial for better progress in the congregations, and therefore the IECLB as a whole!

We believe we need to make some urgent decisions in order to succeed in maintaining unity and church growth.

It would be a mistake to think that issues about unity are resolved through liturgical reforms, because the IECLB in its plurality has great liturgical variety, making it a really Lutheran church. After all, the unity of the Church is in its faith, not necessarily in the way it is expressed. In this sense, we seek faithfulness to our foundation, which is based on the Gospel, not on a form, as we see in Article 7 of the Augsburg Confession.

With this in mind we also propose that, in the short term, the IECLB offer the possibility for creating new congregations through division when the coexistence between different [sectors] becomes excessively conflicted, as [it was done] in Indaiatuba, where there is now an ordained the IECLB worker, or as happened in Agrolândia, Santa Catarina, where there is also a new congregation and an ordained the IECLB worker is already installed. This alternative would help the church solve two of its current problems: first, the issue of vacancies; their number would increase a lot through the creation of new fields [of work], and avoid the embarrassment of a new policy of sending and resending [church workers], which contradicts the historical premise of Lutheranism, according to which the congregation is the one who elects and chooses its pastor; secondly, it would be a way to give freedom of organization to the different expressions that exist and will always exist within the church. The creation of new congregations will provide growth to the IECLB, so that those who are different may have freedom of expression.

We believe that the evidence we have from the IECLB history will help us find paths that lead us to consensus. We are ready to dialogue. We have demonstrated this all along our way, because after all we are and want to continue being the IECLB!

Movimento de Renovação Espiritual

[Spiritual Renewal Movement]

June 2004

II. OPINION ON DEALING WITH ISSUES RELATED TO INTERFERENCE BY CHURCH WORKERS (Pr. Harald Malschitzky, São Leopoldo, July 21, 2004)

Luiz Scheidt starts out his reflection invoking the right to freedom of movement guaranteed by the Constitution, and [arguing that] urbanization would impede maintaining parochial geographic boundaries.

The fact that the Constitution guarantees the freedom of movement does not imply the absence of limits, as if the citizen were allowed to enter any space, ignoring, for example, a fence or a wall. Respect for the fact that someone belongs to a particular congregation does not hinder freedom, but organizes it.

It is true that in metropolitan areas the IECLB members are not always affiliated to the congregation geographically closest to them. They actually are part of and receive services from the congregation they have joined.

Metropolitan experience [however] teaches that people attend celebrations and activities in congregations they don't belong to. But no other [traditional] service can be rendered without the express consent of the respective church worker [of his/her home congregation].

Guaíba being a nearby town, some parishes in Porto Alegre usually have many visitors from other parishes and other churches, due to its location and because of the events they offer. But no liturgical act is performed without express and written permission by the church worker [of the home congregation].

An exception is made when there is a request for a hospital visit. Since Porto Alegre (as with metropolitan areas in general) is an important healthcare hub, church workers of parishes belonging to the Protestant Congregation of Porto Alegre make all the hospital visitation asked for. Whenever possible, contact is made afterwards with the worker's home congregation.

Solidary support between church workers, in order to prevent members from leaving the IECLB, is commendable. But this solidary support should not happen by ignoring colleagues and presbyteries, much less so by creating parallel congregations.

The lack of "interference" has led to the loss of members, argues Pastor Scheidt, and he mentions Três Coroas, Rio Grande do Sul. To my knowledge, one of the earlier church workers [there] focused people on his own person. Whenever this happens, the transfer of the church worker has this [estranging] effect, because nobody was able to gather people as a congregation; after all, church workers are only one part. Apart from that I have no [further] information to assess the Três Coroas case.

Church workers' professional ethics as well as the IECLB regulations imply that parish boundaries be respected. Teamwork and participation of workers in other parishes are salutary, as long as they are desired and consented to.

III. OPINION ON DEALING WITH TENSIONS AND CONFLICTS WITHIN CONGREGATIONS⁷

The church and congregations are not free from internal conflicts. Not even in the last corners you will find a space that is free from conflict. There is none. Much more important is the other question, namely, how to deal with conflict, what guides us in solving conflicts, what the ultimate goal is in finding solutions.

Innovations can be sources of conflict, but [a conflict's] intensity depends largely on the way you introduce any innovation. And here arises the first question to ask the "charismatic movement" within the IECLB: How are traditional members being treated whose language is rather rational and not so pious? What is the difference in dealing with converted and non-converted members? How are those people being dealt with who prefer to maintain traditional forms of celebration?

Whenever conflicts go beyond the boundaries of the congregation, church authorities are called to intervene. What is happening within the IECLB is that the charismatic phenomenon jostles many people, therefore it is more noticed and its conflicts have wider implications. But the reason it is noticed is not only for being charismatic!

It seems to me that contempt for the numerical aspect ("quality, not numbers") is ill-focused. The IECLB should not want large numbers at any price, especially not at the price of biblical-theological infidelity. But this is not the same as saying numbers are negligible; it would be a misinterpretation of what is being stated within the IECLB.

It is no doubt imperative to go to the suburbs looking for people who do not traditionally belong to the IECLB. In this case many things will be different. But it should always be clear that wherever we are, we are as the IECLB and not as a "different" the IECLB. This particular proposal from P. Scheidt, of creating new parallel congregations, causes concern precisely because the differences are insurmountable, it seems. In my understanding, this is the best way to perpetuate differences and conflicts instead of seeking solutions. Just watch how the apostles Paul and Peter kept discussing until it was clear that both "traditionals" and "neophytes" belong to the same body of Christ (cf. Acts, Galatians). And a concrete sign of this unity is the offering Paul collected among the "neophyte" congregations for the benefit of the "traditional" congregations. Creating new congregations based on their difference and inability to resolve conflicts seems quite foolhardy. Only Christ can be the foundation, the love and grace of God being the starting points of any action. From here, there is no "neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female" (Paul).

Liturgy is not meant as a straitjacket and no one expects it to resolve conflicts. It is not an instrument of uniformity but of unity (liturgical design itself is malleable throughout). In other words, the IECLB members, neophyte or traditional, must be able to recognize their church and feel like being in their own church in any of our communities. This factor is important precisely in a migrant and constantly moving society such as ours.

⁷ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Probably also authored by Pr. Harald Malschitzky, though not identified as such.

The proposal for an ombudsman deserves consideration, although the Synod Pastors already have this role. Maybe because the Synod Pastors also have a disciplinary role, there is a lack of trust and freedom in their role as ombudsmen.

First, however, it is necessary to answer the question whether we want to be the IECLB, respect its rules, and contribute to their improvement. The moment regulations are tacitly but deliberately infringed, church workers and congregations place themselves outside their own church.

IV. OPINION ON THE THEOLOGICAL POSITION GIVEN BY THE CHARISMATIC RENEWAL ENTITLED “DIALOGUE ON CONGREGATIONAL ISSUES”⁸

(Pr. Dr. Paulo Afonso Butzke, Blumenau, August 3, 2004)

A. On the document and its introduction

1. Already on the first reading I was immediately struck by the title chosen by the “Charismatic Renewal” (from now on abbreviated as CR): “Dialogue on Congregational Issues.” When I received the request to draft this opinion I was told it was a “theological position” about theological and practical topics, requested of the CR by the IECLB Presiding Pastor. The text presented is clearly not a theological position, and its title implies it does not intend to be one. It rather wants to “dialogue” with the Presiding Pastor about “congregational issues.” The title already announces what the content of the document will reveal: the issues involved are not understood by the CR as of fundamental and crucial importance to the unity of the church—after all, they are but “congregational issues”—and their charismatic practice is presumed to be one of many in a plural church. Thus, the presentation modus demonstrates the difficulty in relating appropriately with the church authority. The Presiding Pastor receives a dialogue offer from a movement whose theology and practice is under suspicion of hurting denominational and church unity. The notion has been lost that before the highest theological and ecclesiastical instance of the church it is the duty, especially of ordained workers, to take responsibility for and to legitimize theology and practice whenever asked for it.

2. In the document’s introduction there is an obvious concern to present the IECLB as a plural church in which you live out diversity and democracy. The thesis that diversity was present in the process of forming the IECLB is used as an argument to legitimate its present internal pluralism. It is an interesting phenomenon that [presently] segments of the IECLB are building up [this] thesis, which tends to relativize the Lutheran confession in the formation of the IECLB, as if [the Lutheran position] were only one among other [optional] theological positions. Meanwhile there are “theses” about the historical and theological evolution of the church which cause some concern. For instance, we hear the “thesis” that “the IECLB became Lutheran because of the Bavarian church’s investments in the IECLB.”⁹ Of course, people don’t know that the Bavarian church and its theological exponents were against the formation of the IECLB, issuing theological opinions to try to prevent its entry into the LWF in 1949. People are no longer conscious of the fact that this Lutheran denomination, its origins being overwhelmingly due to immigration, resulted from a process of theological discernment immediately following World War II, culminating in the creation of a Synodical Federation with a specific confession. The emphasis on the existence of

⁸ Requested by Presiding Pastor Dr. Walter Altmann, forwarded to me by his Advisor, Dr. Carlos Gilberto Bock on July 14, 2004, as a contribution to the reflection of the IECLB Council meeting on August 5 and the IECLB Presidency meeting with the Synod Pastors in September 2004.

⁹ I heard this “thesis” at the *Fórum da Unidade* in Araras, May 2004. Its authors probably were not aware that this thesis disputes the confessionality of all institutions and movements within the IECLB, which today continue receiving money from the Bavarian church or the *Martin Luther Verein*—as if their denomination were up for sale.

“different theological strands” in the process of the IECLB’s formation seems to project current pluralism into church history in order to justify positions which cannot be reconciled with the Lutheran confession. For Lutheran theology, however, relativizing confessional affiliation means the end of church unity.

3. Also interesting is the finding of an absence of any “major splits” throughout the IECLB’s history. However, this undoubtedly highly positive fact does not prove the true unity of the church. The absence of “major splits” perhaps demonstrates that in the IECLB we no longer know what makes for true church unity, prioritizing institutional unity over theological unity. In order to preserve the true unity of the church there may be a need for a split based on the distinction between the true church and a false church. Neither Luther nor subsequent Lutheranism were afraid of theological distinctions and, consequently, of ecclesiastical boundaries. The reformers never conceded a “negotiated solution” on issues central to confessional affiliation (as, for example, on the understanding of the sacrament of baptism) just in order to preserve the institutional unity of the church.

4. The document states correctly that the IECLB is not “immune” to the influences of “pluralistic society.” In planning its activities it should be attentive to the increasingly diverse needs of society. However, it should also be careful not to reproduce within itself these disruptive social processes. While seeking to diversify its operations, it will ensure an unequivocal theological and confessional testimony. Furthermore, a church without a clear theological and confessional position will have little to contribute to a situation of religious confusion and the dissolution of values.

5. In the document the CR does not admit to any errors. Instead, it just analyzes and points out the mistakes and faults of others. It does not discuss criticism about its own theology and practice. Obviously there are other problems in the IECLB, also regarding the practice of baptism. This fact, however, does not minimize or relativize the serious theological and ecclesiastical problem of rebaptizing. It is unfortunate that the CR just keeps on criticizing others while failing to develop and exposit its theological understanding of the issues on which it is being questioned. Members of the CR want to be “charismatic Lutherans.” Precisely this wish could have motivated careful and thorough elaboration of a theological position.

B. “Dealing with baptismal issues”

6. The CR document starts this topic with an auspicious phrase, stating that “baptism is a sacrament, and a sacrament must be dealt with responsibly.” Instead of explaining its understanding of the sacrament, unfortunately, the document goes on to attack the baptismal theology and practice of the IECLB. In the document the CR says, directly or covertly, that the IECLB has a “confused” baptismal theology that generates an “indiscriminate” and “diffuse” practice, in which baptism is merely a “rite of passage” or “magic.” For the CR, the IECLB has a “theologically and biblically untenable practice” inherited from the Roman Catholic church.

7. It must be in fact admitted that, regarding the practice of the sacrament of baptism, there are irresponsible church workers and parishes in the IECLB. After baptizing children a

church must not neglect continuing evangelization and Christian education. Fortunately there are many initiatives integrating the blessed sacrament of baptism in a concept of community building. In our church's parishes there is more life from the gospel than some critics would admit.

8. The document contains quite worrisome statements by CR regarding the understanding of baptism. I will comment on just two of them:

8.1. "The irresponsible practice of this sacrament is due to the fact that many think that in baptism, as if by magic, we receive from God all he promises in his Word."

This phrase from the CR document, stated in the context of criticism against understanding the sacrament *ex opere operato*, makes baptism and its gifts independent of God's Word. The collision of this statement with Lutheran baptismal theology is blatant. To the Lutheran church, the sacraments are rites instituted by Christ himself, in which visible elements—water (baptism), bread and wine (the Lord's Supper)—are linked to the divine promises. Thus Luther defines baptism as a sacrament, stating that: "Baptism is not simply plain water. Instead it is water enclosed in God's command and connected with God's Word" (Small Catechism).¹⁰ The work performed by baptism is this: "It brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the words and promise of God declare" (Small Catechism).¹¹ Baptism is also the sacrament "by which we are first received into the Christian community" (Large Catechism),¹² integrating us in the church of Christ as members of his body. What we receive in baptism, then, is salvation itself. In his Large Catechism, Luther says about the gift of baptism: "...the power, effect, benefit, fruit, and purpose of baptism is that it saves... To be saved, as everyone well knows, is nothing else than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil, to enter into Christ's kingdom, and to live with him forever. Here again you see how baptism is to be regarded as precious and important, for in it we obtain such an inexpressible treasure. This indicates that it cannot be simple, ordinary water, for ordinary water could not have such an effect. But the Word does it, and this shows also, as we said above, that God's name is in it. And where God's name is, there must also be life and salvation. Thus it is well described as a divine, blessed, fruitful, and gracious water" (Large Catechism).¹³ In baptism, therefore, we receive—yes!—all that God promises in his Word, simply because God decided to act savingly in the sacrament! It is not "magic." It is God's decision that offers gifts independent of human action and worthiness.

8.2 "...seek to distance ourselves from the Tridentine understanding of baptism that shapes our Catholic context, as well as seeking the Lutheran view, that baptism is received in faith, and faith comes from hearing the Word."

¹⁰ EDITOR'S NOTE: Martin Luther, "The Small Catechism," in *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, eds. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000) [hereafter cited as BC], 359. All citations of confessional documents will be taken from this English edition.

¹¹ BC 359.

¹² BC 464.

¹³ BC 459–460.

This statement is made by the CR in the discussion context of rebaptism, also searching for alternatives to the [standard] baptismal practice in an urban missionary context. It proposes this sequence as an ideal: “preaching/evangelism—faith/conversion—baptism.” This sequence poses the existential and cognitive grasping of the gospel message between preaching and baptism. It seems evident that this sequence privileges adults and virtually excludes children. Although not clearly stated, the phrase is an apology for the baptism of adults, grounded on the preceding criticism of the concept and practice of infant baptism. Given the assertion of CR and its consequences I think it is necessary briefly to present some considerations about the theological legitimacy of infant baptism. Since a refutation of infant baptism is usually associated with rebaptism, this reflection becomes even more relevant to the IECLB at this moment.

In the writings of the New Testament, no infant baptism is explicitly reported. The reports show baptisms of adult converts to the Christian faith. Baptism marks the change of domain: coming from “darkness,” the baptized enters the realm of Christ (Colossians 1:13). Knowing this, we can understand why newly converted people let themselves be baptized with “all [their] household” (Acts 16:15; 16:33, 18:8; I Corinthians 1:16.) The term “household” (*oikos* in the original Greek) referred to the family in a broad sense, including children, slaves, and the slaves’ children. In order to submit the whole family to the power of the Holy Spirit, making them partakers of salvation, it is likely that all—children included—have been baptized. Not baptized were of course family members who self-excluded, not accepting the Christian faith (I Corinthians 7:12–16).

The question whether early Christians baptized their children or not can neither be affirmed nor disproved by means of Scripture quotations. It is certain that around the year 200 there are testimonies of church fathers reporting infant baptism. In 180, Irenaeus states that “Jesus came to save all who are reborn through him in God. Infants, children, adolescents, and young adults” (*Adv. Haer*, II, 22.4) The phrase “born again,” for the fathers of the church, is a technical term for “baptism.” In Rome’s church order, written by Hippolytus around 215, we find the sentence: “First we should baptize infants, all those who can speak for themselves. For those who still cannot speak, their parents shall speak, or someone belonging to the family” (*Constitutions through Hippolytus*, XVI, 4). Origen, about 240, mentions infant baptism several times. In his commentary on Romans he states, “The church received from the apostles the tradition of baptizing children too” (*Comm. in ep. Rom.* V, 9).

The fathers of the church, therefore, considered infant baptism an apostolic tradition. Probably it was common practice across the early church.¹⁴ This spread of infant baptism in the early church certainly was induced by the conviction that in baptism it is God who acts in the life of the baptized, while the latter just receives baptism. Faith, in this case, is the result of baptism, i.e., of God’s act. Another reason that allowed for the diffusion of infant baptism in the early church certainly was the conviction that the church precedes the individual

¹⁴ The legitimacy of infant baptism was only questioned starting in the sixteenth century by the Anabaptists (*Wiedertäufer* in German, “rebaptizers”), who accepted only adult baptism as legitimate.

Christian as the realm of the lordship of Christ, where the Holy Spirit acts through a communion of believers who mutually support and strengthen their faith. In this sense, the church's faith always precedes that of the baptized, whether adult or child.

The work of Luther and the Reformation in the sixteenth century coincides with the emergence of Anabaptist movements in Switzerland, parts of Germany, and the Netherlands. According to these, true baptism is baptism with the Holy Spirit which occurs in faith. Water baptism for them is only the human testimony of an earlier spiritual decision.¹⁵ From these arguments, the Anabaptists rejected—and do to this day—the baptism of infants, considering it invalid and ignoring 1500 years of church history. An adult baptized as a child, coming to faith, must be “baptized” again.

Luther condemned rebaptism harshly. For him, to rebaptize an adult baptized as a child is “to blaspheme and desecrate the sacrament in the worst way” (Large Catechism).¹⁶ Luther defends infant baptism, stating that to question this practice is the devil's work, who “confuse[s] the world through his sects” (Large Catechism).¹⁷ In defense of infant baptism Luther first argues with church history. He says “[t]hat the baptism of infants is pleasing to Christ is sufficiently proved from his own work. God has sanctified many who have been thus baptized and has given them the Holy Spirit. Even today there still are many whose teaching and life attest that they have the Holy Spirit. Similarly by God's grace we have been given [Luther speaks of himself!] the power to interpret the Scriptures and to know Christ, which is impossible without the Holy Spirit. But if God did not accept the baptism of infants, he would not have given any of them the Holy Spirit—or any part of him. In short, all this time down to the present day there would have been no person on earth who could have been a Christian” (Large Catechism).¹⁸ If God acted through his Spirit all this time in the church, then it is because he likes infant baptism, for “he cannot contradict himself” (Large Catechism).¹⁹

As an argument in favor of the validity of infant baptism, Luther explains the proper relationship between faith and baptism. This was important because the Anabaptists precisely argued that only conscious faith (as an adult!) can receive baptism. For Luther, however, the work of baptism and its validity for humans depend solely on the work that God is doing in this sacrament. Faith, although indispensable, only receives baptism, trusting in his work. Therefore, infant baptism is valid even if faith and trust in the sacrament come later. Incidentally, it is not possible to say that infant baptism happens without faith. Parents, godparents, and the whole church act in faith and hope: “We bring the child with the intent and hope that it may believe, and we pray God to grant it faith” (Large Catechism).²⁰ This, however, still is not the most important argument that allows Luther to baptize both infants or

¹⁵ I question whether baptism understood and performed as a “human testimony” may still be theologically considered a sacrament.

¹⁶ BC 463.

¹⁷ BC 462.

¹⁸ BC 462.

¹⁹ BC 463.

²⁰ BC 464.

adults. Baptism happens because the church acts in obedience to the divine command: “But we do not baptize on this basis, but solely on the command of God” (Large Catechism).²¹

9. The greater value of the CR document is to remind the church of the pastoral care needed to refresh constantly and existentially the meaning of baptism in every baptized person. We agree with the CR when it says, “We lack a *rite* that symbolizes the celebration of baptismal remembrance as has been started in other Lutheran communities.”²² In the “missionary fronts,” where people “have the desire to openly break with their old life, embracing their faith publicly and markedly,” this need becomes even more acute. We understand the frustration of the CR, who expected effective procedures as a result of seminars convened by the IECLB in 1997 and 1998 on the themes of baptism, rebaptism, and charismatic phenomena. Precious time was lost. Reflection about and the development of theological and liturgical materials on the “remembrance of baptism” thus is urgent and should be encouraged by the governing bodies of the IECLB. The exchange of materials and experiences on the Easter vigil,²³ which is a privileged moment in the liturgical year for the remembrance of baptism, can be a good start. The Council on Liturgy and the Center for Liturgical Resources of the *Escola Superior de Teologia* can provide valuable contributions to the IECLB in meeting this challenge.

10. In the document the CR then makes two pastoral-liturgical proposals concerning remembrance of baptism issues. We now analyze them:

10.1. “The confirmation of baptism, by repeating the rite with water.” The CR suggests a liturgical act aimed at reaffirming, insuring, and attesting a baptism already performed. The intent of the CR certainly is good and deserves attention. But in order to prevent undesirable interpretations, it should be reworked. The term “confirmation” is too close to the Roman Catholic sacrament of chrism and to the Lutheran service of profession of faith, which concludes the confirmation teaching period. Moreover, the term suggests that baptism has no full validity [in itself] and needs a supplement. Remember that baptism is a sacrament, that is, the irrevocable action of God in our lives. Luther says, “To be baptized in God’s name is to be baptized not by human beings but by God himself. Although it is performed by human hands, it is nevertheless truly God’s own act” (Large Catechism).²⁴ Clearly the work of God needs no confirmation or complement. Any liturgical act that insinuated this need would be in conflict with the sacramental character of baptism. Since the argument of the CR has the perspective of pastoral care, we suggest a liturgical act designed to reaffirm and celebrate God’s faithfulness in the lives of the baptized, despite the person’s infidelity and sin. For someone baptized, the possibility of conversion is nothing more than the possibility of returning to the grace of baptism. Thus, this conclusion would have the

²¹ BC 464.

²² Here the document mentions the “Lutheran Church of Hosanna” (USA). This congregation should be better identified (there are dozens of congregations under this name in USA); and its experience should be reported.

²³ Indispensable is the essay by Sissi Georg, “Tríduo Pascal,” *Série Estudos de Liturgia* 1 (São Leopoldo: Centro de Recursos Litúrgicos da EST, 2001), especially pp. 114–119.

²⁴ BC 457.

character of renewing baptismal vows and recommitment to the experience of what baptism means.²⁵

This remembrance of baptism suggested by the CR receives a very special emphasis with the suggestion of “repeating the rite with water.” The inclusion of symbolic action, designed to engage the senses, certainly enriches the liturgy of baptismal remembrance. There are limits, however. The symbolic action must never lead the congregation to interpret the remembrance of baptism as a rebaptizing.

To support the proposal, the CR states in the document, “Undoubtedly, the practice of baptismal confirmation by repeating the rite is doctrinally accepted by Roman Catholicism.” This is an unfounded assertion. Confronted with this statement and with the story about the “confirmation of baptism” of Gugu Liberato by Father Marcelo Rossi, Bishop Dom Angelico Bernardino of the Blumenau, Santa Catarina diocese considered [that statement and story] an “abuse.”²⁶

10.2. “Conditional baptism.” This is a correct theological possibility, as stated in the Code of Canon Law: “Can. §869—If there is doubt as to whether a person was baptized or whether a baptism was conferred validly, and after serious enquiry this doubt persists, the person is to be baptized conditionally.” The note to this article reads, “Several churches baptize validly; for this reason, a Christian baptized in one of them cannot normally be rebaptized, not even conditionally.” The following churches are then listed: Orthodox, Old Catholic, Episcopal, the IECLB, the IELB, Methodist. Other churches (Presbyterian, Baptist, Congregationalist, Adventist, and most Pentecostal ones) don’t elicit any reservation about the baptismal rite, although there are problems in the “theological concept of baptism.” Even so, “when there is assurance that the person was baptized according to the rite prescribed by these churches, no rebaptism is allowed, not even conditionally.” There are, however, other churches and religious groups (*Pentecostal Unida*, Brazilian churches, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Christian Science, Umbanda, etc.) whose baptism “we can prudently doubt; therefore, as a general rule, a new baptism is necessary, conditionally.”²⁷

As can be seen, conditional baptism is taken very seriously by the Roman Catholic church. In a context prone to requests for rebaptizing, conditional baptism may suffer abuse and manipulation. Therefore, there must be official legislation from the IECLB for ensuring this same seriousness in dealing with such cases.

C. “Dealing with issues related to interference of (charismatic) workers in ‘domains’ of other congregations” and “Dealing with tensions and conflicts within communities where there is some form of charismatic expression.”

²⁵ Luther reminds us that the ritual sign of *baptism* is performed rapidly, but its meaning—dying to sin and rising again to faith—lasts a lifetime. Therefore, Luther repeatedly asserts that “Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, begun once and continuing ever after... Therefore let all Christians regard their baptism as the daily garment that they are to wear all the time...” (Large Catechism) [BC 465, 466].

²⁶ Personal vis-à-vis communication, July 15, 2004.

²⁷ *Código de Direito Canônico/Codex Iuris Canonici*, revised and expanded 12th edition (São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 1983).

Issues related to the “interference” of workers in other congregations and internal conflicts in communities affected by “charismatic expression” can, in my view, be addressed jointly. They are often related and combined. On the one hand, interference is justified by existing conflicts that are excluding people with a charismatic profile; on the other hand, external interference engenders new conflicts.

In fact, the issue is the coexistence of different spiritualities in one and the same congregation, parish, synod, and church. Clearly the IECLB’s church workers and laity are not yet ripe for this coexistence. In view of the conflict, however, there is a need to address the problem and to advance solutions.

I agree with the CR that “it is virtually impossible to restrict someone’s involvement to a geographically defined parish.” However, the practical consequences that the CR draws from the fact above are extremely problematic. It is indisputable that members may participate in congregations other than the one they are formally enrolled in. You can even enroll in a parish that geographically is not the closest one. To some degree these issues have always been treated with common sense in the IECLB. You cannot, however, extend these rights of members to church workers. Not even an appeal to the Brazilian Constitution can rid a church worker subject to the vows of his or her ordination from disciplinary proceedings if he or she unduly interferes in a field of work that has not been entrusted to him or her by the Directorate of the church. Very peculiar is the fact that the CR document puts quotes around the word “domain” (of other congregations). Do they thus express that the jurisdiction of a parish as historically and legally defined is once and for all relativized and abolished in the IECLB?

The problem of interference in other people’s work field is, in fact, an old problem. The Apostle Paul already suffered from the interference of so-called “itinerant preachers” (*charismatische Wanderprediger*) in the congregations he founded, especially in Corinth. The difficulty and suffering arising from this intrusion are recorded in his second letter to the Corinthians, not coincidentally called “the letter of tears.” The renewed study of this letter would help the IECLB members and staff have greater regard for the authority of the ministry given to IECLB workers and greater respect for other people’s work field.

Some parishes and their particular situation are cited in order to justify interference. This does not contribute too much to an objective discussion. Due to the ambiguity of situations, it can be used both to justify and to accuse those outside interfering in it. I propose, however, to take the foregoing situations seriously and to study objectively and impartially at least one case. A case study would allow the church leadership to find out what actually motivates members to leave the IECLB. The study could map the theological and spiritual profile of these dropout members. Also, it would be possible to know whether some kind of pastoral practice over a given period leads members to leave the IECLB for theological and/or spiritual reasons. Such a case study should consider theological, historical, and sociological approaches.

We agree with the CR when it says that “in the urban community there is a wide variety of audiences.” The communities and parishes the IECLB have not always been competent to follow the diversification of the needs of its members with the parallel

diversification of ecclesiastical offerings. The ideal of encompassing different expressions of spirituality in one and the same parish community seems to have failed so far. If, indeed, we are interested in helping the CR in “keeping within the church those members with a more charismatic form of expression,” we must look for designs that transcend the experience of the traditional IECLB parish. One possible model is the creation of parishes on a Synodical level with a specific spirituality profile—like for instance a charismatic community/parish. The creation of these parishes/communities should be the result of pastoral and Synodical missionary planning for a given region. What must be avoided is the subdivision of parishes and communities due to the incompatibility of spiritualities.

V. LETTER FROM THE PRESIDING PASTOR OF THE IECLB, N° 89657/04, TO PR. LUIZ H. SCHEIDT, SUMARÉ, SÃO PAULO
(Porto Alegre, 9 November 2004)

Dear Luiz:

Once the Church Council is over we would like to resume the dialogue between the IECLB governing body and the Charismatic Movement in the IECLB. To this end, we invite a representative delegation of the Charismatic Movement, up to 6 people, for a meeting at the headquarters of the IECLB, on 26 November, 9 a.m. At this meeting we would like to establish a dialogue agenda for 2005, but also deal with [the following] subject, due to its urgency, since it has been raised in your correspondence from 25/6/2004, which proposes the church establish “a *rite* that symbolizes the celebration of baptismal remembrance,” or even stronger, a rite of renewal of baptismal vows and celebration of God’s faithfulness.

Such a rite would do justice to a life change for which the person also desires the blessing of God. It would also avoid a practice that could be considered “rebaptism,” which contradicts the biblical witness and the IECLB’s confessional writings as well as its guidelines, [as made] explicit in the consultation meeting coordinated between the Presidency and the *Encontrão* Movement in Rodeio 12, Santa Catarina, August 1997. As you can recall, already in our dialogue on 9 June in the headquarters of the IECLB I reacted favorably to the proposal, which you then mentioned orally; so also did the Church Council. Now based on your written communiqué, it decided at its meeting on 5 August, among other things, to commission the Council on Liturgy to develop a liturgical procedure for such a rite.

The representation of the church governing body at this meeting is not yet fully defined but probably will be composed of the Presidency, one or two members of the Church Council Board, some synodical pastors, and one or two representatives of the Advisory Group on Theology and Confessionality and/or of the liturgy area.

Sharing the common desire of, in evangelical integrity, preserving the unity of the IECLB, for which I beg the assistance of the Holy Spirit, I send you my fraternal greetings,

Walter Altmann, Presiding Pastor

CC: Members of the Church Council, Synods, General Secretariat

VI. LETTER FROM THE PRESIDING PASTOR OF THE IECLB, N° 90706/04, TO IECLB PARISHES, CONGREGATIONS, SYNODS, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, DEPARTMENTS, SECTORS, AND CHURCH WORKERS

(Porto Alegre, 27 November 2004)

Re: The Movement of Spiritual Renewal in the IECLB (“Charismatic Movement”)

Dear sisters and brothers,

I write the day before the first Sunday of Advent and greet you with the theme of this week: “Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he” (Zechariah 9:9).

Trusting that God comes to us in the midst of our hopes and concerns, I bring to your knowledge, attention, and intercession some information about the dialogues conducted by the IECLB’s Church Directorate with the leaders of the Movement of Spiritual Renewal in the IECLB, also called the “Charismatic Movement.” The subject is broad and covers a range of theological and practical aspects. The dialogues that have happened and the documents issued by the IECLB recognize a number of positive contributions of the Charismatic Movement to the life of congregations but have voiced concerns about various phenomena characteristic of its theology and practice. Due to the urgency of the matter this letter focuses on the issue of “rebaptizing.” A more comprehensive pastoral letter may be issued in the future.

First I should make a retrospective:

In 1997 and 1998 the Presidency of the IECLB held two dialogue meetings in Rodeio 12, Santa Catarina, with the goal of achieving a clear position on the issue of baptism, rebaptism, and charismatic phenomena in the IECLB. It was an effort to seek consensus without departing from the gospel or abandoning the Lutheran confession.

On 18 August 1997, the then-Presiding Pastor of the IECLB, Huberto Kirchheim, issued a pastoral letter entitled “Valuing Baptism: The Importance, Meaning, and Practice of Baptism in the IECLB.” It discusses the biblical and confessional meaning of baptism. It also makes practical recommendations for baptism’s enhancement in the congregations. The subject “rebaptism” was discussed because in some congregations rebaptisms were happening. The letter emphasizes that “our one baptism is for life” and that, with Luther, we must return to it daily in repentance, so that always “daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever” (Luther, Small Catechism).²⁸ From this basis, the letter stated, “the IECLB recognizes every baptism performed in the name of the Triune God, and does not rebaptize people coming from another church into the IECLB. Consequently, whoever nevertheless practices rebaptism departs from the IECLB’s confession and attacks the church’s ecumenicity.” This position was reiterated in different ways in later official IECLB documents, like *A IECLB às Portas do Novo Milênio* [“The

²⁸ BC 360.

IECLB at the Gates of the New Millennium”] and *A IECLB no Pluralismo Religioso* [“The IECLB within Religious Pluralism”].

In the National Forum on Unity, which the IECLB held in May 2004 in Araras, the representative of the Charismatic Movement in the IECLB expressed that in the CM’s congregations practices were happening that “from the point of view of the church would be seen as rebaptism,” adding that this was a subject of internal discussion within the movement. In June, the Charismatic Movement, at the Presidency’s request, sent the IECLB a document entitled “Dialogue on Congregational Issues.” In it, regarding baptismal practice, the Charismatic Movement stated that “we lack a *rite* that symbolizes the celebration of baptismal remembrance” and made two concrete proposals: 1. “confirmation of baptism, by repeating the rite with water”; 2. “conditional baptism.”

On 9–10 July 2004 the Church Council recommended the Presidency take on the subject, requesting [expert] opinions about the Charismatic Movement’s document. Opinions were collected from Pr. Harald Malschitzky (member of the Advisory Group on Ecumenism) and Pr. Dr. Paul Butzke (member of the Advisory Group on Theology and Confession). This week we also received a spontaneous statement from Pr. Dr. Gottfried Brakemeier, in an open letter, [sent] through the Presidency to the “Charismatic Renewal” Movement within the IECLB. These documents, which in part have circulated, are being made available on the IECLB site.

In May 2004 the Church Council Board decided: to send the documents to the Church Council members and to synods; to recommend that the Presidency issue pastoral letters related to the subject; to emphasize the importance of synod initiatives in relation to church worker courses, evaluations, and disciplinary action in critical cases; to request that “the Council on Liturgy submit a proposal for a rite of reaffirmation of baptismal vows” ([quoted] from the respective minutes). This layout would provide the basis for continuing the dialogue of the IECLB with the Charismatic Movement.

In parallel, the final document of the National Forum on Unity was released and recommended for study and suggestions, given its appreciation in the Church Council, in the meeting of the Presidency with Synod Pastors and Chairmen and in the 24th Church Council (13–17 October 2004). This Council unanimously adopted the IECLB guidance document entitled “Unity: Context and IECLB Identity.” This document dealt in a comprehensive manner with the issue of unity in its biblical and confessional, historical, contextual, and practical aspects. In one of its paragraphs the document emphasizes once again that rebaptism “cannot be accepted as a theologically legitimate practice” and that it is “equivalent to opting out of the confessional basis of the IECLB.” It also reminds, however, that “the Gospel of Jesus Christ calls us to repentance, by which we are forgiven and reintegrated in the communion of saints through the gracious act of God.”

To continue the dialogue, the IECLB Presidency invited a Charismatic Movement delegation to a meeting at the IECLB headquarters, yesterday, November 26. The explicit aim was establishing a dialogue agenda for 2005 and, already at that meeting, due to its urgency, addressing the issue of the “rite of renewal of baptismal vows and celebration of God’s faithfulness.” This issue was all the more pressing in view of new information about

“baptisms in the waters” being continuously performed since 2000 (also by IECLB workers) and new ones already being scheduled.

At yesterday’s meeting were present on the part of the IECLB the Presiding Pastor (Pr. Walter Altmann), and the First Deputy Presiding Pastor (Homero Severo Pinto); the Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Church Council (Luiz Artur Eichholz and Pr. Valdim Utech); Synod Pastors Enos Heidemann and Nilo Christmann, Secretary General Nestor Friedrich, and the Secretary of Education Romeu Martini (an expert in liturgy); and for the Charismatic Movement, Pastors Luiz Henrique Scheidt, Paulo Böhm, Mario Silveira, João Daniel Gasperin da Silva, and lay leader Celso Wentz.

The dialogue, for which we asked in prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, took place in an atmosphere of openness and mutual respect, also ending in prayer, in which we mutually expressed the conviction that in faith in Christ as Lord and Savior we are brethren, whatever may be the outcome of the dialogue process. We also became painfully aware of the deep differences and how difficult it is to find a way out of the impasse that would be both authentic and viable. Several issues surfaced that could compose a more extensive dialogue agenda. But due to its urgency dialogue focused mainly on “baptism in the waters” or “rebaptism,” [the term] depending on one’s point of view.

The Charismatic Movement expressed that the documents of the church and also the [expert] opinions issued regarding its proposal do not leave them a practical alternative consistent with their theological conception. It alleged the syncretistic environment of its missionary activity, the expressed will of converted people to go through the experience of water baptism, and the necessity of faith for baptism. It asked whether the IECLB would want the Movement in their midst. The Church Directorate expressed that, given its mandate to ensure confessional integrity, it cannot fall silent before unilateral decisions by the Charismatic Movement regarding baptismal practice. While acknowledging that baptism is not always taken with due seriousness and preparation in the IECLB’s life, it emphasized respect for baptism validly effected in the IECLB and other churches, as well as faith, which receives the grace of God, for a life in righteousness and blessedness, not as a prior condition for baptism. The IECLB asked whether the Charismatic Movement desires to remain within the IECLB in compliance with the confessional guidelines established by the Church’s official bodies.

We found that what mattered was not just a practical difference but the understanding of church and the theological conception of baptism, the relationship between grace, faith, and word. In this meeting we did not further discuss the proposal of a rite of “remembrance” of baptism or “reaffirmation of baptismal vows.” But we did agree that we should do so. We decided that until 14 December the IECLB would forward a written position on this matter, as well as about how to proceed, in the [whole] Church, in those cases where doubts arise on whether a baptism was validly effected. The Charismatic Movement, in turn, would forward a written statement concerning those points in the IECLB normative documents which in the CM’s perspective make their baptismal practice unfeasible. The Church Council Board should then decide, on December 16, about continuing the dialogue.

I'm sure the brothers and sisters can perceive how serious this matter is for the life of the IECLB. I ask you to become united in prayer, asking that God, in his mercy, forgive us our faults, guiding us by His Spirit in all our deliberations, and grant in us all the gift of love.

Wishing you all a blessed Advent season, I salute sisters and brothers in fraternal love, in the peace of Christ.

Walter Altmann, Presiding Pastor

VII. LETTER FROM THE PRESIDING PASTOR OF THE IECLB, N° 91213/04, TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SPIRITUAL RENEWAL MOVEMENT (CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT) IN THE IECLB

(Porto Alegre, 13 December 2004)

Dear brethren,

In this Advent season, I greet the brethren with today's New Testament watchword,²⁹ reciting the words of Simeon: "For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:30–32).

As a continuation of the meeting we had last November 26 and given [your] request for a written statement about the IECLB's position on the issue of "baptism in the waters" or "rebaptism," particularly regarding the Charismatic Movement's proposal to the IECLB to establish two rites, "the confirmation of baptism, by repeating the rite with water" and "conditional baptism" (in your message from last June), we state the following:

1. Nowadays, as compared to the past, the setting in which the IECLB operates has changed a lot with regard to theological thinking and baptismal practice. With the expansion of the Pentecostal churches, and the growth of Baptist churches, infant baptism has been more and more questioned as to its evangelical legitimacy. Also the growing influence of secularism in certain segments of the population undermines the social recognition that baptism used to have. People with some involvement in syncretistic movements and desiring to make a lifetime commitment to the Christian faith wonder about the validity of infant baptism and express their wish to experience their baptism consciously. Moreover, in the IECLB, a significant number of members has had little participation in congregational life, which raises serious doubts about the commitment [of parents and godparents] to the evangelical education of their sons and daughters as assumed at baptism.

2. In these circumstances it is understandable that many situations arise requiring attentive pastoral care from the church and its workers. This is the *practical and pastoral* aspect of the issue. All persons having come to faith and expressing the desire to receive baptism in the IECLB should be heard, respected, and accompanied with pastoral care and much sisterly love in their wish, even if we think we should not fulfill their request the way they happen to express it. It is also legitimate and necessary for the church and congregations to be concerned about a responsible baptismal practice; about careful instruction to those who are to be baptized, parents, and godparents; as well as about strengthening the congregation in its commitment to care for baptized persons. For people's experience of faith it can be very

²⁹ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: Even though "watchword" may not be the usual phrase in English in this case, it happens to match the dual meaning (only within the IECLB) of *senha* ("motto" and "password"), which is a translation inspired by the German *Losungen*, a devotional book published by the *Evangelische Brüder-Unität—Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine*, and published in Portuguese by the IECLB publishing house *Editora Sinodal* under the title *Senhas Diárias*. *Senha* in non-Lutheran Portuguese means only "password." The German *Losung* has an additional third meaning: the result of a raffle. As it happens, the yearly Bible passages published in the German *Losungen* for each day are actually chosen by a random process or *Verlosung*.

important to make a public act in the congregation, under prayer, remembering the divine promise, and strengthening the imitation of Christ; this act could possibly be accompanied by a confession of faith and renunciation of practices inconsistent with faith in Christ.

3. The IECLB, according to *Nossa Fé—Nossa Vida* [“Our Faith—Our Life”], recognizes the baptism of children and adults. In fact, changes in the religious landscape indicate that more and more we shall have both. With the changing religious scene, the IECLB will receive ever more people who have not been baptized. We increasingly find ourselves in a mission scenario, no longer in one of Christendom in which all citizens are part of the ecclesial community. Moreover, there will also be people whose parents, though active in the congregation, chose not to bring them to baptism as children, leaving that decision to them, whenever they might wish to confess their faith. The IECLB shall deal with these situations with greater theological, pastoral, and liturgical care than it has done so far.

4. As for the biblical-confessional aspect, baptism is one of the sacraments by which the word of God, by his grace, visibly and tangibly acts for the person being baptized. This word must be accepted in faith: by the congregation, by parents and godparents, by the one to be baptized. Infant baptism expresses in a special way that it is God who in baptism acts by his grace. God’s grace always precedes our faith. But infant baptism also runs the risk of being associated with magic, which makes faith superfluous. Adult baptism, associated with the confession of faith of the person being baptized, gives visibility to the change of life that has occurred in the one who comes to faith in Christ. But it also runs the risk of transforming faith into a condition for the grace of God, instead of receiving [it]. It is debatable what in a given situation would be the “best” baptismal practice, subject to the least risks inherent in whatever church practice. It is misleading, however, to pose infant baptism and adult baptism against each other, as if only one of them were valid and the other absolutely false. There is no biblical warrant for this kind of judgment. In this sense, Luther maintained infant baptism vehemently, although he took up a theological position against the magical understanding of baptism, also emphasizing that in the sacraments the word must be accepted in faith.

5. According to the apostle Paul, we were “buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4). This walking in newness of life, mentioned by the apostle Paul, is not limited to that isolated moment in life when baptism took place but is a consequence of baptism for life. So the reformer Martin Luther in his explanation of baptism in the Small Catechism emphasizes the daily return to the baptism [that we have] received, saying that “the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”³⁰ This exhortation goes equally for those who have been baptized as a child or as an adult. So the one who has strayed from God’s ways returns to them (and to his or her baptism), through repentance and forgiveness received, through the renewal of his or her intention to walk in the blessedness and righteousness of God.

³⁰ BC 360.

6. Since apostolic times, baptism has been a unique and unrepeatable event in the Christian community. There is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5). The practice of rebaptism has been consistently rejected throughout church history as an offense against God himself, because it denies that God could have acted, regardless of faith (or the right faith) of the one to be baptized. There is, in the New Testament, no case of rebaptism. Who falls into sin (and we are all sinners) is not rebaptized but goes back into the fellowship of God through contrition and repentance. Thus no pastoral circumstance, as serious as it may be, nor any practical consideration (like what practice would result in more members), may justify rebaptism. It cannot be repeated, just as the saving work of Christ can’t be repeated, either, because it happened “once for all” (Hebrews 7:27, 9:12, 10:10). “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). There is no prerequisite or possible repetition from our side. Also in this context, therefore, the statement of Peter and the other apostles is in place: “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

7. This is the biblical and confessional conviction that has guided the IECLB. It is found in its confessional writings (for example, in the Augsburg Confession, and also in Luther’s Large and Small Catechisms). It is also stated in the regulatory and guiding documents of the IECLB (the reference to the confessional basis of the IECLB is in its Constitution, Art. 5), *Nossa Fé—Nossa Vida* (1972, revised 2002), *A IECLB às Portas do Novo Milênio* (1999), *A IECLB no Pluralismo Religioso* [“The IECLB in Religious Pluralism”] (2000), and *Unidade: Contexto e Identidade da IECLB* [“Unity: Context and IECLB Identity”] (2004). Pastoral letters from the Presiding Pastor, prior to these dates, have equally emphasized this same position, also as a result of dialogue with internal movements in the IECLB, including the Charismatic Movement. Thus, the IECLB recognizes as valid the baptism performed within the IECLB and in other churches who “confess Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior” (Constitution, Art. 5), whenever it has been ministered with water and in the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is needless to emphasize that this recognition does not imply agreement with other ecclesial and doctrinal points of the other churches.

8. We regret that the Charismatic Movement has decided, without consultation with the constituted IECLB bodies or even communicating with them, to adopt a different baptismal theology and a different baptismal practice, starting to practice “baptism in the waters” on people who have previously been baptized, both in the IECLB and in other churches. Pastors who practice it are seriously violating their ordination vows delivered before the congregation and before God himself. We hope this practice will be reviewed and immediately suspended. We ask the Charismatic Movement to express clearly that it accepts and will comply with the confessional basis of the IECLB and its normative and guiding documents in this regard.

9. We reiterate, however, that pastoral care is due to all people in any case. Clarifying to people the meaning of baptism is a noble and essential pastoral task. This includes exposing clearly the reasons why the IECLB recognizes baptisms already rightly performed and therefore does not rebaptize. However, when the congregation welcomes a new member into its midst, it is appropriate to examine the need for a rite of reaffirmation of baptismal

vows and celebration of God's faithfulness. The IECLB through the Council on Liturgy is working out a proposed rite for the reaffirmation of baptismal vows, its theological foundation, and its possible liturgical setting. To this end, we are collecting models from other Lutheran churches and ecumenical partners. Suggestions are welcome, also from the Charismatic Movement. Hopefully by mid-2005 the Church Council will have made a decision about it. The proposal should allow the congregation or people in the community context to reaffirm their baptismal vows while celebrating God's never-broken faithfulness, including waiving any practice inconsistent with the Christian faith—in Luther's words, renouncing the "power of sin, death, and the devil." The rite should clearly refer to baptism, avoiding however the misunderstanding that it was a new baptism.

10. Regarding the proposed conditional baptism, the IECLB recognizes that there may be exceptional cases where there is some doubt as to whether there was a valid baptism performed before. These cases should be examined carefully, including at the competent authority of that church where the supposed baptism may have taken place, and [such cases] should be decided together with the respective Synod Pastor. In such cases, it is important to note that the validity of baptism is linked to its correct execution, never to the moral or spiritual quality of the person ministering it, nor to the conduct of the [baptized] person after baptism. In these situations, the resource [to be used] should be the rite of the reaffirmation of baptismal vows. However, when in exceptional cases the validity of the "baptism" performed cannot be recognized because it does not match the IECLB's confessional standard, it will not be [considered] conditional baptism, but [will instead be considered] the first baptism rightly performed.

Word and sacrament are the core of the gospel proclamation. On them we must have consensus (CA VII). We hope that the Charismatic Movement can, before God and among brothers and sisters, review the position [they have] adopted, reaffirming its identification with the confessional basis of the IECLB and walking together with the IECLB in the ways here explicated.

May God, by His Spirit, assist us in this delicate moment of the IECLB!

Fraternally,

Walter Altmann, Presiding Pastor

VIII. OPEN LETTER OF THE RENEWAL MOVEMENT AS A CONTRIBUTION TO THE DIALOGUE ON CHRISTIAN BAPTISM TO THE IECLB CHURCH COUNCIL C/O PRESIDING PASTOR DR. WALTER ALTMANN

(Rua Senhor dos Passos, 202 Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, 14 December 2004)

Dear brethren,

In compliance with our promise to the presidency of the IECLB in the dialogue held on 26 November 2004 we herewith present our position on baptismal theology and practice as we were asked for. We emphasize, however, that our agenda of topics to be addressed is broader than the proposed approach, namely: Baptism in the Holy Spirit, Spiritual Gifts, Spiritual Battle, Baptism, (Macro-)Ecumenism and Creation of Alternative Communities (in this order).

So, first of all, we want to express our satisfaction with the 24th Church Council's adoption of the document "Unity: Context and IECLB Identity," held from 13 to 17 October 2004, in São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul, because it makes explicit the hierarchy of the official IECLB documents (item 6.1). We also rejoice that [this document] verbalizes the four *solas* (Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, and Scripture alone) as pillars of the Reformation (item 12) for Brazilian Lutheranism.

We understand that this document is guided by the *evangelical logic of inclusion* (item 7) that has been a hallmark of our history and proposes a broad agenda of dialogue by advocating that: "In controversial situations it is necessary to reach a consensus other than simple majority decision or decree of the Directorate of the church, but rather the result of a theological and spiritual process that, with patience and respect for consciences, interpreting the 'signs of the times' and also with full willingness to achieve unequivocal doctrinal definitions, hears the Scripture, interprets the confessional tradition, and dialogues with sisters and brothers, trusting the Holy Spirit 'will guide [us] into all truth'" (John 16:13).

However, we must express our surprise at the fact that both the document and the dialogue with us focused on "rebaptism" as the only threat to our church's confessional integrity.

Although a study of Christian baptism requires a much broader time and approach, we bring, now as a "Theological Stance" of the Renewal Movement, some topics relevant to the current moment, in order to widen the focus and bring the discussion on Christian baptism to all segments of the IECLB. The Directorate of the IECLB has already taken steps in this direction by making several statements available on its website. We hope that our considerations can also be part of this panel and in this way contribute to the clarification of this issue along the lines recommended by the Council!

1. Biblical Foundation

We begin by articulating some aspects of the biblical foundation of Christian baptism that we believe are essential for a responsible baptismal practice at the present time in the Christian church:

1.1. In Matthew 28:18ff, Jesus himself commanded baptism in the context of the congregation being sent to mission, linking it to gospel teaching within discipleship. Its biblical understanding is detailed in Romans 6, where the apostle Paul explains that in baptism we receive by faith participation in the death and resurrection of Christ, namely, that in it we die to sin and rise to new life in Christ. Thus in baptism God works in us graciously. The guiding document *Nossa Fé—Nossa Vida* sums it up: “We are marked by the cross, which is the victory over our failure and the starting point for a new beginning” (p. 19). By using the passive voice, *Nossa Fé—Nossa Vida* well translates the predominance of the passive voice of the Greek verb *baptizesthai* in the New Testament, which signifies that baptism is no merely human testimony but a sign of the change in government in the life of the person being baptized (Acts 2:37ff, 8:12ff, 8:26ff, ch. 10, 16:14ff, 16:30ff; Galatians 3:1ff, 3:26ff; I Corinthians 12:3,13; Romans 6:3ff, 6:17ff; Ephesians 4:4ff; Matthew 28:19ff)!

1.2. We further affirm that, according to the testimony of the New Testament, the good news of the work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who came to earth and became human to save the lost, is the larger framework that determines all understandings of baptism. Baptism is dependent on this gospel, not the gospel or faith dependent on baptism. The baptismal act is therefore a great sign of God’s offer for our life and salvation, although Mark 16:16 does not bind condemnation to a lack of this sign. From this follows that it is not *baptizing* but rather *evangelizing* that is the focus of our mission and our ministry (cf. I Corinthians 1:17).

1.3. In Acts we read: “And he said, ‘Into what then were you baptized?’ They said, ‘Into John’s baptism.’ And Paul said, ‘John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (19:3–5).

In this passage of Acts, the apostle Paul does not recognize the baptism of John, because this baptism of repentance does not signal the baptized’s change of belonging. Therefore, after hearing the gospel, these people in Ephesus were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus in agreement with the reports in Acts, which always entail a public confession of faith by the person being baptized.

1.4. The implications of belonging to Christ are detailed by Paul in I Corinthians 1:12–15:

“What I mean is that each one of you says, ‘I follow Paul,’ or ‘I follow Apollos,’ or ‘I follow Cephas,’ or ‘I follow Christ.’ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name.”

Here the apostle emphasizes that the fact that Christ was crucified for us implies that no other name, not even an apostle’s, may be somehow related with the benefit of salvation and baptism coming from him (cf. also Acts 4:12). Because of this exclusive uniqueness of Jesus, we believe it is unacceptable to consider as a Christian baptism one in which any name other than that of the Triune God is invoked, like, for example, in consecrations to Mary and other saints in the Catholic Church’s baptismal acts.

1.5. When Ephesians 4 says there is *only one baptism*, Paul is referring to the quality and content of baptism for salvation. He is not doing a numerical quantification of Christian truth. Hebrews 6:2 refers to instruction in *other baptisms*. The New Testament mentions *baptism in the Spirit* (Matthew 3:11, John 1:33, Acts 1:5, 8:15ff, 10:44), the *cup of baptism* (Matthew 20:22, Mark 10:38ff, Luke 12:50), the *baptism of fire* (Matthew 3:11), and on a subsidiary level the *baptism of John*. We believe, therefore, that the passage in Ephesians emphasizes the contrast between true and false baptism, between the true and false God, and between true and false faith, etc. So this passage affirms the quality of true Christian baptism which, according to the New Testament, implies repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and the public confession of this faith (Acts 2:37ff, 8:36ff; Romans 10:9ff).

2. Baptism according to Luther

According to the reformer Martin Luther, baptism is a biblical mandate (Matthew 28:18–20 and Mark 16:16), performed in the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. According to Luther and other reformers, the institution of baptism by Christ, as Melancthon expresses it in the Augsburg Confession, serves as a sign and witness to the will of God (Article 13).

In the Small Catechism we realize that Luther understands baptism as an expression of Christian discipleship. According to him, when making reference to water immersion, baptism “signifies that the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”³¹

We notice here that baptism, in Luther’s view, is not restricted to an isolated act, when performing the same, but that it has to do with the whole of the everyday Christian life.

Luther also affirms the important [relationship] between faith, word of promise, and baptism. For him: “it is not baptism that justifies or benefits anyone, but it is faith in the word of promise to which baptism is added. This faith justifies, and fulfills that which baptism signifies... The sacraments, on the contrary, are not fulfilled when they are taking place, but when they are being believed” (Babylonian Captivity, 1520).³²

In this context, it is important to remember that for Luther faith is not primarily a human act but something that springs from the action of the Holy Spirit upon the announcement of the Word of God, without, however, existentially excluding the human being of his or her participation. In this regard it is remarkable how often [the phrase] “for me” appears in the explanation of the Apostles’ Creed in the Small Catechism. Luther interprets it in his Commentary on Galatians in the following manner: “Read the words ‘me’ and ‘for me’ with great emphasis, and get used to accepting them and applying them to

³¹ BC 360. TRANSLATOR’S NOTE: The Portuguese original does not include the word “forever.”

³² EDITOR’S NOTE: Martin Luther, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church,” in *Luther’s Works*, American Edition, 55 vols., eds. J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann (St. Louis and Philadelphia: Concordia and Fortress, 1955ff.), 36:66. Further citations from *Luther’s Works* will be noted as LW.

yourself with secure faith. The Words ‘our,’ ‘us,’ and ‘for us’ should be written with golden letters—the man who does not believe in them is no Christian”³³ (1535).

If this were not so, how should we understand the fact that Luther speaks of faith as something alive and unshakable in God’s grace?

As we can see, it is impossible to understand properly what baptism means, in Luther’s view, by mainly stressing the act (rite).³⁴ The main and deeper meaning of baptism pervades all Christian existence, clearly linking the word of promise, baptism, faith, and the grace of God. Even Luther reminds us in his book “The Babylonian Captivity,” using the criteria of “Scripture alone and Christ alone,” that “if I were to speak according to the usage of the Scriptures, I should have only one single sacrament, but with three sacramental signs”³⁵ (baptism, repentance, and communion). Thus you can conclude that, for Luther, Jesus Christ is the sacrament of salvation par excellence.

Prof. Dr. Walter Altmann, on this same subject, highlights that “correlation between promise and faith was decisive, and he [Luther] can even claim that eventually one could obtain salvation without the sacrament, by faith and promise, but never the other way around, i.e., through the sacrament, without the promise and faith” (*Lutero e Libertação* [“Luther and Liberation”], p. 143, 1994).³⁶

Also the former Presiding Pastor of the IECLB, Dr. Gottfried Brakemeier, points in this direction, stating that “just as there is an intrinsic relationship between baptism and preaching, baptism and faith cannot be separated; because the act of God requires man’s response. A gift from God must be accepted, or else it is rejected. Anyway, there is no salvation for a person except by faith. Hence no baptism provides salvation independent of faith” (*Teses referentes à compreensão e prática do batismo—Enfoques Bíblicos* [“Theses concerning the Understanding and Practice of Baptism—Biblical Approaches”], p. 54, 1980).

Finally, we refer also to Luther’s pastoral tact regarding the practice of baptism. The reformer expressed his pastoral experience gained in long years of ministry in the church in Wittenberg. We mention this because we think there is a lack of such sensitivity in ministry. We refer to a counsel Luther gave a woman surprised by the premature birth of her son, who gave him an emergency baptism.³⁷ Lutheran historian Franz Lau mentions this advice of Luther’s and comments it as follows: “Could Luther have given the questionable advice that a mother baptize her fragile child even without witnesses, but that if she managed to save the

³³ TRANSLATOR’S NOTE: The quotation here is translated according to what is given in the Portuguese. The first sentence can be found in the Galatians commentary, but what follows in the Portuguese does not correspond to what is found in the Luther text: “Therefore read these words ‘me’ and ‘for me’ with great emphasis, and accustom yourself to accepting this ‘me’ with a sure faith and applying it to yourself. Do not doubt that you belong to the number of those who speak this ‘me.’” LW 26:179.

³⁴ TRANSLATOR’S NOTE: This translation deliberately reflects the original’s ambiguity.

³⁵ LW 36:18.

³⁶ EDITOR’S NOTE: An abridged version of Altmann’s book exists in English: *Luther and Liberation: A Latin American Perspective*, trans. Mary M. Solberg (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992). However, since it is abridged, it does not contain the full quotes cited here and later in this document; thus, the translations are made directly from the Portuguese original.

³⁷ TRANSLATOR’S NOTE: The original does not make clear who administered this baptism.

child, she deprive it of baptism in order to baptize it publicly? For all the above, the theologian Luther was able to do it, because for him the prohibition of rebaptism is not ontologically grounded but based on the irrevocability of the God's unique promise. But also Luther as a shepherd of souls was able to speak this way, because he never would deprive a person of his comfort, indulging in despair, especially if her faith were weak" (Luther-Jahrbuch XXV [1958], pp. 137ff³⁸).

3. Open questions

1.1 How does the IECLB evaluate its baptismal practice?

Although the confessional writings teach the necessity of the *right administration of the sacraments*, it is no secret that in recent decades there has been serious questioning about the practice of baptism in the IECLB. We quote here the evaluation by the former professor of systematic theology, Dr. Walter Altmann: "Even though we may criticize rebaptism or even adult baptism as an exclusive practice of the Christian community, it is clear that infant baptism would never have been created by Luther, from his theological premises, if it were not already common practice in the church. At bottom, its meaning remains only within a 'Christian' family and community, or even socially in a Christian environment. Even in the Large Catechism, where Luther defended the legitimacy of infant baptism, asserting that 'my faith does not make up baptism, but receives baptism,' which is the work of God, the reformer needs to ensure that the works of God, which are saving and necessary for salvation, do not exclude faith but require it, because without faith they could not be grasped. It follows, at least in the context of pluralism with regard to religious practices and beliefs, that the arguments Luther was forced to employ to justify the practice of baptism of infants (mainly that the infants themselves could have faith) all have a certain degree of artificiality. Nevertheless, it must be granted that faith also cannot be reduced to a mere intellectual assent, by which faith would become dependent on human rational understanding."

In an environment of indifferentism, religious disengagement, and secular pluralism, which characterizes current society, the indiscriminate practice of baptism of infants assumes contours of deep perversion. It becomes an imposition on persons unable to resist by other people who have no interest in living their own baptism. This is what happens when we baptize indiscriminately, when asked to do it—by people who do not ask it for themselves, but for their children or godchildren. The fact that in many congregations the only criterion for refusal to baptize is non-payment of the church financial contribution only deepens the perversion.

"Consequently, in ecumenical dialogue the need has been stressed for churches that baptize infants not to do it indiscriminately and take "more seriously their responsibility to promote a mature commitment to Christ, for all children baptized." Little has been done in this respect, and virtually nothing to prevent the practice of indiscriminate baptism. Why? Certainly not for mere unwillingness, because churches usually want active members. My suspicion is that the baptism of infants is the most effective way to keep members bound to

³⁸ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: No translator of the original German text is mentioned.

the institutional church when they already are quite indifferent” (*Lutero e Libertação*, pp. 151–152, 1994).

In this text the indiscriminate practice of baptism of infants is considered a “*profound perversion*” and a coercion to maintain ecclesiastical institutional connections. Therefore we ask: Can the sacrament thus given be taken as “rightly administered”?

From such harsh criticism an unprejudiced reader would expect that its author, while exercising the IECLB presidency, would take urgent measures to correct this “*profound perversion*.” But we don’t see it happening! What has changed: the practice of baptism in the congregations or the conviction of Altmann, the theologian?

Similar criticism has been published in the journal *Estudos Teológicos* [Theological Studies]. Among the authors we find other teachers, like Malschitzky, Hüffmeier, and Brakemeier. Professor Albérico Baeske, who is considered an expert on Luther, goes further. In his theses about the understanding of baptism in Luther he states, under the title *Ninguém deve ser batizado sem fé própria* [“No one should be baptized without his or her own faith”] (undated): “We know that we are saved by faith alone, as the New Testament says everywhere, and Martin Luther explains in hundreds of sermons. Not even the Lord’s Supper nor baptism will save us, but only faith: ‘He that believes and is baptized shall be saved,’ we read in the Gospel according to Mark (16:16). On this Luther teaches: “One does not say: ‘The righteous will live from sacrament,’ but ‘from his faith.’ For it is not the sacrament but faith in it that gives life and justifies, since many take the sacrament and are not vivified nor made believers. However, the one who believes is a believer and lives. This is what is meant in Christ’s statement in the last chapter of the Gospel according to Mark (16:16): ‘He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.’ Faith is placed before baptism, for where there is no faith, baptism is worthless, as the text continues: ‘but he who does not believe is condemned’—even if he had been baptized.”

Further on Baeske says, quoting Luther: “Baptism does not help anyone, and should not be given to anyone, unless he himself believes, and no one should be baptized without his own faith... Also the excuse that children are baptized on the basis of their future faith is worth nothing for when they are grown up. Faith must be present before or during baptism, otherwise the child will not get rid of the devil and sin.”

This same statement is also highlighted by Dr. Gottfried Brakemeier in *Enfoques Bíblicos* (p. 60, 1980). Baeske goes on quoting Luther: “He who baptizes also praises the fact that the child would be born again, that its sins are forgiven, it is free from the devil... which should all be false where there was no faith, and it would be better not to baptize children, instead of playing around and doing ‘magic’ with God’s word and sacrament, as if he were an idol or a fool.”

These statements by opinion makers within the IECLB leave no questions about a practice which is frankly contrary to the best of biblical and Lutheran teaching. We understand their words as a refutation or rejection of the practice of infant baptism for lack of biblical and confessional support.

What does the IECLB governing body say about such a severe condemnation of its practices by theology professors who anchor their arguments in Scripture and in Luther's writings? What then is the "right administration of the sacraments"?

1.2 What shall we do with the challenges on the mission fronts?

The IECLB Missionary Action Plan (PAMI) challenges congregations to break their ethnic, cultural, and racial boundaries... in a conscious and intentional missionary advance. This challenge, however, puts our church's missionary work in urban outskirts as well as in the new missionary fronts throughout Brazil, facing both the reigning syncretism where people have gone through various baptismal rites and indifferent or hostile secularism.

As these people hear and accept the gospel and become assured in it, they themselves ask for baptism as a visible signal of rupture from their pacts with alien beliefs contrary to the Christian faith. They need and seek biblical and confessional responses signifying the change of belonging and Lordship in their lives, and their entry into the church. It is not enough to rely on rites administered to them in the past, which they have denied, which mean nothing to them anymore. It is necessary to administer Christian baptism to them correctly as a sign of dying to the old man and being born again in Christ to newness of life (Romans 6).

Considering the serious inconsistencies in our practices and also in the diffuse understanding behind them, why should the baptism of those coming from syncretism who come to faith be so much more inconsistent?

In Roman Catholicism there are also syncretistic baptism practices incompatible with right doctrine: in the baptismal act, the child is consecrated to Mary (as co-redeemer! Cf. CNBB site) or to the patron saint, the saint of the day, etc. *A fé para adultos—O Novo Catecismo* ["Faith for adults—The New Catechism"] states about infant baptism: "It is in baptism that the child officially gets its name, the name of a saint under whose imploring protection we place the child. Not because the grace of Christ is not sufficient, but because Christ loves to come to us through the community, the church, also the church already in glory" (Editora Herder, p. 292). According to the conclusions of the IECLB Seminar in 1998 in Rodeio 12, Santa Catarina, such a practice also cannot be accepted as the right administration of Christian baptism. Moreover, in spite of all the ecumenical fanfare, the Roman Catholic church in Brazil, at the discretion of the priest or bishop, may require a new baptism of a Lutheran Protestant as a condition for the performance of a religious marriage [with a Catholic spouse]. The farther north in Brazil, the more this position prevails, anchored in Catholic canon law!

Who are the excluded ones?

In several policy documents, the IECLB in recent years has expressed its rejection of the practice of "rebaptism" as excluding the person from the Lutheran denomination, stating, "The practice of rebaptism violates directly the core of the faith, the regulations and the guidance documents of the IECLB, and is therefore equivalent to opting out of the confessional basis of the IECLB" (Unity: Context and IECLB Identity, Item 11).

What does that mean?

Does it mean that in the IECLB there is no room for anyone who was "rebaptized," because this practice excludes the person from Lutheran confessionality, according to the São

Leopoldo Council document? How will the IECLB identify these members? Of course everyone who entered the IECLB coming from Pentecostal, Neo-Pentecostal, and Baptist churches in general, as well as from others who have gone through this practice—should they be excluded? We must remember that the IECLB has even admitted pastors coming from the Baptist and the Pentecostal church: were they asked if they have gone through “rebaptism”?

In conclusion we want to assure that, in our pastoral practice, we always respect the baptism of those who were rightly baptized. We only administer the sacrament of baptism to adults who have not been baptized or who have profound questions about their right baptism which cause them conflicts of soul and conscience, so as not to deprive them of the consolation that God promises by the visible sign! We believe that this does not affront the Lutheran confessionality and normative documents, since they also prioritize the consolation of the afflicted and strengthening of their faith! In the cases practiced, we understand that it was a “rightly administered” baptism, not a rebaptism.

If in this process we have done any wrong, should it weigh more on the scale of theological and confessional judgment than the other “wicked” practices denounced by eminent IECLB theologians?

Thus one can see the subject of Christian baptism is broad and complex. We believe it is appropriate to devote more time to study its rationale and its practices in the IECLB. And it does not seem wise to try to solve a problem of such magnitude with unilateral “disciplinary” procedures. Therefore we expect that the continuation of this reflection process will be guided by the dialogue principles stated in the Council document, hoping that we will be treated with fairness and respect. We mention this expectation because, discontented, we have witnessed the Renewal Movement being treated on several occasions as the only one to threaten the confessional integrity of the IECLB. Here we mention the unfair way in which our reasoning in the “Dialogue on Congregational Issues” has been used, prepared at the suggestion of the IECLB Presidency as a proposal of a dialogue agenda between the church leadership and the Renewal Movement. However, this dialogue agenda was referred to as a “Theological Stance” and interpreted as such by the theological advisors convened. This type of treatment creates suspicions about the willingness for dialogue.

Moreover, we do not understand why ethical issues are not treated the same way, considering the emphasis given to the Ten Commandments in our denomination’s enshrined normative document, the Small Catechism. Why, for example, are sins against the Sixth Commandment (Thou shalt not commit adultery) and the Seventh Commandment (Thou shalt not steal) treated as “venial” misdeeds that do not infringe upon normative IECLB documents? Nor that they threaten confessionality, although causing scandals and misappropriations in congregations?

We also cannot help but wonder whether involvement in so-called “ecumenical” celebrations (for example, a Synodical pastor in clergy apparel at an explicitly multi-religious celebration, the 80th anniversary of the *Folha de S. Paulo* newspaper), or encouraging the practice of Zen meditation (by a theological adviser) and publications like the LWF’s *Espiritismo e Espiritualismo: desafios para a América Latina* [“Spiritism and Spiritualism:

Challenges for Latin America”], pp. 171ff)—do they not relativize the exclusivity of Jesus Christ’s Lordship [stated in] the normative documents and reaffirmed by the Council?

So we believe. God help us to be faithful to the Gospel.

Fraternally,

Luis Henrique Scheidt

Paulo Gilberto Böhm

Mário Cezar Reis da Silveira

João Daniel Gasperin da Silva

Celso Wentz

IX. LETTER BY THE PRESIDING PASTOR OF THE IECLB, N° 91473/04, TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE SPIRITUAL RENEWAL MOVEMENT (CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT) IN THE IECLB

(Porto Alegre, 17 December 2004)

Dear Brethren:

The regular meeting of the Church Council Board yesterday, 16 December, dealt again with the relations between the Charismatic Movement and the IECLB, especially the letters exchanged on 14 December between the IECLB Presidency (Presiding Pastor Walter Altmann and Advisor to the Presiding Pastor, Dr. Carlos G. Bock) and representatives of the Renewal Movement (“Charismatic Movement”), our colleagues Paulo Böhm and Mario Silveira. After examining the matter, the Board decided that the Charismatic Movement should deliver in writing by 28 January 2005 its response to the letter received, specifically on topic 8, which reads:

“8. We regret that the Charismatic Movement has decided, without consultation with the constituted IECLB bodies or even communicating with them, to adopt a different baptismal theology and a different baptismal practice, starting to practice “baptism in the waters” on people who have previously been baptized, both in the IECLB and in other churches. Pastors who practice it are seriously violating their ordination vows delivered before the congregation and before God himself. We hope this practice will be reviewed and immediately suspended. We ask the Charismatic Movement to express clearly that it accepts and will comply with the confessional basis of the IECLB and its normative and guiding documents in this regard.”

The Church Council Board shall review the response and compliance or non-compliance with the request made on the topic mentioned at its next regular meeting on 3 February 2005. The IECLB will also analyze the letter received from representatives of the Renewal Movement.

I wish that in this Christmas the peace of the Christ Child be with you all.

Fraternally,

Walter Altmann, Presiding Pastor

Copy to: Chairman of the Church Council, Luiz Artur Eichholz

Correspondence and Documents from 2005 and 2006

I. LETTER FROM LUIZ H. SCHEIDT TO THE PRESIDING PASTOR OF THE IECLB, PR. DR. WALTER ALTMANN

(Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, 28 January 2005)

Dear Presiding Pastor,

In response to your correspondence dated 17 December 2004 we have the following to say:

1. At the end of our dialogue meeting 26 November 2004, it was agreed that we would write a statement reflecting our theological and pastoral concept around the subject of baptism in its relationship to the normative and guiding documents for the confessional basis of the IECLB. The request was that this document be at the General Secretariat until 14 December, so it could be assessed at the Church Council meeting that was to be held on 16 December 2004.

2. We regret that your mail appeals to a final position on our part at the expense of the dialogue initiated on 26 November. Moreover, in view of that dialogue developed so far, we understand that in our “Open Letter” we have responded affirmatively to the spirit of Lutheran confessionality.

3. Having written the “Open Letter” with the specific purpose of having it assessed by our church’s Council at its meeting of last 16 December (which was not done, as expressed in your letter), we are waiting for the response to our paper as the next step in continuing the dialogue.

In the expectation that the Spirit of God lead us to a successful conclusion, fraternally,

Luiz H. Scheidt

II. LETTER FROM THE PRESIDING PASTOR OF THE IECLB, N° 93381/05, TO PR. LUIZ H. SCHEIDT, SUMARÉ, SÃO PAULO
(Porto Alegre, 3 February 2005)

Subject: the IECLB's Relations with the Charismatic Movement (CM), also called the Renewal Movement
Re: Your letter of 28/01/2005 (by email)

Dear colleague,

I acknowledge receiving the above email and also share your expectation that “the Spirit of God lead us to a successful conclusion” in the relations between the IECLB and CM. I am, however, astonished and regret the amount of misunderstandings that your writing reveals (or should they not be misunderstandings?).

1. Contrary to what you stated in section 1 of your email, what we agreed consensually in the dialogue of 26/11/2004 was that both parties, the IECLB Directorate and the CM, exchange a document: “The Presidency will write to the CM, trying to interpret what the documents (especially the conciliar document [about Unity]) state. On behalf of the CM, a document will also be written, expressing how [the CM] receive the documents of the church.” (Cf. notes of the meeting, shared among all participants.) This happened on 14 December, and on that occasion the CM was invited to attend the meeting of the Church Council Board on the 16th (not of the full Council).

2. The CM chose not to accept the invitation, arguing that time was too short to examine the document submitted by the IECLB leadership. How can the CM now accuse the Church Council Board of not evaluating the “Open Letter” delivered by the CM, if the CM itself abstained from evaluating the letter delivered by the church's governing body, not only staying away from the meeting on 16/12/2004, but also not taking note of it until the deadline of 28/01/2005? Were forty-five days insufficient? However, as made explicit in my letter of 17/12/2004, the Church Council Board did preliminarily assess the issue, including the correspondence received. Due to the volume of other subjects and in face of the non-attendance of the CM representatives, it established a new deadline for it to answer the letter from the IECLB. Through my letter, dear brethren, you were also told that “the IECLB will equally consider the letter received from the Renewal Movement representatives.”

3. Your letter also states that my letter called for a “final position of our side on the dialogue initiated on 26 November.” Nowhere has it been stated that the Directorate of the IECLB does not want to talk about controversial issues regarding the practice and doctrine of the CM. This dialogue can be of benefit not only to the CM but to the whole of the IECLB. However, rather than a “final position,” what the Church Council Board expects is that the starting point of this dialogue be made clear, namely the IECLB's confessionality, grounded in Scripture, according to its normative and guiding documents. If the CM cannot or does not want to commit to it (incidentally, this commitment is one that the IECLB's workers assume on their ordination), what is the nature of the dialogue, and what consequences should both parties draw from it? Or does the CM wish the church leadership to adopt measures justifying

those steps that [the CM] has already adopted? On the other hand, we respect the CM's theological conviction; however, all dialogue is truncated if a shadow continually hovers over it, that it could be a protective cloak for continuing practices adopted unilaterally³⁹ without dialogue with the IECLB nor even a notification to it. For a promising continued dialogue, this knot should be untied, but the IECLB has no way to untie it, since it depends entirely on decisions taken by the CM itself.

4. The CM's denial in replying to the letter from the IECLB, dated 14/12/2004 (which met the CM's own request at the meeting of 26 November!), is all the more disappointing by the fact that the IECLB letter in no way contains only an invitation to the CM to reconsider its position taken in this matter; instead, it was a serious attempt to take a stance on the points and proposals regarding baptism raised by the Renewal Movement in its correspondence last June and in the meeting of 26 November. What is the point of the CM requesting a letter if it does not intend to answer it? Or should the CM no longer have any statement whatsoever to present regarding these points, merely hoping the IECLB will confirm the CM's baptismal practice and theology? Could this be considered a dialogue?

5. However, in the hope that dialogue can still be restored on the basis of the IECLB's confessionality, the IECLB governing body, despite not having received the requested communiqué from the CM regarding the IECLB letter of 14 December, is responding to your letter of 14 December, through the Presidency, in substance as well as regarding the main topics and arguments contained in the statements received from the CM and that have been circulated on internet. Through a communiqué to congregations, synods, and the IECLB's workers, departments, and institutions, we are also providing over the internet, for information and study, the correspondence between [the IECLB and the CM] as well as the position of the Presidency.

6. The Church Council Board, which met today, has decided not to establish new deadlines for the expected response of the CM. The CM must decide whether to [respond] or not, and whether they want thus to help pave the way for resuming dialogue or not. The Presidency remains open to both. However, the Board also decided that the matter be referred, together with the data available so far, to the March meetings of the Presidency, with Synod Pastors and the full Church Council; these instances will decide the steps they deem appropriate.

In Christ, who is the path, the truth and the life, fraternally,

Walter Altmann, Presiding Pastor

Cc: Congregations, Synods, members of the Church Council, church workers, departments, institutions

³⁹ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: What the "protective cloak" might be is not clear in the original. Maybe the author's intention is to say that continuing dialogue should not imply that it legitimizes the challenged practices of CM.

III. LETTER FROM THE PRESIDING PASTOR OF THE IECLB, N° 93382/05, TO THE PARISHES, CONGREGATIONS, SYNODS, MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH COUNCIL, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, IECLB DEPARTMENTS, SECTORS, AND CHURCH WORKERS
(Porto Alegre, 3 February 2005)

Communiqué about continuing the dialogue with the Charismatic Movement (CM)

Dear sisters and brothers:

The Old Testament's watchword for today renews our hope also in the midst of pain: "I will turn their mourning into joy" (Jeremiah 31:13). In this conviction, I update the information posted in the Pastoral Letter of 27 November about dialogue with the Charismatic Movement (CM), also called the Renewal Movement. Unfortunately, dialogue has meanwhile become even more difficult.

As agreed at the meeting of 26 November, representatives of the IECLB Presidency and the CM exchanged on 14 December the letters they had agreed to draft, presenting the stances and proposals of both parties, particularly with regard to the subject baptism/rebaptism. These letters were promptly posted on the IECLB site. On that occasion the CM representatives were invited to join the Church Council Board meeting on 16 November. The CM representatives, however, chose not to attend, for lack of time to appraise the letter from the IECLB leadership. The Board then decided to ask for a written position from the CM by 28 January, for consideration at its next meeting on 3 February. At the same time it announced that the IECLB was analyzing the letter from the CM. This information was also made available on the IECLB site.

On 28 January, the IECLB received an email from the CM communicating, *inter alia*, that it was waiting for the church's response to its letter, "as the next step in continuing the dialogue." At its meeting today, the Church Council Board requested the Presidency to write in response to the CM message, to inform them of the decisions made, and to disclose additionally, along with the message received and the response, the position prepared by the Presidency regarding the 14 December Open Letter from the CM. We therefore enclose these documents in this communication for [your] information and study.

Brothers and sisters will see that the Church Council Board now leaves it at the discretion of the CM whether and how it wants to respond to the IECLB letter, delivered on 14 December. The Presidency, in this particular matter, will continue to be open to dialogue. At the same time, the Board is forwarding the matter together with the information presently available to the meetings of the Presidency with the Synod Pastors and the full Church Council, next March, for resolutions and decisions those bodies deem appropriate.

This is undoubtedly a difficult and painful moment in the life of the church. Let us intercede that God may open promising paths ahead.

Fraternally,

Walter Altmann, Presiding Pastor

IV. STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENCY OF THE IECLB, N° 93383/05
(Porto Alegre, 3 February 2005)

Dialogue on Baptism: Statement about the Charismatic Movement's Open Letter, 14/12/2004, and other Communiqués coming from CM Supporters

There is an ongoing and difficult but necessary dialogue between the IECLB and the Charismatic Movement (CM, also called the "Movement of Spiritual Renewal" or simply the "Renewal Movement"). The Open Letter of the CM, and other communiqués coming from CM supporters, which senders generally make widely available through the internet, require a stance to be taken by the IECLB.

This statement is not intended to exhaust the subject in its complexity and should be viewed together with the various communiqués by the Presidency and the letters already posted on the IECLB site, in particular the letter delivered to the CM on 14/12/2004.

Regarding the CM's Open Letter, we recognize as very positive the fact that it presents a biblical foundation and Luther's position with regard to baptism (parts 1 and 2). [Both] could be a promising basis for dialogue. There is relatively little in these sections we would object to. (Regarding the reference in this section to the alleged baptismal practice of the Catholic Church, we will make a remark below.) In the New Testament, the missionary context of the occurrence of baptism is overwhelmingly clear. This relationship is clear, regarding both the gracious action of God and its reference to faith. It also governs Luther's understanding of the sacraments. The Open Letter notes correctly that the IECLB theologians who, from a Lutheran perspective, have written about baptism, all emphasize the relationship between baptism and faith, which in fact corresponds to a continuing emphasis in Luther and which distinguishes it from a magical understanding of baptism, with which he had to contend. Equally positive is the observation contained in the Open Letter that "baptism, in Luther's view, is not restricted to an isolated act, when performing the same, but that it has to do with the whole of the everyday Christian life." Also this [remark in the Open Letter]: "for Luther, Jesus Christ is the sacrament of salvation par excellence."

The Open Letter, however, does not make clear how grace and faith relate in baptism, and here, it seems, lies a fundamental difference in understanding. Ephesians 2:8-9 could have guided this necessary reflection: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." In a letter already posted on the IECLB site in response to a received communiqué, I tried to exposit, in more detail, that faith is not a prerequisite for baptism, but it is [faith] that receives existentially the grace of God. Luther clearly distinguishes between the *effectiveness* that comes from the grace of God, and the *benefit* that occurs through faith. God's grace is always effective, although the baptized person may remain without the benefit of it, if there is no faith. This distinction by Luther always allows and obliges us to supervise for the correct administration of the sacrament but never to become judges of other people's faith. Luther is emphatic in that we always have only exterior elements to judge, but that God, and he alone,

knows the heart (Luke 16:15). More: Luther is convinced that where the Word and Sacraments are, faith is around, even if hidden or externally invisible.

If this distinction were clear in the CM position, the CM could not have proceeded to its considerations in Part 3 (“Open Questions”) the way it did. Moreover, the discrepancy between this part, which deals with the situation of the IECLB and the challenges in its mission, and the previous, which dealt with the New Testament and Luther, is such that it is hard to avoid the impression that they come from different pens. At any rate, conclusions are drawn there that Luther would never have come to and that in no way can be inferred from Scripture.

It would have been understandable and a legitimate theological debate if the CM had concluded that, in this missionary situation (a competitive and syncretistic religious market on the one hand, and secularism on the other), one should recommend so-called “adult baptism” as a preventative against a magical understanding of baptism and its indiscriminate practice. In the dialogue meeting on 26 November, it became clear that the IECLB accepts both infant as well as adult baptism. Moreover, this is expressed clearly in *Nossa Fé—Nossa Vida*. What the IECLB does not agree with, because it clashes with the biblical witness to God’s grace, is rebaptism. The CM, however, wants to go farther than the IECLB, as the Open Letter reveals: “a refutation or rejection of the practice of infant baptism for lack of biblical and confessional support.” The CM argues that for people who come to faith “[i]t is not enough to rely on rites administered to them in the past, which they have denied, which mean nothing to them anymore. It is *necessary to administer Christian baptism to them correctly* as a sign of dying to the old man and being born again in Christ to newness of life (Romans 6)” (my italics). This is not just a striking way for the CM to affirm the *necessity of rebaptism*. It is also impossible to deny more clearly the interpretation of Luther regarding “daily drowning the old man in us,” so clearly mentioned in the previous section but dropped here. For these are two completely opposite things: we either daily drown the old Adam in us, time and again coming back to the baptism performed, and thus to “by grace alone”; or we must administer Christian baptism ever again at each repentance on account of having denied faith due to sin. It would not be “through grace alone” anymore, but by grace *and* my repentance; it would be partially by grace, partially by faith. (Somebody had asked if faith should not be considered a condition for baptism; in my answering letter, I tried to describe in more detail the relationship between “by grace alone” and “by faith alone.”)

The Open Letter reveals that the CM administers baptism “to adults who have not been baptized *or who have profound questions* about their right baptism which cause them conflicts of soul and conscience, so as not to deprive them of the consolation that God promises by the visible sign!” (my italics, exclamation mark in the original). Unfortunately, this statement disregards God’s action in Baptism, since it presupposes that personal, subjective, “profound questions” about the baptism performed invalidate the promise of God in baptism already made, seeking God’s comfort through a new visible sign of baptism. Now what if new “profound questions” about baptism come up again: should there be a third baptism for new divine consolation? The only true solace in our questions, deep or superficial, is to remind ourselves of and be instructed about God’s fidelity. This promise

already made in baptism remains valid, and thank God I can return to it in faith and in trust when my doubts, my failures, my questions come up. The new baptism would offer only an apparent but illusory consolation because it actually relies on “my faith,” not on God’s promise.

These are the fundamental observations. Let us also deal with some objections or questions:

1. Question: Doesn’t the Catholic Church baptize, in addition to the name of the Triune God, also in the name of Mary or some other saint?

The position of the Catholic Church is very clear with regard to baptism: it is made with water and in the name of the Trinity. It is a concept completely equal to that of the baptism performed in the IECLB. Invocations directed to Mary and the saints in connection with baptism, with which Lutheran theology does not agree, do not annul the validity of such a baptism correctly performed, just as a prayer or possibly wrong address from the doctrinal point of view by a church worker does not invalidate the baptism rightly performed in the IECLB. (This issue I have already tried to address, in great detail, in a letter also published on the IECLB site, in response to a query from various congregations and parishes.)

2. Question: Are there not cases where a [Catholic] priest or even a bishop has required the rebaptism of the Evangelical Lutheran spouse as the condition for performing a sacramental marriage?

Unfortunately, there have been cases like this, much more in the past than today. However, it is important to know that they directly affront the official stance of the Catholic Church itself (cf., again, the letter mentioned in the previous point). Any such case that still might occur should be brought to the appropriate Synod Pastor and even the Presidency to be taken to the authorities of the Catholic Church. Moreover, however, even if it was a customary and official practice of the Catholic Church or another Christian church, this would be no reason [for us] to make the same mistake.

3. Question: Has Martin Luther himself argued that one should not baptize infants?

An email circulated over the internet, from a supporter of the CM, cites Luther as having championed the following in a sermon on Matthew 8: “Since we cannot prove that children can have their own faith (since baptism is a consequence of the death of the old man and the new life with Christ), my advice is that we keep away from this practice the sooner the better, so that the sovereign majesty of God not be taken lightly, thus characterizing mockery or blasphemy against God.” The source in Luther was not indicated, but it was possible to locate the sermon referred to in the extensive works of Luther (WA 17, II, 78–88).⁴⁰ The quoted text is torn from its context and is completely distorted. (How good and essential for the church to have good libraries!) We can discuss the arguments of Luther, but the sermon is, in fact, a strong and extensive defense of infant baptism, correctly understood. According to Luther, faith is not an act of reason but the work of God that he can perform also and especially in little ones and through other persons, in this case both parents and

⁴⁰ EDITOR’S NOTE: Published in English as “Infant Baptism and Faith That Is Not One’s Own,” LW 76:257–266. The quoted section from the email appears to be a conflation of several parts of the Luther sermon.

godparents and the congregation (just like the paralytic servant was healed by Jesus through the faith of the centurion, Matthew 8:13). Jesus himself said that no one should prevent children from reaching him because theirs is “the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14 and parallels). The kingdom of God can only be received by grace through faith, because if it were not so, some would receive the kingdom of God through faith, whereas others (children) without faith. This would invalidate the “faith alone.”

But what about that phrase quoted in Luther, is it not there? What happens is that before developing his understanding of infant baptism, Luther countered two misconceptions he considered to be false. The first is the magical understanding, divorced from faith, which existed then in Catholicism. The second, he said, is the understanding of the Waldensian movement, partially correct when it states that baptism should be accompanied by faith, but mistaken when they assumed that children could not have faith, though even then they continued baptizing children. Luther then argues: “If we cannot answer this question better and prove that young children themselves believe and have their own faith, then it is my sincere counsel and judgment that...”⁴¹ That is, the citation of Luther in the email that circulated via the internet omitted the proviso “if we cannot answer this question better.” But Luther had another answer he deemed the right one, and the sermon goes on to explain this conception extensively, defending infant baptism. Totally inappropriate and pure invention it is therefore to state in that email that “Luther himself at the beginning of the Reformation, before being pressed back, had this vision” that one should not baptize children. Incidentally, the sermon is not even from the beginning of the Reformation, but from 1525.

On the other hand, the possible advice of Luther, mentioned in the Open Letter of the CM, towards a rebaptism for a child that, having been born prematurely, could have been baptized in an emergency by its own mother, attests to Luther’s sensitivity to borderline situations. But it cannot be transformed into a rule and clearly this was not done by Luther himself.

4. Question: Didn’t the “professor of systematic theology, Dr. Walter Altmann” (as the Open Letter stresses with unnecessary irony), defend the same, according to the lengthy quotation displayed in the Open Letter?

Indeed in the quoted text I strongly criticize the practice of indiscriminate infant baptism. However, even though the author of the email quoted above is excused because he probably did not have access to Luther’s original text and was based on another author who distorted Luther, my book is perfectly available and was quoted directly by the authors of the Open Letter. Now, since they have decided to quote me extensively, why did they omit the lines preceding? These lines say: “On the theological premise that baptism is, above all, a manifestation of God’s grace, the repetition of baptism is clearly an abuse that raises questions about this preponderance of grace within the promise. In Anabaptist practice, baptism becomes clearly a human work even if it constitutes the first deed of loyalty of those who have come to faith through grace. The fundamental dimension of the free promise is denied” (*Luther and Liberation*, p. 151).

⁴¹ LW 76:261.

Why did the CM omit this statement? Adequately reproducing the position of the one whom it cites is not only a prerequisite of all good research but also an attitude of indispensable ethical correctness. It is very grave deliberately to distort the positions of others. I criticized in my book the indiscriminate baptism of infants, which is why the documents the IECLB also encourage careful baptismal instruction. But I clearly rejected any rebaptism, suggesting, instead of imposing adult baptism, that parents choose to delay the baptism of their children till when they themselves opt [to receive it].

Also “while exercising the IECLB presidency” (again gratuitous irony!), I believe that infant baptism should not be an indiscriminate practice, and that the church must engage in serious and intense instruction in the meaning of baptism and the importance of faith in personal, family, and community life, recognizing as legitimate the choice of parents not to bring their children to baptism, but also respecting the decision of others to bring their children to baptism. We must always, in regard to baptism, speak to the consciences of the people, highlighting the significance and seriousness of baptism, but we must resist the terrible temptation to establish ourselves as judges of the faith of others, which role belongs only to God, who knows every heart. So, therefore, we must always fully respect baptism correctly done at any age or any condition in which it has taken place.

5. Question: Why give so much importance to baptism, since there are so many other even more important matters?

The Open Letter begins by saying that the CM would like to address the following issues, stressing that it should be “Baptism in the Holy Spirit, Spiritual Gifts, Spiritual Battle, Baptism, (Macro-)Ecumenism and Creation of Alternative Communities (in this order).” Several isolated statements from CM supporters criticize the church for giving so much importance to the issue of baptism, when there were other more important matters. (One email even questions why the IECLB should be entitled to insist on dialogue about baptism while the CM was proposing other topics as priorities!) Now, even though we do not want to belittle the importance of dialogue on the issues mentioned by the CM alongside other issues we might add, one need not know much about religion and theology in order to realize that the agenda mentioned in the Open Letter, particularly the first topic (hence the most important or pressing to CM), did not exactly come from a tradition of Lutheran confessionality but from the Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal world.

Couldn't the CM at least agree that the word and sacraments make up the core of the gospel, where it is crucial to have a consensus (cf. CA VII)? Could we really relegate baptism to a secondary level? The amount of emails that belittle baptism is disturbing. Where does the theology reflecting these statements come from? Seen from another angle, however, there is a blatant contradiction in the argument of the CM. If the issue of baptism really were something so minor for CM, it would never have introduced such a drastic change in its practice, nor would it now be so difficult to undo its unilateral decision of introducing a new practice in congregational life.

6. Question: Are there no other matters just as important, or more important than baptism, particularly in the area of ethics and in relation to macro-ecumenism, which are

being treated as if they were “venial” and to which the church does not pay the same attention?

We have never said the church has no other problems besides baptism, or in sectors other than the CM. Contrary to what is often presumed, the IECLB has been engaged in various ways in many issues, in many cases even in secrecy due to the nature of the issues. Some of the issues are real problems. Others are complex issues on which the church must further develop its position more clearly. Still others legitimately allow a variety of positions. In the issue at hand with the CM there are, however, two particular facets. One is that the sacraments, by definition, are at the center of confessionality, being therefore of the utmost priority. The other is that we are not dealing simply with behavior or practices assumed individually by one person or another, but with the attitude of a whole group or movement characterized by a doctrine and practice divergent from the Lutheran confessional basis.

The CM mentions, for example, the existence of adultery cases. Obviously, adultery is a violation of the Sixth Commandment. Still, individual cases of adultery are one thing. Quite a different one would be establishing a movement within the IECLB programmatically introducing adultery and defending its biblical legitimacy. One case would be personal sins, the other would imply a real threat to the church’s confessionality. The church shall deal with both cases in different ways.

7. Question: The IECLB has received as members and even as pastors people from other churches, in which they had been rebaptized. How come it could it receive them? Or else how will it now exclude them from the church?

Now, this question contains a fallacious argument. The IECLB, when receiving people from other churches as members, is not adopting the doctrine and practice of these other churches, but rather it is the people opting for the IECLB who also opt for its confessionality. In the case of a person being baptized more than once, the IECLB obviously does not recognize the last baptism performed, but the first one correctly performed. And whoever coming from another church is accepted as an IECLB worker has already accepted its confessionality and makes a commitment to it, just as all the other church workers do. Furthermore, when the *Documento da Unidade* [Unity Document] states that “[t]he practice of rebaptism... is therefore equivalent to opting out of the confessional basis of the IECLB,” this does not mean that all people will simply be expelled from the IECLB.

Toward all these people there is a pastoral and catechetical duty of being sensitive to the situations that led to “rebaptism” and envisaging how to instruct them in the evangelical doctrine of the Lutheran confession. In this sense, the letter of Pastor Oziel Oliveira Campos to a person who wanted to be rebaptized is exemplary (letter published on the IECLB site). Also from workers who have adopted the practice of rebaptism, the posture will first of all be pastoral and catechetical. However, by the commitment to confessional integrity that every church worker assumes at his ordination, the doctrinal divergence in the central issues of the faith cannot be accepted as “normal” but rather must be overcome, or removal from ministerial function in the IECLB shall occur.

8. Question: Doesn't the CM represent a return to the practice of the early church and biblical testimony, while the IECLB would be "only" interested in applying regulations, based on its tradition?

Several statements from CM supporters are vehement in this accusation. One is reminded that, according to Luther, councils may err, and adds that they also may be "manipulated." We must obviously respect the beliefs sustaining that kind of position, but at the same time we must reject, with equal vehemence, the insinuations that the IECLB has been arbitrary and despotic. Already at the outset of this Presidency, and throughout these two years, we have received information about the practice of rebaptism, including rebaptisms the IECLB workers have been subjected to. Should we infer that they also had "profound questions" about their previously received baptism? Nevertheless we have sought the path of dialogue; however, we want to overcome the problem created by these attitudes and conceptions. The unrest in the congregations has been considerable, as much as the demand that the church assert its confessionality.

In this context, the adoption of the Unity Document by the Church Council was an absolutely transparent process. All delegates were well aware of what they were voting. The document represents their will, and its observance is a commitment by the Directorate of the church. In this context, we also reject the claim of the Open Letter that the rationale of the CM's "Dialogue on Congregational Issues" (June 2004), the result of a request from the Presidency, has been used "unfairly" by the IECLB and its Directorate. When its position was asked for, it was expressly said that it would be presented to the Church Council in the context of the report on the National Forum on Unity last May. However, although the document had not been such as to reassure the Church Council, the latter acted prudently and took it seriously for dialogue. It then asked the Presidency to obtain opinions on the document received, and this request was definitely made with a view toward gaining an appreciation from other people about the proposals and remarks received.

As a result of the deliberations, for example, the Presidency and the Church Council indicated, both orally and in writing, that they are willing and determined that the IECLB adopt a liturgical practice of "reaffirmation of baptismal vows," following, in principle, the proposal contained in the document "Dialogue on Congregational Issues." Why does the CM not mention this anymore? Why prefer to declare that it was treated unfairly? Or was, in fact, the decisive aspect for the CM the complement "by repeating the rite with water," not the reaffirmation of baptism, [thus] being allowed to abandon its own proposal when the IECLB took it up for serious study and implementation?

Many other issues have arisen in the communiqués surrounding this issue. Thus, the subject does not end here. It is quite appropriate that the IECLB in its congregations devote themselves to an intense study of baptism. *Nossa Fé—Nossa Vida* is a good tool for this. The Large and Small Catechisms of Luther are even more relevant. This study may be a positive result of internal controversy. Equally important is that church workers address more often and in greater depth the subject of baptism in their preaching.

Finally, we must stress this is a position regarding the Open Letter from the CM and other statements of CM supporters, not a treatise on baptism. Quite briefly the position of the

IECLB is contained in a letter delivered to the Charismatic Movement on last 14 December and posted on the IECLB site. There is summarized the IECLB position and how it believes dialogue with the CM can have positive results.

Walter Altmann, Presiding Pastor

V. THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT'S RESPONSE TO THE IECLB'S NO. 93383/05
(Rua Senhor dos Passos, 202 Porto Alegre, Rio Grande do Sul, 12 March 2005)

Dear Brethren,

We would like to greet you with the words of Paul in Romans 15:5–6: “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Dear brothers, it is our sincere desire that we find ways of consensus on the issues surrounding the theology and practice of Christian baptism within our church. It is in this spirit that we react to the last letter from the Presiding Pastor addressed to the Charismatic Movement, no. 93383/05.

First, we rejoice in the fact that we have obtained sufficient consensus for continuing dialogue regarding the biblical foundation as well as the understanding of Luther's position around the theme of baptism. On the other hand, we regret that some sentences in our text have been interpreted by the Presiding Pastor as “unnecessary irony.” Forgive us such incorrectness! That was not our intention.

We have, however, some doubts on the interpretation of the document written by the Presiding Pastor, especially in the third part of his letter when referring to our pastoral practice. In this regard we have the following to say:

1. The letter states there is a clear contradiction between items 1 and 2 of our position in relation to the third. It even suggests that this contradiction is due to the fact that they stem from different pens. The signatures at the end of our letter show diversity in the formulation of the final text. Moreover, we received many comments from workers and leaders in the IECLB that allowed us to enhance our argument. That said, we reaffirm there is no contradiction in our position. Instead, there is a different interpretation of what is to be a correct administration of baptism. Your argument insists that a correct baptism largely consists in performing the rite where water and the invocation of the Triune God is present. However, according to Luther, the validity of baptism depends on the word being linked to the water. The correct administration of baptism depends on the word proclaimed over the water, and not simply [on the fact that] it was done in the name of the Trinity. Thus, valid baptism, in Luther, is one that clearly includes the proclamation of the word of promise, the water, and the invocation of the Triune God. Mere invocation of the Trinity when performing it is not sufficient for the validity of baptism. Even if such baptism has been performed during a service or mass, where certainly the word of God was proclaimed in preaching (and even though the preacher may have stumbled in his talk, as you say in your letter), this [word

of God] is not sufficient in order to validate a baptism. Otherwise invoking the Trinity during the baptismal act would not be necessary either, since such invocation certainly has been proclaimed at the beginning of the service or mass. According to Luther, without the audible word of promise, a baptismal rite is no baptism. For him it is nothing more than a bath-keeper's baptism. "I therefore admonish you again that these two, the Word and the water, must by no means be separated from each other. For where the Word is separated from the water, the water is no different from the water that the maid uses for cooking and could indeed be called a bath-keeper's baptism" ([Large Catechism,] Book of Concord).⁴² Word and baptismal rite are therefore not comparable. The second is dependent upon the former.

2. It is important to stress that Luther makes a pedagogical distinction between ritual baptism and spiritual baptism. In ritual baptism the body is sunk into the water, which is the visible expression of the real or spiritual baptism, when the soul is immersed in Christ, in his death and resurrection, through the Holy Spirit. Although similar, they are distinct in their purpose. One announces resurrection of the body, the other [the resurrection] of the soul. In the Large Catechism he says: "This is the reason why these two things are done in baptism; the body has water poured over it, because all it can receive is the water, and in addition the Word is spoken so that the soul may receive it" (Book of Concord, The Large Catechism).⁴³ Now if faith comes from the proclaimed word, Luther makes a distinction between what happens visibly and what happens spiritually. For him it is not the body that embraces the word, but the soul; thus one can deduce that ritual baptism cannot save but rather the faith that receives the announced grace. Luther goes on to say: "But our signs or sacraments, as well as those of the fathers, have attached to them a word of promise which requires faith, and they cannot be fulfilled by any other work. Hence they are signs or sacraments of justification, for they are sacraments of justifying faith and not of works... Thus circumcision did not justify Abraham and his seed, and yet the Apostle calls it the seal of the righteousness of faith, because faith in the promise, to which circumcision was added, justified him and fulfilled what the circumcision signified. For faith was the spiritual circumcision of the foreskin of the heart, which was symbolized by the literal circumcision of the flesh... Thus it is not baptism that justifies or benefits anyone, but it is faith in the word of promise to which baptism is added. This faith justifies, and fulfills that which baptism signifies. For faith is the submersion of the old man and the emerging of the new" (*Obras Seleccionadas*, vol. 2, pp. 381–382).⁴⁴ Luther also says that baptism "brings about forgiveness of sins, redeems from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe it, as the words and promise of God declare."⁴⁵

3. Ritual baptism and spiritual or real baptism, although similar in their meanings of redemption and salvation, do not constitute a single event in time; that is, as events in Christian life, they are not necessarily simultaneous (Acts 2:37–38, 8:14–17, 10:44–48, 11:15–17).

⁴² BC 459.

⁴³ BC 462.

⁴⁴ LW 36:65–66.

⁴⁵ BC 359.

4. If ritual baptism cannot save, it is inferred that the one who comes to believe in Christ can be saved without it. Luther says: “Thus Christ says: ‘He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned [Mark 16:16]. He shows us in this word that faith is such a necessary part of the sacrament that it can save even without the sacrament, and for this reason he did not add: ‘He who does not believe, and is not baptized’” (*Obras Seleccionadas*, vol. 2, pp. 382–383).⁴⁶

5. It does not say, “Who believes he was baptized will be saved,” but rather, “Who believes and is baptized will be saved.” *Believing* and being baptized, then, are two distinct realities. The second assumes the first. The blessings promised by God are not worked in the believer because the rite of baptism itself has been performed. We therefore understand baptism as a public testimony of God (I John 5:8), through his love, that these blessings in fact are guaranteed to his children because they were promised by a God who does not lie. Thus, baptism points to the work of God in the believer, who experiences them through faith.

6. In his letter the Presiding Pastor says that Catholic baptismal practice is identical to Lutheran. Is this not opening a rift in Lutheran ecclesiology (understanding of the church)? Luther distanced himself strongly from the Catholic concept of church. Now, are the ecclesiologies of both churches not dependent on their baptismal views, or vice versa? If it is only by faith that someone receives salvation (which is not the case of the Catholic Church), how can one say that both conceptions of baptism are identical? The recent episode in Salvador, Bahia, in our view, confirmed that there are naive perceptions of ecumenical identity, when a group of pastors representing evangelical churches, among them one of the IECLB, were prevented from participating in the Lord’s Supper during a mass, because the Catholic Church does not practice eucharistic hospitality towards evangelical [churches]. And this is made public precisely at a time of an ecumenical fraternity campaign. The reason for the cardinal’s gesture lies not only in diverse understandings of the Supper but also in the different ecclesiologies. Therefore we must ask, as Luther was mistaken in his ecclesiological concept? Certainly not. Based on this we assume that it is unacceptable to think that there has been a correct baptism amidst invocations to Mary or other saints within Catholicism. We, evangelicals of the Lutheran confession, cannot be silent when the uniqueness of Jesus is stolen in such a subtle manner. One of the pillars of Reformation was and still is the *solus Christus* (Christ alone). How can we talk of baptism correctly performed when Christ is one among other invoked names in the Catholic context, even more so if we remember Mary is acclaimed also by the present pope, on the CNBB site, as co-redeemer and mediatrix of salvation? This picture becomes even more complex if in our assessment we include the practitioners of Umbanda, for whom Mary is the (Catholic) name of the goddess Iemanjá.

7. In his letter the Presiding Pastor mistakenly portrays what we intended concerning divine consolation in light of a “new” baptism. There we meant the rupture existing between the old man and the new man according to God. The sign of rupture given by Jesus for this spiritual purpose is baptism. After confession of faith by the person to be baptized, we then perform baptism. We never practice rebaptisms with anyone, even considering “my doubts,

⁴⁶ LW 36:67.

my failures, my questions” from the one who was rightly baptized. We always serve these spiritual needs of believers through pastoral counseling and prayer.

8. Regarding the long quote we took from a writing on baptism in the book of the Presiding Pastor, *Luther and Liberation*, we did not do it in view of the discussion on rebaptism. Clearly we know your position on this. There we sought an opening for the IECLB reviewing its baptismal practices in a stronger and more effective manner, considering what your article calls “deep perversion” around the practice of infant baptism. Such a perversion should not be dealt with in the way recommended in your letter. In fact, we reaffirm that your views expressed in that article do not correspond to what is proposed in your response to our position. Remember that an increasing number of workers and members of the IECLB no longer baptize their infant children, including prominent leaders of our church. Isn’t also the large amount of “emails that belittle baptism” a clear sign of dissatisfaction about how baptism has been understood and practiced in our congregations? Thus we see that this perverse practice in which infant baptism is embedded needs to be more widely discussed. We believe a national forum on this issue is needed, in which other parties could make public statements about it. Although we are not judges of other people’s faith, it is urgent that we be more judicious in our baptismal practice. Recommending that the Lutheran congregations “devote themselves to an intense study of baptism” seems insufficient in the face of confusion generated by such perversion. Also, before we recommend the book *Nossa Fé—Nossa Vida* as a tool for study, first we should be dedicated to studying this theme on the basis of the Holy Scriptures, which are the first and only foundation of our faith.

9. Regarding the request we made to the Directorate of our church to adopt a liturgical act of reaffirmation of baptismal vows (especially geared to believers of Lutheran origin) and also [for] the possibility of performing a conditional baptism in the face of earlier doubt regarding its correct administration (aimed at those coming from a syncretistic, secular, and idolatrous environment), we maintain the same position. The one who changed this agenda was not us but the current leadership of the church, shifting the focus of discussion about pastoral and counseling issues to denominational issues. So far we were sticking to the decision made in dialogue with the leadership of the church in Rodeio 12, Santa Catarina, in 1998, when we were allowed to rule on cases where a new baptismal rite was necessary under the provision of a joint decision with the presbyteries. However, in this moment of dialogue with the current church leadership, it seems we were considered, in an *a priori* doctrinal judgment, as not being confessional Lutherans. As a result, we have also been denied the liturgical alternatives we described in the document “Dialogue on Congregational Issues,” alleging that we would abuse them in order to favor our baptismal conceptions, regarded as suspicious.

The response letter by the Presiding Pastor states that our agenda topics are of a Pentecostal and Neopentecostal nature and do not come exactly from a tradition of Lutheran confessionality. What we have proposed, first of all, are biblical themes and as such they should be considered, especially taking into account the wide gap in our theology regarding the person and work of the Holy Spirit, a reality widely recognized by all who are engaged in

theological reflection in the IECLB. Now regarding spiritual warfare, we have discovered that our reformer intensely engaged in this theme in his time. His writings show it well. Luther always considered both Satan and demons a reality and always affirmed them as enemies of God's people to be resisted. In the Large Catechism, in his explanation of the Lord's Prayer, Luther makes clear the need for us to undertake a spiritual battle against Satan, especially in the second, third, sixth, and last petition. In the last petition he even states, "Therefore, there is nothing for us to do on earth but to pray without ceasing against this archenemy. For if God did not support us, we would not be safe from him for a single hour" (Large Catechism, *Livro de Concórdia*, pp. 457–474).⁴⁷ It seems, however, that the historical development of Lutheranism, especially since the Enlightenment, pushed biblical teaching about the devil off our theological agenda, to the dangerous point of disregarding his existence as an individual explicitly focused on destroying God's chosen people. If we eliminate Satan, doing theology grounded in the Bible will be meaningless.

Finally, we reaffirm our position as stated in the Open Letter from 14/12/2004. We do so because we have sought to follow the example of our reformer when he grounded his faith and theology on Scripture. This is how we want to contribute to the missionary advancement of the IECLB. We believe that this is possible. We await, asking God to help us all to be faithful to his word and committed to the people of this time.

Fraternally,
The Charismatic Movement

⁴⁷ BC 455–456.

VI. RESOLUTION OF THE CHURCH COUNCIL OF THE IECLB, N° 95330/05, REGARDING BAPTISM/REBAPTISM

The Church Council, at its meeting on 18–19 March 2005, considering that:

- The 24th Church Council, held last October in Sao Leopoldo, issued a guiding document entitled “Unity: Context and IECLB Identity”;
- In the IECLB there is an intense debate about the theological concept and practice of baptism/rebaptism, which causes unrest in the congregations;
- There have been several meetings and correspondence between the IECLB leadership and representatives of the so-called charismatic movement, which up to the present have not led to a resolution of tensions and conflicts;
- The Conference of Synod Pastors with the Presidency, in its meeting of 8–11 March, referred to the Church Council a proposal that a) “the Presiding Pastor proceed in driving the process theologically, according to his constitutional responsibility to ensure unity and confessional integrity as well as openness to dialogue and search for theological understanding”; and b) “the synods give due attention to the matter and take appropriate action in their duties in monitoring, evaluation and discipline,”

decides to endorse the proposal of the Synod Pastors Conference with the following amendments and additions:

- a) Requesting that the Council on Liturgy finish its work of preparing a rite proposal for the reaffirmation of baptismal vows and celebration of God’s faithfulness (as decided by the Church Council Board, in its meeting of 05/08/2004), if possible by the end of May or at the latest by the end of June 2005;
- b) Requesting the Presiding Pastor, while conducting theological dialogue and in the search for understanding, among other initiatives or positions he deem appropriate or necessary, to convene a consultation with the participation of the Advisory Group on Theology and Confessionality; the two former Presiding Pastors of the IECLB; and one representative [each] of the movements CM [Charismatic Movement], ME [*Movimento Encontro*, “Encounter Movement”], MEUC [*Missão Evangélica União Cristã*, “Christian Union of Evangelical Mission”], CML [*Comunhão Martin Lutero*, “Martin Luther Fellowship”] and PPL [*Pastoral Popular Luterana*, “Lutheran Pastorate for the People”] in order to issue a theological opinion on the matter, based on the letter from the Presidency of the IECLB on 13 December 2004, and on further information being prepared by the Council on Liturgy;
- c) Noting with appreciation that the Charismatic Movement has resumed contact with the IECLB Directorate by sending correspondence to the Church Council, on 14 March, expanding its theological position on baptism, but at the same time regretting that the CM has not yet positioned itself with respect to the letter of the Presidency of the IECLB of 13 December, which letter had been requested by the Charismatic Movement itself in the meeting with the IECLB Directorate on last 26 November;

- d) Requesting the synods to carry out, until the end of June, a survey on the incidence of the practice of rebaptism in the congregations within their scope, and also, in compliance with the EMO [*Estatuto do Ministério com Ordenação*, “Statute on Ordained Ministry”], art. 28, to collect information from church workers about their baptismal practice and regarding their own baptism;
- e) Determining that, until the process of dialogue has positive results or competent bodies in the IECLB have reached a final resolution of the ongoing conflict, all church workers having adopted a baptismal practice divergent from the official the IECLB position halt this practice, since it was adopted without the support of any decision of the IECLB as a constituted body, being therefore at variance with their ordination vows;
- f) Determining the sending of this resolution and the letter from the Presidency to the CM of last 13 December (released only on the IECLB site) as well as the chronology of dialogue with the Charismatic Movement to all the IECLB’s church workers, synods, parishes, and institutions.

São Leopoldo, 19 March 2005

Luiz Artur Eichholz, Chairman of the Church Council

VII. LETTER FROM THE FIRST DEPUTY PRESIDING PASTOR OF THE IECLB, N° 95519/05, TO MOVIMENTO DE RENOVAÇÃO CARISMÁTICA, MOVIMENTO ENCONTRÃO, MISSÃO EVANGÉLICA UNIÃO CRISTÃ, PASTORAL POPULAR LUTERANA, AND COMUNHÃO MARTIM LUTERO (Porto Alegre, 1 April 2005)

Dear brothers, dear sisters,

“The Lord will reign forever and ever” (Exodus 15:18).

At its last meeting, held on 18 and 19 March, the Church Council adopted a resolution regarding the topic of baptism and rebaptism within the church, taking into account the recent dialogue between the Presidency and the IECLB leaders of the Spiritual Renewal Movement (cf. attached [together with] a chronology of the dialogue).

One of the initiatives proposed in the resolution is for the Presidency to convene a consultation seeking a theological opinion on the subject. This consultation is to involve the Presidency, the Chairman of the Church Council Board, the two former Presiding Pastors, the advisory group on Theology and Confessionality, and a representative of each pastoral work/movement in the IECLB.

This consultation will take place on 5 and 6 May this year, at Casa Matriz de Diaconisas in São Leopoldo. It is set to begin at 2 p.m. on the 5th and end at 5 p.m. on the 6th. These date is favorable logistically and financially, as in the days preceding (3–5 May) there will be a meeting of the Presidency with the advisory groups, which will also be attended by members of the group on Theology and Confessionality.

This consultation has a well-defined scope, which is the Presidency’s letter from 13 December (see attachment). Regarding the same, the following questions are asked:

- a) Can the letter be confirmed as the IECLB’s position and proposal to CM?
- b) If so, for what reasons? Otherwise, for what reasons?
- c) And if not, what corrections would be needed or recommended?
- d) Again, if so, what amendments or complements are suggested?

One portfolio with copies of documents on this dialogue will be sent to the participants. A second portfolio containing individual comments will be available during the consultation for the participants to take a look.

We will ask Pr. Dr. Brakemeier for an initial presentation of 30 minutes’ length about the subject. Then each movement will have 15 minutes to present its position about the questions above.

We ask you to confirm the name of your respective representative and pray that God will continue guiding us in this dialogue.

Fraternally, in the peace of Christ,
Homero Severo Pinto, Presiding Pastor in office

Cc: Chairman of the Church Council, Mr. Luiz Artur Eichholz; Members of the Church Council: Presiding Pastor Walter Altmann, Second Deputy Presiding Pastor Rolf

Schünemann, General Secretary Pr. Nestor P. Friedrich; Pr. Dr. Gottfried Brakemeier and Pr. Huberto Kirchheim, Advisory Group on Theology and Confessionality

Attachments:

1. Chronology of dialogue with Charismatic Movement
2. Church Council resolution on baptism/rebaptism
3. The IECLB Presidency's letter to the representatives of the Charismatic Movement of 13 December 2004.

VIII. CONSULTATION ON BAPTISM AND REBAPTISM: OPINION FROM THE ADVISORY GROUP ON THEOLOGY AND CONFSSIONALITY

In the last decade the theology and practice of baptism as a sacrament has received special attention. During this time particularly the practice of rebaptism within the charismatic movement has led the IECLB leadership to seek dialogue with its representatives. So far about twenty different documents have been drafted trying to make positions clear and to find solutions.

Analysis of the documents produced in the course of these eight years shows little progress in reestablishing practical theological unity around baptism. There is evident disagreement between the position of the church leadership expressed within the parameters of Lutheran confessionality, and the position of the Charismatic Movement which, having practiced rebaptism, tries to draft proposals which meet its pastoral and missionary demands. There is disagreement, for instance, in the understanding of the sacrament and in working out the relationship between grace and faith.

Among all documents issued, the letter from the Presiding Pastor dated 13 December 2004 deserves special attention and emphasis. The central aspects of the letter should be stressed. It starts by recognizing the difficulties created by a “changed” church context, within and outside the IECLB, which unequivocally reflects on baptismal practice and theology. From this starting point the letter envisages the situation within two perspectives: practical-pastoral and biblical-confessional. Regarding the practical-pastoral issues, the letter emphasizes that pastoral zeal is centered on “listening” and “accompanying,” which however should not mean accepting any request without restriction. Pastoral zeal means increased care for extensive instruction (of the child, parents, godparents, congregation) before and after infant baptism, as well as attention to the growing demand for adult baptism from missionary contexts. The latter needs greater theological, pastoral, and liturgical care from the IECLB.

In its biblical-confessional aspects, the letter calls attention to the adequate relations between baptism and faith, stressing that grace precedes faith, and that there is no biblical support for an opposition between child baptism and adult baptism. The letter emphasizes the need, however, to reject any magical connotation for infant baptism, emphasizing that in the sacrament the word must be received in faith. Walking in “newness of life” means setting one’s life of faith in a permanent dynamic [centered] around baptism. Going back to baptism means repentance, forgiveness, and renewal of one’s commitment to God, his compassion, and his righteousness. The letter also states that this biblical-confessional basis is supported by several normative documents of the IECLB.

This means that the IECLB recognizes baptisms in other churches that “confess Jesus Christ as the only Lord and Savior,” as long as water is present and the Triune God is correctly named.

The letter closes highlighting the fact that, in spite of a long dialogue, the CM has adopted a different theology and baptismal practice. Along these lines, “baptism in the waters” is a grave transgression against one’s ordination vows. The letter states once again that these practices must be revised and suspended and demands a response accepting the

IECLB's confessional basis. Pastoral zeal, however, must be sought, with clear discernment of those situations in which "reaffirmation of baptismal vows" or "conditional baptism" are fitting.

In view of its clear and relevant contents, the Advisory Group on Theology and Confessionality proposes that the Consultation on Baptism next 5 and 6 May confirm the Presiding Pastor's letter as the IECLB's official position regarding the theology and practice of baptism in our church.

The Advisory Group on Theology and Confessionality
4 May 2005

IX. LETTER FROM THE PRESIDING PASTOR OF THE IECLB, N° 98014/05, TO THE IECLB
SYNODS
(Porto Alegre, 10 May 2005)

Subject: Survey into cases of rebaptism and interference in other parishes or synods

Dear sisters and dear brothers,

In its March meeting, the Church Council asked the synods for a survey into cases of rebaptism within the IECLB. In face of new troubling information regarding the creation by the CM of independent congregations outside the IECLB, the Church Council Board in its meeting on 27 April decided to widen the scope of the request so as to include also cases of external interference in the IECLB's parishes, congregations, or synods [insofar as it] has not been agreed on by the IECLB's church workers and congregational leadership.

Responding to existing requests, the synods receive, at the request and suggestion of the Board, two possible sample "roadmaps" to carry out this survey: one related to baptismal practice, the other on cases of interference in the domain of an other congregation, parish, or synod. The Church Council Board also suggests the possibility of synods gathering additional information, as for instance whether in worship the liturgical guides and hymnals of the IECLB are used, as well as the adoption of the Luther's Small Catechism in confirmation teaching, use of liturgical vestments, the frequency and type of work by church workers outside their respective fields of work. The way to proceed in the survey will certainly depend on the circumstances in each synod, which obviously has the freedom to decide on how to meet the request of the Church Council and its Board. As an example, the survey can be made based on information from members of the Synodical Council, or from presbyters, or based on minutes, letters, or written reports. We also note that according to art. 28 of the EMO (church workers "are obliged to supply information requested by the IECLB"), synods have full authority to request information from ordained church workers, which is important because irregular acts and non-compliance with rules and the confessional basis of the IECLB usually occur within ministerial practice. Information can be gathered orally or in writing, from some church workers or from all of them, in church worker conferences, during evaluations and other occasions.

This means the synods [may] decide whether they want to stick to some specific cases or whether they wish to make a more general survey among the workers, for example during church workers' conferences. Each synod will know how best to proceed. The synods may, at their discretion, also include the reporting of other clear and deliberate violations of rules in normative IECLB documents. The survey should be objective and succinct but accurately reporting the facts. Of course, if the synods have reason to believe that the information provided is not true, this must be remarked. Please send the full survey or a preliminary survey, focusing on the clearest situations, as soon as possible, in any case by June 10. The Church Council Board will receive a report on its meeting on 15 June. Add-ons, if any, may be sent later. When available, the synods may attach a copy of reports, letters, or news (for instance, in newspapers) pertinent to the subject.

May the peace of Christ rule your hearts in this difficult yet essential task to cure the spiritual and confessional fractures in our IECLB.

Fraternally,
Walter Altmann, Presiding Pastor

CC: Members of the Church Council Board
Attachments: Two examples of “roadmaps”

X. LETTER FROM THE PRESIDING PASTOR OF THE IECLB, N° 100750/05, TO THE PARISHES, CONGREGATIONS, SYNODS, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, DEPARTMENTS, SECTORS, AND CHURCH WORKERS OF THE IECLB
(Porto Alegre, 9 July 2005)

Subject: The present situation of the IECLB, in particular its relationship with the Charismatic Movement

Dear sisters, dear brothers,

The Old Testament watchword for today reads, “The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry” (Psalm 34:15). As a church of the Lutheran confession, we know that “the righteous” are not people who have merits but rather those sinners who in faith have welcomed the gift of justification, which God by his grace gives us. As such sinful but justified people, we trust in the promise of God that he hears our prayers and assists us at all times, also and above all in the most difficult ones.

In the last weeks and months I have had the opportunity to participate in many events, celebrations, and dialogues in various congregations, synods, and synod councils, conferences of church workers, institutions, sectors, and movements in the IECLB. In the vast majority of cases I could see with great joy how much vitality, community spirit, and missionary impulse there is in the IECLB. Just last weekend, I could be in São Luís do Maranhão, celebrating worship and dialoguing with an embryonic congregation, which bears a clear mark of the northeastern people, in a state capital where so far the IECLB hasn't had any presence. It is so marvelous that this community found us on the IECLB site and awaits pastoral and spiritual care from us.

However, we also have difficulties and problems in the IECLB, as everybody knows, and in the forums mentioned these issues were also dealt with. On the financial aspect, we had the promising National Forum on Faith, Gratitude, and Commitment, encouraging us to new initiatives in our process of self-sustainability. But this year we are particularly hard hit in this area. The drought that occurred in the south and in other regions where the IECLB has a stronger presence compromised the contribution capacity of many members and congregations. The resources from abroad decrease and, in addition, we are affected by the strong valuation of the *real* [Brazilian currency] against the dollar and the euro. Today I will be traveling to Germany, joining the General Secretary, Pr. Nestor Friedrich, and the Director of the Finance Department, Amauri Ludwig, to a meeting at which our partners in Germany are expected to inform us about the amount and pace of cuts that we will suffer in foreign aid in this and coming years.

Even though on our part we will plead that this reduction be the smallest possible, we will do it in gratitude for the extraordinary assistance already received for many, many years and for the help we will still receive from brothers and sisters overseas. Above all, however, we will do so in full awareness that we have before us the major challenge of taking new steps of faith in a project of seeking the increasing self-sustenance of our church. We are very glad that in recent decades we have achieved this self-sustenance in our theological training

and in supplying our congregations and areas of activity with Brazilian church workers. We are developing, in greater numbers than in the past, missionary initiatives at home and abroad. Regarding financial self-sustainability, we will achieve it in the hopefully not-so-distant future. God hasn't been parsimonious but abundant with his gifts to the IECLB and its members. We will generously bring to the altar our offerings of faith and gratitude, thus participating more intensely in the mission of God in our country.

Still, right now, the biggest concern of the IECLB is not financial but rather the confessional integrity and unity of the church. The diversity of spirituality that exists in the IECLB is, in principle, beautiful and enriching for the church. There are many people who have felt attracted to the IECLB or appreciate it particularly because there is a fairly broad and quite unique and characteristic space to develop the experience of faith, community-building, and missionary projects. Diversity has its limits, however, which are crossed precisely when the pillars of Lutheran confessionality are undermined somehow and a divisive spirit comes down on the life of the community that is incompatible with the understanding of the church as the body of Christ, in which different members cooperate for its edification.

As is well known, in recent times we have been engaged in a "difficult but necessary" dialogue, as I have characterized it previously, with the so-called Charismatic Movement. I need not describe the steps of this dialogue, more intense since last year, if only because there have been previous communiqués from the Presidency, as well as resolutions of the Council of the church. The hope that such dialogue could lead to a greater identification of the Charismatic Movement with the confessional basis of the IECLB, to the Charismatic Movement itself curbing radicalization, and that together we could find alternative outlets for the legitimate yearnings of the Charismatic Movement, unfortunately did not materialize, in spite of efforts on both sides. In no way do I intend to assign responsibility here for this fact, but [simply] to register it, and do so with great regret, because "if one member suffers, all suffer together" (I Corinthians 12:26). It seems there is no doubt that there are deep theological issues dividing us.

Following a resolution of the Church Council, on 5 and 6 May we had a consultation of the Presidency with the Advisory Group on Theology and Confessionality, both former Presiding Pastors of the IECLB, and one representative [each] from the Charismatic Movement (CM), the *Encontrão* Movement (ME), the Christian Union of Evangelical Mission (MEUC), the Martin Luther Fellowship (CML), and Lutheran Pastorate for the People (PPL), to issue an opinion based on the letter of the IECLB Presidency to the CM dated December 13, 2004. In this consultation, in which each participant presented his/her position, the theological-confessional position rejecting the practice of rebaptizing was strengthened, as stated in that official letter, recommending that with regard to so-called "conditional baptism" the IECLB draw up criteria and guidelines for the examination of specific cases that leave doubt as to whether a prior correct baptism had been performed or not. These guidelines would seek to clarify when (and when not) the decision can be made to perform a so-called "conditional baptism" and by what procedure. This task is still pending. The consultation also emphasized that it is not a question of rejecting people who happen to

have been rebaptized but the practice of rebaptizing, and that, therefore, particular responsibility rests with the IECLB's church workers, in compliance with their ordination vows. The consultation also received a preliminary report on the progress of the IECLB's Council on Liturgy's studies on baptism, with more comprehensive studies already underway since before and independently of the dialogue with the CM. These studies include drafting liturgies of remembrance of baptism, which also satisfies, in that respect, the resolution of the Church Council.

In the consultation, the Charismatic Movement was also emphatically told the resolution of the Church Council that every practice of "baptism in the waters" of persons who have been previously baptized, as infants or not, should be suspended. The representative of the CM, in turn, requested that none of its supporters be subjected to disciplinary proceedings. Mention was made that there was an ongoing synodical procedure and that there is no interference from the IECLB leadership in processes that are of synodical jurisdiction, advanced by independent legal and doctrinal commissions. On the other hand, there would always be the possibility of finding other solutions for the facts which gave rise to potential disciplinary proceedings; this would thus make possible the suspension of these processes.

In this context, a word is fitting on the nature and mechanisms of disciplinary proceedings according to the IECLB's regulations. Some voices in the IECLB seemingly reject any recourse to disciplinary proceedings; others, on the contrary, demand that in the face of existing infractions and slowness as well as difficulties in disciplinary mechanisms there should be something like a "summary procedure." According to the Legal and Doctrinal Order (OJD), approved by the 23rd Council held in Santa Maria do Jetibá in 2002, "the set of rules of the IECLB must always serve the maintenance or restoration of peace between brothers and sisters" (OJD, Preamble, Section 3). That is, the purpose of disciplinary regulations is not properly to punish offenders but rather to recover the person who has violated the rules and doctrines of the IECLB through possible sanctions and, in any event, to preserve the unity of the church. The OJD stipulates that actual disciplinary procedures are to be preceded by fraternal discipline, aiming thereby to remedy existing issues, and by an independent inquiry to investigate the facts. When disciplinary proceedings are initiated, they are conducted by independent bodies, elected by the Church Council and synod assemblies.

Meanwhile, relations of the IECLB with the CM have seen several developments and acute situations. Three pastors (two men and one woman) recently have asked for dismissal from their situation as IECLB church workers: Luciano Linzmeyer and Simone Thereza Schier Linzmeyer (Sidrolândia, Mato Grosso do Sul), and João Daniel Gasperin da Silva (Cosmópolis, São Paulo), in addition to another pastor, Valdemar Botke, who already did so last year. The CM has set up several independent congregations outside of IECLB structures and procedures (Cristal, Rio Grande do Sul; Caxias do Sul, Rio Grande do Sul; Dourados, Mato Grosso do Sul; Guaíba, Rio Grande do Sul), and the CM has sent people to take charge of the pastoral care for these congregations. The CM, questioned about this practice, has said that this is a pastoral emergency effort to prevent these people from leaving the IECLB once

and for all. However, it is certain that none of these decisions were made with prior agreement, consultation, or communication with the IECLB.

In the case of Guaíba, the IECLB received a petition from about 140 congregational members communicating their withdrawal from the IECLB in protest against the disciplinary action underway within the Rio dos Sinos Synod against Pr. Roberto Etter dos Santos for practicing rebaptism and other infractions against the IECLB's regulations, a process in its final phase. The group began to meet in a new place of worship. The letter states that no member of the congregation would disagree with the action taken. Nonetheless, services have meanwhile been restarted by the pastoral leaders sent by the synod, with the participation of a significant number of members who felt or had been excluded in the previous period. In Cosmópolis, a significant number of members also began to conduct their services in a separate place. The IECLB has sent a minister to the remaining congregation.

All these cases point to a process of division that is painful to the IECLB, which regrets it deeply, but it is a consequence of theological and pastoral options taken within the CM that the IECLB could not and cannot simply accept. On the other hand, however, we must recognize that these theological and pastoral options are taken by the CM in accordance with its faith convictions. Therefore the IECLB has no right to any feeling of superiority or arrogance. On the contrary, respect and reflection must prevail.

We must recognize, as a church, that the Charismatic Movement is not a phenomenon restricted to the IECLB nor to our country or even our continent. We must not dream of a delusional scenario where as a church we could be totally immune to the influences of this movement. The Pentecostal-Charismatic movement today can be seen throughout the world in virtually all denominations. In its own way it meets the spiritual needs or feelings of people in our time. Thus, the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement of our time poses challenges to historic churches such as the IECLB. Are we too rational a church? Do we cling too much to cultural aspects of our ethnic background and of our tradition? What space do we in our services and activities give to our members' personal needs? Are we enough of an inspiration for missionary action? How strong is our will to support God's mission, dedicating our time, our talents, and our financial resources? Have we given enough consideration to the Holy Spirit's action in our lives and in our time? These and other questions should receive our serious attention on an ongoing basis, in any circumstance.

However, we are equally certain that the IECLB with its characteristics and, above all, with its biblical and confessional basis has an important contribution to make in Brazil's religious scene as an expression of God's mission. "Justification by grace and faith," "the distinction between law and gospel," "Christian freedom," "simul justus et peccator," "the church as the people of God, both justified and sinful" are some of the unique theological concepts we proclaim, interpret, and experience.

At this point, I wish to respond to a specific frequently raised question: why has the church prioritized the issue of baptism/rebaptism, leaving aside many other important issues in the dialogue with the CM? No doubt there are many other issues, but in a confessional Lutheran church, word, and sacrament take precedence and may not be diluted among many other issues, as relevant those are. There is a core of confessional unity that cannot be

abandoned without betraying Lutheran confessionality, based on Scripture. On this, in particular on the meaning of baptism, and on the relationship between grace and faith, we have already taken a stance in previous letters, and this, in many ways, will continue deserving attention from congregations, synods, and the church.

I also wish to discuss the question of how the relationship between the CM and the IECLB will continue. This is not about making predictions but observing trends and establishing criteria. On certain matters:

1. the IECLB leadership, particularly the Presidency, shall continue pursuing the possibilities of theological-confessional dialogue regarding the relevant issues insofar as spaces and personal contacts to do so appear;
2. in particular, the IECLB will finish the pending tasks of establishing criteria for allowing or not so-called “conditional baptism” and the liturgies for baptism remembrance, as noted above;
3. synods, of course, will continue acting within their constitutional and regulatory responsibilities, including at this moment the task with which they were entrusted by the Church Council to make a “a survey on the incidence of the practice of rebaptism in the congregations,” collecting “information from church workers about their baptismal practice and regarding their own baptism”;
4. the CM, it seems, is in a decision-making process, depending on the particular and local circumstances it operates in. Its unfolding inside and outside the IECLB is not entirely predictable, but we must count with the possibility of having the Charismatic Movement, or portions of it, being structured completely outside the IECLB;
5. it is important to note once again that for confessional reasons the IECLB rejects rebaptism but not rebaptized people. As expressed in the 24th Council held in São Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul, in 2004, the practice of rebaptism is equivalent to “opting out of the confessional basis” of the church but not to the automatic exclusion from the church as a member. The IECLB must be willing and prepared to deal pastorally with any person who, for reasons of conscience, has submitted to rebaptism. This care includes the challenge that he or she now view his or her former baptism, rightly performed, as the fully valid baptism, as an expression of God’s grace received in faith.

6. In principle, this distinction also applies to the church worker who has chosen “water baptism” for himself or herself and/or has administered it to others. However, the continued exercise of the ministry with ordination conferred on him or her by the IECLB, followed by respective ordination vows, will depend less on the IECLB itself than on the clear readiness for a personal and public review of the practical-theological position adopted.

Sisters and brothers: writing this letter was not easy for me. But I hope we can all be comforted by the words of the Apostle Paul: “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (II Corinthians 4:7–10).

Fraternally, in the peace of Christ,
Walter Altmann, Presiding Pastor

XI. RESOLUTION OF THE CHURCH COUNCIL, MEETING ON 5–6 AUGUST 2005, REGARDING THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT

The Church Council received updated information about the current state of relations between the Charismatic Movement and the IECLB, considered the matter, and decided:

1. to reaffirm the understanding that the IECLB is legitimately characterized by a rich variety of theologies and spiritualities, always anchored in the confessional pillars of the Lutheran confession;

2. to note with sadness that, particularly given the doctrinal divergence and practice with regard to baptism, there have been dismissals of church workers and the splitting of IECLB congregations;

3. to persevere in seeking dialogue and reconciliation possibilities without compromising Lutheran identity, and urging congregations and workers to join efforts in this direction;

4. to ensure, through procedures laid down by synods, pastoral accompaniment to the remaining IECLB members in congregations suffering division;

5. through the Council on Liturgy and forwarding the results of its work to synods and congregations to finish the process of preparing liturgies for the remembrance of baptism, with an expected resolution of the Church Council to this effect at its meeting in November 2005;

6. to request of the Presidency and Synod Pastors Conference the drafting of criteria for granting or not a so-called “conditional baptism,” as recommended by the Theological Consultation on Baptism held on 5–6 May;

7. to request the synods: a) to finalize the survey of rebaptizing practice in their area for consideration at the next meeting of the Synod Pastors Conference with the Presidency; b) to continue and intensify their continuing pastoral efforts aimed at church workers and congregations, and c) where necessary to advance the appropriate disciplinary measures;

8. to request of synods that they also obtain at notary offices, through their parishes or directly, a copy of the legal registrations of the IECLB’s congregations and parish statutes, streamlining the process of their updating or adjusting to standard IECLB statutes.

XII. LETTER FROM THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE IECLB, N° 113176/06, RE: THE SPECIAL SOLIDARITY FUND
(Porto Alegre, 29 March 2006)

Dear Representatives of the Synods in the Church Council, Chairpersons of Synods, Synod Pastors, Chairpersons of Parishes, and Church Workers,

In 2005, the IECLB faced a difficult task: (1) managing conflict situations involving segments of the Charismatic Movement and (2) giving pastoral care to congregations that suffer the consequences of divisions generated by these groups. These divisions have occurred in congregations of different synods after a long process of tensions, conflicts, and dialogues. The result is that we now have wounds, sufferings, sorrows, and some extremely vulnerable congregations. Still, there is enough conviction and courage, with God's grace, to support and strengthen the congregations in these situations.

In some synods these conflict situations were and still are extremely stressful. We are grateful to God that, through the action of the Holy Spirit, he has strengthened and given everyone wisdom to everyone: synodical Pastors, synods and church leadership, members and leaders of congregations involved, who seek to safeguard the confessional integrity of the IECLB based in Holy Scripture and base their actions on an ethical stance committed to love and justice, which God expects of his sons and daughters. Throughout this process we have always sought to preserve the unity of the IECLB. No one, no IECLB member or staff identified with the Charismatic Movement, has been expelled or excluded by the initiative of the church leadership. Meetings were held with leaders of this movement. Unfortunately, these efforts have not shown any positive results. Why? Unwillingness from the IECLB leadership? Of course not!

When synod leadership took note of the divisions caused by certain groups identified with the Charismatic Movement, in some particular synods they spared no efforts to support members who would not follow the dissidents but wanted to remain in their congregation/church, the IECLB.

These divisions, however, compromised the maintenance of pastoral work and management of these congregations. We therefore ask ourselves: what, as the body of Christ, is our responsibility towards these congregations?

We are convinced that we cannot remain indifferent to these weakening congregations. We want to assure them of pastoral care. We want to strengthen our solidarity with those IECLB members who, faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ, have remained in the congregations suffering because of divisions. And it is in this sense that we appeal to all of you.

Unfortunately, the trouble with some segments identified and committed to the Charismatic Movement did not end with their departure. In this painful process, we were surprised and perplexed by the fact that some groups that left also wanted to take ownership of the estate of the congregation/parish and its legal entity. We found, so far, that three statutes of congregations and two statutes of parishes in which people identified with the Charismatic Movement were active were previously changed in a premeditated way. In some

cases, these changes were made over the course of years. Legal procedures expected from all congregations and parishes in the IECLB were not monitored, something elementary that church workers and presbyteries committed to the cause of Christ in the IECLB are supposed to take care of.

In these statutes, clauses were included, against regulations, which in the event of “disaffiliation” permit the appropriation of the legal entity of the congregation and the entire IECLB estate irrespective of any authorization by the General Secretariat of our church. What does this mean? The “charismatic pastor” and “his group of supporters” make a General Assembly and decide to “disaffiliate themselves” from the IECLB and, moreover, take over an estate that, in most cases, was built with joy and dedication by a whole community throughout its history, including through donations from brothers and sisters in the churches overseas. Another amendment unilaterally made allows for the selling of real estate without the need for authorization from a higher level of the IECLB, in a frontal assault against the standard statute and guidelines from the General Secretariat.

Now, what kind of spirit is inspiring the one who acts this way? Is the one who purposefully acts this way willing to talk? Even more deplorable is that those faithful members of our congregations who helped build up this patrimony, in so far as they did not submit to the “new way of being a church” imposed by the church worker and “his presbytery,” felt compelled to move away from their own congregations, their spiritual home. Isn’t it strange that a segment of that movement, saying it has no problems with finances and even with tithing, wants to take ownership of an estate that, in most cases, it has not helped build up?

In explaining the Ninth Commandment, Martin Luther says: “We are to fear and love God, so that we do not try to trick our neighbors out of their inheritance or property or try to get it for ourselves by claiming to have a legal right to it and the like, but instead be of help and service to them in keeping what is theirs.”

What is the current situation of congregations in which divisions happened? We are now in a time of rebuilding hope and reaffirming our commitment to and confessional identity with the IECLB in these communities. There is a huge commitment from church workers and synod leaders. After the departure of these groups, people that never wanted to leave began to return and participate in the IECLB congregation and church. The wounds, however, are profound. People were verbally abused and disrespected because they did not agree with what was being imposed on them. Some congregations have been completely taken apart. Because of this, what lies ahead is a huge task of reconstruction. Some measures have been taken; for example, sending workers committed to the IECLB’s confessionalism and unity and who take their mission with great seriousness. At the same time, there are lawsuits aiming to protect the rights of the IECLB’s congregations and parishes. All these cases are accompanied by legal counsel from synods and the IECLB. Synods are designing ways to remedy the financial difficulties, although at this time they do not know the amount of resources needed.

Given this situation of difficulties and challenges, the Church Council decided to approve the creation of a Special Solidarity Fund. Its objective is to find resources to meet the

demand for the reconstruction of these congregations, such as contributing to the livelihood of church workers, to cover litigation costs, and to rebuild these congregations. This is a special fund whose resources will come from voluntary donations and collections made in our congregations, parishes, synods. We also have suggestions for parishes and synods as to how to perform this gesture of solidarity so urgently needed at this time. The important thing is that this fund will ensure [pastoral] care for members who have remained faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Scriptures based on Lutheran confessionality as preached in the IECLB. The fund will be a way to witness our faithfulness to God, who works through his Holy Spirit in the life of each of his sons and daughters, as well as through our disagreement with the situation created by these groups.

We are convinced that we will know how to join hands and embrace this cause. Our brothers and sisters from congregations hit by the turbulence described above need and expect our deepest sympathy at this time. Before us we have a concrete opportunity to practice what we hear and sing at the celebration of the Lord's Supper: We, who are many, are one body (I Corinthians 10:17).

We ask you to send your donations/offerings to your synods. They will consolidate the amounts and pass them on every month to the IECLB via the Report on Tithes and Offerings under the title "Special Solidarity Fund." The Special Solidarity Fund will be managed by the Church Council Board.

Thank you for the solidarity, understanding, and attention so necessary to the congregations involved in these conflicts.

Fraternally,

Pr. Dr. Nestor Paulo Friedrich, IECLB Secretary General

4. Attachments

4.1. Letters

XIII. LETTER FROM THE PRESIDING PASTOR OF THE IECLB, N° 77006/04, TO CERTAIN PARISHES
(Porto Alegre, 26 January 2004)

Subject: Baptism and “rebaptism”

Dear brothers and sisters:

Months have passed since I received a letter from you requesting consultation on the Evangelical Lutheran concept of and most appropriate baptismal practice for “members from the Roman Catholic Church who say they were baptized in the name of the Triune God and of Mary or of some other ‘saint’ or *Candomblé* entity.”⁴⁸

First of all, I apologize and ask for your understanding for the delay in this response, which was not only due to numerous commitments but also to the seriousness of the matter, which should not be dealt with hastily. In my report *Caminhos da IECLB* [“Pathways of the IECLB”], distributed to all parishes and workers, I briefly mentioned the subject, expressing my concern that this issue be not [only] addressed theologically but pragmatically because of the possible consequences for the IECLB of one or another position adopted by members.

In fact, this issue has been brought to my attention in various ways by congregations, leaders, and church workers, in some cases with deep concern about the occasional practice of “rebaptism” within the IECLB, in other cases expressing the view that the IECLB should, for missiological reasons and reasons of spiritual care, perform a baptism in situations similar to those you have mentioned.

I would like to thank you for seeking the guidance of the church, refraining from adopting decisions alone. The issue really affects the center of our own faith according to the evangelical understanding of the Lutheran confession,⁴⁹ which states that constitutive for the integrity and unity of the church are the pure preaching of the gospel and the correct administration of the sacraments (Augsburg Confession, Article VII). There is, in the churches of the Lutheran confession, a wide diversity in organization and even in spirituality. In this matter, however, the evangelical consensus, grounded in the Bible and guided by our Confessions, must prevail.

We distinguish two aspects of the issue: one theological and confessional, another practical and pastoral. I start with the practical-pastoral one. All persons who come to faith and express the desire to receive baptism in the IECLB should be heard, respected, and accompanied with pastoral care and much brotherly love in their desire [for baptism], even when we think that we should perhaps not meet their request in the way they express it. It is

⁴⁸ EDITOR’S NOTE: *Candomblé* is an Afro-Brazilian religion, sometimes combined with aspects of Catholicism. So is *Umbanda*, which is mentioned later in this letter.

⁴⁹ TRANSLATOR’S NOTE: “*Compreensão evangélica de confissão luterana*” is a specific formulation referring to the IECLB’s way of being Lutheran, as opposed to that of the Igreja Evangélica Luterana do Brasil (IELB), the other main Lutheran church in Brazil, mentioned in this book only once and in passing. *Confissão Luterana* (“Lutheran Confession”) is a trademark in the IECLB’s name (Igreja Evangélica de Confissão Luterana no Brasil) and, as it seems here, also in its theological reasoning, perhaps in order to distinguish it from its “competitor,” the IELB.

also legitimate and necessary for the church and its congregations to be concerned about responsible baptismal practice. For people's faith life, it can be very important to have an occasion and public ceremony in the church, including prayer, as a divine promise and strengthening in the discipleship of Christ, possibly also accompanied by a confession of faith and a statement renouncing practices not consistent with faith in Christ.

If it could be proven that someone had been baptized in the name of Mary or of some saint or *Candomblé* entity, in addition to the Triune God, this baptism would clearly be invalid, and the person should be considered as not yet baptized. In this case she/he, along with making a profession of faith, would receive baptism, and this would not be a rebaptism but his/her first and only baptism.

However, I must say that, even though I have asked for it, no one has really been able to give me proof that a "baptism" of this kind has occurred in the Catholic Church. Neither can we expect such a proof to be produced. A baptism practiced in that manner flatly contradicts what the Catholic Church teaches and keeps a watchful eye on. If we have evidence of this type (for example, a certificate of baptism or clear indication of name, date, temple, and mode of such a baptism, confirmed in writing by witnesses)—with such evidence or testimony we could perfectly address the Catholic Church itself to take disciplinary action against the priest who may have performed such a baptism, and the Catholic Church would declare it void.

Turning to issues of *theological grounding*, it is important to note that caring pastoral consideration of people should always be present. The fear of possibly losing members, however, cannot be the decisive factor in that consideration. In a central issue of faith, we must be guided by evangelical and biblical-confessional criteria, not by pragmatic considerations that may compromise evangelical integrity. Moreover, there is no practical evidence that an honest attitude clearly presenting the evangelical Lutheran confession's position might really be less attractive than giving in to requests of people who have not had the opportunity to gain profound knowledge of the evangelical position of the Lutheran confession. What matters is that leaders and church workers have clarity and conviction in the subject matter, and it is fundamental that evangelical integrity prevail as the ultimate criterion.

As the issue has largely to do with people coming from the Catholic Church, it is appropriate to consider the Catholic position. The CNBB [National Conference of Bishops of Brazil] has published an "Ecumenical Guide" (*Estudos da CNBB* 21, 3rd ed., São Paulo: Paulus, 2003), authored by Fr. Jesús Hortal, current Dean of the Pontifical Catholic University in Rio de Janeiro and former member of the Catholic-Lutheran National Committee; it is always recommended to consult it in cases of doubt about the doctrine and practice of the Catholic Church. In relation to baptism, for example (pp. 40–50), there appears, citing the official *Diretório Ecumênico* of the Catholic Church, "Baptism is conferred with water and the formula which clearly indicates the act of baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (pp. 41–42). On this point there is no divergence between the Catholic and Lutheran positions.

It is also wise to accept for ourselves the recommendation this guide provides to Catholics: “If somebody raises doubts regarding the proper use of water and the way to perform it, respect for the sacrament and deference to [other churches] require a serious inquiry into the practice of the congregation at issue before making any judgment on the validity of their baptism” (p. 43). On p. 48, the Guide explicitly cites the IECLB “and all the churches within the Lutheran World Federation” as churches that “beyond any doubt baptize legitimately. For this reason, a Christian baptized in them must not be rebaptized, not even conditionally” (which the Catholic Church practices when there is doubt about the validity of a baptism performed in a different church). Conversely, we also have every theological reason to consider baptism practiced in the Catholic Church as fully valid, and we should abstain from any practice that could be characterized as rebaptism. If there are any doubts, we should try rigorously to clarify them, including by inquiring of the ecclesiastical authority of the other church.

Of course, recognition of the Catholic Church’s baptism does not in any way imply that the two churches do not have differences in doctrine and faith practice. In fact, during baptism in the Catholic Church, a prayer may have been voiced that evokes the protection and intercession of Mary or a saint. This may contribute to the impression some people have that baptism would have also been made “on behalf” of the Virgin Mary or a patron saint. However, the evocation of Mary or a saint in a baptismal prayer does not invalidate baptism rightly done, just like a baptism in the IECLB does not become invalid either just because the pastor pronounces a prayer or an address with some theologically debatable assertion. If this were true, we could not be sure of any baptism whatsoever. Moreover, the validity of baptism does not depend on the “holiness” or “orthodoxy” of the officiant. It is the free promise of God to the life of faith of the one being baptized.

I must also say a word regarding “baptism” in non-Christian religious movements. If a person has not been validly baptized in any Christian church, but has only received a so-called “baptism” in Umbanda, Candomblé, or some other similar religious movement, the person shall be deemed not baptized in the sense of the Christian tradition or the Lutheran confession, and shall therefore receive the first and only baptism. In almost all cases, however, it is to be presumed that the person who has received a so-called “baptism” in one of these religious movements has also been previously baptized in a Christian church, in most cases in the Catholic Church. In this case, of course, the first baptism performed remains valid. Then one should consider the possibility of renouncing the non-Christian practice, which would be performed in a liturgical act of reaffirmation of baptism but not in a new baptism altogether.

Let us also deal with the issue of *the IECLB’s regulations and guidelines*. These are equally clear. In 1997, in [the town of] Rodeio 12, a consultation was held with several internal movements in the IECLB; it became fully clear then that the IECLB does not practice nor accept a practice of rebaptism, assuming that the baptism in another church was validly performed (with water and in the name the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit). The IECLB Presidency accordingly addressed all church workers in a letter. The IECLB documents *IECLB às Portas do Novo Milênio* [At the Gates of the New Millennium] and

IECLB e o Pluralismo Religioso [The IECLB and Religious Pluralism] made that position equally clear.

The issue, therefore, cannot be considered an open question in the IECLB; instead, it is clearly defined. Toward people who are petitioning for rebaptism, being legitimately moved by the desire to be authentic in their faith life, a beautiful task rests with the IECLB's workers and leaders: to accompany these people pastorally, showing them the theological reasons why we do not perform rebaptism, and offering an alternative liturgical act of reaffirmation of baptism, confession of faith, and Christian commitment, without using water accompanied by the Trinitarian formula, which might evoke the image of a new baptism. Now that the project *Livro de Culto* [Book of Worship] is complete, hopefully the IECLB will have liturgical guidance for this act in the near future.

One last recommendation: it is important that our congregations, especially their leaders, study the subject, for example using the Small and Large Catechisms by Martin Luther, as well as *Nossa Fé—Nossa Vida*. With Luther we can learn that baptism, once performed and always valid, engages us for all of life. Every day we are called to go back to our first baptism, as Luther says in the Small Catechism: “the old creature in us with all sins and evil desires is to be drowned and die through daily contrition and repentance, and on the other hand that daily a new person is to come forth and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.”⁵⁰ This is what we should also convey to people pleading with the IECLB for a space for the communal experience of faith.

Wrapping up:

1. All persons applying for baptism in the IECLB must be pastorally accompanied with empathy, warmth, and love. But the matter must be decided theologically, according to correct Lutheran doctrine, not depending on practical considerations of hypothetical gain or loss of members.
2. If they were baptized in the Catholic Church (or Orthodox or other Protestant churches), that baptism is considered fully valid, and no new baptism should occur. We recommend a liturgical act of confession of faith and reaffirmation of baptism without the use of water or simultaneous evocation of the name of the Trinity, in order not to give the impression of a new baptism.
3. If there are reasonable doubts about the validity of a baptism received by someone in some other Christian church, there must be a conscientious investigation, including consultation with the church in which he/she would have received baptism before deciding for baptism in the IECLB. These cases should also be brought to the attention of the appropriate synodical pastor and the IECLB Presidency.
4. If people have not in fact been baptized in some other Christian church but have received another act classified as “baptism” by some other religious movement, they should be considered as non-baptized and receive Christian baptism.
5. If people were baptized in a different Christian church as well as receiving “baptism” in some other religious movement, the baptism performed in the other Christian

⁵⁰ BC 360.

church is valid, whereas the act called “baptism” in the other religious movement can be renounced in an act of confession of faith and reaffirmation of baptism.

6. There are still other aspects of the understanding, meaning, and practice of baptism, which is why it is always recommended to study this matter using Luther’s Catechisms as well as the normative IECLB documents, trying to clarify their meaning to people who [wish to become members of] the IECLB.

I hope these considerations help clarify the issues you raised. Nothing prevents you, however, from returning to the subject, raising any new doubts or questions.

Wishing that the Holy Spirit may guide you in this and all other matters in your important task of leading congregations and always witnessing to the Gospel of Christ, I send you a cordial and fraternal embrace.

Walter Altmann, Presiding Pastor

XIV. LETTER FROM THE PRESIDING PASTOR OF THE IECLB, N° 91874/06, TO A CONCERNED MEMBER OF THE IECLB
(Porto Alegre, 22 December 2004)

Dear [Name], brother in Christ:

Thank you for consulting me regarding my statement that faith should not be understood as “a precondition for baptism.” I apologize for answering you only now. I was away when you wrote, then we had a series of meetings and a lot of issues to deal with. You say you need my help. I’ll try to give it and ask God to guide my words and both of our understanding.

Among other matters, you report the following sentence contained in a letter from the [IECLB] Presidency: “[The church leadership] emphasized respect for baptism... as well as faith, which receives the grace of God... not as a prior condition for baptism.”

Then you add your comments: “The rather traditional Lutheran person and even the ‘four-seasons’ Lutheran (baptism, confirmation, matrimony, and burial), has the idea that he has to baptize his child so that it won’t be a *‘pagãozinho’* [little heathen]. Implicit is here a quest for faith, which for lack of preaching and congregational experience is relegated to a second, third, or even tenth level. This reminded me of Mark 16: ‘Whoever believes and is baptized...’ Also Colossians 2:12, ‘through faith.’ I read *Nossa Fé—Nossa Vida*, and it also speaks of faith as a condition for baptism (even if it is outsourced to the godparents). In this case, doesn’t the assertion that faith is not a condition for baptism go against Lutheran confessionality? Isn’t this [assertion] another extreme that once again confuses rather than helping?”

And you conclude: “I need your help to understand that. In the peace of the Lord Jesus, an embrace. [Signature.] Please.”

I am very touched by your appeal. I will try to answer. Let’s for a moment put aside the issue of baptism. Let’s imagine somebody, say, twenty-five years of age, who never heard the gospel, never heard of Christ. Let us say now, that at this age, she hears the preaching of the gospel and comes to faith in Christ. All of it a work of the Holy Spirit, as we know. But what happened? Was salvation produced there? By means of her faith? Not at all. The faith that the Holy Spirit has given her is “in Christ.” And the saving work has already taken place there—two thousand years ago! What a marvel! That is: my faith, the Holy Spirit, connects me with the saving work that already took place two thousand years ago for my benefit. Oh, here I’ve started talking about “me,” while I was talking about that person of twenty-five who never had heard the gospel. Never mind that; the experience is always the same, whether with that person, with me, or with you. In faith we are connected to the saving work that has already taken place in Christ two thousand years ago.

Now say that person of twenty-five who came to faith in Christ loses her faith, which unfortunately happens sometimes. We are all called to be faithful to God. But we cannot count on the loyalty of believers, only trust the never-broken faithfulness of God. God is faithful, we are sinners. “If we confess our sins, [God] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9). Let’s say that person, now aged

thirty, repents of having turned away from faith and wants to return to the living God. She confesses her sin and God forgives, according to his promise. What has happened? A new saving work? Not at all. Through the confession of sin, the forgiveness received, and the “return” to faith, that person was reconnected to the same saving work in Christ that already took place two thousand years ago. This work will not be repeated ever again. It happened “once for all,” as the Epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes more than once (7:27, 9:12, 10:10).

Now we get to baptism. Let us presume that the person, twenty-five years of age, had most likely never been baptized, because she had never heard of Christ. Upon hearing the preaching of the gospel and coming to faith, she also requested baptism, just like the eunuch requested of Philip upon hearing the interpretation of Scripture: “What prevents me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36). Here we are dealing with a missionary situation. You will then have a baptism of an adult. Was salvation produced there, in baptism? Obviously not. Salvation happened in Christ, two thousand years ago. Faith received that salvation. What then is baptism? Baptism is the sign—visible, personal, with water, in the name of Trinity—of God’s grace to new life. The apostle Paul says: “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).

However, in our example, the person who came to faith and, as we now have added, was baptized and later turned away from faith but repented at age thirty, confessed her sin, was forgiven, and returned to faith. Should she request and receive a new baptism? No way! This is not a new faith, much less a new salvation. It is always a return to that salvation already achieved once and for all in Christ. And baptism, being the sign of that work of God’s grace, should not be repeated. Upon returning to faith, this person also came back to that baptism that already took place. If she were rebaptized, she would be again denying the grace of God! She would be denying that God had already acted in that first baptism and thus, strictly speaking, would be denying that salvation in Christ (two thousand years ago) is sufficient. She would be saying that God’s saving work in Christ needs to be complemented by something that she needs to do, faith as a deed. She would then be making faith a “condition” for salvation, and consequently limiting the grace of God. Therefore, she must not request rebaptism, nor should it be granted if requested. Rather, we must explain the reasons why rebaptism should not occur, and why she can rejoice in the baptism already done before.

Let us now talk of infant baptism. Let’s imagine a very extraordinary, very rare, but not totally impossible thing to have happen. Deliberately I’m taking an extreme example to illustrate clearly how we should view infant baptism. Let’s imagine that the person, twenty-five years old, who’d never heard of the gospel, was, in fact, correctly baptized as a baby, but then was given to a foreign non-Christian family who took her to a distant country where there is no Christian church. Therefore she never heard about Christ. However, the new parents received and took along a certificate of baptism. At age twenty-five, this person discovers (or receives) the baptismal certificate and wants to know what it is. She decides to go back to her origins, to the country and place where she was born. She then listens to the preaching of the gospel and comes to faith. Must she apply for a new baptism? Should a new

baptism be offered or given to her? Not at all. She will consider that the baptism performed on her when she was a baby was the sign of God's grace. She will know that God has acted in her favor long before she could react to him in faith. But she will give glory to God for his unfathomable mercy and will propose to live with this God every day.

Well, once again I admit the story is offbeat, but it still illustrates the meaning of baptism. In infant baptism, rightly done, whatever amount of time it takes to get to conscious faith, it will always be a turning [back] to baptism, to the grace of God, to the saving work in Christ (two thousand years ago!). We can discuss what is the best practice in the Christian community: infant baptism or adult baptism. But we cannot reject one for the sake of the other. What is needed is to be clear about the meaning of baptism, about the relationship between grace and faith, and that faith does not make baptism but receives it, as Luther says. And then we must strive for infant baptism to occur in a context of faith, of fathers and mothers, of godparents, of the Christian community, and [also] that adult baptism does not put our faith in the place of God's grace. In both cases faith is important, but in different ways. Above all, it will always be on the receiving end, never a precondition for grace and baptism.

This is not in contradiction with Lutheran confessionality, which is clear in this regard, and does not either contradict *Nossa Fé—Nossa Vida*, which says, "This grace wants to be embraced in faith, both by parents and godparents and later by the child as well. Faith, however, is awoken and maintained until the blessed end by the Holy Spirit. To the same effect [lo and behold, in the same sense!], after due preparation we also baptize adults, who profess their faith on that occasion" (p. 20). Then, on p. 23, the question is answered whether baptism can be repeated: "Because of the faithfulness and holiness of God, baptism performed in accordance to this order happens once in a lifetime. We must, however, live baptism daily. Through repentance, God drowns the sin in us and, through forgiveness, he makes us rise again to a new life of faith and love." This also agrees with the apostolic witness: There is "[only] one Lord, [only] one faith, [only] one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). And that is what Luther also emphasized, speaking of the daily return to the baptism once performed.

Allow me to deal now with something slightly more difficult in theology but very important. You have, of course, heard many times about the doctrine of justification. We received it from the Apostle Paul, especially in Romans, which was rediscovered and updated by Luther, for whom this doctrine was the one on which everything else depended. We speak of "justification by faith" and "only" by faith (not by works or deeds). But we also say that "justification is by grace" and "only" by grace. How can we say "only" twice? There would be TWO "conditions" and hence it could no longer be "ONLY"! Now, using "only" twice can be meaningful only if the two add-ons, "by grace" and "by faith," are different in nature. So when we say that justification or salvation is by grace alone and by faith alone, the two "BY"s are not equal. But first, let's go back to the "only"; it is important for the doctrine of the Reformation.

We must understand: salvation is not by "two things," by grace and by faith. It happens "only" by grace, "only" by faith. This only makes sense if the grace and faith do

different things in relation to salvation and not the same work. Now, the biblical witness is very clear: only God is the author of salvation. It happens by grace, “only” by grace. What means then “by faith alone”? It means the salvation that God has performed in Christ only by grace is *received* by me; I desire now to live from Christ. This personal receiving of salvation is “by faith alone,” not because of some work done by me. Luther went so far as to speak of a “passive righteousness”: I can do nothing toward salvation, only receive it; God has done everything.

In this sense I stated, and we need to state it, that faith is not a “prerequisite” for salvation; salvation is merely received. Theologians, by consequence, also formulated the phrase that justification is by grace alone and faith alone, thus: “justification happens BY MEANS OF the grace of God THROUGH faith.” And then we can say, without falling into contradiction, “by grace alone” and “by faith alone,” because the term is used in two different senses, each of them exclusively. Moreover, if we say that “faith is a condition for salvation,” then we automatically deny the “by grace alone.” Or, conversely, only if we say that faith is not a precondition are we respecting the “by grace alone.”

You see, all this is at stake when in the church we debate which is the true relationship between faith and baptism. This is not a secondary issue, which one might conceive this way or that, whatever. The very core of our faith is at stake here. And we must not give up, but persevere in “sound doctrine” (cf. II Timothy 4:3).

We are in the Christmas season. A famous theologian, Karl Barth, said that Christmas is the birthday of every Christian person. In that infant Jesus, God became brother to each of us. In this wonderful fellowship I greet you very fraternally.

Walter Altmann, Presiding Pastor

Cc: Synod of [Name]

XV. LETTER TO A PERSON THINKING ABOUT HAVING A NEW BAPTISM

(How would you pastorally respond to a young girl who, having just come to faith, though baptized as a child, would like to have the experience of a new baptism, now by her own choice? Pastor Oziel Campos de Oliveira Junior, resident in Palhoça, Santa Catarina in Florianópolis, and pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Parish Union of Sobriety, responded in writing to a young woman who expressed this request to him.)

Thursday, 23 December 2004

Dear [Name],

Thank you for your email.

[Name], you received not only baptism as a gift when you were not aware of the world around you but hundreds of other gifts as well: your name, father and mother, brother, home, the language you speak, skin color, the country you live in, many many hours of daily care, the church you joined, and so forth. Baptism was one of those gifts: your parents and godparents affectionately led you to the altar. There you were touched in Jesus' name, according to the command given by Jesus. There you were blessed by God. How great that you didn't grasp anything [at the time], so you cannot think you had any merit in what happened. Thus, the only explanation possible is that "everything happened by the wonderful grace of God, of Jesus," who welcomes little children.

People who think you first must know what you are doing in order to be baptized think that part of what happens in baptism is our merit, that is, that we can be baptized because of "our repentance, our conversion, our faith, our piety," etc. [However,] Paul teaches thus: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8–9). Being baptized again is to despise the baptism already performed in Jesus' name. During the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, some churches of the so-called Anabaptists ("rebaptizers") began to teach that it was necessary to baptize again. Some of the arguments for this rebaptism were the following: "Perhaps the priest who baptized me was an unbeliever," or "Maybe he was living in adultery," or "I was young and did not know what was happening," etc. This caused a lot of confusion. Many people thus "rebaptized" did not feel secure because even after the second baptism they thought, who knows if this time the pastor isn't living with some hidden sin? Maybe I should be baptized a third time. Martin Luther taught that baptism is not validated by the one who receives it but by the one who commands it. Money is valid in the hands of a doctor, and in the hands of a dealer as well. What makes money valuable is not its owner, not the one who uses it, but the mint [that issued it]. Thus baptism is valid because Jesus commanded it, not because of the worthiness of those who practice it. Indeed, who of us is worthy? We Lutherans believe that none of us is worthy. Worthy is Jesus who sanctifies whoever has him in their life.

I think it is unfortunate that some churches claim that only baptism performed in "their church" is "valid." Just as unfortunate is using baptism as a rite of entry into a certain denomination, which is customary in some churches. We will never have peace of mind and

an unwavering trust in God as long as we don't rely solely on the grace and mercy of God revealed in Jesus Christ. If you let yourself be baptized again, I think you are shifting a percentage of the trust we put in God into [your] works.

You have been baptized, [Name]. Live your baptism daily, repent daily, and know that God, among the thousands of gifts he gave you while you were still a "little dear *cucaracha*," also gave you baptism.

Pr. Oziel

XVI. LETTER FROM THE PRESIDING PASTOR OF THE IECLB, N° 106752/05, TO A SYNOD PASTOR
(Porto Alegre, 11 November 2005)

Dear [Name]:

We have just finished the National Forum for Evaluation of the IECLB's Restructuring, which we assessed as extremely positive in the spirit of brotherhood, consciousness of church unity, and commitment to the gospel. The Forum also led to a series of very concrete recommendations. [Your] synod representative will certainly report on the matter.

At two occasions during the Forum we gathered the synodical pastors present, eleven in number, with the Presidency, in order to review your letters concerning the request for baptism by new IECLB members in northeastern Sertão, baptized but who due to the circumstances they described wish to receive baptism in the IECLB.

The following points were agreed upon between the Presidency and the synodical pastors, who fully support them. The writing, of course, is mine and could not be shared with them prior to dispatch.

1. Thank you for submitting the matter to the IECLB through the Secretary of Education, Romeu Martini. In fact, in this issue even more than in others, it is crucial that we have a uniform and consistent approach across the IECLB, even while considering the particularities of each situation. Moreover, there are decisions and measures already taken by the Church Council which naturally must be complied with.

2. The accounts of people from northeastern Sertão who became members of the IECLB, as shared by you, are touching and denote well the depth of involvement people had in their lives, often far distant from the wholesome gospel, as well as the intensity of questions and dilemmas they face when they come to evangelical faith. There is then a daunting pastoral challenge of spiritual counseling and theological orientation, which is of great importance. People should absolutely be taken seriously in their feelings, in their questioning, and even in their anguish (and also respected in their decisions, even if for theological reasons we diverge from their assumptions).

3. We should be thankful to God for these people having found (or rediscovered) the faith and fellowship of God in the company of brothers and sisters in the IECLB, and should ask God to strengthen these ties, always on the basis of the gospel's truth. We must also intercede for our church workers so that they can help these people understand more comprehensively and deeply the gospel entrusted to us.

4. Regarding the request for baptism, we should consider the following: in any baptism correctly performed (with water and in the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), God is the principal agent whose promise is never revoked and whose fidelity has no end, although the circumstances of its realization and paths subsequently taken by the one baptized may be diverted or even perverse, the result of human sin. Moreover, through faith we accept the grace of God, and when we sin we return to [grace] by repentance. Thus, there is one exclusive and unrepeatable baptism. These assumptions are an indispensable part of

our Lutheran confessionality, because they correspond to the biblical message of God's grace.

5. As a general rule, the IECLB recognizes baptism performed by Protestant churches, the Orthodox churches, and the Roman Catholic Church. In baptism we can even glimpse their common foundation as Christian churches. This obviously does not mean there is a full agreement between these churches regarding the doctrine and practice of faith. Instead, often there are profound differences, as is the case in relation to the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, based on our faith conviction, we do not agree nor can we agree with problematic elements that may be associated with baptismal celebration of other churches, as, for example, intercessory prayer to the Virgin Mary and the saints. But these elements do not make void the baptism with water performed on behalf of the Trinity, simply because God in his mercy and his promise was present there, and his grace must not be doubted.

6. On 12 November 1979, the IECLB (through its Presiding Pastor Ernesto Augusto Kunert) and the Catholic Church signed an act of mutual recognition of baptism. It states: "Both churches agree that baptism was instituted by Jesus Christ and is essentially a free gift of God to the one being baptized, linking him/her with the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3–6), for the forgiveness of sins and to new life. Both churches teach that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism and came down on the church then and again today, transforming it into the community of the Holy Spirit who, in witness, service, and fellowship, proclaims his kingdom. Both churches accept baptism as a basic bond of unity given us by faith in the same Lord. Both churches accept baptism in the unrepeatable dimension of our consecration to Christ for the edification of his body, envisaging our growth to perfect maturity, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:13). Both churches administer baptism with water and in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins, according to the intention and command of Christ (Matthew 28:18–20). By this mutual recognition both churches exclude the possibility of rebaptism when members change over to the other church. Both churches give thanks to God for this basic bond of unity given to them and ask for the assistance of the Holy Spirit to overcome their divisions and engage in the commitment to continue the journey towards perfect Christian unity."

7. On the basis of this mutual recognition we hope that the Catholic Church does not rebaptize IECLB members that may possibly join it. Vice versa, the Catholic Church must be confident that the IECLB also will not rebaptize people already baptized when they are admitted as members in the IECLB. Ultimately, however, this is [handled this way] not out of consideration for the other church but because we recognize the action of God himself in the baptism performed. He is the one we must not and do not want to disregard. The normative instructions of the Catholic Church are very strict about the celebration of baptism with water and in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Any remaining doubts about this should be clarified with the relevant competent authority of the Catholic Church.

8. Still, not least considering the religious context in which we live, it is understandable that new IECLB members wish to express their commitment to faith in a significant way, within the community, especially if they have had a [previous] religious

experience they now see as conflicting with the faith [now] attained. Thus, the Church Council commissioned the Council on Liturgy to prepare models for a liturgical rite of baptismal remembrance (also called a rite of reaffirmation of baptismal vows). The Council on Liturgy drafted three different liturgies, one of them aimed at “entering or re-entering members.” These liturgies will be presented to the Church Council at its next meeting with a request for approval. I share these liturgies already now, for consideration at the synod, in situations such as those described in the letter sent. I draw attention to the fact that [these] liturgies include the moment of “renunciation,” with questions and answers. One of the modes also proposes the use of water, though obviously not in the form of repeating baptism. Like all liturgical models in the IECLB, they are models not to be rigidly followed, but always moldable according to local particularities or the occasion, naturally without distorting their direction.

9. The Church Council also asked the Presidency to establish guidelines for granting (or not) so-called “conditional baptism.” The Presidency is still awaiting suggestions from a number of people asked to submit them. If possible, the proposal will also be brought before the next meeting of the Church Council. In principle, one can say that conditional baptism will be considered (and eventually performed) when there is reasonable doubt whether the person requesting it has been previously baptized in some sister church, and if this doubt cannot be removed despite efforts to elucidate it. In no way may conditional baptism be granted simply because someone desires it, although we must show understanding and give pastoral and theological care to the person making such a request. Also the criterion of “correct administration of the sacrament” must be used with utmost caution. It obviously includes ensuring that the act of baptism with water and in the name of the Triune God is performed in a sister church with the sincere will to baptize; but [the correct administration of the sacrament] must not be undermined by a catalogue of additional requirements that would make our action a condition for the free grace of God. That is: “conditional baptism” will be an exception, never something “normal and commonplace.”

10. This letter is [just] a guiding framework, still to be finalized, regarding this sensitive issue in the life of the IECLB today. In pursuing these goals, it is the responsibility of every worker (with their presbyteries) to discern the specific situations, and the synodical pastor (with the synodical council) to monitor workers, guide them, and ensure compliance with the guidelines. Naturally, non-settled issues can (and should) be taken by church workers to the synodical pastor or, by this representative, to the IECLB Presidency.

11. Finally, I would put the Presidency at the disposal of the synod, if it so deems appropriate or necessary, envisaging some future moment and mode in which [the Presidency] could talk about these guidelines with synod staff and/or leaders.

Wishing you a continued blessed work, fraternally,
Walter Altmann, Presiding Pastor

Attachment: Proposals for Liturgical Remembrance of Baptism

Cc: Synod Pastors

Pr. Dr. Romeu Martini—in hand

XVII. "ROADMAPS"

A. Roadmap for assessing external interference in congregations/parishes or synods:

1. What situations, meetings and/or schedules has the synod come to know about that have given rise to unrest, tension, protests, conflict, or division within congregations over the actions of staff and/or lay leaders coming from other congregations, institutions, or synods?

2. What are the actions of workers and/or lay leaders coming from other congregations, institutions, or synods that occurred without proper authorization and/or knowledge by the synod?

3. What are the cases where unrest, tension, or conflict have arisen through the action of missionaries, workers, or leaders coming from churches other than the IECLB?

4. Has the creation of preaching points, a new congregation, or a "church" disregarding regulatory procedures taken place in your synod? Which are the cases?

5. Has there take place within your synod the installation of so-called "pastors" or "missionaries" who do not belong to the IECLB staff? What are the cases?

6. In which cases have people from other churches have been hired for a ministerial function?

7. In which cases have ministerial practices led to the division of congregations and/or exclusion of members?

Note: We suggest reporting primarily cases of the kind in which synod pastoral care has not proven effective, as far as possible detailing persons involved and/or affected, also by attaching, if they exist, information, letters, minutes, reports, newspaper articles, etc., corroborating the fact. We also ask for the arrangements made in each case by the synod to be reported.

B. Roadmap of questions about baptism, baptismal teaching and practice (information requested by the IECLB according to the EMO [Statute on Ordained Ministry], art. 28):

Church worker's name:

In teaching and preaching, which points do you emphasize regarding baptism?

How do you perform baptism? Were you baptized as an infant? Where? When?

Who baptized you?

(Attach a copy of the certificate if the IECLB does not yet possess it. Note: This can be done in due course.)

Have you opted to go through "baptism in the waters" or a "baptism of faith"?

Where?

When?

Who baptized you?

(Attach a copy of the certificate, if any, and in case the IECLB does not have it yet.

Note: This can be done in due course.)

Have you baptized people who previously had received baptism in another Christian church, even as infants? If so, under what circumstances did this occur?

Have you baptized people who had previously been baptized within the IECLB?

If so, in what circumstances did this occur?

In what situations do you refuse infant baptism?

Have you officiated over a “baptism in the waters” or “baptism in faith” of fellow IECLB workers?

If so, in what circumstances and why did you do it?

I declare the above information to be true and complete. (Note: Data or attachments not included here can be provided in due course if they are not currently available.)

Place and date:

Signature:

Supplementary Texts

I. OPEN LETTER TO THE “CHARISMATIC RENEWAL” MOVEMENT IN THE IECLB: REACTION TO THE STATEMENT “DIALOGUE ON CONGREGATIONAL ISSUES”

Pr. Dr. Gottfried Brakemeier

“There is... one Lord, one faith, one baptism...” —Ephesians 4:5

I allow myself to speak out about the statement above, formulated as early as June of this year [2004] but come to my hands only now. I do so without any official mandate or request by anybody. I am only motivated by the concern for the future of the IECLB and its congregations. As a former minister and Presiding Pastor, although retired I still feel responsibility for the trajectory of “my” church. This letter intends to be an expression of [this concern and responsibility].

I am encouraged by the harmony of purposes. As I read in the position, the goal of the Charismatic Renewal is “maintaining unity and church growth.” That’s exactly it: growth not without unity, and unity not without growth. It is also about deterring members from leaving and about gaining new members, very much in agreement with the proposal of the “Missionary Action Plan” (PAMI). Only as long as the IECLB remains missionary will it be a “viable” church in this country. On this there is agreement. But how to achieve this goal? That is the question. Allow me to bring some brief reflections on four issues that seem to be crucial and in need of clarification. They require intensive discussion, to which this letter intends to be a stimulus. They are “diversity,” “rebaptism,” “community,” and “charismaticism.”

1. Diversity

Christian community is plural by its very nature. It needs the diversity of its members for the proper functioning of the body. Only what is different qualifies to serve one another. The blind cannot lead the blind, Jesus warned (Matthew 15:14). Uniformity kills the dynamics of life. Yet diversity is wealth only as long as it is capable of mutual complementarity. It must fit a common denominator and be based on a basic consensus. Otherwise it will become chaotic and destroy fellowship. Without the gravitational pull of a central star, planets are lost in space. Unity, therefore, needs a center that “makes ends meet” and controls centrifugal energies.

The IECLB has always allowed for an extraordinary variety in theological orientation and religious practice in its congregations. The fact that nevertheless no breakup has occurred⁵¹ is undoubtedly something to be proud of but also the result of much effort and dialogue. “Leaving it as it is to see the outcome” is highly dangerous precisely in this issue. Therefore, diversity should be crafted and made accountable before the “basic consensus” that characterizes the IECLB and constitutes its confessionality. If the Charismatic Renewal claims some space as one more “Lutheran” variety within the IECLB, it must demonstrate its

⁵¹ TRANSLATOR’S NOTE: Many IECLB congregations have broken up for various reasons, contributing to the growth of the other Lutheran church, the IELB. It is not clear why the letter does not acknowledge this.

compatibility with this body; a requirement, in fact, applicable to all movements, groups, “theological lines,” forms of piety, that is the existing plurality in the institution.

The dividing line between benefit and loss from plurality is not always clear. Could not the lack of a clear IECLB identity be a cause of its “shrinkage” as noted and deplored in the statement? Who are the members leaving the IECLB and what are their reasons? This question must be studied very seriously. Where is the IECLB shrinking and why? Could this shrinkage not be [understood] also [as] a form of division, certainly not of the IECLB macrostructure, but of its very bases? Be that as it may, I see great urgency to pinpoint the common ground of a church called the “Evangelical Church of the Lutheran Confession in Brazil.” If this foundation is strong, it will bear, undamaged, conflicts that often accompany human interaction and learning processes. Otherwise, unity is threatened. For this very reason we need to value the Confessions identifying the IECLB. If members no longer recognize “their” church, they will leave. Every plurality needs links in order to avoid social disintegration. This also applies to the IECLB.

2. Rebaptism

Until recently one of the most important uniting links appeared to be our understanding of baptism. According to the Charismatic Renewal, however, this is an illusion. Allegedly there is “a diffuse baptismal practice in the IECLB because there is a confused theology.” Regarding practice, I do not deny the possibility of abuse, although I recommend not to generalize and thus make unjust judgments about the overwhelming majority of pastors who perform their ministry with a high level of responsibility. But I do deny that baptismal theology in the IECLB is [in a state of] confusion. There surely was discussion whether, for pastoral reasons, it would not be advisable to prefer adult baptism as opposed to infant baptism. Yet this debate was premised on the common belief that baptism is God’s action for the human being, exactly as stated by Luther in his Small and Large Catechisms.

Certainly I need not repeat that good Lutheran doctrine rejects baptism as a magical act with an *ex opere operato* effect. It is intended to be received by faith, again and again. For baptism is the “word of God... united to water,” as Luther says, thus being a visible word together with the audible word of preaching. Neither preaching nor sacrament have priority here. Therefore, to deny that by baptism “we receive from God all he promises in his Word,” as the statement says, is at odds with the Lutheran position. Faith does not endorse nor legitimate baptism. It just receives it, either before or after the act. God’s grace always precedes human action. God first loved us (I John 4:19). This is the reason why Luther, after a brief initial hesitation, so forcefully defended infant baptism. Just read his testimonials in the Large Catechism. Legitimate concern with people’s faith should direct attention to other factors, not to questioning the practice of infant baptism, provided that parents, godparents, and the Christian congregation really commit themselves to the Christian education of the baptized-to-be. Denying infant baptism is legitimate only in the absence of such a commitment.

Failures in pastoral practice should motivate a more authentic practice. But they never justify the adoption of measures that compromise Lutheran identity. This is the case in

rebaptism, which is in blatant opposition not only to the Lutheran tradition but to the absolutely predominant Christian tradition since New Testament days. Even when people came back having denied the faith while facing the threat of martyrdom, the old church stood firm. It did not repeat baptism. It demanded rather a penitential act. Baptism as an act of God does not require reconfirmation. For God is faithful. Now, the human being and his/her faith are another matter. The old Adam/Eve in us must be drowned daily, as Luther said. So, what needs to be confirmed is the baptismal commitment, not the sacrament.

I ask if this is not a proposal that meets the needs of those troubled by doubts concerning their baptism as young children. I see no benefit in introducing a “conditional baptism,” even less a “baptism of confirmation.” The latter is identical to “rebaptism,” which puts the group who practices it on a collision course with the virtually consensual basis of the church of Jesus Christ. If the lack of faith, or awareness of the same, were considered sufficient reason for repeating this sacrament, then its celebration should actually take place daily: there are no sinless people. —By the way, I am unaware of a Catholic practice that admits some form of “confirmation of baptism.” The Catholic Church rather practices the so-called “conditional baptism.” The Lutheran church must also baptize, if baptism in the name of the Triune God is not proven. Yet the legitimacy of the rite is not related to factors of pastoral care, nor to the degree of faith of the baptized person. It would be an abuse of the “conditional baptism” to perform it whenever the person confesses to having suffered under the lack of active participation in this sacrament, or else every infant baptism would have to be repeated. Baptism is no award to believers nor a ceremony of faith graduation. We must reemphasize that what gives validity to baptism is the Triune God and [its] performance “in his name.”

I suggest, instead of rebaptism, to introduce a rite of “reconfirmation of baptismal commitment.” This surely would have a Lutheran basis. It could be accompanied by an act of penance, absolution, and blessing. As is known, Luther was for a time in doubt whether or not to recognize penance as a third sacrament. In some versions of the Small Catechism the relevant part is still there. It offers itself as a starting point for drafting a corresponding liturgy. But of course some other form is also conceivable. This subject deserves discussion.

3. Community

If Christian community is plural, the pastoral task is complex. The difficulty is exacerbated because of pluralism in a democratic urban society in a globalized world, with numerous options on offer, even more so in the religious sphere. Postmodern multiculturalism and multireligiosity are reflected in the Lutheran community and affect its unity. Tradition is eroding, gradually losing its stabilizing function of the past. The different kinds of “public” which make up the church are diversifying. This also, in principle, is not new. The evangelical community has always included people of diverse ages, ethnicities, professions, educational levels, social classes, men and women, healthy and sick people, “traditional” and “progressive” people. But the explosion of options in the free religious market has added new types of “public” and introduced the law of competition. You must be a good competitor, otherwise you go broke.

The traditional image of the congregation has been “one flock, one shepherd.” It also supported the concept of “parish” as a community based in a given area limited by geographical borders. This is also what the apostle Paul had in mind when writing “to the church of God that is in Corinth” (I Corinthians 1:2). In the parish model, only one worker takes care of a plural flock. The problems here are blatant. For it is extremely tempting for a pastor to focus on a group of his/her choice and imprint on the members his/her vision of authentic faith. Depending on the theological orientation of the church workers, congregations are conducted in the style of the Charismatic Renewal, the *Encontrão* Movement, the Lutheran Pastorate for the People, the Christian Union of Evangelical Mission, and the Martin Luther Fellowship, among others. Songbooks or hymnals, devotionals, liturgies, vestments, church ornamentation, the celebration of the Supper—they are all different. Also in this case, diversity is wealth only if anchored in a strong common foundation. While pastors leave after awhile, congregations stay put. They cannot apply for transfer. So what is determinative in the IECLB? Confusing diversity is nothing to be proud of, not at all. I regret to note the lack of discipline in respecting normative IECLB documents and council resolutions. The reason is, it seems to me, an excess of individualism as well as perplexity regarding what a church of the Lutheran confession has to offer Brazilian society at the beginning of the twenty-first century. What is it here for?

Is the Lutheran community project bankrupt? Some people question the parish model. It is no longer functional under the conditions of urbanized society. But what is the alternative? In other countries, the model of “communities of orientation” has been discussed, established according the affinity people show with some particular form of religiosity. The result has not been encouraging. Should we replace the parish model with a model of “personal communities”? In this case, the figure of the pastor with his theological proposal and personal charisma would establish the boundaries of the community and define its confessional orientation. It would be the congregation of Pastor So-and-so. Does such a proposal promise to be successful? I have no ready answer. Of course, the IECLB should diversify its “offerings.” It cannot offer one liturgy to all groups, young and old, Teutonic and Luso-Brazilian, to mention only these. This is one more urgent matter for study and reflection. In a way it is about “reinventing” the evangelical community. Which profile could it have—in megacities, in the dispersion, in a minority situation?

In this effort, I think it is important to resist the danger of replacing the church “member” with a “customer.” It is not just about meeting individual religious needs. The Lutheran church must never fail to seek the edification of an authentic “community,” that is, of people in solidarity with each other and constantly sharing fellowship with those who are different as well. Moreover, it would be absurd to try to solve the problem of plurality in the congregation by making available a specialized pastor for every kind of “public.” This would once and for all split the congregation into rival or hermetic groups. Urgent now is a critical review of pastoral work as such. Among other things, pastors must be able to manage plurality, work on conflicts and reconcile diversity. Particular theological preferences must fit into the church’s and its congregations’ “confessional option.” This is a priority. In the case

of the IECLB, this means that personal theological preferences must by their nature be “evangelical of the Lutheran confession.”

Therefore the ecumenical project of “unity and reconciled diversity” is relevant to the churches even internally. We are not yet sufficiently prepared to accept and work in plurality. We continue dreaming of uniformity, which is the same as the “privatization of the flock.” Every one of us pastors wants to have “our” congregation. Is the separation of individual congregations the only way to solve the problem of plurality? Can we not solve it under the same institutional roof? The implosion of parish unity will be followed by the implosion of synod unity and finally by that of the IECLB itself. I believe that an evangelical Lutheran congregation should be an example of diversity, enabled to enjoy peaceful coexistence and mutual service.

4. Charismatism

Within the diverse landscape characterizing the body of Christ, the charismatic variety of the Christian faith must also have its place. Its legitimacy is given, among others, by the Apostle Paul in his statements in the First Epistle to the Corinthians (chs. 12–14). The Charismatic Renewal could compensate for a traditional deficit within the Lutheran community regarding the emotional dimensions of the human being by meeting what has been identified as the “Brazilian religious matrix,” that is, the “pentecostalizing” tendency of our people. It could be a catalyst for indigenous revivalist religious experiences and a looser, more spontaneous, joyful, and engaged spirituality. The CR movement stresses, with good reason, dimensions in the work of the Holy Spirit that are too often silent in the churches. I believe the CR should be encouraged to make proposals that would be valid for the entire IECLB.

At the same time, however, we should observe the clear limits Paul drew between simple religious fervor, also existent in the pagan world, and the manifestation of the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and God the Father. He did not let excitement take the place of faith and insisted on love as the main charismatic manifestation. This is the most excellent way. Without excluding emotions, some of them quite strong, the apostle strove in favor of a “sober community” that convinces by its clear, prophetic, uplifting speech. Ecstasy does not replace faith, and occasional bragging by visionaries who said they were “spiritual” and despised those they considered “carnal” earned his harsh criticism (II Corinthians 10–13). Certainly the situation in Corinth was different from the IECLB today. Still we must carefully listen to Paul’s testimony.

The apostle Paul did not suppress charismata. But he required them to be incorporated into the Christian faith and stand in the service of community-building. It never crossed his mind to agree with the separation of the charismatic faction by forming a second “evangelical church of the Pauline confession in Corinth.” The charismatic expression had to be integrated into the whole community, a requirement valid, of course, for all other “theological schools,” be they of Apollo, Peter, or of Paul himself (I Corinthians 3), or be they PPL, MEUC, *Encontrão*, etc. Parallel structures, lack of communication between groups, and rivalry undermine the unity of the church and weaken its missionary force.

Therefore the IECLB will have to invest in the exchange of theological expressions that exist within it, always looking for what, in its confessionality, may contribute to the presence and action of the church of Jesus Christ in this country. For the IECLB exists among its ecumenical sister [churches] because of its confessional heritage, without which members might just as well join other denominational groups. This Lutheran heritage, I maintain, is committed to the evangelical authenticity that often annoys the “market” and that, nevertheless, bears the promise of blessing. All plurality contains a potential for conflict that will be deactivated only when worked on with honesty, readiness for self-criticism, and, above all, the Spirit of love, wisdom, and truth.

It is this Spirit who also prompted my reaction. Since I do not know the authors of the statement by the Charismatic Renewal, and I want first to have the permission of the Presidency of the IECLB, I forward this reaction through the same. I hope it will be perceived as a service to that unity which Jesus wants for his community (John 17:21). The peace of Jesus Christ be with us all.

With a brotherly hug,
Gottfried Brakemeier

Nova Petrópolis, in the season of the Advent of our Lord 2004

II. LETTER FROM *ENCONTRÃO* MOVEMENT: OUR RELATIONSHIPS, OUR PAIN, OUR HOPES (THINKING OUT LOUD)⁵²

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” —Romans 15:13

On 3 and 4 July we had a meeting of brothers and sisters, gathering leaders of the *Encontrão* Movement, the National Board of *Encontrão*, and more than thirty guests: lay leaders, professors of theology, congregational pastors, evangelists, leaders representing various ministries, men and women engaged in the work of God’s kingdom in the IECLB.

In this meeting of leaders we had a moment for recognizing how the mercy and grace of God have marked our lives and ministries over the forty-year history of *Encontrão* within and from the IECLB.

We devoted significant time to listening to each other in a spirit of humility and fellowship. Different voices echoed there, different points of view in an effort to practice a pedagogy⁵³ of dialogue and integration of individuality and diversity. We talked about our historic calling to evangelism and edification of the Christian community; we shared our experiences in the area of theological education and in areas of Mission Zero and the Urban Mission; we rejoiced about the growth of the ministry among the youth and the training of lay leaders in our midst through Bible study and discipleship programs.

In this event we also did a joint reading about how these nine years have been a [period of contacts] between the Charismatic Movement, the *Encontrão* Movement, and the relationship with the IECLB governing bodies.

Our aim was to come together as brothers and sisters in faith, with the commitment to be the body of Christ seeking to practice listening, to learn feeling, understanding, respecting diversity, to learn discernment, to live together with a sincere wish to learn more and more how to serve Christ and one another, to serve the church, to serve the kingdom of God.

We had the opportunity to affirm the importance of spirituality and the charismatic missionary impetus for the IECLB’s life and for evangelical people in Brazil and Latin America. We recognize there is a retrieval being achieved by the charismatic emphasis on some elements of the body of Christ, theology, and the work of the Holy Spirit. [These elements] have often been neglected by many mainline Protestant churches, which has impaired the contextualization of the gospel among Brazilian people and their anthropological, emotional, spiritual, social, and cultural needs.

We also had a moment of regret, of expressing the pain and suffering of the body of Christ due to insensitivity, the inability to listen, to integrate diversity, and to preserve the fraternal and ecclesial unity in the internal texture of the IECLB, explicitly in the

⁵² Note: This letter is addressed to leaders and others identified with the *Encontrão* Movement, not intended as an academic document, but as a pastoral message. Through this letter we want to share our concerns about the situation we are going through in IECLB, as we have felt and shared it, thought and dialogued about it.

⁵³ TRANSLATOR’S NOTE: *Pedagogia* appears seven times in this paper. It appears to be a characteristic phrase of the *Encontrão*, meaning the style in which the church leadership deals with its flock.

uncompromising positions of some voices within the IECLB leadership and of some leading voices within the Charismatic Movement. This can be felt in the content and spirit of letters disseminated in the church media, where the sole fault always lies on the other side. It looks like true Lutheran confessionality or true biblical theology is the private property of each segment.

Apparently, a pedagogy of sharp conflict was increasingly taking roots, the will for closure was greater than the readiness to open up, individualism was radicalizing on both sides, and the trend toward exclusion was stronger than the willingness to integrate, as already evidenced in the Forum on Lutheran Identity in May 2004 in Rio de Janeiro.

The dialogue agenda and schedule between the IECLB management and the Charismatic Movement leadership showed there was a three-year vacuum, practically, in dialogue between both sides, and when returning to dialogue in 2004 radical thinking and attitudes were already quite consolidated.

With its strategy of consolidating a uniform position institutionally supported by the General Council of Church, dogmas, normative and constitutional documents, and legal-doctrinal regulations, the IECLB commissions seem to have been quite effective in setting up a pedagogy of exclusion that is however insufficient for maintaining unity, inclusion, brotherhood, and preserving diversity within the body of Christ.

The proposal from the expert on Natural Church Development, Dr. Christian Schwarz, that there should be a relationship of complementarity and cooperation between the static pole (institutional: doctrine, dogma, sacraments, functions, regulatory documents) and the dynamic pole (faith, fellowship, evangelization, service), seems not to have been assimilated yet by leaders of both conflicting segments.

It seems institutionalized power has enormous difficulties in dealing with revolutionary power (towards reform and transformation brought by theological and missionary movements throughout church history).

The document “New Transdenominational Movements and the Churches” produced by the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, affiliated to the Lutheran World Federation (in whose drafting the well-known ecumenical theologian Harding Meyer participated, a former professor at EST⁵⁴ in São Leopoldo) suggests there are three models for the relationship between the church and its movements. One model would be the strategy of elimination, as has often happened in history. This elimination could be active or passive but it would be an inadequate solution in view of the challenges and renewal that movements bring into the churches. Another possibility would be the relationship of tolerance and coexistence, which would also be an inappropriate solution because it does not deal seriously with the differences between movements and churches.

Yet another possibility would be integration, which can often result in absorption, where movements lose their purpose, identity, and *raison d’être*. Beyond absorption there can be integration through domestication, where a movement loses its independence and autonomy by becoming submissive to the institution. The proposal suitable for a fairer

⁵⁴ TRANSLATOR’S NOTE: Currently called the Faculdades EST.

relationship between a movement and the church, in a coexistence based on respect, would be theological pluralism, asserting the possibility of coexistence and fellowship between diverse conceptions and ways of life integrated into the Body of Christ. It would be the path of dialogue, mutual respect, preservation of otherness, and mutual fertilization between the church and renewal movements.

We regret that, in the dominant pedagogy and strategy in the relations between the IECLB leadership and the Charismatic Movement, the principle of exclusion and intransigence has prevailed, which includes mechanisms of pressure via theological and confessional documents (conciliar and legal-doctrinal) as well as pressure by actions (Pentecostal ministerial practices, indiscriminate practice of rebaptism, and disrespect regarding the IECLB's normative documents).

At this meeting of national leaders of the *Encontrão* Movement and at other occasions of dialogue with church workers and lay leaders, we find:

1. That the *Encontrão* Movement has a history of forty years of service to the IECLB in unity with the biblical and confessional basis expressed in the IECLB Constitution. We work in line with the mission and core objectives of the IECLB when relating to people, congregations, parishes, synods, leadership functions, positions, and ministries in various institutions, departments and committees of the church.

2. The *Encontrão* Movement throughout its history has made a significant contribution to spiritual renewal of the IECLB by its collaboration in evangelizing people, restoring families, revitalizing congregations, training lay leaders and workers, creating new congregations and ministries, expanding the missionary mandate of the church (Mission Zero and mission on the outskirts of cities), in the Christian calling and training of thousands of young people, in diaconal service from congregations and in diaconal projects.

3. The *Encontrão* Movement in its forty-year history did not prioritize writing any position on baptism and rebaptism, nor condoning infant baptism or adult baptism, or even on controversies over the ritual practice of baptism. The first book on the subject of baptism drafted by theologians and pastors identified with the *Encontrão* Movement is currently in preparation and will probably be launched in October. The theme of baptismal theology and practice in a missionary and syncretistic context as we experience it today in Brazil (especially in mission across borders and mission in the context of the outskirts of cities) requires a more significant response, establishing a serious dialogue with anthropology, religious culture, and the social reality and postmodern context we live in.

The suspicion raised by a recent document sent by former President [sic] of the IECLB, a theologian respected by all of us, Dr. Gottfried Brakemeier, that the *Encontrão* Movement was defending rebaptism, giving an unrestricted and unconditional support to the Charismatic Renewal, has no foundation neither in its literature nor institutionally. Suffice it to say that the document released by the *Encontrão* Movement in 2001 under the title: "What Church Do We Want?" does not once mention the issue of rebaptism. Unfortunately, [the reaction to] that document, which was a call for theological dialogue on various issues of church life, was limited to two or three articles restricted to a personalized academic debate. This procedure is also fashionable nowadays, when we avoid face-to-face dialogue to find

viable solutions to the main problems of the IECLB. When will we have the maturity to prioritize dialogue with each other, rather than limiting ourselves to talk about others in the small group of those who do not contradict our theological positions?

We need to talk about the myth of a static, uniform, ahistorical confessionality that needs no contextualization, as we have seen in many statements from representatives of the so-called official IECLB theology.

4. The *Encontrão* Movement states in line with the study and position issued by the Institute of Ecumenical Research in Strasbourg (supported by the Lutheran World Federation) that the more Christian, more democratic, fairer, and more ethical way in relating to movements in the church would be the pedagogy of tolerance, integration as citizens, respect for the otherness of these movements, a fraternal relationship marked by experiencing plurality in dialogue and seeking a reciprocal enrichment.

1.⁵⁵ Once established which charismatic segment will leave the IECLB (possibly one-third of this movement's supporters) and what remains of the charismatics in the IECLB (the other 70%), what kind of relationship will the IECLB leadership establish with these brothers in faith, members of the IECLB, committed to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and anxious to be treated with the same dignity afforded to other segments and movements in the church? Our fellowship and communion with charismatic brethren leaving the IECLB does not depend solely on confessional and institutional connections but also on belonging to the Living Body of Christ and on the recognition of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless we deeply regret this division and disruption with the IECLB.

Dr. Brakemeier's paper states, "by all one can see, we have not yet discovered in the IECLB the way to deal with plurality."⁵⁶ Shall we continue dealing with plurality through the pedagogy of conflict, normative documents and doctrinal procedures, or limiting ourselves to strategic ecclesiastical policy of majority pressure to silence the minority through some forums and councils with predetermined intentions? Shall we continue the ideological pedagogy or shall we seek consensus, practice tolerance, integrate diversity and theological representativeness (and not just a geographical-synodical one), prioritize the ethics of dialogue for inclusion and respect for plurality? Shall we prioritize the pastoral principle of fraternal relations or the ideological principle of power?

After this whole process of conflict and attrition, unless we learn to create other forms and principles of mediation, we really will make the IECLB increasingly impracticable theologically, missiologically, and institutionally.

2. Church history from the earliest communities to the present days has always displayed ecclesiological diversity and various renewal movements. In its 180-year history the IECLB has always coexisted with ecclesiological diversity, also of theological currents

⁵⁵ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: The reason why the numbering starts over in the original is not made explicit. One possibility is that the first series states findings while the second offers questions and proposals.

⁵⁶ TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: This exact wording cannot be found in Brakemeier's paper above. Perhaps they were thinking of the sentence in §3, "We are not yet sufficiently prepared to accept and work in plurality."

and renewal movements within the church. The Lutheran Identity Forum held in Rio de Janeiro, with lectures held by several IECLB historians, spelled out this living and dynamic reality of our history. Besides discussing ecclesiological diversity in the IECLB, we should also discuss christological conceptions within the IECLB and make a deep analysis of Brazilian religiosity and Brazilian anthropology.

3. [We should] deepen some subjects and conditioning factors characteristic of postmodernity, such as: the concept of identity being recast as dynamic and not static, the affirmation of the freedom of the subject, the diversity of possible models of existence and human society, and the reduction and dissolving of boundaries; the loneliness, fear, and ecstasy of the human being; the distrust of reason and disenchantment with the ideals of modernity, the crisis of dogmas and fixed principles, practical atheism and religious fragmentation, ideological and cultural diversity, the ethics of sexuality, the possibilities and limits of classical ecumenism, and the ecumenical challenge of the Pentecostal evangelical world. These and other current topics are key for the IECLB being viable.

4. The *Encontrão* Movement sees with concern the increasing evidence of control mechanisms being established over the lives of IECLB workers as well as the increasing demand for liturgical uniformity and surveillance on the use of robes (vestments). We are also concerned with the campaign for parishes, congregations, and other fields of work giving up their freedom to elect or dismiss their staff, this freedom being backed by the writings of Luther himself and built up over the 180 years of IECLB history. The anxiety of the IECLB governing body with respect to the number of church workers who cannot find work [in the church] should not be solved at the cost of congregations and staff losing autonomy. We run the danger of setting up an increasingly paternalistic and controlling relationship by the IECLB governing body and synod leaders, interfering more and more in the freedom of the parishes, institutions, and the very freedom of church workers. Do parishes today and their leaders have less maturity or competence to choose their staff? Will we not induce an infantilization of our community leaders at a time when we have much more access to knowledge in the field of leadership management than our ancestors did?

These are some of the concerns we share in this letter, so people identified with the *Encontrão* Movement may have some outlet for dialogue on these issues in their congregation, parish, or synod meetings.

Hoping that we can join forces in dialogue and commitment to serve with joy and responsibility in the work of the kingdom of God, I close with fraternal greetings.

Pastor Jairo L. Menezes dos Santos
Executive Director of the *Encontrão* Movement
Curitiba, July 2005

III. IF THE SHIP IS SINKING: A MANIFESTO FROM THE SPIRITUAL RENEWAL MOVEMENT

With much regret have we observed some unfortunate signs that make us wonder whether the Lutheran IECLB ship is floundering. What are those signs?

It has lost its direction.

Without the compass of Scripture, the ship is sailing on strange waters, for example, universalism (the teaching that all will be saved). Now, we know that “inclusive” is the opposite of “exclusive”—and saying that Jesus is the only way seems too exclusive. The most appropriate thing would be to say that he is the best way, because we do not want to embarrass those with whom we have maintained (macro-)ecumenical relationships and interreligious dialogue. Although the gospel is the message of salvation through Jesus Christ by his death on the cross, that word—salvation—has been misrepresented. For instance:

- “Grace” is now understood as the freedom to do what seems best, because God is loving and forgiving and certainly will not condemn anyone.

- “Theological diversity” today means that virtually anything goes; this idea, by the way, is spreading rapidly. The theology of the cross, strangely, no longer focuses on Christ’s blood being shed, like it did for Luther. Rather, it emphasizes suffering and makes pain an end in itself.

- “Spirituality” is anything stimulating a religious feeling of contact with the sacred. Thus, the gospel becomes any “good news” that blows in our favor.

Because of that, the message becomes relativized and methods tend to become absolute. This is what is happening, for example, with the liturgy of worship, increasingly rigid and straightjacketed. Technique replaces passion, which is kept under constant suspicion. Apparently, aboard this ship called the IECLB, it is easier to talk about Romans 7 than about Romans 8, because you need to avoid any allusion to the “theology of glory.” “Liberating the oppressed” is the new gospel to some crew members. We moved from a message centered on Christ to a message centered on a Creator (not the Father) and on a Holy Spirit, not in the sense of the New Testament’s Spirit, but in the sense of a vague, harmless, and theologically permissive spirit.

Fearing the subject of sanctification, passengers end up being limited to a poor diet with a nutritional quality similar to baby food.

While the ship is sinking, the captain reminds people to “walk wet,” a reference to their baptism, which is not so difficult on a sinking ship. The new anthem is: “My hope is grounded only in baptism,” our eternal security, which prevents people aboard from realizing that the ship is sinking. Baptism is separated from a life of faith because of fear of a human response, which reduces faith to fatalism and baptism to a rite of mystery. Thus, baptism, an important teaching of the New Testament, ends up becoming as grotesque as a warped image in a funhouse mirror.

The ship is taking on water.

It is adrift, agitated by opposing theological waves, and it sails without anchors. In it, you can talk without any embarrassment about saving whales, but you must not talk about

saving the lost. The lost ain't lost, so don't try to save them. We don't need evangelists! Let's call back the missionaries!

It is also said that other cultures are as rich as Christian culture. No room for imperialism on this ship. What are we, then? Pirates? Theological tolerance ends up being adjusted to all kinds of permissiveness. We are even redefining the idea of what homosexuality is and giving it a new meaning, in order to "protect" people who still need to be born again and know the liberating power of Jesus Christ.

Although the ship appears to be in serious trouble, the captain and chief officer seem not to be alarmed, because they do nothing to prevent the ship from sinking. What they are doing hastens the sinking. The ship has been taking on water for a long time, threatening all aboard, including the schools of theology, which run the serious risk of also losing their proper direction.

So what will eventually happen in the near future? Loyalty to the captain and his crew (who are in leadership and pursuing the same interests) will decline. The gulf between them and many on board will further increase. Vital ship movements, those that reflect the cool breeze of the Spirit, will consider the captain's activity ever less relevant. This will estrange the crew from those under suspicion of disloyalty, which will then be marginalized. An increasing number of passengers suspects that the ship is being taken to the port of Rome. As things get worse, some crew members see danger ahead; they become nervous and control more and more. Meanwhile, others believe the ship is unsinkable.

If you instead think the ship is not sinking, pray for those at the helm to change the ship's direction and do what you can to keep it afloat. If you, however, realize the ship is sinking, then do not pray for it not to sink, because it is probably too late. Pray that you have a good lifeboat, and make sure all those dear to you are wearing lifejackets. Do not let yourself be swallowed by a religious system that is guided more by political ideals than by a genuine message of salvation.

What should those on board do facing a potential disaster?

1. Take care of your own life. Don't get involved with the crew. Mutiny is no good. Don't write resolutions to keep the ship afloat. It's too late for that. Be like Noah, who did exactly what he was told to do. He built an ark as an option not to drown. Build something strong enough to face the biggest storm. Keep the focus on your call and vocation. Take care of those under your authority rather than trying to change those who are not.

2. Fight if you have to fight but only if God tells you to do so. Crusades and causes are not necessarily values of the kingdom, so don't specialize in fights, especially if you are a pastor—unless you have an abundance of grace to do it. Otherwise you will transform your entire community into warriors. Many prophets were warriors and required a large measure of grace to accomplish their difficult task. Be guided by the same grace and ask continually: "Is my cause the cause of Christ?" And, for your love for the gospel of Jesus Christ, don't deviate from your call and vocation.

3. Abandon your desire to change the system. This only makes your heart sick with a feeling of frustrated hope. Do this: reduce your expectations and be the best church worker you can be. Changing yourself may be more important than changing the other. God can

always do new things in you. Redirecting your expectations will certainly turn you into a winner. God does not waste anything. He uses everything for his purpose, even the struggles of a religious system.

4. Pray as if you were part of the problem. Otherwise, you won't come to any solution. Daniel identified with the problem and God used him as a prophetic voice. Avoid Elijah's self-righteousness, who mistakenly said: "I am the only one left." Your prayer should be for people who are desperately sad because of the ship's condition and yet are not bitter. Embittered people don't pray, they just complain and all they do is demoralize those who are drowning. If your case is complaining against the IECLB, we have a bit of an advice for you: change your way of seeing things. Blessing is better than cursing. In addition, the clearest action toward an unknown future, while we await the unfolding vision, is to pray. Despair, as one pastor said, is the hammer of God. The God's opportunity lies behind human impossibility.

5. Be bold and don't give in to shyness. Reassess your own values. Learn where and why you are, so you won't feel condemned when it is against the prevailing current. Raise the banner of truth, the infallible Word of God. Building the ark was a difficult task and poorly understood by those who saw it happen. Expect criticism, but don't allow it to curb your confidence. Pay the price for doing whatever God tells you to do.

6. Be positive. Live in hope. There are many things you can be optimistic about. The church of Jesus is not the [IECLB headquarters at] *Senhor dos Passos* ["Lord of Steps" Street] in Porto Alegre. Christ is building his church and nothing and no one will stop it from prevailing in the world. Jesus himself said that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Don't forget: you have value! As has been said before, the ark was built by amateurs; the Titanic by professionals. It's easy to stray from your vision and neglect it. The ship was sinking when Jesus came on scene. He addressed a religious system that was sick. Jesus came to die rather than destroy the Pharisees. He neither fled a confrontation nor did he waste his time with them. He did not even appear to them after he rose to prove that he was alive. When the plans of Jesus interfered with those of the Pharisees, he spoke the truth, exposing their lie. Jesus knew what he was called for and did what he should do. Let us follow his example, in the spirit of Christ! Let us keep going!

Joinville, Santa Catarina
September 2005

IV. SICK OF IT: FROM A CHARISMATIC TO CHARISMATICS

Pr. Luiz Paulo Geiger

(January 2006)

Once upon a time I got baptized. Unconsciously baptized, but baptized correctly. I don't remember how it was, can't remember which pastor baptized me. No need for it. Whether my parents knew what they were doing to me, I don't know. But I think they were of goodwill. And I sincerely believe that with that act they were surrendering me into God's hands and putting me in a Christian community. I believe in baptism, God agreed to be my Father in advance and said *yes* to me.

Once upon a time I myself, *yes*, this time consciously, committed my life into the hands of Jesus. Fifteen years after being baptized. I remember it well. And I believe that with that act I took up my baptism. I said *yes* to God, agreeing to be his son. Whether this act is called conversion or new birth does not matter to me.

Once upon a time I had a charismatic experience. This was twenty years after I surrendered my life into the hands of Jesus. I also remember well how it was. Whether this experience is called baptism with the Holy Spirit or infilling of the Holy Spirit doesn't matter. What matters is that from then on, I felt more empowered for ministry, my life got a boost. But by no means did I feel less dependent on the grace and mercy of God. And no less a sinner. On the contrary: now my weakness became even more evident.

But I never questioned my unconscious baptism. Because even before conversion and charismatic experience, infant baptism became secondary for me. I never entertained the theory that now I might need a conscious baptism.

But I understand those who call into question their infant baptism. In pastoral practice I never refused to listen to these people in their distress.

I even came to think that maybe I should help these people in their distress by performing a new baptism. But then I realized that most people who were baptized again continued with the same sorrows, the same problems, the same doubts. Some became even more arrogant and intolerant than before. It seems that the new baptism did not solve their problems. So, in their dissatisfaction with themselves, they invented other needs. Meanwhile, along with other colleagues, we started organizing the Charismatic Movement. I did it because I had a dream; it was soon after I went through the charismatic experience.

I dreamed that all the IECLB would experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit, just like me, and nevertheless remain of the Lutheran confession. Even better: much more Lutheran than hitherto.

I dreamed that nobody, no group needed to leave the IECLB for being charismatic, forced by some church worker who didn't understand what had happened.

But also because no one, no group, was radical and intolerant towards people who were different, who had not understood the charismatic experience.

I dreamed there was respect. That no one was talking to the other as traditionalist or revivalist, not even as a classical type or PPL or *Encontrão*. I dreamed I had the freedom to

express the gifts, freedom to pray with those who needed healing or deliverance, as Jesus prayed without anyone being shocked.

And also I dreamed there was no confusion. But there was praise to God. There was no liturgical rule imposed for conducting worship services; nevertheless everyone knew it was Lutheran, because being Lutheran was something heartfelt, not just following external rules.

I dreamed that the IECLB never again lost members to other churches because everyone liked being Lutheran. In my dream, some churches even had to be enlarged because there were too many people trying to get in.

I dreamed there was unity, coherence, and balance between faith, Lutheran tradition, and charismatic manifestations. There was no controversy, no fights or divisions or discrimination. The church grew, more and more people were added to the number of those who loved and served Jesus.

But I woke up, and my dream was over. And the reality I see is groups leaving congregations, saying the Lutheran church is a cold church, pastors are not spiritual, they don't have the Holy Spirit or they've quenched the Holy Spirit.

I see many mistakes being committed in the hustle of enthusiasm, with the justification that "it is for the glory of the Lord." I see Lutherans criticizing their church, who do not love their church, working against their church and attending other churches on the grounds that they "need to replenish."

I see people with no scruples using the ends to justify the means. I see people trying to change the congregation and the pastor by force before they themselves have been transformed. I see people acting with pride and arrogance, in complete lack of love and humility.

I see people trying to impose their way of being on the community, shoving and hurting people. I see those who say they are very spiritual using human methods, not at all spiritual.

I see people who don't allow their mistakes to be confronted, who don't accept being taught, because they say they have "a direct connection with God" and don't need to read the Bible.

I see people who want renewal and revival without change of character nor consistency in life[style]. I see pastors yielding to the temptation of populism, preaching and doing what people wish, failing to exhort and correct; pastors who are the mirror of their members' wishes.

I see that pastors who before preached conversion now advocate baptism as if it were the "mainspring" of revival.

I see a struggle for power in the congregations, disunity, jealousy, envy. People who prefer to leave, dividing congregations, because they are not able to love, to socialize with, and to connect with those who think differently.

I see people who say one thing and do another: they talk of obedience to authority but fail to submit to anything going against their plans.

I see people inaugurating churches and hiring those who preach what they want to hear. Churches in their image and likeness, not an expression of love of neighbor and Jesus. Churches wanting to be “perfect,” where you don’t need to live with those who are different, where everyone is the same. It is no coincidence that Paul said in II Timothy 4:3, “having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.”

I see pastors unreservedly supporting groups that leave congregations without first hearing the colleague involved, without assessing the character of the leaving group, as if all problems, all motives, all groups, all congregations, and all ministers were the same.

I see no concern for healing wounds, for listening to both sides, for promoting forgiveness and reconciliation between the parties.

I see people who call themselves brothers cheating, lying, and slandering. People who cannot forgive, cannot love. Who see the speck in the eye of others, but don’t see the plank in their own eye. Living solely on appearance.

I see people who want something spectacular, a show, not intimacy with God. People who live by emotion, not faith. People who speak more of the evil done by the devil than of the good Jesus does.

I see people who seek God for what he can give, not for what he is. I see sacrifice and service being replaced by running after success, blessing, and prosperity. I see people who, instead of seeking God in prayer themselves, just want to be “ministered to”; they want others to pray for them.

In February 1996, when I sent an invitation to some colleagues inviting them to hold the first meeting of the IECLB Charismatic Pastors, I did it because of this dream for the IECLB to become more lively, with room for all theological expressions, with freedom from discrimination and radicalism.

A few sentences of that letter were: “If the Holy Spirit is one, then he does not divide but unites.” “We really need to see what is biblical and what is not.” “For us, everything is new. We’re still learning. Therefore none of us can claim that his experience is the only feasible, correct, and biblical one.” “We have to learn to submit to one another in faithfulness to God and in love. We now have the opportunity to allow for a serious and true charismatic movement to come up within the IECLB. It all depends on us humbly allowing ourselves to be used... or not.”

In a response letter that I sent to the then-Presiding Pastor, in May 1996, I wrote, “We believe that charismatic groups arising in our communities need to be worked on, to find balance, to find the point of contact between faith and the Lutheran tradition and spontaneous manifestations of the Holy Spirit. We do believe this is possible. After all, nobody wants to stop being a Lutheran.”

“We’re not here to argue, fight or divide. We don’t want to be one more group of opposition within the church. Rather, we want to contribute, add, unite for the love of Jesus and the church.”

This was my dream and, I sincerely believe, of some other colleagues too. Today, unfortunately, the reality is different. The more democratic model was sacrificed on the altar

of personal projects of some radicals that the Charismatic Movement has unfortunately been handed over to.

Those who disagreed, who questioned radicalism, who fought for balance, for less dictatorial relationships, less “centered on the pastor,” less euphoric, more authentic, more “down to earth,” with more love and less power, more reflection, more depth: these are treated as “black sheep” and have been abandoned along the way. They are treated as dissidents.

So today, I do not consider myself anymore part of this radical Charismatic Movement as it exists now. I still consider myself a charismatic, yes! And I remain a Lutheran within the IECLB. I still believe there is a true Charismatic Movement, balanced, serious, and that this being moved by God is aimed at the IECLB too. I still believe the gifts of the Holy Spirit are for today, too, but they need to be accompanied by the fruit of the Holy Spirit. I still believe I Corinthians 12, 13, and 14 can also be experienced today.