

THE WORD OF GOD IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

*A Report of International Conversations between
The Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance
2006-2010*

PREFACE

It is with gratitude to God and with deep appreciation of the friendship that has grown between Catholic and Baptist participants in these conversations, that we come to the end of five years' work. In our last meeting in Oxford, England, there was a sense of sadness that we would not be meeting and sharing in prayers again in the way to which we had grown accustomed, a feeling only alleviated by the pledge to keep in contact with each other and sustain at least a 'virtual' community.

We therefore warmly commend this report to Baptist and Catholic readers, and all others interested in relations between them. As we suggest in our conclusion, we do not think that such a sustained attempt has ever been made before to identify as accurately as possible the convergence and divergence between Catholic and Baptist Christians. Sympathetic readers will, we believe, find a great deal of light cast here not only on the beliefs of another Christian communion, but on the convictions of their own. It has been in setting our beliefs side by side in a thorough way that we have come to understand both them and each other more deeply, so that we have been able to move further towards the goal set by our Teacher and Master Jesus Christ, 'that they all may be one'. While we do not expect our readers to be surprised by differences that remain, we think they will be surprised by the extent of the common mind that has been revealed. We hope that readers may be helped here by the typographical convention we have adopted, placing a summary of our convergence in paragraphs in bold type. Here we simply set out what we can say together, without explicitly making the point each time that we are in agreement. The passages in regular type are a kind of commentary on the statements in bold, either expanding on our agreement, or explaining the divergences that remain.

We came to discover, as we met year by year, that the choice of the overall theme of 'The Word of God in the Life of the Church' had been a wise one, not only prompting us to reflect continually on the relation between Scripture and tradition, but also directing our attention to the one who is the living Word of God and the Lord of the Church. So we have tried to fulfill the aim which was formed at the planning of these conversations, to foster a life of shared discipleship.

We have thought it helpful to provide references to Catholic Councils and papal teaching in the footnotes, so that both Catholics and Baptists can follow up issues in greater depth. We have also provided references to historic Baptist confessions of faith for further study, largely coming from the beginnings of Baptist life in England in the seventeenth century. However, we must emphasize (as we do in an important footnote) that the Catholic and Baptist references are not the same kind of authority, as Baptist confessions are not binding on local churches as Catholic teaching is on the Catholic faithful. Nevertheless, Baptists might like to be reminded of their heritage of faith, and others will find significant witness here to what Baptists believe.

In the light of the whole report we hope it will become clear how much our conversations with each other have been assisted and informed by conversations we have already each held with other Christian communions. This, we think, illustrates how Catholics and Baptists have been engaged in seeking to find the mind of Christ for His Church in our time. It has been our joy to add a further stage to this pilgrimage of hope together. Meeting as we did just before Christmas each year, we were prompted to say with the early Church, *Maranatha!* 'Come, Lord Jesus!'

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The Status of this Report

The Report published here is the work of the International Conversations between the Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance. It is a study document produced by participants in the Conversations. The authorities who appointed the participants have allowed the Report to be published so that it may be widely discussed. It is not an authoritative declaration of either the Catholic Church or of the Baptist World Alliance, who will both also evaluate the document.

I. INTRODUCTION: AIMS, HISTORY AND CONTEXT OF THE CONVERSATIONS

1. Representatives of the Catholic Church (through its Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity)¹ and the Baptist World Alliance (through its Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation Commission) met in Vatican City, Rome in March 2006 and issued the following warm statement:

“The goal of these conversations is to respond to the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ to his Father for his disciples ‘that they may all be one ... that the world may believe’ (John 17:21). Facing the challenges of our world today, we believe this means that we should continue to explore our common ground in biblical teaching, apostolic faith and practical Christian living, as well as areas that still divide us, in order to:

1. Increase our mutual understanding, appreciation of each other and Christian charity towards each other;
2. Foster a shared life of discipleship within the communion of the triune God;
3. Develop and extend a common witness to Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world and the Lord of all life;
4. Encourage further action together on ethical issues, including justice, peace and the sanctity of life, in accord with God’s purpose and to the praise of God’s glory.

We envisage that we can move towards the fulfilment of these aims by focusing on the theme: ‘The Word of God in the Life of the Church: Scripture, Tradition and *Koinonia*.’”

2. The theme which had been identified was handled in five annual meetings lasting a week in December each year, from 2006-2010:

(1) *The Authority of Christ in Scripture and Tradition*, hosted by Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama, USA.

(2) *Baptism and Lord’s Supper/Eucharist as Visible Word of God in the Koinonia of the Church*, hosted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in Rome, Italy.

(3) *Mary in the Communion of the Church*, hosted by the Baptist House of Studies at the Divinity School, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, USA.

(4) *Oversight and Primacy in the Ministry of the Church*, hosted by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in Rome, Italy.

(5) *A Final Meeting* for gathering the harvest of the previous sessions, and working on a draft report, hosted by two Halls of the University of Oxford: Regent’s Park College (Baptist) and St. Benet’s Hall (Benedictine).

Two or three theological papers were given by members of each communion on each of these occasions (listed in the appendix), and the fruits of the week’s discussion were gathered together on the last day into agreed memoranda which have formed the basis of this report. A highly valued part of each meeting was the sharing in morning and evening prayer, which united participants in fellowship and gave depth to all the discussion.

It was originally envisaged that the last session might address the theme: ‘The Word of God in the contemporary situation’, exploring challenges in ethics, mission and evangelism that face our two Christian communions today. While this theme was present as a continual context for all our conversations, it did not prove possible to find the time in our limited programme to treat it separately. We hope that it may be possible to continue these conversations, perhaps in different forms and forums, further exploring these practical issues on the basis of the theological convergence that comes to light in this present report.

¹ In this report the Roman Catholic Church is abbreviated to the ‘Catholic’ Church. This must not be taken to mean that Baptists renounce the description ‘catholic’ in the sense of belonging to the universal church: see §30.

3. The meeting in the Vatican in March 2006 was not, however, the beginning of the story of conversations. There had been an earlier round of conversations in 1984-88, under the title 'Summons to Witness to Christ in Today's World' (between what were then called the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the Division of Study and Research of the BWA). The co-chairmen reflected that 'those of us who took part in the conversations regarded our experience together as a great gift from God,' and the report ended on the note of mutual respect and growing understanding. An essential part of those conversations was firm agreement between Baptists and Catholics on the person and work of Christ, so that when the steering committee came to decide on the contents of the present conversations there seemed no need to repeat this. However, it is important to register this previous convergence at the beginning of this report, as it provides a necessary Christological basis for the theme of 'The Word of God in the Life of the Church'. The two delegations in 1984-88 agreed that:

The Christological statements in the New Testament express the faith of individuals and groups. In their earliest forms, such as we find in Paul's resurrection *paradosis* (1 Cor. 15:1-11) and in the 'kerygmatic' speeches of Acts (e.g. 2:22-24; 3:14-16; 4:10-12; 10:40-43), Jesus is proclaimed as the one whom God raised up (or made Lord and Messiah) for our sins or in whose name we are saved. The doctrine of the person of Christ [thus] cannot be separated from the message of the saving work which God accomplished through Christ (§6)

The work of Christ is presented under a variety of metaphors such as justification (Gal. 2:16; Rom. 3:26-28; 5:18), salvation (2 Cor. 7:10; Rom. 1:16, 10:10; 13:11), expiation and redemption (Rom. 3:24-25; 8:32) and reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18-20; Rom. 5:10-11). These expressions point to the ontological, objective event wherein God has begun the restoration of a fallen humanity to relationship with himself and has inaugurated a renewal of creation through Christ's death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. The offer of salvation from God in Christ is received in faith which is a gift of God 'who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Tim. 2:4). (§10)

Discussion of our witness to Christ has revealed that our two communions are one in their confession of Jesus Christ as Son of God, Lord and Saviour. The faith in Christ proclaimed in the New Testament and expressed in the first four ecumenical councils is shared by both of our churches. Our discussion uncovered no significant differences with regard to the person and work of Christ, although some did appear with regard to the appropriation of Christ's saving work. We believe that this communion of faith in Christ should be stressed and rejoiced in as a basis for our discussions of other areas of church doctrine and life, where serious differences may remain. (§11)

4. The 'differences' that remain are identified in the earlier report as 'theological authority and method' (relating to scripture and tradition), 'the shape of *koinonia*' as it is made actual in the church, and the relationship between faith and the sacraments. To these three topics the report adds the need to clarify the terms 'mission' and 'evangelism/evangelization', together with the need to consider further the challenge to common witness that arises from differences over 'the place of Mary in faith and practice'. As outlined above (§2), the present conversations take up four of these five 'areas needing continued exploration'. The first was seen as key to all, and occupied us in our very first meeting in 2006.

There was a conscious sense in the steering committee of March 2006 that by tackling these specific points in depth within the overarching theme of 'The Word of God in the Life of the Church', rather than taking a broad sweep of issues as before, it would be possible to advance beyond the first stages of mutual understanding into a relation which had the character of 'a shared life of discipleship'. We notice that the opening paragraph of the agenda proposed in 2006 is somewhat less tentative than the Preface to the 1988 Report. Now we were in a position where we could speak about *increasing* a mutual understanding that we already have (point 1), *extending* a common witness to Jesus Christ (point 3) that we are already making, and *furthering* action together on ethical issues that we are already taking (point 4). The aim in these conversations was not to seek a united church structure (what is often called 'organic' unity) – but it was felt that this time we could still set our goal as becoming more clearly one as Jesus prayed. We must notice that some Baptist conventions in South America during the 1980s had serious reservations about engaging in the process of mutual dialogue with Catholics, in the light of what they judged to be a situation hostile to Baptist witness to the gospel. In July 2006, however, at the Annual Gathering of the Baptist World Alliance in Mexico City, the General Secretary Dr Denton Lotz reported that in recent talks with Latin American Baptist leaders they had said that they understood the reasons for the new conversations, and that they would approve their taking place.²

² Minutes of the Decision Meeting, BWA General Council/ Annual Gathering, Mexico City, July 7, 2006 as printed in *Baptist World Alliance Annual Gathering, Accra, Ghana, July 2-7, 2007* (Falls Church, VA: Baptist World Alliance, 1977), p. 52.

5. We had the advantage also of certain informal conversations that had already happened before 2006, and which had addressed some of the issues identified in a provisional way. In 2001 a meeting was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina between representatives of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Union of Baptists in Latin America; this was addressed by Cardinal Kasper, then President of the Pontifical Council, and papers were given on *koinonia* and the sacraments or ordinances. Discussion on these themes was renewed in the first and second meetings of the present conversations. In December 2003, papers were delivered at a meeting of European Baptist theologians and the Pontifical Council in Vatican City. The themes were twofold: first the 'Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification' achieved between Catholics and Lutherans, and second the Petrine Ministry, responding to the encyclical *Ut unum sint* ('That they may be one'), in which Pope John Paul II expresses his belief about the special place of the Bishop of Rome in being a minister of unity to the churches. In those conversations a Baptist paper proposed that the Petrine Ministry could only be discussed in the context of a general theology of 'oversight' in the church,³ and this was the strategy we adopted in the fourth meeting of the present conversations. A year later in December 2004 the focus moved from Europe to North America, and papers were delivered in Washington DC by North American Baptists and theologians appointed by the Pontifical Council, the two themes being baptism and the Blessed Virgin Mary. At the December 2004 meeting a paper from the Baptist delegation affirmed that evangelicals should give the same honour to Mary that is given her in scripture and the earliest church, celebrating her as an example for all believers as one who was truly obedient to the Word of God, and recognizing her significant part within the history of salvation.⁴ These themes have been picked up in the second and third rounds of the present conversations.

6. Grateful for this rich background in earlier conversations between Baptists and Catholics, we now come to record the substance of our own present conversations. The reader will find a common shape to the following five sections. **Agreement between Baptist and Catholic representatives, in summary form, is placed in bold type.** What follows or precedes this in regular type may be a further exploration of our convergence, or it may register where divergences remain. What emerges is a certain degree of consensus, with some remaining differences between us. We hope that this approach will make clear, as the report progresses, how much we share a life of Christian discipleship.

³ Nigel Wright, 'The Petrine Ministry: Baptist Reflections', later published in *Pro Ecclesia* 13/4 (2004), pp. 451-65.

⁴ Timothy George, 'The Blessed Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective', in Denton Lotz (ed.), *Papers Delivered at Meeting of North American Baptist Theologians and The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity*, Washington DC, December 10-11, 2004 (n.p., n.d.)

II. THE *KOINONIA* OF THE TRIUNE GOD AND THE CHURCH

7. The One God exists from eternity in a life of relationship, in a communion (*koinonia*) of three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, is the Word of God as God's self-communication of self-giving love. Jesus Christ is thus God's self-revelation who draws us into the communion of God's own triune life and into communion (*koinonia*) with each other. This means that the Word of God in the church in the fullest sense is Christ himself who rules as Lord in the grace and power of the Spirit.

8. The first round of conversations began by setting the doctrine of the Word of God in the context of the *koinonia* of the triune God. The doctrine of the Trinity affirms that the life of God is characterized by mutual relationships of self-giving and receiving love, in which each of the three 'persons' (the Greek term is *hypostasis* or 'distinct identity') is entirely constituted by relations in the one being of God. We could find no differences between ourselves as Baptists and Catholics with regard to our confession of the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and it gave us joy to add this agreement to our earlier consensus on the nature and person of Christ (see above, §3). Christ as the Word of God is the self-communication of God, so that the Word is not in the first place a bundle of propositions or concepts but God's own personal self-unveiling. This Word not only *reveals* the nature of God as Trinity, showing us a Father speaking forth a Word – as a Son – eternally and in history, but actually *draws* us into the life of the triune God. Thereby, the communion (*koinonia*) of God is the foundation for the communion of the church. [Jn 17:22-3, 1 Jn 1:3, Eph 4:3-6, 2 Pet 1:4]

In recent years this has become our common language, whether Catholic or Protestant, or specifically Baptist. Through the work of our theologians we have all emphasized that God 'in God's self' corresponds to 'God for us'; we have affirmed that who God is eternally, in triune communion, must be the same as the God we know in revelation. Human beings can thus engage in the story of the interweaving relations of the Trinity, and are called to participate in God's own life. One implication of this theology of *koinonia* is that the saving work of Christ (see §3 above) is understood in the context of God's humility in allowing Jesus' fellowship with his Father to be disturbed by human sin in the cross, as revealed in Jesus' cry of forsakenness. The brokenness of human fellowship in the world is thus healed by the sacrificial love of God in the death and resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

9. Since the *koinonia* of the church shares in the *koinonia* of the Trinity, the church stands under the rule of the Word which is Christ. An early paper from the Catholic group affirmed that 'Christ remains truly present in his church' so that 'the crucified and risen Lord Jesus accompanies and guides in the Spirit the community he has gathered together.' Both Baptists and Catholics appealed in discussion to the words of the risen Christ in Matthew 28:20: 'Behold I am with you always', and the Baptists explained that another text which has had historic importance for them on this theme is Matthew 18:20, 'where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' All this is common ground for the church of Christ, but differences begin to appear when we consider the *implications* of the presence of Christ who rules among the people of God for the shape and structure of the church (see §§14-15 below).

10. The Trinitarian *koinonia* consists not only of relations between the Father and the Son – for instance, the Father sends out the Son on mission into the world and the Son glorifies the Father in his obedience – but of their mutual relation with and in the Holy Spirit. While the western understanding of the Trinity has tended to emphasize the nature of the Spirit as the 'bond of love' between Father and Son, the eastern church reminds us that the Spirit has a particular identity and distinct personal activity in the fellowship of the one God. For this third movement of relationship the scriptures give us a whole series of impressionistic images – a wind blowing, breath stirring, oil trickling, wings beating, water flowing and fire burning. These images evoke an activity which disturbs, opens, deepens and provokes. Following Richard of St Victor we may identify the role of the Spirit as opening up the other persons in God to new depths of relation,⁵ with some modern theologians we may also see this as an opening of God to new possibilities of the future, an opening to interaction and partnership between God and the world. The Spirit thus opens this *koinonia* to ever-new dimensions of relationship.

In relation to the Word, the Spirit thus not only makes reception of the Word possible, uniting human persons with the life of God, but also enables us to find new and unpredictable aspects in the Word; this is why the Spirit is often associated with prophecy, or the ability to see into a reality more deeply. Word and Spirit belong together in the life of the church: the self-expression of God's purpose and the continual renewing of that purpose come together since, as an Old Testament scholar put it, God always fulfills his promise in unexpected ways.⁶ It follows that our *perception* of

⁵ Richard of St. Victor, *De Trinitate*, 3.11, 19. Translated in Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God. A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Hutchinson, 1972), 193.

⁶ Walther Zimmerli, 'Promise and Fulfilment', in C. Westermann (ed.), *Essays on Old Testament Interpretation*, transl. J.L. Mays (London: SCM Press, 1963), 107.

God's purpose always needs to be renewed. This is an argument for the importance of tradition, in which the Word speaks anew in new times. It is also an argument for the church to be renewed and reformed,⁷ always willing to let the Word provoke and challenge its life.

It is important to note that the Catholic understanding of the fundamental unity of the missions of the Word and the Holy Spirit are that the action of the Spirit is not outside or parallel to the action of Christ. There is only one salvific economy of the One and Triune God, realized in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, through the Holy Spirit, and extended in its salvific value to all humanity and to the entire universe: "No one, therefore, can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit".⁸

11. The church is thus to be understood as a *koinonia* ('communion', 'participation' or 'fellowship'), which is grounded in the *koinonia* of the triune God. Believers are joined in *koinonia* through participation in the communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. At the same time they are in *koinonia* through their participation in the community of believers gathered by Christ in his church: '...that you may have fellowship with us. And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (1 Jn. 1:3). While the phrase 'communion ecclesiology' is relatively recent, and is more frequently used by Catholic theologians than by Baptist ones, we both recognize it as expressing the heart of the nature of the church.

12. The principle of *koinonia* applies both to the church gathered in a local congregation and to congregations gathered together, whether in a regional association of churches (in the Baptist model) or in a local church (in the Catholic sense), or in still wider expressions of the church universal. We agree that the local fellowship does not derive from the universal church, nor is the universal a mere sum of various local forms, but that there is mutual existence and co-inherence between the local and universal church of Christ.

13. Despite this agreement, a certain asymmetry exists between Baptists and Catholics regarding the meaning of the 'local' church. Catholics define the local church (usually identified as the 'particular church' or diocese)⁹ as:

'a section of the people of God whose pastoral care is entrusted to a bishop in cooperation with his priests. Thus, in conjunction with their pastor and gathered by him into one flock in the holy Spirit through the gospel and the Eucharist, they constitute a particular church'.¹⁰

For Catholics, the ministry of the bishop is essential for the identity of the local church as the office which witnesses to the continuity of the church with its apostolic origins. In the local church the faithful are gathered together by the preaching of the gospel of Christ, and the mystery of the Lord's supper is celebrated.¹¹ Thus for Catholics the 'local' church is defined and identified by word, sacrament and apostolic ministry.

The Baptist understanding of the 'local' church is similar in principle, holding to all three elements mentioned above, but it results in the identification of the local church with a single congregation rather than a diocese. Baptists identify the local church as a congregation of believers, joined together through faith and baptism, where the Word of

⁷ *Unitatis Redintegratio* 6. Cf. *An Orthodox Creed, or a Protestant Confession of Faith* [General Baptist] (London:1679), XXX, in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1959), pp. 297-334. References to historic Baptist confessions in this Report are taken both from the Particular (i.e. Calvinistic) and General (i.e. Arminian) streams of Baptist life. They are given only as illustrations of the points being made, and are not to be regarded as having an authority comparable to that which the references in this report to Councils and papal teaching have for Catholics. Confessions of faith among Baptists are not considered binding on the local church, but provide guidance for teaching, express mutual agreement at the time of writing and explain beliefs to those outside the Baptist community. Quotations from Baptist confessions, historic and contemporary, illustrate only what large numbers of Baptists have believed and do believe. The first citation from a particular document gives the modern book in which it may be consulted.

⁸ *Dominus Iesus* 12, citing *Redemptoris missio*, 28-29

⁹ There are differences here in Catholic writings: 'local' may not always be identical with particular, but may represent the national Church rather than a diocese.

¹⁰ *Christus Dominus* 11. Translations of texts from the Church Councils are from Norman P Tanner, ed., *Decrees from the Ecumenical Councils*, Volumes I and II (Sheed and Ward and Georgetown University Press, 1990).

¹¹ *Lumen gentium* 26.

God is preached and the Lord's Supper is celebrated.¹² Baptists believe that the third element of apostolic ministry is not absent, but is understood to be offered by the minister (or ministers) called by the members of the local congregation to serve among them. Where it is reflected upon theologically, this office of ministry is understood to be episcopal, since it exercises 'oversight' (*episkope*); early Baptists in fact called their ministers either 'elders' (*presbuteroi*) or 'bishops', making no distinction between these terms.¹³ (The meaning and practice of *episkope* is to be explored further below in the report.) This ministry is also understood as apostolic, in the sense that it continues the witness of the apostles to Christ and enables the congregation to stand in the apostolic tradition of faith. This understanding of 'apostolic ministry', without which early Baptists thought the local church was not 'completely organized according to the mind of Christ',¹⁴ thus results for them in the equivalence of local church and local congregation.

We must add that even though Catholics do not identify the parish as the local church, nevertheless as the place of Sunday Eucharistic worship, and as the place of Christian initiation, it is where the people of God experience the church most immediately. The parish is where Catholics assemble to hear the gospel of Christ proclaimed and to be united with Christ and with one another through the celebration of the Eucharist.

14. Despite agreement on the basis of 'communion ecclesiology' in the communion of the triune God, differences can also be discerned between Baptists and Catholics. For Catholics, each parish is in a relationship of communion with its bishop, and each diocese is in a relationship of communion within the universal church through union with the Bishop of Rome. The Bishops, by being in communion with each other and with the Bishop of Rome, assure the continuity of the churches with the apostolic church. While local churches are in communion with each other, this is expressed visibly and personally in the collegiality of bishops, each bishop representing his own 'particular' church in the episcopal college – that is, in the joining together of all bishops in communion with the Bishop of Rome. This relationship of communion is worked out concretely through solicitude for the entire church in such things as common efforts in evangelization, assistance given to other churches, and collaboration in joint efforts.¹⁵ This cooperation is often organized by regional 'conferences' of Bishops, which express communion in practice even though they cannot express fullness of communion, or the fullness of collegiality of the worldwide college of bishops in their representation of all particular churches (dioceses) within the communion of the one church.

The Catholic Church thus understands itself to be one church, which is concretely realized in each local church: As Pope John Paul II expressed it, 'The Catholic Church herself subsists in each particular church, which can be complete only through effective communion in faith, sacraments and unity with the whole body of Christ.'¹⁶ The particular church embodies the church universal insofar as it is the specific place where the church universal is manifested and encountered, but it can only manifest this universality in its communion with the other particular churches.

15. For Baptists, because Christ rules in the midst of the local congregation (see §9 on the rule of Christ as Word), then that single gathering of believers has certain privileges: early Baptists called them 'signs (or seals) of the covenant'. The congregation shares in the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest and king, so that it has the responsibility for calling its own ministry, to celebrate the gospel sacraments or ordinances, and to order its own life under Christ.¹⁷ This authority is not its own; it is Christ's, but it shares in it. The congregation stands under the rule of the Word because the risen Christ stands in its midst and the members look for his purpose in the written word of scripture and seek for his mind together in the church meeting. Baptists thus think that the local congregation cannot be imposed upon by any external human or ecclesial authority. It has the 'freedom' to order its own life. This is not 'autonomy' – a modern concept that means 'self-rule' and that did not appear among Baptists as a description of the local church until the end of the nineteenth century. The freedom of the local congregation is not the individualistic freedom espoused by the

¹² *The Confession of Faith of those Churches which are commonly (though falsely) called Anabaptists* [Particular Baptist] (London: 1644), XXXIII-XXXIV, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, pp. 153-71; *Orthodox Creed* (London: 1679), XXX.

¹³ *Confession of Faith Put forth by the Elders and Brethren of many Congregations of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith)*[Particular Baptist] (London: 1677), XXVI.8-9, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, pp. 241-95.

¹⁴ *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXVI.8; cf. *Orthodox Creed* (London: 1678), XXXI.

¹⁵ *Lumen gentium* 23.

¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, Address on September 12, 1987, in *Origins* 17:16 (October 1, 1987), p. 258. Whereas *Lumen Gentium* 8 states that the Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church, Pope John Paul II asserts by analogy that all the elements of the Catholic church are present in the particular or local church.

¹⁷ *Confession of Faith* (London: 1644), XXXIV-XXXVI; *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXVI.7.

Enlightenment, but is freedom 'under the rule of Christ'.

Each local church is nevertheless in 'communion' with others, not through its minister or bishop, but directly through Christ who rules in other expressions of the church. He rules in the gathering of churches together in 'association'. He rules in a council or convention of churches at national level. In all these contexts churches should be seeking to hear his word, to know his mind, his purpose for them. Since Christ also rules among the churches gathered together, a local church is expected to take the resolutions of assemblies of churches seriously into account as a means of finding the purpose of Christ for its life and mission in the world, though it remains free in its own final decisions. At the same time, associating or communing together provides opportunities for mutual help, the sharing of resources and social and evangelistic action on a wider than local level. Local churches are inter-dependent, but Baptists have not sought to codify the relations between them into structures of authority or matters of canonical law, leaving the authority of Christ as a demand to be discerned in the situation. As the 'London Confession' of 1644 put it:

And although the particular Congregations be distinct and several Bodies, every one a compact and knit City in it self; yet are they all to walk by one and the same Rule, and by all means convenient to have the counsel and help of one another in all needful affairs of the Church, as members of one body in the common faith under Christ their only head.¹⁸

Since local congregations are members of 'one body ... under Christ their only head', the universal church is no mere accumulation of local churches; it has reality as the body of the risen Christ. Yet since Christ rules in the local church, Baptists agree with the Catholic perception that this embodies and manifests the universal.¹⁹

16. The *koinonia* of the church may also be understood as a 'covenant community' although this language is less familiar to Catholics than to Baptists. 'Covenant' expresses at once both the initiative and prior activity of God in making relationship with his people through Christ, and the willing commitment of people to each other and to God. The church is a 'gift' in the sense that it is 'gathered' by Christ, and it 'gathers' in response to the call of Christ. The term *ekklesia* indicates an 'assembly' that is 'called out' by God. Calling the church a 'fellowship of believers' does not mean that the church is constituted only by faith: faith is always a response to the initiating grace of God. The fellowship or *koinonia* of the church itself is both a gift and calling, just as the unity of the church is both a gift of the Spirit and a task to be achieved.

17. 'Covenant' must not be confused either with a legal contract or a merely 'voluntary' agreement. Covenant is not a mere human decision to ally strategically with others to achieve certain ends, or even to worship in a way that suits one's own choice. Covenant is based on the calling of God through Christ, and from their beginnings Baptists have understood that the eternal 'covenant of grace' between God and humanity, initiated by God, is actualized in a particular time and place when believers covenant together in a local church.²⁰ More recently, some Baptists have been extending their concept of covenant to give a stronger theological basis for the gathering together of churches into associations, and then into regional and national conventions or unions. In this way, 'covenant ecclesiology' is parallel to 'communion ecclesiology', and will be more familiar language to Baptists.

18. The basis of acts of covenant today in the 'new covenant' established in the redeeming death and resurrection of Christ underlines the strong relationship both Catholics and Baptists find between sacrament (or 'ordinance') and church. For both, the church is constituted by the presence and saving activity of Christ through the Spirit, and for both, this constitution is inseparable from baptism. Baptism will be a separate topic later in this report, but here we must link it to the *koinonia* of the church, and notice an important divergence as well as convergence between Catholics and Baptists. Catholics speak of all those baptized, including young infants, as being incorporated into the body of Christ through their baptism. Baptists think of baptism as entering into covenant by repentant believers, or baptism as a 'seal' of the covenant, which implies for them that those baptized are taking on the responsibilities of disciples. As

¹⁸ *Confession of Faith* (London: 1644), XLVII. Spelling modernized. This is virtually identical to article 38 of the Separatist *A True Confession* (1596), in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, p. 94.

¹⁹ *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXVI.1-2.

²⁰ 'A visible communion of Saints is of two, three or more Saints joined together by covenant with God and themselves'; so John Smyth, *Principles and Inferences concerning the Visible Church* (1607), in W.T. Whitley (ed.), *The Works of John Smyth* (2 volumes; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1915), I, p. 252. Covenant might also be expressed in the form of 'consenting to walk together': see *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXVI.5-6. For a thorough review of the Baptist idea of covenant, see Paul S. Fiddes, ' "Walking Together": the Place of Covenant Theology in Baptist Life Yesterday and Today', in Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces. Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2003), pp. 21-47.

will become clear later, this does not mean that Baptists cannot recognize a process of initiation into Christ and his church in the Catholic rites of baptism and confirmation. Moreover, the very notion of covenant means that some Baptists are able to speak, with Catholics, of 'the church in Christ as sacrament of intimate union with God and of the unity of all humanity'.²¹

19. Baptists will be most familiar with the language of 'communion' in the designation of the church as a 'fellowship of believers', understanding that a particular church is founded through the baptism of believing disciples. We should note that for Catholics, too, baptism is an event of faith. It both imparts faith and requires faith. Catholics also, therefore, think of the church as a community of believers, for 'it is only within the faith of the church that each of the faithful can believe'.²² This communal faith is operative in the paradigm of infant baptism. The infant is baptized into the faith of the church; the baptismal rite itself contains an act of faith professed by both parents and godparents and the assembled church. The child is welcomed into the faith of the community where the infant will be drawn to personal belief through hearing the Gospel proclaimed in word and witness. In infant baptism, the community of faith precedes the individual believer (and this, of course, is also true of the Baptist understanding of the baptism of a professing believer). Catholics allow for very young infants to be understood as believers in so far as they are included in the community of faith and so have received 'infused' faith. However, full initiation requires receiving the three sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. In so far as an individually-owned faith is included in this sequence, this is not far from the Baptist conviction that for full membership in the church, people must be able to profess their own faith. Baptists nevertheless cannot find meaning in attributing 'infused faith' to very young infants, although they welcome them as 'belonging' to the community of faith, embraced by its love and care.

20. Communion with the triune God and with the whole church of Christ is continually actualized in the Eucharist/Lord's Supper. In the celebration, those participating are sharing communion not only with each other in the local congregation, but with the whole church of Christ in time and space. 'Because there is one bread, all of us share in one body' (1 Cor. 10:17). Because we hear the word of God in the Eucharist/Lord's Supper, this is a sharing in both word and sacrament (or ordinance) at the same time.

21. While both Catholics and Baptists can make the affirmation above, and while in doing so they will each intend to be faithful to the tradition handed down by the apostles (1 Cor. 11: 23), they will diverge on some of the conditions regarding the minister of the Eucharist/Lord's Supper, and that person's role in representing and promoting the unity of the community in a sacrament/ordinance of unity. For Catholics, it is essential that the celebration of the Eucharist be presided over by a bishop, or by a priest ordained by a bishop in apostolic succession who represents the bishop in the Eucharistic assembly. 'Communion ecclesiology' requires that there should be a bishop who represents Christ and the church, local and universal, as a visible sign of communion. For the Eucharist to be celebrated in communion with the apostolic church, there must be a bishop who safeguards and preserves the apostolic succession of the gospel as an 'authentic teacher' of the faith. The bishop, in his person, through his membership in the college of bishops, is in communion with the whole church, including communion with the Bishop of Rome and his ministry of unity. Catholics can recognize that the liturgical actions, such as the Eucharist/Lord's Supper, in 'ecclesial communities' (such as Baptists) outside the Catholic Church 'can truly engender a life of grace' and are 'capable of giving access to the communion of salvation', but there cannot be a *fullness* of communion because there is the element of *ecclesial* communion missing.²³

22. Baptists can agree that the minister presiding at the Lord's Table represents the universal church in the local congregation (see §§171, 178), and that it is therefore *appropriate* for the minister normally to preside. It is also the 'good order' of Christ for the person to preside who preserves the apostolic tradition, and is responsible for teaching it. However, it is not essential for full communion with God and the church for an ordained minister to preside. A fullness of communion can exist wherever the bread is broken and the wine poured out in faithful remembrance of Christ within a congregation gathered together as church. For Baptists this is because the church is assured of the presence of Christ ('wherever two or three are gathered together there I am in the midst of them'), and so a local congregation is in communion with all other churches where Christ is also present in the fellowship of the Spirit.²⁴ The

²¹ *Lumen Gentium* 1.

²² CCC 1253.

²³ Cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3.

²⁴ See *A Declaration of Faith of English People Remaining at Amsterdam* [General Baptist] (Amsterdam: 1611), 11, in Lumpkin (ed.) *Baptist Confessions*, pp. 116-123.

essential, God-given sign of communion is not the person presiding, but the visibility of the body of Christ in the gathered church which is making confession of the apostolic faith.

Catholics and Baptists also may have differing practices regarding the frequency with which they celebrate the Eucharist/Lord's Supper. Catholics observe the Lord's Day through a celebration of the Eucharist at least on Sunday. Though some Baptists celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly or fortnightly, many Baptists do so regularly but less frequently. Baptists believe that in worship where scripture is read and preached, and thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) is offered to God in prayer, they can still enjoy a wholeness of communion with the triune God, each other and the whole church of Christ.

23. Local churches must be in visible and not only spiritual communion with each other, or else communion will lack fullness.

24. For Catholics visible communion between the churches is focussed, and essentially embodied, in the person of the bishop since the unity and fellowship of the Catholic Church is made visible in the college of bishops. Varying levels and degrees of collegiality exist in different groupings of bishops – in national conferences of bishops, in synods and ecumenical councils. The latter is the most complete expression of episcopal collegiality. For Catholics, however, the reality of 'communion ecclesiology' is by no means restricted to the visible sign of episcopacy. Communion is expressed sacramentally, particularly in the Eucharist, and in a multitude of ways in which local churches and congregations within them meet with each other and assist each other, outside formal ecclesial structures. There are also 'renewal movements' in the church that cut across the formal lines of local churches.

Both Baptists and Catholics hold that they are in communion with the blessed in heaven in the communion of saints and agree that the church has visible and invisible dimensions, though they envisage these differently to some extent (cf. §25 following). In Catholic perspective, saints who have departed in the faith are not visibly part of the church, but the church itself is always visible. The Catholic Church believes that the church universal must be both *visible* and *undivided*, and it finds these characteristics together in itself. The church universal becomes visible in the celebration of the liturgy since the full nature of the church is expressed in worship: 'the principal manifestation of the church consists in the full, active participation of all God's holy people in the same liturgical celebration, especially in the same Eucharist, in one prayer, at one altar, at which the bishop presides, surrounded by his college of priests and by his ministers.'²⁵ It is visible insofar as it is a hierarchically constituted society²⁶ wherein the communion and unity of the church is represented in the persons of the bishops in their collegial relations with each other and the bishop of Rome. Finally, it is visible wherever the people of God profess the faith, commune in the sacraments, and follow their legitimate pastors.²⁷ The Second Vatican Council alludes to the visibility of the church in describing it as 'a sacrament-a sign and instrument of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race,'²⁸ since signs are by nature visible.

Several recent documents have followed Vatican II in affirming that 'the One Church of Christ ... subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him'.²⁹ This phrase seeks to harmonize two doctrinal assertions – first, that the church of Christ exists in its fullness only in the Catholic Church, and second, that outside of her structure, many 'elements of the church' (*elementa Ecclesiae*) can be found, characterized by sanctification and truth, which 'derive their efficacy from the fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church.'³⁰ The document *Dominus Iesus* sets out to clarify the consequences of this approach. The non-Catholic Christian communities in the West, stemming from the Reformation, are 'not churches in the proper sense', but may be called 'ecclesial communities'. They certainly possess aspects or elements of the One Church, and those baptized in them are incorporated into Christ and 'are thus in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Church.' For Catholics baptism is the first sacramental bond of communion with other Christians. Moreover, since all ecclesial communities or churches share in the *koinonia* of the Trinity, in spite of separation they cannot be 'out of

²⁵ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 41.

²⁶ *Lumen Gentium* 20.

²⁷ See Robert Bellarmine's definition of the church: 'The one and true Church is the assembly of men, bound together by the profession of the same Christian faith, and by the communion of the same sacraments, under the rule of legitimate pastors, and in particular of the one Vicar of Christ on earth, the Roman Pontiff.' St. Robert Bellarmine, *De Controversiis Christianae Fidei* (Naples: 1857), vol. II, p. 74.

²⁸ *Lumen Gentium* 1.

²⁹ *Lumen Gentium* 8; cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio* 4; *Ut Unum Sint*, 10, 86; *Dominus Iesus* 6.

³⁰ *Dominus Iesus* 17; *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3.

communion', but share a 'degree of communion'.³¹

25. Some Baptists in the last century have taken the view that the church of Christ only becomes visible in the local church, and that the universal church must remain 'invisible' until the coming of God's kingdom, being only a 'spiritual' reality until then. However, this was not the historic understanding of Baptists, and has been repeatedly countered in Baptist writings of more recent years. In older confessions and Baptist writings we find a classification of the *visible* local church ('visible saints'), the *invisible* church universal (made up of all persons regenerated by the Spirit of God, whether inside the institutions of the church or not) and the visible church universal (made up of all regenerate people who consciously profess Christ, together with the churches to which they belong).³² Communion between churches is made visible in associations and unions of churches, where representatives or 'messengers' of the local church are not confined to the ordained ministers but drawn from a wide range of the congregation. This in line with the Baptist conviction that *episkope* flows between the communal, the personal and the collegial so that pastors and people can all, in appropriate ways, exercise *episkope* or (in the words of many early covenants), 'watch over each other'. Most Baptists prefer not to call these trans-local structures of communion 'the church' but regard them as 'ecclesial' or 'churchly'.

It follows that Baptists can affirm the visibility of the church universal even when it is divided, tragic and sinful though this situation is. Baptists thus do not associate the terms 'visible' and 'undivided' in the way that Catholics do. Though the unity of the divine *koinonia* should ideally be reflected in the church, it is a sign of the humility of God that God actually consents to dwell in a church which is broken, and which contains tensions and conflict. Moreover, Baptists will tend to agree that the 'full communion' for which we are working and hoping is 'reconciled diversity'. Just as God lives in unity and true diversity as three persons in one God, so the church in God's image can and should show – in the words of the WCC document 'Towards koinonia' – *legitimate diversity* rather than uniformity.³³

The Baptist view of other Christian communions is that they are to be regarded as 'church' where they show characteristics of the church of Jesus Christ; these might be variously described as a corporate life which shows marks of the presence of Christ, the true preaching of the word and celebration of the sacraments or ordinances. Baptists have primarily found their unity with other Christians on the basis of this kind of discernment of the church as a body, and on what they see as evidence of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual from another church. Looking for doctrinal agreement or a common understanding of the sacraments (or ordinances) and ecclesiology would generally only come as a second stage after this initial discernment and recognition of the other.

26. Local churches and congregations have communion with each other in order to hear the Word of God and find the 'mind of Christ' together.

27. For Catholics, the pope and the college of bishops have a unique role in safeguarding unity and truth in the church. They discern the mind of Christ by meditating on scripture, consulting the wisdom of tradition, and attending to the witness of holy women and men. They listen to a whole range of voices – priests, deacons, laity, religious orders of men and women, theologians and ecumenical partners. They read the "signs of the times" in our contemporary world.³⁴ For Catholics, to live in accord with the purpose of Christ in a local church or local congregation means *sentire cum ecclesia* ('being in mind and heart with the church'). This 'reception' includes not only accepting the conclusions of ecumenical councils, the dogmatic decrees of the Pope, and the formulations of creeds, but also being immersed in the sacred scriptures, being formed by the liturgy and prayer life of the church, and being knowledgeable of the church's tradition and the ordinary teaching of the church contained in the catechism and promulgated from time to time in encyclicals and other teaching instruments of the Pope and bishops. The *sensus fidei* (the 'instinctive sensitivity and discernment' of the baptized faithful) also has a part to play in reception, and may contribute to the understanding of church teaching while not conflicting with it.

³¹ *The Church, Local and Universal*. A Study Commissioned and Received by the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (Faith and Order Paper 150; Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990), p. 10

³² See e.g. *The Orthodox Creed* (1678), XXIX-XXX, in Lumpkin (ed.), *Baptist Confessions*, pp. 318-19.

³³ 'Towards Koinonia in Faith, Life and Witness', in Best and Gassmann (eds), *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993), para. 57, p. 280. 'Towards Koinonia' suggests that diversity is not acceptable where it denies the 'common confession of Jesus Christ as God and Saviour', where it justifies discrimination on the basis of race or gender, where it prevents reconciliation, where it hinders the common mission of the church, and where it endangers the life in *koinonia*.

³⁴ *Gaudium et Spes* 4.

28. For Baptists, local churches find the mind of Christ together by gathering in an assembly where pastors and people have the same powers of representation, in accord with the conviction that *episkope* is shared between ordained ministers and all baptized believers. However, not all voices have the same influence, and people are expected to give weight to the voices of those appointed as ‘overseers’ and teachers of the faith in the churches. This personal office of oversight is exercised not only in the local congregation, but in the associations, unions and conventions that have set aside a trans-local ministry of ‘regional ministers’, ‘executive ministers’, ‘presidents’, ‘general secretaries’ and (in some national unions) ‘bishops’. Such are trusted teachers and guides in the faith, who can offer their gifts to help churches find the mind of Christ and live under his rule. As already mentioned, for Baptists no decisions made at an assembly of churches can be imposed on the local church. But the Baptist version of ‘reception’ at the local level is that a congregation should listen to churches gathered together, not supposing that it has all the gifts in itself which are needed to discover and implement the purpose of Christ for its life and mission.³⁵

29. The universal communion of the church of Jesus Christ may be aptly called ‘catholic’. Catholicity, deriving from a Greek word meaning ‘wholeness’ or ‘inclusiveness’ is to be understood both as the fullness of God’s self-manifestation in Christ and as the final destination of the gospel message in reaching and transforming all people. Catholicity is thus not a static possession of the church but is actively sought in the mission of evangelization, which aims at the proclamation and reception of the fullness of the gospel throughout time and space.

30. Both Baptists and Catholics consider themselves ‘catholic’ (lower-case-c) in the sense above, while the term ‘Catholic’ (upper-case-C) is used in this report to denote the Catholic Church that recognizes the primacy of the Bishop of Rome. Catholicity is expressed when the message of Christ is proclaimed in a wide variety of languages and thought forms, when the Eucharist or Lord’s Supper is celebrated by peoples of many cultures, races and nations, and when ministry enjoys and serves communion both locally and at wider regional and world-wide levels.

31. The idea of catholicity functions, however, somewhat differently in the two traditions. Catholics think that the fullness of the Gospel as revealed in Christ must imply a fullness of the church, in the sense of a fully visible and organic unity and a universal extension to all people in time and space. Baptists certainly affirm the need for the church to be a stable reality in the midst of an unstable world. However, while striving to grasp the fullness of the mind of Christ, and having a hopeful vision of the universal church in its final completion, Baptists see the church here and now as sinful, in need of continual reformation, not yet fully unified, and having invisible as well as visible aspects (cf. §25 above).

32. Just as Christ is the source of the unity in the catholicity of the church, so Christ is the source and goal of the holiness of the church and its members. The final goal of the church is union with Christ, the all-holy one, in the communion of saints.

33. While Catholics and Baptists are agreed on the Christological basis and eschatological completion of holiness (Eph 5:25-7), they differ in the way they articulate the relationship between the holiness of the church as a body and the holiness of the individual members of the church. While both Catholics and Baptists affirm the sinlessness of Christ, only Catholics draw the conclusion that the church, in union with Christ and as his body, must also be sinless in herself.³⁶ Catholics express it in this manner: ‘While Christ, holy, innocent and undefiled knew nothing of sin, but came to expiate only the sins of the people, the church, embracing in its bosom sinners, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal’.³⁷ This means for Catholics that the church as such realizes and generates embodied holiness, while still entering upon a path of constant renewal as a pilgrim community because of the sins of her members. Baptists agree that holiness is the goal of the church as a pilgrim community, but they tend to place more emphasis on the as-yet unrealized nature of the church’s holiness, equating the state of the church with the imperfect holiness of its members who are ‘sinners and at the same time justified.’³⁸

³⁵ See *We Baptists*. Study and Research Division, Baptist World Alliance (Franklin: Provident House, 1999), pp. 24-5.

³⁶ *Lumen Gentium* 39.

³⁷ *Lumen Gentium* 8, citing Heb 7:26, 2 Cor 5:21, and Heb 2:17.

³⁸ So Luther: *simul justus et peccator*.

III. THE AUTHORITY OF CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

34. The report of the conversations between the Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance, 1984-88, was able 'to articulate [a] shared response to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as this has been given to us in the Bible and in the faith and practice of our respective communities' (report, §4). Yet it acknowledged substantive differences in the manner in which the two communions understand the relationship between the canon of Scripture and the traditions of the communities that interpret it. Accordingly the report listed 'Theological Authority and Method' first among five areas of the conversations in need of continued exploration. The paragraphs that summarize these differing configurations of authority and call for further discussion of them provide the appropriate point of departure for this section of the present report:

These conversations between Baptists and Roman Catholics have frequently surfaced different views and uses of theological authority and method. The theoretical reason for that is clear: Baptists rely on Scriptures alone, as interpreted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Reformation principle. Roman Catholics receive God's revelation from the Scriptures interpreted in the light of the tradition under the leadership of the *magisterium*, in a communal process guided by the Holy Spirit.

In fact, however, the differences are not as sharp as this formulation would suggest. At the Second Vatican Council the Roman Catholic Church dealt carefully and in detail with the relationship between Scripture and tradition ("Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," 2). It endeavored to reach and express an understanding of the relationship between Scripture, tradition and the teaching office of the church (*magisterium*). Each of these has its own place in the presentation of the truth of Jesus Christ. The place of one is not identical with that of the other, yet in the Roman Catholic view these three combine together to present divine revelation. On the other hand, Baptists invoke the Baptist heritage as decisively as Roman Catholics cite tradition, usually disclaiming that it bears the same authority as Scripture but holding on to it vigorously nonetheless..... The key issue needing discussion here is that of development of doctrine. (§§ 38-39)

When the Catholic and Baptist delegations met eighteen years later for a new series of conversations, participants were able to identify a deepened and striking convergence on the nature of Scripture as the inspired Word of God and its central place in the life of the church, along with a mutual welcome for two developments that surfaced during this new phase of dialogue: a more appreciative assessment of the value of tradition and its relation to Scripture by the *Baptist* participants and a more critical approach to tradition in its relation to Scripture by the *Catholic* participants.

The place of Scripture in the life of the church

35. In sacred Scripture the Word of God has been put down in writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, announcing the gift of salvation. Scripture is thus central to the life of the church, which shares in the *koinonia* of the triune God. The Scriptures that contain the Word, bear witness to the Word, and are a form of the Word of God are active in the church today. They offer guidance to the community God has gathered together and enable its members to share in the ministry of Christ by the power of the Spirit to the glory of God. The church in all of its aspects including its ministry stands under the Word of God. The Word of God assumes various forms in the world through the spoken word of preaching, through the written word of the Scriptures, through baptism and the Eucharist (or Lord's Supper), through the events of God's action in history and in the witness of faithful believers.

36. As is evident in the common affirmations above, we discovered that it was impossible to address the themes of the Word of God, revelation, Scripture, and authority apart from their ecclesiological dimensions. The previous section of the report has already highlighted some convergences and divergences in an understanding of the church. Now we must observe that the inseparability of the Word of God, and its transmission, from the community to which divine revelation is entrusted means that the differing ecclesiologies of Catholics and Baptists necessarily result in differentiated understandings of the function of Scripture in the life of the church. Nevertheless, the Catholic and Baptist participants in these conversations were also able to find significant agreement regarding the use of the Bible in the church. For instance, both Catholics and Baptists affirm a teaching authority in the church, but they conceive of it differently, the one finding it in the *magisterium* and the other in the local *congregation* (a difference explored in detail below, §§49 and 61).

37. The Bible is the divinely-authorized written norm for faith and practice, but this normativity of Scripture is principally located in the worship of the church, from which its life and mission grows. The Bible was canonized by and for the worshipping community, and it comprises those writings that are suitable for reading, preaching, and supplying the narrative content of other acts of worship that recall and represent (in *anamnesis*) the mighty acts of God in the past. Both Catholic and Baptist patterns of worship presuppose that sacred Scripture is the source of the

story of the triune God in which worshippers participate.

38. Scripture has a central place in the liturgy and worship of the church because it recounts the history of salvation which is the story of the mission of the triune God in the world. [1 Tim 4:14]. Likewise both Baptists and Catholics use Scripture in declaring the *kerygma* or the good news about Christ. We also agree in the catechetical use of the Scriptures, by which Christians are formed in the faith. [2 Tim 3:16-17] This agreement finds practical expression in cooperation in the translation and dissemination of the Scriptures.

39. The phrase '*written norm*' is deliberately used above, since Christ himself is of course the final authority for the beliefs and life of the Christian church, as the personal and incarnate Word to whom the Scriptures bear reliable testimony. Aptly, the Declaration of Principle of one Baptist union states that 'Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures'.³⁹ We may say that the Lord of the church is encountered in worship, and this encounter is enabled by the Scriptures which bear witness to him and which themselves shape that worship.

40. For both Baptists and Catholics the liturgical function of Scripture might be expressed as the 'sacramentality' of the word. While Baptists are less likely to use this kind of language, they do recognize the saving activity of the Word made flesh in reading, preaching and sharing Scripture, and the human possibility of encountering the Triune God through this means of grace [1 Cor. 1:21]; it is this to which the term 'sacramental' refers. Scripture is essential to worship in both traditions. A weekly Eucharist is normative in Catholic parishes, in which the liturgy is permeated by Scripture in a similar way to Baptist use of the Bible in readings, prayers and hymns, even where the Lord's Supper is not celebrated. In addition there are Catholic services such as the hours of the divine office in which the liturgy of the word is the primary 'place' where the divine reality narrated in the biblical story of the Triune God is made present. Baptists are able to concur with the Catholic teaching that '[i]n the sacred books the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children and talks with them.'⁴⁰

41. 'God is the author of Sacred Scripture'.⁴¹ The church 'accepts as sacred and canonical all the books of both the Old Testament and the New, in their entirety and with all their parts, in the conviction that they were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit...and therefore have God as their originator: on this basis they were handed on to the church'.⁴²

42. Alongside the divine origin of the Scriptures, Baptists and Catholics also recognize that God has given the Scriptures to the church through human instrumentality. While avoiding the suggestion that there is an actual incarnation of Christ in the written Scriptures (which can result in a simple equivalency between the authority of Christ and Scripture), we can use a Christological analogy to express the truth that Scriptures are both divine and human in authorship. Thus, in interpreting Scripture, a failure to give sufficient attention to the historical and cultural factors involved in their human composition can result in a 'Docetic' (or at least a 'one-nature') view of Scripture, in which they only 'appear' to be human. Correspondingly, a failure to appreciate their divine authorship results in an 'Ebionite' approach to the Bible, in which they are 'merely' human. Both Catholics and Baptists have experienced turmoil over the proper role of historical and critical investigation in the interpretation of Scripture. Each communion has laboured to develop adequate ecclesial responses to the challenges of modernity, but in the main, both communions seek to practice a kind of 'Chalcedonian reading' of Scripture, just as they hold to a 'Chalcedonian Christology'. As the Council of Chalcedon confesses that 'we all with one voice confess our Lord Jesus Christ one and the same Son, the same perfect in Godhead, the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man', by analogy we can hold the Scriptures as both human and divine. A 'Chalcedonian reading' thus has a proper place for the use of historical-critical, cultural-critical and literary-critical tools in discerning human instrumentality in the gift of the Scriptures to the church; yet it recognizes the shortcomings of all such interpretation when it is exercised apart from the reading of Sacred Scripture in the church.

³⁹ Declaration of Principle of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, clause 1, in Keith Parker, *Baptists in Europe: History and Confessions of Faith* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982), p. 36.

⁴⁰ *Dei Verbum* 21.

⁴¹ CCC 105; so also *The New Hampshire Confession* (1833), I, in Lumpkin (ed), *Baptist Confessions*, pp. 361-7, and the (Southern) Baptist *Faith and Message* (2000), I, accessed at www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp: 'it has God for its author'; the 2000 version of the *Faith and Message* here repeats the phrasing of the versions of 1925 and 1963.

⁴² *Dei Verbum* 11.

43. The activity of the Holy Spirit among the people of Israel and in the church of Christ, inspiring the writing of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, has also led these communities to discern these Scriptures as having canonical authority for faith and practice.

44. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* specifies that 'it was by the Apostolic Tradition that the Church discerned which writings are to be included in the list of the sacred books'.⁴³ Baptists customarily affirm the providence of the Spirit in 'preserving' Scripture during the history of the church. However, they do not always explicitly affirm that the Spirit who was active in inspiring the Scriptures was also working in the ecclesial tradition that recognized the canon of Scripture. Yet, despite this reticence, Baptists *assume* the providential guidance of the Spirit in the church's discernment of the canon since, with Catholics, they regard the canon of Scripture as the written norm for faith and practice on the grounds of its being divinely-authorized rather than an historical accident. Therefore both Catholics and Baptists recognize that the canon of Scripture has some relationship to 'traditioning' processes in the life of the church in the first few centuries after the writing of the New Testament documents, and in this recognition they trust that the Spirit has guided these processes.

45. Nevertheless, the Baptist affirmation of the canon of Scripture differs from the Catholic identification of the canon: Baptists exclude from the canon of the Old Testament the deuterocanonical books included in the Septuagint and Vulgate versions, and listed by the fourth session of the Council of Trent. When Baptists declared in their early confessions that 'the books commonly called Apocrypha, not being of divine inspiration, are no part of the canon (or rule) of Scripture',⁴⁴ they vested authority in the shorter canon they received from streams of the Protestant Reformation that preceded the Baptists. Yet many Baptists recognize that the deuterocanonical books are important for an understanding of the historical context of primitive Christianity, and some even appreciate their value as devotional literature to be read alongside the Protestant form of the Bible.

46. Baptists and Catholics insist that the Old Testament and the New Testament together form a coherent story that requires a Christ-centred interpretation.

47. In the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 'Christians...read the Old Testament in the light of Christ crucified and risen'.⁴⁵ The Catechism further quotes from Hugh of St. Victor, that ' "All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and that one book is Christ, because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ"'.⁴⁶ Baptists likewise read the Bible in this Christocentric fashion. For example, the 1963 version of the Southern Baptist Convention's *Baptist Faith and Message* declares that 'The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ,' and according to language that replaced this phrase in the 2000 revision of the same confessional statement, 'All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.'⁴⁷ Taken together, the 1963 emphasis on the Christocentric 'criterion' and the 2000 emphasis on the testimony of the whole of Scripture to Christ exemplify the way in which Baptists share with Catholics a commitment to reading the entire Bible as a coherent story centred on the person of Christ.

48. The Bible can and should be read by individual Christians on their own. Yet this reading should not be isolated from interpretation by the community which is indwelt by the Spirit who inspired the Scriptures.

49. Catholics believe that the Spirit has guided them to locate the communal interpretation of Scripture in the historically extended ecclesial community that is represented by its episcopal leadership: 'The task of authentically interpreting the Word of God has been entrusted exclusively to the living teaching office of the church whose authority is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ. The teaching office is not above the Word of God but serves it.....'⁴⁸ 'This means that the task of interpretation has been entrusted to the bishops in communion with the successor of Peter,

⁴³ CCC 120.

⁴⁴ E.g. in the *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), I:3, reproduced in the *Philadelphia Confession* (1742).

⁴⁵ CCC 129.

⁴⁶ CCC 134.

⁴⁷ *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963), 2, accessed at www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/history/bfam.stm.txt; *Baptist Faith and Message* (2000), 1.

⁴⁸ *Dei Verbum* 10, also quoted in CCC 100.

the Bishop of Rome'.⁴⁹ Baptists also locate the communal interpretation of Scripture in the ecclesial community, but primarily in the form of the gathered local congregation.⁵⁰ This practice of 'congregational hermeneutics' can be traced back to the time of the early Anabaptists and the Radical Reformation.

50. Both Baptists and Catholics agree on affirming the ancient practice of reading the Bible according to multiple senses, which include the literal and spiritual senses. The spiritual sense of Scripture, grounded in the literal or 'plain' sense, facilitates its devotional use by individuals in local communities. The personal application of the Bible to one's daily life (what was termed the 'tropological' or moral sense in the ancient church) is a vital support to the faith of the believer. Devotional reading on the part of individuals should not be confused with private, isolated interpretations of Scripture. In fact, there should be continuity between the devotional nourishment by Scripture on the part of the single believer and the corporate interpretation of God's Word which takes place in preaching, group Bible study, and reflection on scripture by the people of God seeking guidance for their life together; in this way, communal interpretation of Scripture contributes to the formulation of the normative doctrines of the Christian community.

51. Catholics and Baptists hold in high regard the principle of catholicity in the interpretation of the Bible and its embodiment in the life of the church.

52. Catholicity – understood as wholeness, universality, and inclusivity – implies an openness to the needs and gifts of the world and the expectation that all people are called to participate in the new creation brought about by Jesus Christ and the Spirit (on the meaning of 'catholicity' see §§29-31 above). Scripture is read and used in the light of this vision, so that in interpreting scripture it is important to know how churches in different parts of the world and in a variety of social, cultural and political circumstances hear the Word of God addressed to them.

53. Baptists and Catholics agree that the proper reading of the Bible should lead to the proper behaviour of the Christian community.

54. The paradox inherent in biblical images of the church as hearer of the Word – for example, the church as the body of Christ and bride of Christ – is that despite being shaped by the Word, believers may still fail to act justly in the world. Instances of this paradox that come immediately to mind are the moral failures of many white Christians in South Africa in the era of apartheid, or in the Southern States of America and in the West Indies during the period of slavery; public apologies have rightly been made for such immoral behaviour. Discussion of this tragic situation involves differences between Catholic and Baptists about whether the church as well as its members is sinful (see §33 above).

The relation of Scripture and tradition

55. Because of their historic insistence on the normativity of Scripture as the only trustworthy written rule for faith and practice, Baptists have historically tended to pit Scripture against tradition and often have manifested an antipathy toward all post-biblical tradition.⁵¹ While this historical tendency continues to figure prominently in some contemporary attempts to articulate Baptist identity, a noteworthy trend in Baptist theological scholarship since the 1984-1988 conversations has made it possible for Baptist participants in the current phase of conversations to express an appreciation for the value of tradition in the church's ongoing efforts to embody the teachings of the Scriptures in the present; consequently the Catholic participants were able to discern a convergence toward some sense of a shared tradition. This trend has been largely limited to a small number of Baptist academic theologians, however,⁵² and does not represent a movement of large numbers of Baptist churches and their members toward a conscious embrace of the authority of tradition.

At the same time, the Baptist participants were able to discern in the contributions of members of the Catholic delegation a critical approach to the formation of tradition that defied stereotypes that many Baptists have of the nature of Catholic tradition. Presentations, responses, and comments by Catholic participants made it clear to the Baptist

⁴⁹ CCC 85.

⁵⁰ See e.g. *Declaration of Faith* (Amsterdam: 1611), 19; *Confession of Faith* (London: 1644), XLV; *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXVI.11, 15.

⁵¹ The meaning of this term emerges in the following discussion: see esp. §59.

⁵² For a useful summary of this trend, see Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity. Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), chapters 1, 3.

delegation that in Catholic perspective, tradition is developed⁵³ through human instrumentality in a process that requires dialogue and the taking into account of various voices within the church—not only the voices of the pope and the bishops but also of theologians, including lay theologians, and the laity itself—in order to discern what is truly authoritative in the tradition. A more appreciative assessment of the value of tradition exemplified by Baptists and a more critical approach to tradition by Catholics has made it possible for us to articulate a substantial common understanding of the relation of Scripture and tradition (as indicated below) even while identifying our differing sensibilities or remaining disagreements about the relation of Scripture and tradition.

56. The Bible is the written embodiment of a living tradition (*paradosis*) which is handed down through the work of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the people of God. The source of this process of transmission is the living Word of God, Jesus Christ.

57. The inspired text of Sacred Scripture is rooted in the handing on of the good news that Jesus is the risen Lord and Son of God, along with the teachings and way of life which he imparted to his disciples. The New Testament emerged over a period of time under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who not only inspired the authors who put into words its various books but also guided the process of handing on the Gospel within the apostolic community. A similar process also guided the writing of the Old Testament. This process implies that oral traditions were present before the formation of Scripture, a fact on which Baptists and Catholics are agreed.

The Bible is thus the church's book and is to be read and understood first of all in the midst of a community of believers. Although Scripture is the principal and inspired witness to the Word of God, it is nevertheless never *read 'alone'*, that is, never without the context of a community which translates it, proclaims it and interprets it, using other written sources.⁵⁴ Tradition for both Baptists and Catholics plays some form of didactic role. Creeds, confessions, preaching, catechesis, liturgy and worship all work together in the active process of the handing on the gospel. They all provide useful norms for Christian life. In receiving God's Word, the church receives also the mission to evangelize all people; the Bible is not only the church's book, but the church's book for the whole world.

58. There is a certain 'co-inherence' of Scripture and living tradition, in the sense of a mutual indwelling and interweaving of one in the other. They should not be considered as two separate and unrelated sources, but as two streams flowing together which issue from the same source, the self-revelation of the triune God in Christ.

59. On the basis of such mutual indwelling of Scripture and tradition, one can also distinguish between 'tradition' as the living gospel of Jesus Christ (sometimes expressed as 'Tradition-with-a-capital-T') and 'traditions' as the various forms by means of which the gospel finds expression in particular historical and cultural situations. Identifying whether a particular tradition is truly the living tradition of Christ can still raise problems. However, we agree that the Bible is to be used as a norm to critique and evaluate all traditions in order to distinguish which are merely human traditions and which are authentic expressions of the gospel [cf. Mark 7:5-13].

60. While Catholics and Baptists agree on the normativity of scripture, they admittedly have different sensibilities as they approach the issue of the relation of Scripture and tradition. Indeed, they have very different experiences in their respective histories on this matter. Both have known the antagonisms between, and oppression of, Christian communities in the aftermath of the Reformation.

Baptists experienced a denial of religious liberty by state churches, which made them suspicious of traditions in general. The same suspicion toward tradition can also arise as a result of either a narrow biblicism or, at the other end of the spectrum, a rationalism of the type fostered by the Enlightenment. The emphasis upon knowledge of Scripture is an unmistakable characteristic of Baptist life and tradition, where Baptists constantly appeal to the authority of the Bible. However, Baptists themselves confess that they have not always used their acquaintance with the Bible for the purpose of being conformed to the image of Christ.

Catholics were guided during the period after the Reformation by leaders who had a heightened awareness of the dangers of private interpretation of Scripture. Because of this, it is fair to say that, between the Councils of Trent and Vatican II, the popular reading of the Bible by Catholics did not receive the encouragement that it deserved. Relatively few resources were offered to lay Catholics who wanted to encounter the Word of God in Scripture. Despite the insistence by the Second Vatican Council upon the necessity of being nourished by familiarity with Scripture, it must be admitted that some Catholics still have not embraced the rightful role and authority of Scripture in their lives, especially by means of such practices as reading the Bible in the family. Obviously, both communities can honestly

⁵³ See *Dei Verbum* 8.

⁵⁴ This perception overcomes the historic opposition between '*scriptura sola*' (scripture alone) and '*scriptura numquam sola*' (scripture never alone).

admit to some shortcomings.

61. Catholics and Baptists have different conceptions of the authority to interpret Scripture. As noted above, Catholics maintain that the Bible as a whole is authoritatively interpreted by the official teaching office of the church (*magisterium*) as exercised by the bishops in communion with the Bishop of Rome. Baptists maintain that a local congregation of believers has the responsibility and freedom to interpret the Bible under the rule of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, always remembering that it is in covenant with other churches. Despite this exercise of 'congregational hermeneutics', the conscience of the individual cannot be coerced or compelled to accept the interpretation of Scripture proposed by the local congregation and denominational bodies. No formulation in any church teaching has the same binding force as Scripture. At the same time, the congregation has the obligation to test insights into Scripture brought forward by individual Christians.

62. Thus, it can hardly be denied that Catholics and Baptists have different approaches to the nature of tradition. Baptists tend to speak more about 'faith and practice' than about 'tradition.' Most Baptists acknowledge those traditions that support the primacy of Scripture, but some still want to deny traditions altogether. For their part, Catholics stress that tradition is nothing less than the handing down of revelation in words and deeds. In our conversation together, some convergence was, however, assisted by paragraph 9 of Vatican II's 'Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation' (*Dei Verbum*), which reads:

Hence sacred tradition and scripture are bound together in a close and reciprocal relationship. They both flow from the same divine wellspring, merge together to some extent, and are on course towards the same end. Scripture is the utterance of God as it is set down in writing under the guidance of God's Spirit; tradition preserves the word of God as it was entrusted to the apostles by Christ our Lord and the Holy Spirit, and transmits it to their successors, so that these in turn, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, may faithfully preserve, expound and disseminate the word by their preaching. Consequently, the church's certainty about all that is to be revealed is not drawn from Holy Scripture alone; both scripture and tradition are to be accepted and honoured with like devotion and reverence.⁵⁵

It was agreed in our discussion that this statement meets many concerns of Baptists about the priority of scripture over tradition, and the need for tradition always to stand under the correction of scripture (an exception to this agreement is noted below, in §65). In his commentary on *Dei Verbum*, Joseph Ratzinger stressed the difference as well as the unity between Scripture and tradition: 'it is stated that Scripture *is* the Word of God consigned to writing. Tradition, however, is described only functionally in what it *does*: it hands on the Word of God, but is not the Word of God'.⁵⁶ Tradition is the dynamic process of transmission, 'preserving, expounding and spreading abroad' the Word of God. It is not in itself a set of revealed truths which are supplementary to Scripture and which have no basis in scripture; rather, the Constitution affirms that the process of tradition increases 'certainty' about the meaning of revealed truths, as the scriptures are read in the communion of saints within the church. The phrase that certainty in faith comes 'not from the holy Scriptures alone' (*non ... per solam sacram scripturam*) is intended to acknowledge the way that tradition can contribute to our certainty about the meaning of the gospel. In confessing a trinitarian faith, for example, Baptists are dependent on post-biblical development of doctrine, i.e. tradition, for their 'certainty' about the triune nature of God. One Baptist theologian urges that 'Baptists who ... insist on a clearly articulated doctrine of the Trinity, often using terms easily traceable to the patristic age, would do well to affirm *suprema Scriptura* ['scripture as supreme'] rather than an unqualified *sola Scriptura* ['scripture alone']'.⁵⁷ There are, of course, other doctrines that have emerged in the course of tradition for which Baptists will not find a basis in Scripture in the same way.⁵⁸

63. Apostolic tradition, transmitted by the apostles, is handed on over the course of time by the church, which seeks ever to grow in understanding it more completely. It is to be distinguished from those subsequent traditions which are merely ecclesiastical. Only apostolic tradition is normative before, during and after the formation of the

⁵⁵ *Dei Verbum* 9.

⁵⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, 'Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation: Chapter II, The Transmission of Divine Revelation', in Herbert Vorgrimler (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Volume 3, trans. Lalit Adolphus, Kevin Smyth and Richard Strachan (London: Burns & Oates, 1967-69), p. 194.

⁵⁷ James Leo Garrett, Jr., *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 181.

⁵⁸ Examples noted in this report are some of the Marian doctrines, and the doctrine of the infallibility of the teaching office of the church.

canonical Scriptures.

64. In giving primacy to apostolic tradition, Catholics judge that some teaching of the church can be recognized as 'apostolic' when it faithfully clarifies the earlier teaching of the apostles. For example, the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon that Jesus Christ is 'truly God and truly human' is a trustworthy witness to the apostolic message about Christ, while it is later than the time of the apostles. In principle Baptists can agree with this understanding, though they may question some claims that particular post-biblical developments of doctrine are trustworthy witnesses to the apostolic message about Christ.

65. Vatican II reaffirms the teaching of Trent on the close connection and communication between Sacred Scripture and tradition, but does so within the context of a deeper understanding of both and how they are interrelated. *Dei Verbum* §9 states that 'for Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known.' However, one phrase stands out in *Dei Verbum* 9 which it seems Baptists cannot accept, namely: 'both scripture and tradition are to be accepted and honoured with like feelings of devotion and reverence'. This view of tradition goes beyond what Baptists confess and seems to conflict with what they affirm regarding the inspiration of Scripture alone and its sufficiency. In further exploring this theme, nevertheless we found that both the Council of Trent and Vatican II included Catholic bishops who voiced the same concern that Baptists would have about attributing 'like devotion' to Scripture and tradition, that is, the potential danger of obscuring the unique authority of Scripture as the inspired Word of God.⁵⁹ We noted that it was never the intention of the bishops at either council to call into question the inspiration and primacy of Scripture. In both councils, moreover, the bishops embraced the crucial distinction between apostolic tradition and merely ecclesiastical traditions. Normative tradition stems from the apostolic church of the time of the apostles, the primitive community which received the fullness of revelation in Christ. Such views, expressed in the debates and sometimes echoed in the final texts of Trent and Vatican II, are more congenial to the Baptist understanding of the relation of Scripture and tradition.

66. There are questions that remain to be resolved on the relation between revelation, Scripture, tradition and proclamation, but these are as much issues within each communion as issues that divide us.

67. One open issue concerns the ongoing self-disclosure of God. Both Baptists and Catholics think that 'public' revelation, or revelation whose content is to be proclaimed as essential to the gospel and of universal relevance to all people, ended with the death of the last apostle. But this needs to be aligned with the conviction that God still speaks today in the acts of reading scripture and proclamation (preaching) of the gospel, insofar as these offer an encounter with a self-revealing God. This issue has a bearing on the nature of revelation within tradition, and recalls the recent Catholic account of tradition as being that 'God who spoke of old still maintains an uninterrupted conversation with the bride of his beloved Son,' the church.⁶⁰ It also makes more urgent the finding of a method for using the criterion of scripture to distinguish authentic and legitimate development of the original revealed message from illegitimate 'accretion.'

68. Connected with the affirmation that 'God speaks today', we several times noticed during our conversation a possible correlation between *tradition* as emphasized by Catholics and *preaching* as given prominence in worship by Baptists. In preaching, the Word of God as originally given becomes newly alive in the present situation, in a form which is suitable for the particularities of history, social context and culture. In the relation between Scripture and preaching there may be a clue to the relation between Scripture and tradition. To this end, further reflection on the theology of proclamation is needed. Baptists may also find a hint in their own early history, when it was common to have two periods of teaching and preaching in a service of worship – a strict exegesis of Scripture and a more 'prophetic' application of the Word to the present situation – which again seems to be relevant to the relation between Scripture and tradition.

69. We agree that conscience needs to be formed in order to hear the Word of God clearly. In the Catholic perspective

⁵⁹ For example, in the vote of the general congregation of 1 April 1546 there were thirty three votes for a statement on the parity of Scripture and tradition (*pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia*) but also eleven votes in favour of replacing *pari* (like) with *simili* (similar): see Hubert Jedin, *A History of the Council of Trent*, trans. Ernest Graf (St. Louis: Herder, 1961), vol. 2, p. 82.

⁶⁰ *Dei Verbum* 8; CCC 94.

the education of conscience is a life-long task and 'guarantees freedom'; in the formation of conscience the Word of God is a 'light for our path' (Psa 119).⁶¹ Baptists have always defended freedom (or 'liberty') of conscience in the service of advocating freedom of religion, believing that conscience can be a means of standing under the rule of Christ.⁶² From their beginning Baptists have called for freedom of conscience before God not only for Christians but for those of every religion and none.⁶³ They also recognize that conscience can become distorted, so that it is inviolable but not infallible. However, as yet our communions have not sufficiently explored together the relation of conscience to the reception of church *doctrine*. The issue of conscience is connected with the 'reception' of tradition and wider teaching by the local church and the local congregation and this needs much more reflection.

70. The question of the difference between the 'living tradition' of Christ and human 'traditions' can look quite different from the perspective of the global South, in comparison with North America and Europe; the insights of flourishing African Christianity, for instance, will increasingly need to shape our thinking in the future. We must ask ourselves whether the cultural presuppositions of the global North and the modern West precondition our understanding of tradition. In general, we need to reflect on the way that a given context determines how we understand both the nature and the content of tradition.

71. Both of our communities acknowledge the need to learn from the world as well as to learn within the church. God is free to speak God's Word through whatever means in the world God wishes, and so the question arises as to how one discerns what Karl Barth called 'the secular parables of the Kingdom',⁶⁴ or what Vatican II calls 'the signs of the times'.⁶⁵ Other questions are how one can avoid confusing the Word with culture, even though we can discern the Word in the culture, and how hearing the Word in the world affects the development of tradition.

We think that it is a mark of the progress Baptists and Catholics have made in their discussion of Scripture and tradition that the set of unresolved questions above (§§ 67-71) takes the 'missional' form it does, rather than the more conventional disputes that have divided Christian communions in the past.

IV. BAPTISM AND LORD'S SUPPER OR EUCHARIST: THE VISIBLE WORD OF GOD IN THE *KOINONIA* OF THE CHURCH

The meaning of sacrament and ordinance

72. The report of the earlier conversations between Catholics and Baptists (1984-88) identified the relation between faith and sacraments – which the report noted are 'called "ordinances" by most Baptists' – as a key problem to be dealt with in the future. In our present conversations we have sought to address this issue in the context of our main theme of 'The Word of God in the Life of the Church.' On the one hand, the development of convictions about the nature of sacraments or ordinances belongs to the larger context of the relation between Scripture and tradition which we have explored above. On the other, sacraments or ordinances may be understood as the 'making visible' of the Word of God who rules in the church, so that the same interweaving of divine grace and human faith that we find in the hearing of the Word is to be found in the bodily practices of sacraments or ordinances. Further, as the activity of the Word of God in the life of the church is grounded in the being of the Word in the triune life of God (see §§ 8-9), so the sacraments/ordinances are rooted in the relationships of God as Trinity.

73. Sacraments/ordinances are signs through which God acts, visible signs of invisible grace or divine blessing.

74. Catholics describe sacraments in terms of Christ's actions through signs to make grace present. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes 'sacraments' thus:

⁶¹ CCC 1783-5.

⁶² See *Confession of Faith* (London: 1644), XLIX-LII; *Brief Confession* (London: 1600), XXIV.

⁶³ See Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* (Amsterdam: 1612), p. 69: '...for men's religion to God, is betwixt God and themselves; the King shall not answer for it, neither may the King be judge between God and man. Let them be heretics, Turks, Jews, or whatsoever, it appertains not to the earthly power to punish them in the least measure.'

⁶⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, transl. & ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-77), IV/3, pp. 113-17.

⁶⁵ *Gaudium et Spes* 4.

‘Seated at the right hand of the Father,’ and pouring out the Holy Spirit on his body which is the Church, Christ now acts through the sacraments he instituted to communicate his grace. The sacraments are perceptible signs (words and actions) accessible to our human nature. By the action of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit they make present efficaciously the grace that they signify.⁶⁶

75. Among Baptists, the term ‘ordinance’ lays stress on the fact that these acts have been ordained or instituted by Jesus Christ and entrusted to the church, to signify the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ [1 Cor 11:25; Lk 22:14-20; Matt 28:19]. Many Baptists who use the term ‘ordinance’ do so as a deliberate rejection of the term ‘sacrament’, and often they intend to differentiate themselves from what they understand to be the Catholic understanding of ‘sacrament’. They lay stress on the ‘remembering’ of Christ at the Lord’s table and the witness of baptism to a regeneration that has already taken place in the believer. However, in practice these Baptist Christians approach the ‘ordinances’ in a way that may seem quite ‘sacramental’ to other Christians. All Baptists approach the ordinances with reverence and expectation, are ready to pray for the activity of the Holy Spirit as they celebrate them, and will usually hope to experience God’s ‘blessing’ there, though some prefer to speak of ‘grace’ as well as blessing. They think that Christ promises to meet his disciples in the waters of baptism and the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper and that this meeting will change lives. The function of the ordinances as signs does not mean that they are merely *empty* symbols.

As the Baptists in this conversation have talked together, they have thus come to think that there is not an absolute difference, but a kind of overlapping of meaning between ‘sacrament’ and ‘ordinance.’ In fact, while most Baptists today prefer to speak of these acts of worship as ‘ordinances’ some of the confessions and writings of the early Baptists employed the language of ‘sacrament’;⁶⁷ further, whether using the term ‘sacrament’ or ‘ordinance’, they affirmed the presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper and the transformative grace of God in baptism in a sacramental way, while rejecting Catholic doctrines of transubstantiation and regeneration of infants.⁶⁸ Some contemporary Baptists have continued this earlier Baptist sacramental viewpoint. While Baptists can generally agree with the phrase in the *Catholic Catechism* quoted above, that ‘Christ acts through the sacraments’, they will, however, disagree with the last sentence, preferring to say only that *Christ* offers the grace that the sacraments or ordinances signify.⁶⁹

76. The differing Catholic and Baptist terminology, as well as the differences among Baptists themselves, necessitates the following conventions in the present document: perspectives that are *only* Catholic will be indicated by using the term ‘sacrament’ on its own, whilst the term ‘sacrament/ordinance’ will be used to express the varying Baptist perspectives as well as Catholic and Baptist convergences.

77. The terms ‘sacrament’ and ‘ordinance’ express both God’s own gift of love (*agape*) and faith-filled human response. The sacrament/ordinance becomes the point of intersection between a divine commitment and a human commitment, where the priority belongs to God’s salvific act.

78. The Latin word *sacramentum* translates the Greek word *mysterion*, which refers to God’s acts in history for the salvation of the world, especially the incarnation, death, and resurrection of his Son [cf. Col 2:2-3]. *Sacramentum* was already used in Roman times with the secular meaning of a soldier’s pledge of allegiance. In their theological meaning, both terms (*mysterion* and *sacramentum*) have a complementary sense; they express at the same time the action of God (the ‘mystery’ of God’s saving work) and the active and lively human response to that divine salvific act in personal commitment and freedom (the ‘pledge’ of faith) . The term ‘ordinance’, which most Baptists prefer to ‘sacrament’, stresses institution by the command of Christ. However, this term can indicate both the action of God and the necessity of faith, as does ‘sacrament’.

79. Christ must be central to any account of the meaning of the sacraments/ordinances and of their relationship to the church.

⁶⁶ CCC 1084.

⁶⁷ e.g. *Short Confession of Faith in XX Articles by John Smyth* [General Baptist] (1609), (13), in Lumpkin (ed.), *Baptist Confessions*, pp. 100-102; *Orthodox Creed* (London: 1679), XXVII

⁶⁸ e.g. *A Brief Confession or Declaration of Faith* [General Baptist] (London: 1660), XII, in Lumpkin (ed.), *Baptist Confessions*, pp. 224-235; *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXIX.1, XXX.6-7.

⁶⁹ That is, declining to regard the sacraments as causal in themselves, as conceived in Catholic thought. See further §§88, 90.

80. For both Baptists and Catholics, Christ is the originator, 'the author and perfecter' of the sacraments/ordinances.⁷⁰ They are united in their understanding of these acts of worship as ordained by Christ, who acts in and through them in the context of the church. The rites and signs of the sacraments/ordinances have no efficacy apart from Christ who acts through them. They not only witness to Christ in his death and resurrection, but offer an opportunity for deeper union with him.

81. There is a co-inherence between sacraments/ordinances and the preaching of the Word of God.

82. For both Catholic and Baptist traditions, the sacraments/ordinances proclaim what God has done in Christ; thus they function as the tangible and visible words of God in their communication of the good news of salvation.⁷¹ Therefore the sacraments/ordinances not only build up the Christian community, but are also directed toward the world and its salvation as the church participates in the mission of God. Normally the sacraments/ordinances are celebrated in the context of the ministry of the Word in reading scripture and preaching.

83. Baptism and the Eucharist/Lord's Supper are central to the life of the church.

84. Among both Catholics and Baptists acts of worship other than Baptism and the Eucharist/Lord's Supper can also be designated as sacraments or ordinances. Further, in both communions acts of worship which are not strictly identified as sacraments or ordinances also partake of their qualities. But baptism and Eucharist/Lord's Supper retain their central place as the 'principal sacraments' or ordinances.⁷²

Catholics number baptism and the Eucharist among seven sacraments, which include additionally confirmation, penance, the anointing of the sick, holy orders, and matrimony. Baptists typically identify only baptism and the Lord's Supper as sacraments/ordinances, but a few Baptists also accord a similar status to footwashing⁷³ and occasionally to other rites as well. Even though Baptists do not usually identify all seven Catholic sacraments as sacraments/ordinances,⁷⁴ Baptists do act in ways that have some correspondence to the remaining five: they provide opportunities for the reconciliation of believers to God and one another through times of mutual confession, call for the rededication of life in worship, provide pastoral counselling or spiritual direction, pray for the sick (and sometimes anoint believers with oil), ordain ministers, and perform rites of Christian marriage. Some Baptists also offer the laying on of hands after baptism, following the practice of the early General Baptists. Baptists believe that, in these actions just described, they experience the presence and grace of Christ and commune with him, as do Catholics in the seven sacraments of their respective tradition.

85. The sacraments/ordinances are experiences of encounter with Christ that transform the lives of those who enter into these moments of worship by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Both Catholics and Baptists affirm the full freedom of God in relation to the sacraments/ordinances, and both traditions emphasize that no experience of salvation is fully whole without the free and loving entrance of the believer into the covenantal fellowship of Christ's church, for there can be no experience of grace apart from faith.

86. The Constitution on the Liturgy from Vatican II summarizes the purpose of the sacraments for Catholics:

The purpose of the sacraments is to make people holy, to build up the body of Christ, and finally, to express a relationship of worship to God; because they are signs, they certainly also belong under the heading of teaching. They not only presuppose faith; they also nourish it, strengthen it and express it, both through words and through objects. This is why they are called sacraments of faith. It is true that they confer grace; but, while they are being celebrated, they also are very powerful in opening people up to receive this same grace

⁷⁰ Heb 12:2; cf. the application of *auctor* to Christ in relation to the Eucharist in Ambrose of Milan in *De sacramentis* IV.4.13 and in relation to baptism by Augustine of Hippo in *Contra Litteras Petitioni* II.24.57.

⁷¹ Correspondingly, see discussion of the sacrament-like nature of the preached and written Word in §40 above.

⁷² For Catholics, these are identified as *sacramenta maiora*.

⁷³ Examples among contemporary groups are the 'Primitive Baptists', 'Old Regular Baptists' and 'Freewill Baptists', all in the USA, together with some Baptists in Russia (under Mennonite influence).

⁷⁴ There are exceptions – e.g. the Baptist theologian John Colwell, *Promise and Presence. An Exploration of Sacramental Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), argues for the seven Catholic sacraments.

fruitfully, so that they can express properly their relationship to God, and enact divine love.⁷⁵

87. An early confession, approved by the Baptist congregation of John Smyth in 1610, sounds many of the same notes as the modern Constitution above:

There are two sacraments appointed by Christ in his holy church namely the Holy Baptism and the Holy Supper. These are outward visible handlings and tokens, setting before our eyes, on God's side, the inward spiritual handling which God, through Christ, by the cooperation of the Holy Ghost, sets forth in justification in the penitent faithful soul; and which, on our behalf, witnesses to our religion, experience, faith, and obedience, through the obtaining of a good conscience to the service of God.⁷⁶

88. Baptists emphasize the freedom of God to work through the sacrament/ordinance when and where God wills, although they have confidence that God will be faithful to his promises to do so. Baptists generally reject the *ex opere operato* account of the gift of grace through the sacraments ('through the act performed', or 'by the very fact of the action's being performed'),⁷⁷ because they understand it to be asserting that the sacraments confer grace in and of themselves, which would infringe the freedom of God.

89. For Catholics, however, the concept of *ex opere operato* in no way intends a 'magical' interpretation of sacramental efficacy. It rather protects the objectivity and primacy of God's own action in the sacrament with respect to the minister's action, by assuring Christians of God's sovereign and gratuitous intervention in the sacraments. In Catholic teaching, the reception of the grace of the sacrament depends on the disposition of the one receiving it, on the receiver's not placing an obstacle in the way of God's grace, on the presence of faith, and on the minister's intention to 'do what the church does' and fulfill what is essential to each sacrament. Divine generosity grants the gift, and human freedom accepts it by cooperating with God, in a personal act inclusive of conversion – which implies the rejection of sin – reaching to God through faith, hope, and charity, and the will to live according to Christ. Although the sacrament cannot be fruitful apart from these dispositions, the salvific action itself gives rise to this willingness. In this sense, the grace conferred by the sacraments is 'operative': it is not a purely human contribution to sacramental efficacy, but instead is the first effect of sacramental grace. If a person should remove himself or herself from the action of grace, the sacrament becomes ineffectual, at least in what refers to sanctification. The final effect of the sacraments in each person is always the result of a harmonic exchange between the objective and the subjective, the gift of God and the personal attitude. The sacramental objectivity of the *ex opere operato* and the *opus operatum* ('the act performed') does not cancel human freedom, but neither does the human response give objective validity to the sacraments, which would limit God's freedom.

90. Understanding Catholic teaching on *ex opere operato* more fully enables Baptists to be able to confess with Catholics, as above, that God displays a full freedom in the sacraments/ordinances, and that 'there can be no experience of grace without faith.' Baptists will, however, remain uncomfortable with the inference drawn from the Catholic teaching of *ex opere operato* that the sacraments themselves 'confer grace', 'impart grace', 'effect grace' or 'make grace present'. They will lay stress on the teaching's own insight that God acts in the sacrament to insist that God *uses* the sacraments/ordinances to make God's self present, as an occasion for God's imparting of a grace which can be nothing other than God's own gracious coming (cf. §89).

91. The essential relationship between faith and the sacrament/ordinance involves the faith of the individual believer and the community.

92. Both traditions affirm that faith is visibly expressed through both its public profession and through the community celebrating worship. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* refers to the sacraments as 'sacraments of faith'.⁷⁸ Sacraments are the word of God expressed in sacramental form. They are received in faith through a free acceptance of God's gift. Thus there is no sacramental event without faith. The sacraments express acceptance of God's word and are, thereby, a profession of faith. Faith is always both personal faith and ecclesial faith. Baptist teaching has always similarly insisted

⁷⁵ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 59.

⁷⁶ *A Short Confession of Faith [General Baptist/Mennonite]* (1610), 28; in W. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, pp. 102-13. Spelling slightly modernized.

⁷⁷ CCC 1128.

⁷⁸ CCC 1122-1126; *Sacrosanctam Concilium* 59.

on the necessity of faith for receiving the grace of God through the sacrament/ordinance.⁷⁹ If Christ is personally encountered through the Lord's Supper or baptism, then a response of belief and trust is essential for the meeting to happen, although this human act is always enabled through the work of the Holy Spirit and is supported and encouraged by the faith of others.

Baptism

93. We baptize in obedience to Christ's command: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you' (Matt 28:19-20). Baptism has its foundation and meaning in the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology. Through baptism we are brought more deeply into the communion of the triune God, and we share in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

94. Baptists and Catholics can make a number of common affirmations about the doctrine of baptism, owing to our common confessions of faith about God as Trinity and the person and work of Christ which are intrinsic to baptism. For both communions, baptism is a profession of faith in God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We both acknowledge that the act of baptism provides an occasion for special encounter with this gracious God and for being drawn into the *koinonia* (fellowship) of God's relational life. We share belief in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who was incarnate, suffered, died and rose for our salvation. We are baptized into the very baptism of Christ, which is his humble coming down low into human existence through his ministry, sacrificial death and transformative resurrection (Rom 6:3-4). Recalling the words of Jesus, 'You will be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized' (Mk 10:39), we understand the 'one baptism' of Ephesians 4:5 to be *in the first place* an immersion into the one Lord Jesus Christ ('One Lord, one faith, one baptism'), not a reference to a unified act of baptism among all Christian churches.

95. Many Baptists understand baptism to be a sign of the benefits of salvation that have *already* been received. For them, baptism is an opportunity for the exercise of God-given faith in response to a gift of salvation that God has *already* given. While this act of faith is also a moment for receiving God's gracious blessing, and so is an occasion when God brings us more deeply into the communion of God's life, this divine act cannot be understood as having any saving effect. Some Baptists, however, draw on the understanding that salvation is not an isolated moment, but an extended process of 'being saved' (as Paul puts it in 1 Cor 1:18),⁸⁰ so they think that through baptism we are drawn further into God because baptism is part of a whole process of being transformed by the saving grace of God which begins in the preparatory work of God in the heart and continues in conversion and baptism. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, consistently teaches that baptism efficaciously brings about the benefits of salvation.

96. We all confess with St Paul that 'in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body' (1 Cor. 12:13), but among Baptists there are differing views about the relation of baptism in Spirit to baptism in water. Those who think that baptism is *only* a sign of a salvation that has already happened, and who identify 'baptism in Spirit' with that earlier moment of regeneration, will believe that spirit-baptism always precedes the sign of water-baptism. Those Baptists who envisage baptism as part of a whole process of 'being saved' (see § 95) think that baptism in water is usually simultaneous with baptism in the Spirit. They understand 'baptism in the Spirit' at the time of water-baptism to be a deeper reception of the Spirit who has already been given at the moment of conversion. Catholics simply stress that the gift of the Spirit is given in baptism, whatever the age of the recipient. Both Catholics and Baptists have groups in their communions (usually influenced by the movement for 'charismatic renewal') which speak of a 'baptism of the Spirit' at a later point than either conversion or baptism, but we understand this 'second blessing' to be a deeper reception of the gifts of the Holy Spirit who has already been given.

97. Faith is always necessary for baptism.

98. Catholics and Baptists agree that the first directing of conscious faith towards Christ will be initiated by the grace of God and is accompanied by an act of the Holy Spirit bringing the believer into fellowship with Christ. Correspondingly, for both Baptists and Catholics, baptism is the sacrament/ordinance of this faith, and there is a large degree of agreement on the nature of faith embodied in this event. For both, the act of baptism is an affirmation of faith in the triune God into whose name Christians are baptized. Both agree that baptism involves the faith of the

⁷⁹ *Confession of Faith* (London: 1644), XXXIX; *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXIX.2, XXX.7; *Orthodox Creed*, XXVIII, XXXIII.

⁸⁰ The view of salvation as a process, including sanctification and final glorification may, of course, be shared by Baptists who do not want to include baptism as part of that process.

community, and that members can help each other's faith develop. The act of being baptized in the midst of the public prayer of the church manifests the willingness to live out faith in the context of the faith community, which receives the baptized. Both Baptists and Catholics affirm that the nature of initiation as a process (see §§101-103 below) means that the faith that one brings to baptism is not a mature one, but a faith that needs to grow and to develop. Catholics and Baptists can agree that the practice of baptism that most fully expresses its meaning is that of a believing disciple, whose faith is supported by the faith of the believing community.

99. From their understanding of the role of faith in baptism as expressed above, Baptists require among their churches that every baptism that takes place should include the personal confession of faith of those baptized. Baptists only baptize those persons who are already believing disciples, that is, at an age when they can meaningfully take on the responsibility of sharing in God's mission in the world.

100. Catholics also believe that faith is necessary for baptism, but allow the community to profess faith for an infant if the parents indicate that it is their will that the child be baptized and have the intent to raise the child in the faith of the church. Catholic parents find that this practice fits their role as nurturers of life.⁸¹ By its very nature infant baptism requires a post-baptismal 'catechesis', that is an engagement in a process of receiving Christian teaching and growing in faith. The whole ecclesial community bears a responsibility for the nurturing of baptismal faith.

Baptists, although they do not baptize infants, also believe that Christ calls children to himself as a sign of the Kingdom of God. They usually express this in an act of 'Presentation of Infants' in which the child is prayed for and blessed, and parents and church together make promises to bring up the child in the care and instruction of the Lord, with the hope that child will in due time come to his or her own faith in Christ. Some Baptists are increasingly understanding this wrapping of children in the prayers and nurture of the church as part of a whole process of Christian initiation.

101. Initiation into Christ and his church is a process wider than the act of baptism itself. We can work towards a mutual recognition of the different forms that *initiation* takes among us, as an entire 'journey' of faith and grace.

102. In conversations with other Christian communions, Baptists have recently been speaking of a process of initiation, or a 'journey of Christian beginnings.'⁸² In strikingly similar terms the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, 'becoming a Christian has been accomplished by a journey and initiation in several stages.'⁸³ For adults who come to faith in both traditions, this journey begins with the church's evangelization, the proclamation of the gospel that calls a person to faith. God's call to faith comes by way of the faith community: 'But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent' (Rom 10:14-15)? Belief and acceptance of the gospel entail several steps or stages along a journey: conversion (which follows in response to the proclamation of the Gospel), then water baptism in the name of Father, Son, and Spirit, reception of the gifts of the Spirit with the responsibility to participate in God's mission in the world, and a sharing in the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper for the first time. This period of initiation is followed by life-long discipleship, which has a baptismal pattern of daily dying and rising with Christ.

103. For Catholics, the sacraments of initiation are Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. The 'journey of initiation' as described above can include the baptism of young infants; although the sequence of stages will be different from that which happens with adults, all the elements of the journey will be present. Baptists only practice baptism when it follows conversion along the path of the journey, although this may be preceded by a long process of Christian nurture from infancy onwards (perhaps marked by the blessing of the child in the midst of the community of faith). However, Baptists and Catholics can both recognize that the processes of initiation, taken as a *whole* in both communions, are aimed at the making of Christian disciples and the deepening of each disciple's relationship with the triune God.

We thus think that in relations between Baptists and Catholics it is more fruitful to work together towards a mutual recognition of *initiation*, rather than attempt to make an affirmation of 'common baptism'. Baptists think that

⁸¹ CCC 1252.

⁸² This was a feature of earlier conversations between Baptists and Anglicans; see *Conversations Around the World. Conversations between the Anglican Communion and the Baptist World Alliance*, 44-51. Similarly, see *Dialogue between the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and the European Baptist Federation (EBF) on the Doctrine and Practice of Baptism*. Leuenberg Documents 9 (Frankfurt: Verlag Lembeck, 2005), 19-22; *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity. Anglicans and Baptists in Conversation* (London: Church House Publishing 2005), 31-57.

⁸³ CCC 1229.

the baptism of believing disciples cannot have exactly the same meaning as the baptism of infants and hence find the notion of 'common baptism' to be untenable. In recent conversations with other communions, Baptists have therefore preferred to speak of a 'common initiation,' recognizing in others a 'journey of Christian beginnings' despite differences regarding baptism.⁸⁴ The issue of 'common baptism' will always run into the impasse of the nature of faith in baptism which was noted in earlier Catholic-Baptist conversations. Baptists may well recognize the place of faith in the baptism of young infants, in the sense of the faith of the parents and the church, but most Baptists will not consider this to be the kind of faith appropriate to the sacrament/ordinance of baptism. However, some Baptists are more ready than others to accept that infant baptism plus adult profession of faith is a process of initiation equivalent to the baptism of believing disciples.

104. Baptists are more easily able to recognize the 'journey of Christian beginnings' in those churches that baptize young infants when the process of initiation is not seen to be concluded until a person comes to a point of affirming faith in Christ for himself or herself. Baptists will thus often see the act of confirmation as an opportunity for two happenings that are otherwise associated with the baptism of a believing disciple – a personal and public profession of faith, and a receiving of gifts of the Holy Spirit for service in the world. Baptists note that the Rite of Confirmation of the Catholic Church affirms that 'the reception of the sacrament of Confirmation is necessary for the completion of baptismal grace.'⁸⁵

105. Catholics nevertheless caution that the essence of Confirmation is not to be found in the public profession of faith, although the rite of Confirmation incorporates the profession of faith as a renewal of baptismal promises. In fact, the essence of the sacrament is not the adult profession of faith, but rather the reception of the Holy Spirit by which the confirmands are 'endowed...with special strength,'⁸⁶ and which confers a character by which the confirmands are more 'closely bound to the Church,'⁸⁷ and 'under more pressing obligation to spread the faith by word and deed as true witnesses of Christ.'⁸⁸ Finally, 'confirmation is so closely linked with the holy Eucharist that the faithful, after being signed by baptism and confirmation, are incorporated fully into the Body of Christ by participation in the Eucharist.'⁸⁹ While the nature and requirements of confirmation may satisfy Baptist requirements for profession of faith by a disciple (although the age at which confirmation is sometimes received may still pose an obstacle for this recognition),⁹⁰ Catholics caution that it is essential to see confirmation as first an act of God before it is a human act of profession of faith. The emphasis is on God's gracious initiative in acting through sacramental instrumentality. Baptists are, in principle, willing to accept this caution since for them the baptism of believing disciples is the occasion for receiving gifts of the Holy Spirit to equip them for sharing in God's mission in the world, and this is exactly what they hope Catholics will affirm in their act of confirmation of a believer.

106. Catholics and Baptists agree that even though the process of initiation begins before baptism and continues afterwards, baptism stands as a radical stage in this journey. They concur here in a Baptist statement:

Whenever God meets us with grace, lives are transformed and relationships are given new depth. In this particular meeting place ordained by Christ, there is such a rich focus of life-giving that we can, with New Testament writers, apply to it the images of new birth or regeneration (John 3:5, Titus 3:5), forgiveness of sins and cleansing from sin (Acts 2:38, 1 Cor. 6:11, Hebrews 10:22), death and resurrection with Christ (Rom 6:1-6), baptism in the Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13, Acts 2:38, 10:47 cf. Mark 1:9-11), deliverance from evil powers (Col. 1:13), union with Christ (Gal. 3:27), adoption as children of God (Gal 3:26), and membership in the body of Christ (1

⁸⁴ See note 32 above.

⁸⁵ Roman Ritual, *Rite of Confirmation* (OC), Introduction 1.

⁸⁶ *Lumen Gentium* 11.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* See also *Ad Gentes* 11.

⁸⁹ Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution on the Sacrament of Confirmation, *Divinae consortium naturae*, 15 August 1972, referring to *Presbyterorum ordinis* 5.

⁹⁰ For example, in eastern Catholic churches confirmation accompanies baptism; see CCC 1290

There is, however, a diversity of views among Baptists about the extent to which these benefits of salvation are *effected* as well as *expressed* in the act of baptism. As already indicated above (§§95-96), some understand baptism to be essentially a sign of the benefits of salvation that have *already* been received. Other Baptists, however, believe that if baptism is an encounter between the faith of the believer and the transforming grace of God, what the images of salvation express must be actually *given* in baptism (1 Pet 3:21, 'baptism now saves you as an appeal to God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ'). However, they stress that salvation is a continuous and daily process of being transformed into the likeness of Christ ('to us who are being saved the message of the cross is the power of God' 1 Cor 1:18). Catholics invariably believe that the benefits of salvation expressed in the scripture images above are actually *effected* in baptism, though they agree that they are not to be restricted to the event of baptism.

107. Baptism is administered, with water, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and is a once-for-all event.

108. Baptists and Catholics have substantial agreement on the manner and once-for-allness of baptism. Both communions agree that baptism is administered by water with the words 'I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.'⁹² We agree that immersion into water is the mode that is most expressive of the meaning of baptism, signifying the death and resurrection of Christ. Nevertheless, Catholics do not require immersion, but also administer baptism by pouring water so that it flows over the candidate's head (effusion) while reciting the baptismal formula. Many Baptists also, while regarding immersion as the normative practice, will still recognize the baptism of a believing disciple that has involved effusion, as was the usual practice of early Baptists themselves.⁹³

We also agree that baptism, rightly understood, is to be received only once, although disagreement exists on whether infant baptism is truly baptism. Most Baptists do not regard infant baptism as being baptism at all,⁹⁴ and so do not accept that the baptism as a believer of those baptized in infancy is a repetition of baptism. Nevertheless, some who take this view may still affirm aspects of the grace of God and human faith within infant baptism and can recognize it as part of the journey of Christian beginnings (see §§101-103 above).

109. In baptism we are united with other believers in the church of Christ, 'for in the one Spirit we are all baptized into one body' (1 Cor 12:13).

110. Baptists take varying views on the relationship between baptism and the church. A first group considers that someone can be initiated into Christ and his church regardless of his or her baptism. This group can thus recognize a paedobaptist church as a true church of Jesus Christ while not recognizing its baptism, on the basis that it is faith that constitutes the church and not baptism. Some, who belong to 'open membership' churches, are thus able to welcome into membership believers baptized as infants, without requiring them to receive a second baptism. This will usually not be because of a positive evaluation of infant baptism, but because a profession of personal faith is considered to be the essential element for membership.

A second group believes that baptism cannot be separated from church membership. For this group, baptism as well as faith is required. Most of those who hold this conviction will belong to 'closed membership' Baptist churches who will insist on believers' baptism for admission into membership of their churches. However, there has always been a third group of Baptists who have combined the belief in an indissoluble link between baptism and church membership with an 'open membership' approach. In the past these would have appealed to freedom of conscience before God to accept into membership those who *themselves* believed that they had been truly baptized as infants, and whose conscientious conviction could not be denied. Recently, there is a small but growing number of Baptists willing to recognize the baptism of infants as a secondary form of baptism 'derived' from the norm of believers' baptism, while continuing themselves only to practise the normative form.

⁹¹ *Believing and Being Baptized. Baptism, so-called re-baptism, and children in the church. A discussion document by the Doctrine and Worship Committee of the Baptist Union of Great Britain* (London: Baptist Union, 1996), pp. 9-10.

⁹² This does not exclude a variation of words in the Eastern liturgies where the catechumen turns toward the East and the priest says: "The servant of God, N., is baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

⁹³ Baptism by effusion was practised by General Baptists from 1609 to about 1630.

⁹⁴ But see §110 for other views held by Baptists.

111. Catholics believe that baptism incorporates recipients into the church. Catechumens, those on the way to baptism, moved by the Spirit and explicitly desiring to be incorporated into the church, are also considered members of the church.⁹⁵ Baptism in a local community gives the baptized his or her ecclesial identity as a Catholic. The faith of the community that baptizes, receives, and nurtures the newly baptized in faith, and whose faith the baptized professes, determines the ecclesial identity of the person baptized. No rite of baptism specifies a name of a church or denomination into which one is baptized, for it is presupposed that one is baptized into the church of Christ. Thus ecclesial identity comes, not from the rite of baptism itself, but from the community in which baptism occurs.

112. Baptists find it difficult to agree with Catholics that very young infants are members of the body of Christ by virtue of their baptism. Baptists hesitate to apply the term 'member' to very young infants before they have exercised *any* faith at all for themselves, including a simple faith suitable for a young age, holding that a member must make his or her own active contribution to the way that Christ, in the community of the church, becomes material, tangible, and visible in the world. However, young infants are regarded as *belonging* in their own way to 'the body of Christ' insofar as they are welcomed and embraced by the church and immersed into its prayers and ongoing pastoral care. As with the catechuminate in the Catholic Church, children who have come to faith and are on the way to baptism may be considered as members of the body of Christ. With baptism they become members commissioned for service in a covenanted relationship with other disciples, and so will be formally received into membership of a particular local church.

113. Baptism signifies forgiveness of sins and new birth.

114. Catholics affirm that the two principal effects of baptism are purification from sins and new birth in the Holy Spirit.⁹⁶ The newly baptized is made 'a new creature,' an adopted son or daughter of God who has become a 'partaker of the divine nature,' member of Christ and co-heir with him, and a temple of the Holy Spirit [2 Cor 5:17; 2 Pet 1:4; cf. Gal 4:5-7; 1 Cor 6:15,12:27; Rom 8:17]. Baptism is an 'effectual sign' and bestows sanctifying grace. Catholics interpret the gifts of baptism as the grace of justification, which includes the remission of sins, sanctification, and the renewal of the inner person.⁹⁷ As the consensus statement between Lutherans and Catholics in the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (1999) states, 'By the action of the Holy Spirit in baptism, they [sinners] are granted the gift of salvation, which lays the basis for the whole Christian life.'⁹⁸ The document then further elucidates the Catholic position: 'Persons are justified through baptism as hearers of the word and believers in it. The justification of sinners is forgiveness of sins and being made righteous by justifying grace, which makes us children of God. In justification the righteous receive from Christ faith, hope, and love and are thereby taken into communion with him.'⁹⁹

115. Whereas Baptists believe that baptism *signifies* new birth (regeneration) and forgiveness of sins, together with many other scriptural images of salvation, there is a diversity of views among them about the extent to which this rich symbolism is *effected* in baptism. As already noted above (§§95-96, 106) some understand baptism to be essentially a sign of a salvation¹⁰⁰ that has *already* been received. Others, however, can discern the work of regeneration and remission of sins within baptism, because they do not think the gift of salvation can be restricted to one particular moment of conversion but understand it to be given before, during and after baptism.

The Eucharist/Lord's Supper

116. The Eucharist/Lord's Supper¹⁰¹ is essential to the church. We celebrate the Eucharist/Lord's Supper in obedience to Jesus' command, 'Do this in memory of me' (1 Cor 11:24, Lk 22:19).

⁹⁵ *Lumen Gentium* 14.

⁹⁶ CCC 1262.

⁹⁷ CCC 1265, 2019-2020.

⁹⁸ *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (1999) 25.

⁹⁹ *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* 27.

¹⁰⁰ See the citation from *Believing and Being Baptized*, Baptist Union of Great Britain in §106 above.

¹⁰¹ The word "Eucharist" means "Thanksgiving." Although a term not popularly used by Baptists, it is often used by Catholics to refer to the Lord's Supper.

117. Baptists and Catholics agree that the church cannot be the church without the Eucharist/Lord's Supper. Likewise, there can be no Eucharist/Lord's Supper without the church, for it is never a private or individual act, but one always done in the context of a community. Catholics believe that in a certain sense 'the Eucharist makes the Church.'¹⁰² While Baptists would mostly find this a strange expression, they agree that in the Lord's Supper Christ unites those who receive the bread and wine with all the rest of the faithful in one body, the church [1 Cor 10:16-17]. Communion in the Eucharist/Lord's Supper renews, strengthens, and deepens the incorporation into the church already achieved through conversion and baptism.

118. The celebration of the Eucharist/Lord's Supper is both a sign and a source of unity [1 Cor 10: 16f]. We all yearn for the time that we will be able to celebrate it together, and so we are looking both for visible unity on earth and for the final coming of the Kingdom of God. At the moment we feel the pain of not being able to share fully in the fellowship of the Lord's table.

In the Catholic view, since a sacrament is both an act of Christ and of the church through the Spirit, 'its celebration in a concrete community is the sign of the reality of its unity in faith, worship and community life.'¹⁰³ Consequently, Eucharistic communion is inseparably linked to full ecclesial communion and its visible expression. In addition to this principle, the Catholic Church also teaches that 'by baptism members of other churches and ecclesial communities are brought into a real, even if imperfect communion, with the Catholic Church and that baptism, which constitutes the sacramental bond of unity existing among all who through it are reborn... is wholly directed toward the acquiring of fullness of life in Christ'.¹⁰⁴ In the light of these two basic principles, 'in general the Catholic Church permits access to its Eucharistic communion only to those who share its oneness in faith, worship and ecclesial life. For the same reasons, it also recognizes that in certain circumstances, by way of exception, and under certain conditions, access to these sacraments [Eucharist, penance and anointing of the sick] may be permitted, or even commended, for Christians of other churches and ecclesial Communities.'¹⁰⁵

Baptists, agreeing with Catholics that sharing in the Lord's Supper will strengthen the fellowship of believers within the church, generally have an 'open table' at which believers from all Christian communions are welcome.¹⁰⁶ A commonly-heard expression is that 'this is the Lord's table, not ours'. Although the nature of the invitation may differ from one church to another, a familiar wording would be a welcome to 'all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth'.

119. The Bible must play a formative role in the liturgy of the Eucharist or in the order of worship of the Lord's Supper.

120. Catholics and Baptists both affirm that Scripture informs us about the practice of the Eucharist/Lord's Supper, which is structured upon the practice of Jesus as recorded in Scripture: he took, broke, and blessed bread and gave it to his disciples; he took a cup of wine, blessed it and shared it. Baptists think that taking this scriptural account as a model means sharing both bread and wine among the whole congregation. For Catholics, since the Second Vatican Council communion under both the form of bread and the form of wine may be offered to all the faithful,¹⁰⁷ although the actual practice may vary according to local directives and circumstances. Catholics hold that Christ is fully present whole and entire in each of the elements.¹⁰⁸

At the Eucharist/Lord's Supper we also proclaim the Scriptures as expressing the faith of the church as we seek to model our lives according to God's Word. The Baptist order of worship usually centres on the reading of the 'words of institution' as recorded by Paul (1 Cor 11:23-26), and so follows the scriptural genre of narrative at this point, passing on the 'tradition' (v. 11) by telling the story to the congregation gathered. The Catholic liturgy of the mass takes the Pauline words into a prayer of thanksgiving to the Father and a prayer of consecration of the elements. While the

¹⁰² CCC 1396.

¹⁰³ Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism*, 1993, 129. Hereafter, *Ecumenical Directory*.

¹⁰⁴ *Ecumenical Directory*, 129. See CCC 1399-1401.

¹⁰⁵ *Ecumenical Directory*, 131.

¹⁰⁶ Throughout the world an 'open table' is much more common among Baptists than 'open membership'; however, in some areas such as Brazil and Mexico the table may be restricted to Baptists only.

¹⁰⁷ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 55

¹⁰⁸ CCC 1390.

Baptist practice stresses the scriptural element of story, the Catholic practice highlights the scriptural element of drama, enacting the breaking of bread and the lifting of the cup (which is present but may be underplayed in the Baptist form).

121. There is a trinitarian pattern in the order of worship of the Eucharist/Lord's Supper. In it the church prays to the Father in thanksgiving (*eucharistia*) as Jesus did, recalling God's acts in the history of salvation; it remembers, celebrates and participates (*anamnesis*) in the death and resurrection of the Son; and it calls upon the Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*) to make the presence of Christ real to his disciples.

122. *Anamnesis* or memorial is a central key for clarifying the dimensions of sacrifice and temporality within the sacrament/ordinance. Both Baptists and Catholics have benefited from modern biblical scholarship which has stressed that 'remembering' (*anamnesis*) in Old and New Testament is not simply historical reminiscence, but a participation in the present in the mighty acts of God that are being remembered from the past.

123. Catholics understand memorial (*anamnesis*) and the invocation of the Spirit (*epiclesis*) in a strong sense. The church not only calls to mind the passion and resurrection of Christ Jesus in the Eucharist, but also 'presents to the Father the offering of his Son which reconciles us with him.'¹⁰⁹ Catholics believe that the Eucharist is a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the once-for-all sacrifice of the cross. It is a memorial of that sacrifice and an application of the fruits of that sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins¹¹⁰ (cf. 1 Cor 11:23; Heb 7:24, 27). In the liturgical celebration of the events of Christ's passion, they 'become in a certain way present and real'.¹¹¹ Catholics believe that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice, 'not a multiplication or repetition of sacrifices'.¹¹² In the Eucharist the sacrifice of Christ also becomes the sacrifice of the church, the body of Christ, who participates in the offering of her Head.¹¹³ Re-presenting (not repeating) the sacrifice of Christ by means of *anamnesis*, the Church is united to the sacrifice of Christ by Christ himself acting through an ordained minister. The church invokes the Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*) to transform the bread and wine into the sacramental body and blood of its Lord, Jesus Christ. It also prays that the Spirit may transform all those present into the ecclesial body of Christ.

124. Baptists do not agree with Catholics in all respects concerning the sacrificial character of the rite, even though they find some resonances with their account. They recognize that understanding the category of *anamnesis* in a scriptural way clarifies the Catholic insistence that the Eucharist is not a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ. In their act of remembrance (*anamnesis*) Baptists also think that they are participating in the very events of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and that they are sharing in 'all the benefits' of Christ's saving sacrifice.¹¹⁴ However, they make a distinction between 'sharing' in the self-offering of Christ and 'presenting' the sacrifice of Christ to the Father, believing that only Christ can present himself. When they pray to God as Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*) they are asking for the help of the Holy Spirit in making the act of remembrance, and asking that the Spirit may use the signs of bread and wine to bring them into closer fellowship with Christ and each other. They are not asking for the Holy Spirit to transform the substance of the bread and wine. They are happier, then, with the description of the Lord's Supper, along with other acts of worship, as a 'sacrifice of *thanksgiving*' (*eucharistia*) [Psa.50:14, Heb 13:15, cf.1 Pet 2:5], or 'a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God'.¹¹⁵

125. Christ is 'really present' to his disciples in the celebration of the Eucharist/Lord's Supper.

126. Catholics believe that in the Eucharist the substance of bread and wine is changed into the substance of the body and blood of Christ through the efficacy of the Word of Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit. Thus Catholics hold that Christ is 'really, truly and substantially present'¹¹⁶ in the fullest sense in the Eucharist, though the elements remain bread and wine to outward appearance, touch, smell and taste. This presence begins at the moment of the consecration

¹⁰⁹ CCC 1354, 1362-1372.

¹¹⁰ Council of Trent (1562): DS 1740.

¹¹¹ CCC 1363.

¹¹² CCC 1367.

¹¹³ CCC 1368.

¹¹⁴ *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXX.1, 7; *Orthodox Creed* (London: 1679), XXXIII.

¹¹⁵ *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXX.2.

¹¹⁶ Council of Trent, Session 13, canon 1

and endures as long as the appearances of the bread and wine subsist. For Catholics, this substantial change is 'fittingly and properly called transubstantiation'.¹¹⁷

127. Baptists think that Christ, who is always present with his people, is certainly present at his table. Some Baptists think that sharing in the bread and wine makes them more aware of his presence; others think that Christ also makes *himself* more deeply and intensely present to his disciples through the use of the elements (not *in* them). As one modern Baptist confession of faith expresses it, 'In the observance of the Supper we experience the saving nearness and fellowship of Jesus Christ, by recalling his suffering and dying for us.'¹¹⁸ Baptists therefore do not accept any doctrine about the change of 'substance' of the bread and wine, and have historically rejected 'transubstantiation';¹¹⁹ some have affirmed instead a 'spiritual eating and drinking', or being spiritually 'nourished' by Christ.¹²⁰ All lay as much emphasis on the presence of Christ in the 'body' of the gathered believers who are sharing in the bread and wine as through the use of the elements themselves, appealing to the saying of St Paul that 'because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread' (1 Cor. 10:17). In this way Baptists have found a congruence between their ecclesiology of a covenant community and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Catholics also recognize that there is a presence of Christ beyond the elements, including presence through the word read and preached, in the community of people, and in the minister presiding. However, they emphasize that Christ is most fully present in the Eucharistic elements,¹²¹ expressing this in the doctrine of transubstantiation.

128. The difference in the way that Baptists and Catholics treat the elements of bread and wine after celebration shows that there is still a difference in understanding of the presence of Christ at the Eucharist/Lord's Supper. Baptists dispose of the remaining bread and wine reverently, remembering that they have been 'set apart' for use in worship as a sign of the life and death of Christ¹²², but they do not think they have to be consumed and they do not find any meaning in reserving the bread.

129. Baptists and Catholics also differ over who presides or officiates at the Eucharist/Lord's Supper. For Christ to be present in the sacrament, Catholics always require a priest to consecrate the elements. In the liturgy of the Eucharist the priest acts 'in the person of Christ the head' (*in persona Christi capitis*) with respect to Christ's body, the church. He also acts 'in the person of the church' (*in persona ecclesiae*) with respect to the church's offering of its priestly prayer to the Father. In Catholic theology, Christ is thus the principal actor in all the sacraments as well as head of the church. It is Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit who effects the change in the elements so that they become his body and blood. The ministerial priesthood sacramentally represents Christ, enabling the priest to recite effectively Christ's words of institution in the first person singular ('This is my body this is the cup of my blood'). Thus 'in the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself present to his Church as Head of his Body....'¹²³ The priest, by reason of his ordination, is made 'like to the high priest and possesses the authority to act in the power and place of the person of Christ himself.'¹²⁴ Because a sacrament makes present under sign that which it signifies, the sacramental priesthood makes the presence of Christ as head of the church visible in the midst of the community of believers.¹²⁵ Both the priestly sacramental representation of Christ and Christ's personal presence and activity in the liturgy constitute a dynamic and ongoing relationship of reciprocal participation in the sacramental event

While appreciating the Catholic stress on the personal presence and activity of Christ, Baptists nevertheless find the *necessity* of a sacramental office of ministry for celebration of the Supper to be in tension with the belief that the church is formed by the presence of the risen Christ - in the reading and preaching of the word, in the

¹¹⁷ Council of Trent, Session 13, canons 2 and 4.

¹¹⁸ *Confession of Faith of the Union of Evangelical Free Churches in Germany*, in Parker, *Baptists in Europe*, pp. 57-76, II.1.4.

¹¹⁹ *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXX.6.

¹²⁰ *A Short Confession of Faith* (Amsterdam: 1610), 32; *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXX.1.7.

¹²¹ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7.

¹²² *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXX.5: 'set apart to the uses ordained by Christ.'

¹²³ CCC 1548.

¹²⁴ Pius XII, Encyclical Letter, *Mediator Dei*, 20 November 1947, 69: AAS, 39 (1947) 548.

¹²⁵ *Lumen Gentium* 21.

sacraments/ordinances and in the church meeting. The risen Christ stands in the congregation which is under his rule; it is his body, but he alone remains the head. As the body of Christ, the whole gathered congregation makes Christ visible. From their beginning Baptists have regarded the ordained ministry as a gift of Christ to his church, and have understood the administration of the sacraments/ordinances *normally* to be the minister's Christ-given responsibility and privilege.¹²⁶ The minister represents the whole church of God at the table (see further §171), helping to make clear that as the table of the Lord this is not the private table of any local congregation. But to see the office as somehow *assuring* the coming of Christ to his church in the sacraments/ordinances seems to Baptists to undermine the rule of Christ, even when it is believed (as Baptists do) that the office has been given by Christ in the first place. For Baptists, the ordained minister called by the congregation to be its pastor almost always presides at the table, if he or she is available; but today this is usually seen as a matter of good order rather than an absolute requirement, and in some circumstances a lay person can preside if this is agreed upon by the members of the local church.¹²⁷ While there is a divergence here with Catholic belief and practice, there is a certain convergence in the conviction that Christ *has* given the church an office of word and sacrament/ordinance.

130. There is a strongly ethical and eschatological dimension to the Eucharist/Lord's Supper.

131. Among the dimensions of the church recognized by both Baptists and Catholics are not only *koinonia* (fellowship, communion), *kerygma* (proclamation) and *leiturgia* (service to God which includes thanksgiving or 'Eucharist. '), but also diakonia, or service to others. These are all clearly expressed in the Eucharist/Lord's Supper. This special meal compels us to share bread with others (especially the needy) as an act of both justice and compassion. Confession of sins is requisite for celebrating Eucharist/Lord's Supper worthily for both Catholics and Baptists (1 Cor 11:27-31), and St Paul's words make clear that this confession has particular reference to sorrow for lack of care for other people (1 Cor 11:33-34). Both Catholics and Baptist stress the eschatological orientation of the Eucharist, celebrating the Supper 'until Christ comes'. While we experience the Eucharist/Lord's Supper as a 'Messianic banquet' in which the future is already in a sense present, our hope for the full coming of the reign of God is a motivation for working for the transformation of human society here and now.

V. MARY AS MODEL OF DISCIPLESHIP IN THE COMMUNION OF THE CHURCH

132. 'But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children' (Gal 4: 4-5). This New Testament confession calls to mind the crucial role of Mary in the mystery of the Incarnation and the communion of the church, and it requires all Christians to pay attention to how the Bible presents her. At the same time, the role of Mary remains a matter of serious contention between Baptists and Catholics.

133. Mary has a significant place in the New Testament. She was a witness to the saving acts of Christ from his conception and birth to his death and the giving of the Holy Spirit after his resurrection. Chosen by God to be the mother of the Saviour, Mary deserves to be honoured and called 'blessed' (Luke 1: 42, 48) by all Christians in all times and all places. Beliefs about Mary should be rooted in Scripture, warranted by Scripture, and not contradicted by Scripture.

134. Nevertheless, Baptists and Catholics disagree about what enjoys the warrant of scripture when it comes to Mary. Their doctrinal differences have their basis in different practical outworkings of their understanding of the relationship between Scripture and tradition. Baptists, with Catholics, find that there is explicit scriptural basis for the virginal conception (Mt 1: 22-23). Believing in the deity of Jesus Christ, they can also with Catholics confess Mary as 'Theotokos', or 'God-bearer' (Lk 1:43).¹²⁸ However, they do not find a scriptural warrant for what Catholics believe about her perpetual virginity (§141), immaculate conception (§147), and bodily assumption (§149). Catholics accept these doctrines as revealed by God, and as based in Scripture as it is interpreted in the ongoing life of the church.

¹²⁶ *A Short Confession* (Amsterdam: 1610), 24; *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXVI.8; *Orthodox Creed* (London: 1679), XXXIII.

¹²⁷ This was already the practice in the congregation of Thomas Helwys in Amsterdam: see *Declaration of Faith* (Amsterdam: 1611), 11.

¹²⁸ This was, for example, accepted by French Baptists in *Marie, Comité mixte baptiste-catholique en France*. Documents Episcopat 10 (Le Secrétariat Général de la Conférence des Evêques de France: 2009), §15

135. Mary belongs to the Jewish people. She stands in a long line of those expecting the Messiah, at the point where Old and New Testaments meet [Gal 4: 4; Lk 2: 25-32]. Mary has a place in the genealogy of the Messiah [Mt 1: 16] and among the holy women who kept alive the hope of Israel's salvation. Mary may be called 'Daughter of Israel' in that she is the mother of the one called the Son of David and insofar as she welcomes the Saviour with joy and he takes up his dwelling within her. [See Zeph 3:14-17; Joel 2:21-27; Zech 2:15, 9:9-10; Lk 1: 28-33; Lk 3:31.]

136. In their confessions of faith, Baptists have emphasized the importance of taking into account that Mary is Jewish, 'of the Tribe of *Judah*, of the seed of *Abraham* and *David*.¹²⁹ Similarly, Catholics emphasize that Mary is the 'Daughter of Zion' (Zeph 3:14; Zech 2:10) and personification of Israel, the dwelling place of God; she is thus also the image or type of the church, God's new dwelling place.¹³⁰

137. A number of Old Testament passages may be interpreted as referring to Mary. Isaiah 7:14 is to be recognized as a prophetic text fulfilled in Mary's conceiving of Christ (Matt. 1:22-23), and many Christian readers of the Old Testament find an implicit reference to Mary in 'the woman' of Gen. 3:15 whose son, the promised Messiah, triumphs over the Evil One.

138. A Christological reading of Scripture allows us to find types or foreshadowings of Christ in the Old Testament. In a similar way, Catholics find types or foreshadowings of Mary in the Old Testament: for example, they follow the ancient patristic tradition of interpreting Mary in light of Eve.¹³¹ On the one hand, Eve who is involved in the fall is contrasted with Mary (the 'New Eve') who is involved in the coming of redemption; on the other, Eve, the 'mother of all the living,' is the prototype of Mary. Baptists differ among themselves on the extent to which typological readings for Mary may be found in the Old Testament.

139. The Gospels present Mary as a 'hearer of the Word' who responded to God's gracious initiative as an active and faith-filled disciple of her divine Son. Mary is one who heard and obeyed the word. (Lk 1:38) She 'treasured' and pondered the Word in her heart. (Lk 1:29; 2:19,51) As a disciple, Mary was a woman of faith. She met the divine call with faith (Lk 1:45; 11:28) and made a complete gift of herself to God in her cry, 'let it be so' (Lk 1:38). Mary grew in faith and understanding. She was not merely a passive instrument in God's hand, but was actively engaged, freely consenting to God's gracious election and eternal purpose. Mary's response to God was itself the result of grace.

140. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. The virginal conception of Jesus is clearly attested in the Gospels according to Matthew (1:18-25) and Luke (1:26-38). Matthew (1:22-23) interprets the virginal conception as the fulfillment of prophecy (Isaiah 7:14). The doctrine that Jesus was 'conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary' is found in the Apostles' Creed and was added to the Nicene Creed at the Council of Constantinople (381).

As a sign of both Jesus' divine origin and his true humanity, Mary's virginal motherhood safeguards Christological orthodoxy. This doctrine first of all concerns the person and identity of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God who took human flesh from the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of Jesus' divine origin insofar as the Virgin Mary conceived him by the power of the Holy Spirit without the intervention of a human father. Jesus' birth of the Virgin Mary is also proof of his true humanity, in that he is born of a human mother. The virgin birth is an eschatological sign, that is, a sign that God is with us (Mt 1:23; 28:20), that the Messiah has come, and that the new age has begun.

141. The Catholic Church teaches that Mary was a virgin not only in conceiving the Lord by the power of the Holy Spirit, but also in the course of giving him birth and for the remainder of her life.¹³² Whereas the New Testament attests explicitly only to the first aspect of her virginity, the second and third aspects belong to an ancient tradition. Although both of these were disputed for a time, Catholics find that they were solidified by means of arguments appealing to

¹²⁹ See *Confession of Faith* (London: 1644), IX; *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), VIII.2; cf. *Brief Confession* (London: 1660), III.

¹³⁰ CCC 489.

¹³¹ CCC 411.

¹³² CCC 499-500, 510.

Scripture during the post-Nicene period and prior to the Council of Ephesus.¹³³ The classical biblical text cited in favour of her perpetual virginity is John 19:25-27, in which Jesus entrusts his mother to the care of the Beloved Disciple, since she has no other children. Mary was commonly referred to as '*Aeiparthenos*' or 'Ever-Virgin' from the late fourth century forward.¹³⁴

142. Although a number of the early Protestant Reformers did affirm Mary's perpetual virginity (e.g. Luther and Zwingli), Baptists do not find any basis for this in the Scriptures; according to the plain sense of the text, they usually assume that Mary delivered Jesus in the normal way, that she and Joseph lived a normal married life, and that the brothers and sisters of Jesus referred to in the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament (Mk 3:31; 6:3; Mt 1:24-25; 12:46; 13:55; Lk 8:19-21; Jn 2:12; 7:3,5,10; Acts 1:14; 1 Cor 9:5; Gal 1:19) were his true siblings, the offspring of their marriage. While Baptists do not think the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary is rooted in scripture, some will nevertheless say that it does not directly contradict scripture, inasmuch as they think the texts cited above are capable of alternative explanations.¹³⁵

143. Mary is properly named the *Theotokos* or 'God-bearer'. The term indicates that she is the mother of the eternal Son of God according to his humanity. The title has a basis in Scripture ('the mother of my Lord', Luke 1:43) and safeguards the identity of Christ: whatever is said about Mary, including *Theotokos*, derives from what is said about Christ. Mary is the 'God-bearer' inasmuch as she is the human mother of the Son of God incarnate. To call Mary 'Mother of God' does not imply that Mary is divine or the source of Christ's divine nature, and certainly not that she is Mother of God the Father or of God the Holy Trinity.

144. Any attempt to understand Christ apart from the mystery of the incarnation through Mary is a reduced Christology. One and the same Lord Jesus Christ, who is of the 'same substance' as the Father according to his divinity, is of the 'same substance'¹³⁶ with us according to his humanity by virtue of his birth from the Virgin Mary, *Theotokos*. Because the child to whom Mary gave birth is the very Son of God made man, Mary is in truth the 'Mother of God.' This teaching was affirmed at the Council of Ephesus (431) and confirmed by the Council of Chalcedon (451).

145. While Baptists affirm the content of the creeds of the first four ecumenical councils as reliable summaries of what Scripture teaches, they do not regard them, or other post-biblical statements, to be binding in the same way that Scripture is for the individual believer or for subsequent periods of church life. They therefore do not feel obliged to use the title *Theotokos*. In fact they rarely use the expression 'Mother of God' in preaching and prayer because it is easily misunderstood, and this potential for misunderstanding may explain why many Baptists have reservations about the term itself, though not about the doctrine for which it stands. Catholics, on the other hand, commonly refer to Mary as 'Mother of God,' for example in the prayer, the 'Hail Mary.' Many Catholic theologians regard the identification of Mary as *Theotokos* as the 'fundamental principle' from which the other Marian doctrines flow. For example, her perpetual virginity signifies her total consecration, body and soul, to her role as *Theotokos*; the immaculate conception is her preparation for this role, and her glorious assumption is its logical and fitting consequence.

146. Among all the women of the Bible, Mary has a special calling in the plan of salvation, but like every Christian, she too was elected, justified, and sanctified by God's grace (Rom 8:29-30). According to Scripture, 'There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.' (1 Tim 2:5-6) All, therefore, are in need of redemption by Christ. Mary too has been redeemed by Christ, her Saviour (Lk 1:47), by grace.

¹³³ For instance, some patristic writers discerned Mary's virginity in the course of birth (*virginitas in partu*) by drawing an analogy with places and things consecrated to God, which could not be put to other uses, and defended it by appeal to several biblical texts, e.g. Isaiah 7:14, Ezekiel 44:2, and John 20:19

¹³⁴ After Chalcedon this title was inserted into the prayers of the Eucharistic liturgy; it is found in the teaching of the Second Council of Constantinople (553), and was explicitly taught by the Lateran Synod (649), a council whose teaching was subsequently confirmed by the Third Council of Constantinople, an ecumenical council (681).

¹³⁵ e.g. Timothy George, 'The Blessed Virgin Mary in Evangelical Perspective,' in Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (eds.), *Mary, the Mother of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2004), pp.100-121.

¹³⁶ Chalcedon (451), 'Definition of the Faith,' cited in Tanner, *Decrees*, p. 86.

147. Catholics, like Baptists, believe that Mary was redeemed by Christ,¹³⁷ but they also believe that the mode of her redemption was singular, namely, that it was by 'preservation' from original sin rather than by a cleansing from that sin after she had inherited it. They believe that from the first moment of her personal existence, by a singular grace of God, Mary was preserved from all stain of original sin by the foreseen merits of Jesus Christ, Saviour of the human race. This is the dogma of the immaculate conception. It is a misconception of Catholic teaching, held by many non-Catholics, that the immaculate conception is thought to ensure the sinlessness of *Jesus* or his freedom from original sin in his subsequent birth from Mary. Correctly understood, the doctrine teaches the sinlessness of Mary: Mary is conceived immaculately to prepare her through grace to make the *response* of 'yes' to God in perfect freedom at the Annunciation.

The doctrine that Mary was preserved from original sin, the doctrine of the immaculate conception, was solemnly defined as a truth of divine revelation by Pope Pius IX (1854) after centuries of controversy.¹³⁸ The papal definition, far from imposing a new doctrine, was intended only to confirm that this belief about Mary's 'all-holiness' belonged to the apostolic tradition and was divinely revealed. Catholics find it to have a New Testament foundation in Luke 1:28-30: the angelic salutation which addresses Mary as *kecharitomene*, 'highly favoured one', is an expression that refers to an already existing condition, and this can be understood as 'full of grace'. They find the doctrine further supported by Luke 1:42, Elizabeth's salutation which addresses her as 'blessed among women.' Mary's preservation from original sin is credited entirely to the merits of Christ (Lk 1:47) who shares with her his own victory over sin by preventing any 'stain' of Adam's sin from touching her. She is understood to be the 'elect' of God by a predestining grace (Rom 8:29 and Eph 1:4) given in view of her vocation as *Theotokos*. This doctrine has a doxological character: it praises God's gratuitous gift by which Mary freely cooperated in his saving plan.¹³⁹

Catholics hold that, in addition to Mary's freedom from original sin, Mary's holiness also includes her freedom from personal sin. Mary's freedom from personal sin by virtue of her free cooperation with divine grace was at first disputed, since it was thought that she must have some sin for which Jesus died, but by the end of the fourth century, as Marian devotion spread, she was commonly called the 'all-holy' Mother of God and a consensus was reached regarding her freedom from personal sin.¹⁴⁰

148. Baptists see no reason to believe that Mary was sinless, that is, free of either personal sin or original sin. They read the Apostle Paul's words, 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Rom 3:23), and find no reason to regard her as an exception. In Scripture, the only person said to be exempted from sin is Jesus (Heb 4:15). He alone was perfectly holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners. According to the Bible, no other human being can claim this (Jn 8:46; Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:22; 2 Cor 5:21; Eph 2:3). Baptists find no biblical foundation for belief in the immaculate conception of Mary, and ask how she who never sinned could be forgiven and redeemed. Baptists do believe that Mary was the object of God's gracious election in Christ, and that she was uniquely prepared to become the mother of our Lord. However, Luke 1:28 makes no mention of Mary's conception and the Greek perfect passive participle *kecharitomene* is better rendered 'highly favoured' as it expresses God's gracious regard and favour to Mary. This favour is an 'already existing condition' in the sense of her choice by God, and was shown through the coming and overshadowing of the Holy Spirit (Lk1:35) through whom Mary, by divine grace alone, was enabled to conceive and bear the Son of God. Baptists recognize that the Catholic teaching of the immaculate conception has been controverted through the centuries and only defined as dogma since 1854. They also recognize that it has been misunderstood by non-Catholics (see §147), and that this misconception needs to be cleared away. But along with many other Christians, Baptists think that this teaching makes it more difficult for Christian disciples to identify with Mary as an example of discipleship, growing in faith and trust through normal human conditions.

149. Catholics also believe that Mary's redemption is already complete. According to the dogma of the assumption,

¹³⁷ CCC 491-2.

¹³⁸ Some of the great theologians of the Latin Church (St. Augustine, St. Bernard, and St. Thomas Aquinas) objected that the idea of Immaculate Conception could not be reconciled with faith in Christ as the universal Mediator. St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, thought it necessary to affirm that Mary incurred original sin before being sanctified. Blessed John Duns Scotus responded to this objection by introducing the idea of redemption by 'preservation.' He reasoned that Christ, the perfect Mediator, is capable of a perfect act of mediation, i.e., preventing a soul from contracting original sin in the first place. This speculative insight eventually cleared the way for the formal recognition of belief in Mary's Immaculate Conception, a belief firmly held by Catholic Christians and carried forward by the annual celebration of a liturgical feast marking Mary's conception and the pious devotion of the Catholic faithful (*sensus fidelium*).

¹³⁹ CCC 511.

¹⁴⁰ CCC 493.

solemnly defined by Pope Pius XII in 1950, Christ the Lord took his mother, body and soul, into heavenly glory at the end of her earthly life.¹⁴¹ This belief, commemorated in the church's liturgy since the late sixth century, is not based on an event attested in the Scriptures. It arises, rather, from the *sensus fidelium* ('sense of the faithful') and it celebrates the confident belief that by God's grace the *Theotokos*, from whose flesh the Son of God took his humanity, already enjoys in her whole person the risen life promised to all those who die in the Lord (Rom 8:30; 1 Cor 15:51-57). Catholics appeal to Genesis 3:15, in which the Messiah is promised victory over sin and death, in the confidence that Christ has shared his own victory over death with his mother. Baptists, however, can find no biblical or historical foundation for belief in Mary's bodily assumption, or for the belief that an exception has been made for Mary among other disciples of Christ in being glorified ahead of the end-times. As with the teaching of the immaculate conception, the dogmatic definition of the bodily assumption points to a different outworking of the relation between Scripture and tradition in our two communities.

150. Mary is a model of discipleship in faithful listening and obedience to God's Word. Ordinary Christians are in solidarity with her as the first New Testament disciple.

151. Baptists and Catholics agree that Mary is a member of the church and model of discipleship.¹⁴² Mary heard the Word of God and said 'yes' at the annunciation, she grew in faith during her life as a pilgrim disciple and she was faithful along with others at the cross; she was overshadowed by the Holy Spirit before the birth of Christ and she received the gift of the Spirit in the upper room at Pentecost. The picture of Mary as the sorrowing mother (Lk 2:35; Jn 19:25-27) is significant for both Baptists and Catholics in their discipleship, facing human sorrow and loss.

152. Catholic doctrine sees Mary as the model of all disciples, but in a particular way it finds in her – as virgin, handmaid, and mother – the archetype of the personal dignity of women.¹⁴³ Mary of Nazareth is 'blessed among women' because God entrusted his Son to her, inaugurating the New Covenant with her free and active consent.¹⁴⁴ By the grace of the Holy Spirit, Mary entrusted herself without reserve to God, in faith, and cooperated generously in her Son's saving mission. Since 'all generations' will call her 'blessed,' Mary can be a model for women in the new circumstances of our day.¹⁴⁵

153. Among both Baptists and Catholics, however, some are concerned about the *way* Mary is presented as a model of discipleship for women. They are concerned about what they perceive as an over-emphasis on the aspects of Mary's virginity and motherhood, to the exclusion of other aspects of her discipleship. They fear that emphasis on perpetual virginity can lead (often unintentionally) to a disparagement of sexuality and human passions as being inherently sinful, and that when there is an exclusive stress on women's vocation as mothers this can result in an exclusion of women from roles exercised by men in church and society. Other scripturally-based images may be employed to counteract this tendency, such as the image of Mary as prophet and liberator as portrayed in the 'Magnificat', which will have special meaning in a situation of oppression. Significantly, the Catholic Bishops of Oceania recently proclaimed Mary as 'Our Lady of Peace' since 'in Jesus Christ whom she nurtured in her womb there was born a new world where justice and mercy meet, a world of freedom and peace.'¹⁴⁶

154. Mary is not only a member, but also a representative figure, of the church of Christ in being specially chosen to bear witness to the Lord. Her faithfulness along with others at the cross represents the faithfulness of the church.

155. Catholics regard Mary as the 'preeminent and entirely singular member of the Church' and a type or figure of church because of her faith, love, and intimate union with her divine Son.¹⁴⁷ As 'virgin,' the church herself keeps whole and pure the fidelity she has pledged to her Spouse. As 'mother,' the church cooperates in the re-birth and spiritual formation of her sons and daughters. Mary is also called 'mother of the Church' because her maternal relationship to

¹⁴¹ CCC 966.

¹⁴² See *Marie*, Comité mixte baptiste-catholique en France, §63.

¹⁴³ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, 15 August 1988, 5.

¹⁴⁴ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris Mater*, 25 March 1987, 46; *Mulieris Dignitatem* 11.

¹⁴⁵ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation, *Marialis Cultus*, 2 February 1974, 37.

¹⁴⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 22 November 2001, Joh 53.

¹⁴⁷ *Lumen Gentium* 63.

Christ the head extends to his brothers and sisters (Rom 8:29), members of his body.¹⁴⁸ Baptists recognize Mary's exceptional role in the church of Christ because she alone was drawn into God's plan as the Mother of the Word-made-flesh, giving her a unique place in the coming of the Redeemer into the world.¹⁴⁹ However, they will prefer to think that Mary, as a model disciple, is a representative figure of the church, rather than 'mother of the Church'.¹⁵⁰

156. The prayer of Christians always shares in the greater intercession of Christ as Son to the Father (1 Jn 2:1), exemplified in his life and continuing in his exaltation (Heb 7:25). As the Apostle Paul puts it, we say 'Amen' to God through Christ (2 Cor 1:20) and so we pray to the Father through the Son and in the Holy Spirit. We pray like this in the company of all the saints who are praying with Christ, those who are alive and those who have gone before us. So the church prays with Mary (Acts 1:14) and learns to pray like Mary in the communion of saints. For instance, Mary's prophetic canticle, the 'Magnificat' (Lk 1:46-55), expresses the church's song of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord its Saviour, its preferential love for the poor and lowly, and its mission to establish God's reign of justice.

157. Catholics not only pray 'with Mary and all the saints', but pray to Mary in the sense of asking for her intercession for them. They recognize Mary as having a pre-eminent place in the company of the saints. They believe that she is their Mother in the order of grace (Jn 19:26-27),¹⁵¹ who intercedes for them with her Son, just as on earth she once interceded with him at the wedding feast of Cana (Jn 2:3-5). Of course, the special devotion with which they honour her 'differs essentially' from the worship paid to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.¹⁵² When they invoke Mary in prayer, according to a very ancient tradition in the church, it is to enlist her motherly intercession with her Son on their behalf.

158. Baptists do not ascribe such pre-eminence to Mary for fear that it could detract from the unique glory and intercession of Christ. While they recognize the presence of Mary with Jesus and the saints in glory, and so can pray 'with' her, they do not ask for her intercession (or that of any of the saints)¹⁵³ for they believe that they can with confidence directly 'draw near to the throne of grace so that [they] may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need' (Heb 4:16).

159. Because Mary always witnesses to Christ, the representations of Mary which are received in particular cultures are subject to the gospel as the norm which is centred on Christ, and to which Scripture attests.

160. Since the Gospel is always received in particular times and places, it necessarily takes form in a variety of cultures, languages, and spiritual practices. Along with other elements of the Gospel, Mary will also be received in different cultural contexts. (This is already evident in the Gospels, where Mary is interpreted in light of the 'Daughter of Zion,' an image from the Old Testament.) For Catholics, various 'readings' of Mary which are based in Scripture and shaped within particular cultures can be aids to Christian discipleship and growth in holiness, provided they conform to the norm of revelation as recognized in the wider church. Devotion to Mary in popular piety often centres upon an apparition, an icon, or statue, understood to be an expression of God's providential care for the local people, and bearing a title reflecting the people's experience (for example, the 'Virgin of Guadalupe' and the 'Black Madonna' of Czestochowa).

The Catholic Church teaches that Mary is always a witness to Christ; it recognizes that exaggerated veneration of Mary obscures the centrality of Christ, especially when popular devotion is divorced from the liturgy.¹⁵⁴ It has norms for determining the authenticity of apparitions and judging whether local practices and attitudes associated with Marian devotion are in harmony with Catholic doctrine and worship or not. No appearance by Mary to an individual

¹⁴⁸ CCC 963-70.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *Propositions and Conclusions concerning True Christian Religion, containing a Confession of Faith of certain English people, living at Amsterdam* [General Baptist] (1612), 31, in Lumpkin (ed.), *Baptist Confessions*, pp. 124-142; *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), VIII.1-2.

¹⁵⁰ So French Baptists in *Marie, Comité mixte baptiste-catholique en France*, §59.

¹⁵¹ CCC 2618.

¹⁵² *Lumen Gentium* 66; CCC 971.

¹⁵³ *Orthodox Creed* (London: 1679), XLI.

¹⁵⁴ See *Lumen Gentium* 60, 66, 67; Paul VI, *Marialis Cultus*, 23-26, 31.

is by itself regarded as a guarantee of a communication of the Gospel.

161. When they subject representations of Mary to the critique of the gospel, Baptists generally reject the usefulness for faith of the various Marian *apparitions* as reinforcing what they perceive to be oppressive and even idolatrous elements of a culture. Some Baptists will think that pictures of Mary, as with all religious art on many subjects, can be an aid to devotion to God when used with care. Others will avoid any representation of Mary, because of what they regard as the danger of giving to Mary the worship due to Christ alone. As should be clear from this section, Baptists nevertheless recognize that Mary as presented in the Bible should be honoured by all Christians, and can be held as a model for their own discipleship.

162. Christ is the head of the church, her founder, creator and cornerstone. The church owes her whole existence to Christ and he continues to be her 'shepherd and guardian (*episkopos*)' (1 Pet 2:25). He nourishes and sustains his church with the proclamation of the Gospel and the celebration of the sacraments/ordinances. Through these means, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the community of the church grows in her communion with God, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

163. Baptists speak of the 'rule of Christ' in the local community of the church, which understands itself as being called into being by Christ, living in covenant with God and with each other. So the Second London Confession of 1677 (Particular Baptist) speaks of church members as those whom Christ 'commandeth to walk together in particular societies or Churches' and who 'willingly consent to walk together according to the appointment of Christ'.¹⁵⁵ A more modern Baptist statement on the church affirms that 'Such churches are gathered by the will of Christ and live by the indwelling of his Spirit. They do not have their origin, primarily, in human resolution'.¹⁵⁶ For Baptists, Christ thus creates *koinonia* in the church and remains its authority, discerned through the church meeting which gathers to seek the mind of Christ. *Episkope* flows from the creation of *koinonia*, as Christ and the community together – Christ calling, the community recognizing the call – appoint some to exercise personal oversight (*episkope*). Such are 'those which Christ hath appointed ... for the feeding, governing, serving and upbuilding of His Church',¹⁵⁷ an office 'to be continued to the end of the world'.¹⁵⁸

164. For Catholics all ecclesial ministry is called to continue the ministry of Christ over his church. Through the proclamation of the Gospel and the celebration of the sacraments the ordained ministries in the name of Christ nourish and sustain the whole people of God. Founded on the one Gospel and in the one Eucharist, the church of Christ is kept in the unity of the one body. Catholic doctrine teaches that 'episcopal ministry' is exercised by bishops who are ordained in apostolic succession. Their ministry derives from the mission that Christ entrusted to the apostles: 'That divine mission, which was committed by Christ to the apostles, is destined to last until the end of the world (cf. Matt. 28:20), since the Gospel, which they were charged to hand on, is, for the church, the principle of all its life for all time. For that very reason the apostles were careful to appoint successors in this hierarchically constituted society'.¹⁵⁹

165. *Episkope* (oversight) is a gift of Christ to the church to enable the ministry of the whole people of God. Christ calls the whole people of God to share in his ministry as prophet, priest and king. The *episkope* of some is a gift of Christ to enable and equip the body of Christ as a whole (Ephesians 4: 11-13).

166. In Catholic teaching, the expression 'divine institution' has been used to indicate that Christ has given to his church, in the persons of his chosen apostles, an ordained, sacramental ministry by means of which he wishes to continue to guide his flock as its one Shepherd (cf. Jn 10:11,16). Vatican II reaffirmed this when it taught that 'bishops have by divine institution taken the place of the apostles as pastors of the Church'.¹⁶⁰ Their ministry, therefore, is among the essential gifts Christ has given to the church. Catholics believe that the fullness of the sacrament of orders is conferred upon bishops through episcopal consecration.¹⁶¹ Ordained ministry was intended by Christ to serve the entire priestly people of God (cf. 1 Pet 2:9). Thus, for Catholics, even although the ministerial priesthood 'differs essentially and not only in degree from the common priesthood of the faithful', nevertheless 'each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ'.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁵ *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXVI.5-6.

¹⁵⁶ From *The Baptist Doctrine of the Church* (1948), in Hayden (Ed), *Baptist Union Documents 1948-1977* (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1980), p. 6.

¹⁵⁷ *Confession of Faith* (London: 1644), XXXVI.

¹⁵⁸ *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXVI.8.

¹⁵⁹ *Lumen Gentium* 20.

¹⁶⁰ *Lumen Gentium* 20.

¹⁶¹ *Lumen Gentium* 21.

¹⁶² *Lumen Gentium* 10.

167. Baptists affirm that by union with Christ we share in ‘the priesthood of all believers’ by which they mean that the church as a whole is a priesthood to God offering sacrifices of thanksgiving and service.¹⁶³ This corresponds quite closely to the Catholic affirmation of the ‘common priesthood’. For Baptists, this priesthood of the church as a whole explicitly includes the task of the whole community to ‘watch over one another in love’, a form of communal *episkope*.¹⁶⁴ However the early Baptist Confessions also speak of Christ creating personal episkope in the form of ‘offices’ in his church, consisting of those called and appointed to ‘watch over’ the community or to ‘watch for their souls.’¹⁶⁵ It is a mark of Baptist covenant ecclesiology not to define in a legal or canonical way the respective authority of the minister and the whole meeting, but to leave the relationship as a matter of trust in each other and obedience to the rule of Christ. Thus an early confession simply asserts both kinds of *episkope*:

‘And as Christ for the keeping of this Church in holy and orderly Communion placeth some special men over the Church who by their office are to govern, oversee, visit, watch; so likewise for the better keeping thereof in all places, by all members he hath given authority, and laid duty upon all, to watch over one another.’¹⁶⁶

168. Our differing patterns of *episkope* seek to be faithful to Scripture and to the apostolic tradition.

169. We can discern a diversity of forms and patterns of ministry in the New Testament, both ‘charismatic’ and more ‘ordered’. We find an inner circle of disciples (‘the Twelve’) being commissioned by Christ to continue his ministry [Mt 28:16-20; Mk 16:14-20; Lk 24: 36-51; Jn 20:21]. Later we find a larger group of ‘apostles’ commissioned through appearances of the risen Christ, and then a concern to continue their ministry with others being set aside by them. In the New Testament we also encounter the appointment of *episkopoi* (bishops) and *presbuteroi* (elders), terms used quite interchangeably [Phil.1:1, Acts 20:17, 28, Titus 1:5,7, 1 Pet 5:1-5], who together with the *diakonoi* (deacons, or pastoral servants) exercise ministry in the church. These ‘offices’ of ministry were established to guide and serve the community and especially to guard and transmit the ‘deposit’ of the faith (1 Tim 1:14).

170. Catholics see a great deal of this New Testament material as relevant to their understanding of the origins and development of ordained ministry in the three-fold form of bishops, presbyters and deacons. The later biblical evidence shows the apostles establishing presbyters or *episkopoi* in the churches through the laying on of hands (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5-7) and entrusting the tradition of the teaching of the gospel to dependable persons (1 Tim 1:3-7, 2 Tim 4:1-5). After the disappearance of the apostles and faced with the danger of heresies and schisms, the Catholic view is that the Christian communities considered those dependable men the guardians of the apostolic tradition and recognized in them an authority to make decisions.

The decisive features of succession in the threefold ministry of bishop-presbyter-deacon were soon recognized by the church of the first centuries, various aspects of which are witnessed to in the writings of such early fathers as Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus of Lyon, Tertullian and Cyprian of Carthage. Catholics see this as a faithful implementation, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, of what is found in seed already in the Scriptures.¹⁶⁷ While the whole community hands on the apostolic tradition, that whole community itself discerned that Christ established the episcopal ministry in succession to the apostles as a sure means of fidelity to that tradition. The church

¹⁶³ See *Confession of Faith* (London: 1644), XVII: ‘an holy priesthood’. For modern statement, see *We Baptists*, pp. 28-9.

¹⁶⁴ The verb ‘to watch over’ in the early English Baptist confessions is an English form of the Latin *episkopein*, and a synonym for the verb ‘oversee’.

¹⁶⁵ *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXVI.10.

¹⁶⁶ *Confession of Faith* (1644), XLIV, spelling modernized, our italics. This wording is virtually identical to article 26 in the Separatist *A True Confession* (1596), in Lumpkin (ed.), *Baptist Confessions*, p. 90.

¹⁶⁷ This has been acknowledged in the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue: “... the New Testament shows a variety of ministries and charisms, along with forms and concepts of ministry which are different while they overlap with one another. With due caution, one can distinguish lines of development within the New Testament. How this development is discerned and evaluated is of course not independent of how one assesses the later historical development of the ministry. The Early Church’s structure of the threefold ministry is not attested as such in the New Testament, but it did emerge by the further development of offices referred to in the New Testament which were then brought together into a particular configuration. The development of the office of ministry in the Early Church is a specific form of the reception of New Testament testimony to ministries and charisms which were effective in the church of the apostles.” *The Apostolicity of the Church* (2006)169.

in both East and West embraced the threefold order of ministry until the Reformation, a conviction which endures in the Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox communities until the present time. Catholics and Orthodox have also concurred that only men, by God's design, were to be ordained, in light of a very strong common witness of the tradition.

Catholic confidence in the ultimate fidelity of the church to the apostolic tradition does not imply that leaders have not sometimes failed in their ministry, nor that the church is ever without need of renewal and reform. Indeed, 'In order that we may be continually renewed in him (see Eph 4, 23), he [Christ] gave us a share in his Spirit, who is one and the same in head and members (*in capite et in membris*).'¹⁶⁸ The church recognizes that, comprised of sinful members, it 'is at one and the same time holy and always in need of purification and it pursues unceasingly penance and renewal.'¹⁶⁹

171. Baptists hold the same Scripture material (§169) to be generally in accord with their view of a two-fold ministry. They believe that the pattern of elders or bishops (*presbuteroi and episkopoi* being indistinguishable offices in the earliest period) together with *diakonoi* is expressed in the two offices of pastor and deacon.¹⁷⁰ Early Baptists thus called the ordained pastor of the congregation either 'bishop' or elder',¹⁷¹ and Baptists today attribute much of the function of the 'bishop' in the Catholic tradition to him or her. Baptists see the apostolic tradition primarily as the faithful handing on of the original testimony to Jesus Christ; this continuity lies in the *whole* church and its ministry in its faithful witness to the Gospel. Nevertheless Baptists do see the 'overseers' (*episkopoi*, pastors) in the local church as inheriting the role of apostolic ministry through their faithful witness to the word of God in word and sacrament/ordinance, and through their representation of the whole, universal church on the local scene.

172. Baptists hold diverse views regarding women as pastors. Those who do not support the idea of women in pastoral *episkope* often base this on the maleness of Jesus and the apostles, or more usually on a particular interpretation of passages in the New Testament regarding the place of women in the church (1 Cor 11:2-16, 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:8-15). Those who support the ordination of women believe that, since in Christ, 'there is neither male nor female' (Gal 3:28), any baptized Christian may be called to shepherd and watch over a congregation. Furthermore, they affirm that the Holy Spirit distributes gifts, freely and at will, to both women and men (1 Cor 12:4-11). The association of these gifts with ordained ministry is thought to be supported by many references in the New Testament to significant spiritual leadership of women (e.g. Rom 16:1-3,7; Acts 18:24-8).

The twentieth century saw much discussion across the whole Christian family on the question of the ordination of women. The Catholic Church affirms an unbroken tradition of the Church in not ordaining women. Indeed, Pope John Paul II expressed the conviction that 'the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women' (*Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, §4, 1994). The Catholic Church teaches that Jesus established the priesthood when he chose a dozen men out of his group of male and female followers. Pope John Paul notes that Jesus chose the Twelve after a night in prayer (cf. Lk 6:12) and that the Apostles themselves were careful in the choice of their successors. These men did not in fact receive only a function which could thereafter be exercised by any member of the Church; rather they were specifically and intimately associated in the mission of the Incarnate Word himself.¹⁷²

173. *Episkope* is exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways in the church. These ways are not exclusive to one another but bound together in a network of dynamic relationships which together make up overall *episkope* in the church.

174. For Baptists, *episkope* (oversight) is exercised by the local church meeting in a communal way; the members appoint the pastor and deacons according to what they discern to be the calling of Christ, in order to 'watch over' ('oversee') the body with competence and with fidelity to the word of God. The pastor, holding personal *episkope*, works collegially with his or her board of deacons and also with other ordained ministers who might be part of a ministerial team. Beyond the local church there are structures, bearing some of the characteristics of church, that

¹⁶⁸ *Lumen Gentium* 7.

¹⁶⁹ *Lumen Gentium* 8.

¹⁷⁰ See *Short Confession of Faith* (John Smyth, 1609), (16); *Declaration of Faith* (Amsterdam: 1611), 20; *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXVI.9. An exception to the two-fold pattern of *episkope* occurred among the General (Arminian) English Baptists of the mid-seventeenth century who for a short period had a three-fold structure of Bishops or 'Messengers', (trans-local figures ministering among a group of churches whose name has clear apostolic overtones) Elders or Pastors, and Deacons or Overseers of the poor: see *Orthodox Creed* (1679), XXXI.

¹⁷¹ e.g. *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXVI.9

¹⁷² Cf. *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* §2, cf. Mt 10:1, 7-8; 28:16-20; Mk 3:13-16; 16:14-15.

connect the local church to a wider communion of faith and mission, such as regional associations, national unions and international federations. Within these structures some individuals are appointed who exercise a personal *episkope* which will be accorded varying degrees of 'authority' within their own sphere. They may be designated as 'regional ministers', 'directors of missions' or 'presidents' of unions and conventions, or 'regional general secretaries' of the Baptist World Alliance. In a few countries the term 'bishop' is used,¹⁷³ usually because it is a New Testament designation, rather than expressing any concept of apostolic succession.¹⁷⁴ These *episkopoi* are not consecrated into a 'third order' of ministry; they are regarded as exercising the same order of ministry as the local episkopos (pastor of a congregation), but with a wider sphere of service among the churches. Within a two-fold order of ministry, their *episkope* differs in scope but not in kind. They also exercise oversight communally, in fellowship with the wider groupings of churches by whom they are appointed, and collegially with each other and other ordained ministers. Whether at local or trans-local level, *episkope* generally flows between the communal and the personal in relations of trust, without any juridical authority being exercised.

175. Catholics see the bishop (*episkopos*) as exercising personal *episkope* over his own particular church (i.e. a diocese or, in the Eastern Churches, an *eparchy*, including many local congregations or parishes). As a member of the 'college of bishops' (i.e. all the bishops together in communion with the Bishop of Rome), he cares for the church universal within a collegial *episkope*. The fullest expression of this occurs in an ecumenical council. Within his own particular church (diocese) the bishop governs in a collaborative way with his Presbyteral Council, Pastoral Council, Finance Council and other consultative bodies which include the laity; this bears some analogy with collegiality.¹⁷⁵ The bishop exercises his *episkope* from within the community rather than over against it, and this might be called a kind of 'communal *episkope*' although the bishop has final juridical authority.

The Second Vatican Council gave special attention to the 'collegiality' of bishops. It is possible to say that from earliest times ecclesial life was 'collegial' in two senses: (a) the inner life of each local church was characterized by dialogue and collaboration, and (b) among the various local churches communication, solidarity and mutual accountability were the norm. The word 'college' in Catholic teaching about bishops should be understood as 'a permanent body whose form and authority is to be ascertained from revelation'.¹⁷⁶ Catholics hold that the 'college' of bishops succeeds the 'college' of the apostles, an institution that refers back to the very intention of Jesus Christ, in his laying the foundations of this ministry in the calling of the Twelve. This is the basis of the belief in an apostolic succession of bishops as successors of the apostles, which continues to the present time.

176. *Episkope* is primarily exercised in the local or particular church, but always in communion with the wider church.

177. Catholics hold that the particular church is that portion of the people of God (diocese or eparchy) gathered around the bishop, who makes the headship of Christ visible by proclaiming the Word, presiding over the Eucharist with his presbyters and deacons, and by shepherding his people in one community in the Holy Spirit.¹⁷⁷ In each particular church, in full communion with other particular churches, the Catholic Church subsists in its fullness, as pointed out by Pope John Paul II: 'The very mystery of the Church impels us to recognize that the one, holy, Catholic and apostolic Church is present in each particular Church throughout the world.'¹⁷⁸ The bishop is therefore not only the point of reference or 'visible principle'¹⁷⁹ for the unity of the diocese to which he is assigned, but he also, as member of the college of bishops and by means of his active collaboration with the other bishops, serves the bond of unity between his

¹⁷³ E.g. Russia, Georgia, Burundi, Moldova, Latvia.

¹⁷⁴ An exceptional example is in Georgia (Europe) where the Baptists are known as The Evangelical Church of Georgia, rather than a 'Union' and have adopted a threefold order of ministry. The national Baptist leader is termed 'Archbishop', has consecrated four bishops to assist him and adopts a model of 'bishop' drawn more from the episcopal traditions of Orthodoxy and Anglicanism.

¹⁷⁵ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 6 January 2001, 45.

¹⁷⁶ Vatican II, *Nota Explicativa Praevia* 1.

¹⁷⁷ *Christus Dominus* 11; *Lumen Gentium* 21.

¹⁷⁸ John Paul II, *Meeting with the Bishops of the United States*, Los Angeles, 16 September, 1987. In context, the Pope also uses this argument to affirm that the ministry of the successor of Peter belongs to the essence of each particular church.

¹⁷⁹ See *Lumen Gentium* 23.

own local church and all other local churches which makes the local church 'complete'. In the parish the priest represents the bishop and it is this link with the bishop that makes visible the one church.

178. For Baptists, as for Catholics, Christ gathers the church (for Catholics the 'particular' church, for Baptists the local congregation) through the preaching of the Word, and the celebration of the sacraments/ordinances.¹⁸⁰ For Baptists, he also uses the personal *episkope* of those appointed by the community, which recognises their call and confirms their spiritual gifts. Most Baptists believe that a minister of a local church is a minister of the church in general (i.e. a minister of the universal church of Jesus Christ) and that he or she represents the universal church in the local congregation. The local congregation is wholly the church but not the whole church.¹⁸¹ This connectedness to the wider church – whether Baptist or a communion with other Christian churches – is a necessary component of a local church. Baptists can echo the Catholic conviction that this communion with the whole body of Christ makes the local church 'complete', and in this the pastor has a key role.

Thus in a Report to the Baptist Union of Great Britain on *Forms of Ministry among Baptists* ministers or pastors of local churches are seen as those called to exercise a general oversight related to every part of the life and work of the church community. This is what characterises the *episkopos* figure in the church and sets him or her apart from *diakonoi* who may have responsibility for particular areas of the church's life. So the pastor or minister of a local church:

...will develop an overall vision of the whole Body and gifts of all its members, and is entrusted with this general oversight to enable all to grow in to the identity of Christ the Servant of humankind, and to help them make visible God's own ministry of reconciliation in the world around them.¹⁸²

Such an overall vision and oversight is possible because of the perspective brought from the life of the church *universal*. Ministers in their theological formation have gained a vision and understanding of the faith of the whole church universal and from that perspective the minister can proclaim the word of God into the particular local situation in which the church finds itself, and can call that community to take its place in the wider mission of the church in the world today. So the minister, as representative of the universal church can open the horizons of the local congregation to this greater vision.¹⁸³ This role is expressed in their ordination, in which (in most Baptist conventions and unions) hands are laid on by representatives of the wider fellowship of churches as well as the local church.

179. Personal *episkope* is established by Christ for the good of the church.

180. For Baptists, ordained ministry belongs to the well-being (*bene esse*) and good order of the church, recognizing that for practical reasons some local churches may not be able to enjoy the *episkope* (oversight) of an ordained pastor. Without this oversight, the congregation still remains under the *episkope* of its church meeting and its local leaders, such as its deacons. While in some Baptist churches the deacon is also an ordained office, local spiritual leadership will always include non-ordained people. The *episkope* of the pastor is certainly essential in the will of Christ for the church: as the Particular Baptist 'Second London Confession' of 1677 expresses it, 'A particular Church gathered, and *completely Organized*, according to the mind of Christ, consists of Officers and Members; And the Officers appointed by Christ to be chosen and set apart by the Church for the peculiar Administration of Ordinances, and Execution of Power, or Duty, which he intrusts them with, or calls them to, to be continued to the end of the World, are Bishops or Elders and Deacons.'¹⁸⁴ However, the church can still exist as a church, though incomplete, without personal *episkope* as embodied in an office.

181. Catholics can agree that personal *episkope* is exercised at least for the good ordering of the church. However, more must be said than this. The ministry of bishops belongs to the sacramental structure (*esse*) of the church. By their episcopal consecration they receive the fullness of the sacrament of Orders. They are assisted in their ministry by the presbyters and deacons. Christ has so ordered his church that its full communion is maintained by the links of one

¹⁸⁰ *Confession of Faith* (London: 1644), XXXIII; *Brief Confession* (London: 1600), XI.

¹⁸¹ Cf. *Declaration of Faith* (Amsterdam: 1611), 11-12; *Confession of Faith* (London: 1644), XLVII.

¹⁸² *Forms of Ministry among Baptists. Towards an Understanding of Spiritual Leadership*. A discussion document by the Doctrine and Worship Committee of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (London: Baptist Union, 1994), p. 25

¹⁸³ *Forms of Ministry Among Baptists*, p. 30.

¹⁸⁴ *Confession of Faith* (London: 1677), XXVI.8. Our italics; so also *Orthodox Creed* (London: 1679) XXXI. According to the *Confession of Faith* (London: 1644), XXXVI, Elders and Deacons are 'appointed by Christ for the feeding, governing, serving and building up of his Church'

faith, a common sacramental life and the fraternal harmony of the people of God under the guidance of those entrusted with episcopal ministry. Vatican II succinctly describes the role of the bishops within this order when it teaches: 'It is through the faithful preaching of the Gospel by the apostles and their successors – the bishops with Peter's successor at their head – through their administering the sacraments, and through their governing in love, that Jesus Christ wishes his people to increase, under the action of the Holy Spirit; and he perfects its fellowship in unity: in the confession of one faith, in the common celebration of divine worship, and in the fraternal harmony of the family of God.'¹⁸⁵

182. The ministry of episkope or oversight, the roots for which can be traced to the New Testament, is a service which includes as one of its principal purposes the promotion of the unity of the Christian community.

183. As the foregoing paragraphs make clear, Baptists and Catholics agree that the office of oversight (*episkope*) has a special part to play in linking the local church (however understood) to the whole fellowship of churches beyond the local level. For Catholics, this is not just one of the functions of the office but a structural and sacramental necessity for the oneness of the church universal. Catholic and Baptist communities also each tend to stress different aspects of the unity of the church. Baptists tend to emphasize the freedom of the local congregations under the rule of Christ, even as they remain connected to one another in covenantal relationship. Catholics tend to emphasize the universal unity of the whole catholic community, without stifling diversities that are legitimate and even mandated by the ecclesiology of communion.

184. Jesus' prayer 'that all may be one so that the world may believe' (John 17:21) sets out the common vocation of all Christians to be one, and so to conform themselves to the will of their Lord. This unity is both spiritual and visible.

185. Baptists may express caution about the nature and extent of such visibility, and may differ among themselves about the extent to which visible structures of unity beyond the local church are an ecclesial reality (see §25). However, Baptists can agree with Catholics that some degree of visibility is suggested by the reason Jesus gives for unity – that the world may believe. There must then be a form of unity which can be seen. The *Acts of the Apostles* repeats on various occasions the harmony of the earliest community, a harmony that others could see and be attracted by. It also shows the attempt to heal imminent divisions within the whole community, beyond the local, by means of common discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Acts 15). The letters to the Ephesians (4:3) and the Colossians (1:21-23) emphasize the unity of the whole body of Christ, with Jesus as its head (Col 1:18; Eph 1:22-23). Unity is not a creation of the church; it is a gift given and received; it is to be discovered and preserved. The very notion of the 'body of Christ' points to the embodiment of Christ in the world, and therefore his manifestation and visibility through the church. At the same time this gift of unity calls for a response.

186. The unity of the church at all levels reflects its apostolicity, which is expressed both by *faith* and by *ministry*. The faith of the church is apostolic by being faithful to revelation as contained in Scripture and handed down through the ages. The ministry is apostolic in so far as it hands on the apostolic faith (2 Tim 2:2; 1 Cor 11:23, 15:3-5) and seeks to fulfill the missionary mandate contained in each of the Gospels (Mt 28:16-20; Mk 16:14-18; Lk 24:44-49; Jn 20:21). Scripture itself attests that the church is founded upon the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20, 3:5), yet emphasizes that the one foundation is Jesus himself (1 Cor 3:11).

187. Church unity requires unity in faith. This is true not only locally and regionally, but also at the widest level which considers all Christians throughout the whole world as belonging to the one body of Christ. Such unity of faith is expressed in the Scripture as the inspired Word of God; it can be summarized in brief New Testament professions such as 'Jesus is Lord' (Rom 10:9, 1 Cor 12:3, Phil 2:11); it is professed in the rite of baptism in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and it is reflected in the trinitarian and Christological doctrines (or 'dogmas') as formulated in the early councils. This unity in faith also has what might be called a 'spiritual' dimension as distinct from, yet related to, its more doctrinal dimension. Those who personally love and trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and who want to follow him in their daily lives are to that extent truly brothers and sisters, even if they belong to different churches or

¹⁸⁵ "The Decree on Ecumenism [*Unitatis redintegratio*]," 2. This role is also nicely summed up in the first sentence of each of the three paragraphs of *Lumen Gentium*, which describe the prophetic, priestly and shepherding role of the bishops. 'Among the principal tasks of bishops the preaching of the gospel is pre-eminent' (LG 25). 'The bishop, marked with the fullness of the sacrament of order, is "the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood," especially in the Eucharist which he offers or which he ensures is offered, and by which the church continuously lives and grows' (LG 26). 'The bishops govern the churches entrusted to them as vicars and legates of Christ, by counsel, persuasion and example and indeed also by authority and sacred power which they make use of only to build up their flock in truth and holiness, remembering that the greater must become as the younger and the leader as one who serves (see Lk 22, 26-27)' (LG 27).

have different offices or ministries in their churches.

188. While Catholics often profess their common faith by means of creeds, especially the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, this is not a frequent practice among Baptists. Both Catholics and Baptists understand the words of the creeds as short expressions of the truth expressed in the Scriptures, but neither would put them on the same level as the Scriptures (see §59). Because of their connection to the official teaching office, however, creeds enjoy a normative authority for Catholics. For their part, Baptists affirm the contents of the creeds, and have explicitly commended them in some of their confessions of faith as reliable witnesses: a confession of a group of English General Baptist churches in 1679, for instance, explicitly affirms that the Apostles Creed, the Creed of Nicaea and the so-called Athanasian Creed are to be 'received' and 'believed' and Christians are to be 'instructed in the knowledge of them by the ministers of Christ'.¹⁸⁶ Baptists do not generally regard creeds as binding in the same way as Catholics do; however, both believe that the authority of creeds depends on their ability to reflect Scripture.

189. In addition to creeds, both Baptists and Catholics acknowledge other instances in which teaching or the evaluation of teaching plays an important role in fostering or maintaining unity in the apostolic faith. Both communities acknowledge a number of ways in which the truths of the faith are transmitted and preserved. These include worship, preaching, catechesis and the general sharing of faith among all the people of God. The writings of theologians and the witness of the saints also hand on the faith.

190. An important role of the ministry of *episkope* (oversight) is to safeguard and promote true doctrine in cooperation with the grace of God.

191. Catholics believe that Christ's promise to send the Holy Spirit to guide the community into the truth (Jn 16:13; cf. 14:16-17) includes the assurance that, in its profession of fundamental, normative doctrines concerning faith and morals, God preserves the community as a whole from error. This is the fundamental understanding of the word 'infallibility' in Catholic thought. Here, Catholics give attention to the authority of both the pope and the bishops. When the First Vatican Council applied this term to some teachings of the pope, it taught that, in the very precise and limited circumstances it was describing, the pope, in his ministry as Peter's successor, could exercise the infallibility of the church as a whole. The Second Vatican Council makes explicit that the ability to teach infallibly also belongs to the college of bishops in communion with the pope, especially when gathered in an ecumenical council.¹⁸⁷ Catholics believe that an essential responsibility of the ordained ministry of oversight that is conferred in the sacramental consecration of each new bishop is to hand on Christian doctrine concerning faith and morals. Whether individually in their own dioceses or in groups at various levels of church life, bishops are seen as teaching with a special authority because of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The 'office' or 'task' of official teaching is often referred to by the Latin word *magisterium*, a word also sometimes used for those who exercise this office or even for the teaching itself.

192. Baptists believe that the community, guided by the Holy Spirit, stands under the ordering of the Word of God that comes through God-given ministry. Thus, the pastor in whom *episkope* is focused will also be the one who has primary (though not exclusive) responsibility for the ministry of the Word in the community.¹⁸⁸ The whole church shares in the ministry of Christ who is the Word of God, but to the pastor is assigned the primary responsibility for witnessing to the Word in proclamation and in teaching, interpreting in each age the written word of scripture. Other members of the church who have been given the gift of teaching can certainly share in this ministry of the Word; but to the pastor is given the responsibility for training, overseeing and coordinating all teaching and preaching that happens within the congregation. Thus the whole church is called to be 'apostolic' in witnessing to the good news of Christ and the forgiveness of sins as the apostles did, but some are called to be guardians of the apostolic tradition. This may mean at

¹⁸⁶ *Orthodox Creed*, XXXVIII; the creeds are then printed in full. In the later twentieth century the German-language Baptist confession used in Germany, Austria and Switzerland declares that 'it presupposes the Apostles' Creed as a common confession of Christendom' (Parker, *Baptists in Europe*, p. 57) and the Norwegian and Finnish Baptists have affirmed 'the content' of both the Apostles' and the Nicene Creed (Parker, *Baptists in Europe*, p. 111). The Apostles Creed was affirmed and recited by assembled delegates at the founding of the Baptist World Alliance (London, 1905) and at its centenary celebration (Birmingham, UK, 2005).

¹⁸⁷ e.g., when it proposes a teaching for belief as being divinely revealed. See CCC 891; cf. *Lumen Gentium* 25, *Dei Verbum* 10:2. They also can propose in the exercise of the ordinary Magisterium a teaching that leads to better understanding of Revelation in matters of faith and morals. To this ordinary teaching "the faithful are to adhere [...] with a religious assent" (*Lumen Gentium* 25) which, though distinct from the assent of faith, is nonetheless an extension of it. Cf. CCC 892.

¹⁸⁸ *Confession of Faith* (London: 1644), XLV.

times that the pastor stands over against the congregation with a word of prophetic challenge. The church willingly accepts this oversight for as long as it recognises the overseer's calling to minister among them, but while taking the guidance of the pastor with great seriousness, it cannot abdicate its own responsibility for interpreting the Word in the congregation. It also retains the authority, in communal *episkope* (see § 167), to discern that a pastor is no longer called by Christ to minister in its midst.¹⁸⁹ Such a decision is made by fallible people in good conscience before Christ.

Baptist associations or unions (conventions) of churches can also exercise communal *episkope* and remove a congregation from fellowship on account of doctrine, or if the church no longer appears to be a Baptist church in its practice. But at the moment Baptists do not consider that this could happen at a universal level. Likewise, there is no agreement between Baptists and Catholics about whether such a teaching role at a universal level of the life of the church can be found in the New Testament. Baptists reject the idea that the church has the charism to teach infallibly, attributing infallibility only to Christ as the Word of God.

193. The ministry of unity, as exercised by 'overseers' (*episkopoi*) is needed in the local church and at the various levels where the local churches may be grouped together.

194. For Baptists, the New Testament *episkopos* is primarily the pastor in the local congregation, while for Catholics it is the bishop who shepherds a community of many parishes. Baptists and Catholics emphasize the exercise of *episkope* in differing ways. While both communities see this ministry as being exercised in personal, communal and collegial modes (see §§173-175), Catholics tend to think of individual oversight first and so give greater accent to its personal character, as embodied in the ministry of bishops. This individual ministry is of course always exercised collegially within the college of bishops, which will then consult as appropriate with other communal structures. Baptists, by contrast, emphasize its exercise in communal ways (the gathered church, whether 'gathered' locally, in a regional area of a country or nationally), and only think of the personal and the collegial in that context, as called out by the mutual 'oversight' exercised within the whole *koinonia* of the church. These differences of emphasis would remain even were Baptists to consider some kind of ministry in service of the unity of all Christians beyond the national sphere, at the universal level.

195. Catholics believe that, in addition to collegial ways of maintaining unity, an individual ministry of *episkope* serving the unity of the whole community is the special role that Christ assigned to Peter. Although Catholic teaching about the pope at the First Vatican Council spoke of a 'primacy of jurisdiction', subsequently this was sometimes interpreted in ways which exceeded the intentions of that council. It would be a misunderstanding of the 'primacy of jurisdiction' to think of it as usurping or supplanting the role of bishops and other ministers in the local churches. One of the contributions of the Second Vatican Council was to insist that the primacy of the pope cannot be isolated from the church as a whole; it can be properly understood only from within an ecclesiology of communion. Its purpose is to build up the church, an aim that also provides a basis for speaking of its limits.

196. At the present time, however, Baptists and Catholics have no agreement about whether Christ's will for the unity of the whole church includes an individual ministry such as the papacy in service to universal unity, nor how such a ministry might be exercised. Most Baptists would not see a personal ministry of universal oversight as being at all necessary. If Baptists try to envisage participating in a world-wide ministry that fosters unity and cooperation among the churches, they tend to think of such a ministry as being shared among a group of persons, or rotating among a number of church leaders called by God.¹⁹⁰ One might compare this to the situation where Baptist leaders have sometimes been part of a collegial national leadership alongside Catholic leaders and others: for example, when a Baptist has been one of the four presidents of Churches Together in England (the English national ecumenical instrument).¹⁹¹ Catholics, of course, regard this covenanting of church leaders together as an ecumenical rather than an ecclesial structure, while Baptists can regard such covenants as partaking in the characteristics of the church.

197. Christ is the head of the church. Under this supreme headship, the New Testament shows a certain primacy of leadership exercised by the apostle Peter among the Twelve, a role which is rooted in the intention of Jesus.

¹⁸⁹ See *Short Confession of Faith* (1609), (13).

¹⁹⁰ See response to *Ut unum sint* of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, which was reflected upon by the Catholic Bishops Conference of Britain and Ireland: *One in Christ. Ecumenical Notes and Documentation* No. 4 (1999), pp. 360-65.

¹⁹¹ There is a 'rotating' element to this in that whilst two of the four presidents are always the Anglican and Roman Catholic primates in England, the other two places are for a Free Church leader and a leader of another Church for a time-limited period.

198. Baptists and Catholics disagree in their interpretation of many biblical texts which mention Peter. While the three key texts of Matthew 16:18-19, Luke 22:31-32 and John 21:15-19 show an interest in the leadership of Peter in the community of the early church, Baptists doubt that they provide a basis for the principle of an ongoing 'Petrine office' or 'Petrine ministry' which is to persist beyond the situation of the earliest community.¹⁹²

Moreover, Baptists have traditionally argued that a text such as John 21:15-19 could apply to any pastor as an exhortation to care for the flock of Christ; it can also be interpreted as a reassurance to any Christian that he or she can be forgiven and have a fresh start. Baptists tend to think that Matthew 16:18-19 can refer to the 'rock' of any disciple confessing Christ, as well as to Peter in the immediate context. Texts that mention Peter should not be isolated from the mention of other apostles in the earliest communities. While a large number of verses certainly speak of Peter, this can also be said of Paul, who exercised a trans-regional ministry of unity; James seems to have been the leader in Jerusalem.

The weighing of these various testimonies is a complex task and such complexity needs to be taken into consideration in seeking biblical evidence about a possible ministry of primacy. In considering such biblical data, Baptists will want to distinguish logically between several strands of the issue: (a) the role of leadership that Peter played, historically (but not exclusively), among the other apostles; (b) the belief that this leadership role continues in a 'Petrine Ministry' after the death of Peter; (c) the belief that the New Testament supports the need for a universal ministry of unity embodied in an individual *episkopos*; (d) the belief that the continuing 'Petrine Ministry' exercises this universal ministry and is embodied in the Bishop of Rome, based on the presence and witness of Peter in Rome.

In the Catholic mind these four strands are intimately interconnected, and the term 'the Petrine Ministry' embraces them all. Discussion with other communions calls for a mutual assessment of these strands, the issues involved, and their inter-relation. Many Baptists will affirm the first, historical strand, and a few may be open to being convinced about the third, while regarding the actual institution of a universal ministry of *episkope* as a post-biblical development. The other two points are even more contentious. For their part, Catholics affirm that the Bible provides a *foundation* for the post-biblical development of a ministry in service to the universal unity of the church.

199. A further issue concerns the relation of a primatial ministry to the local church of Rome. While Scripture does not record their deaths, the historical tradition that Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome, thus giving their ultimate witness to Christ in that city, is widely accepted by Baptists, Catholics and many other Christians.¹⁹³ We agree that, despite other issues arising in the power-struggle between western and eastern regions of the Roman Empire, this historical connection with the martyrdoms of Peter and Paul was a factor in affirming a particular role for the Church of Rome and its bishop in maintaining fidelity to the witness of the apostles.

At this early stage of Baptist-Catholic conversations, no agreement about a ministry of primacy can be recorded. However, the very clarification of these pertinent questions seems a promising beginning for further work in the future.

200. The historical failures of the past among both Baptists and Catholics must be addressed, with due repentance and appropriate action in the present.

201. The new situation created by the spirit of ecumenism invites all brothers and sisters in Christ to re-examine the past and, if appropriate, to revise some of the earlier stances taken by members of our communities. Many within both Christian communions wish to distance themselves from the negative judgments made of each other in the past. Historical failures have been acknowledged from the Catholic side, for instance by John Paul II in his encyclical on ecumenism *Ut unum sint* ("That they may be one") and on occasions such as the liturgy of reconciliation on the First Sunday of Lent during the Jubilee Year 2000. For their part, most contemporary Baptists wish to disassociate themselves from harsh names applied to the papacy by their ancestors in very different circumstances.

202. Baptists think that the history and reputation of the papacy includes positive and negative factors requiring re-evaluation today. The important place of Rome within the Christian community is related to its connection with the ministry and martyrdom of the apostles Peter and Paul. The wider ministry for unity of some famous bishops of Rome, such as that of Leo I at the time of the Council of Chalcedon, is acknowledged by many Christian communities. Practices such as seeking support from the pope or appealing to him in principal cases of dispute grew up in the early centuries, showing a widespread sense of the value of this ministry. At the same time, Baptists think that this history includes events and actions that did not have a unifying impact. Baptists and Catholics may draw different conclusions

¹⁹² For example, these three texts are recalled by John Paul II in *Ut unum sint*, 91, and more recently by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "The Primacy of the Successor of Peter in the Mystery of the Church," 3.

¹⁹³ The tradition that Peter and Paul were martyred in the city of Rome is recalled by John Paul II in *Ut unum sint*, paragraph 90.

from the history of the use of papal authority, even in cases when they agree on the basic facts in question.

203. The witness of recent popes to many truths and values of the Gospel which are also cherished by the Baptist community has prompted many Baptist church leaders and scholars to re-evaluate long-cultivated views of the papacy. In particular, the long and dynamic pontificate of Pope John Paul II, with his strong presence in the mass media, spoke to the imagination of Baptists. Many Baptists can acknowledge some practical advantages to having a voice that can speak at times for the whole of the Christian community. This can serve a prophetic function, especially by drawing upon Scripture and proclaiming in our day the perennial truths of Christian faith. The usefulness of such teaching for catechesis and social solidarity extends more broadly than to the Catholic Church alone, so showing features of a ministry of unity.

204. While there is no substantial agreement on a universal ministry of unity, there are opportunities today for Catholics and Baptists to share in ministries that have a unifying effect at a world-wide level. Because of his wide recognition, the pope is in a position to initiate common efforts by other Christian leaders and their communities concerning cultural, scientific, ethical and theological questions. The deeper participation of the laity and ministers of other churches in the bishops' synods of the Catholic Church, and participation by Catholics in the various councils and assemblies of Baptist churches, are a means of unity that does not require ecclesial union. Perhaps a helpful step forward could be for Baptists, at whatever level of their life it is feasible, to make formal responses to John Paul II's invitation in *Ut unum sint* to consider ways in which a ministry of unity might be exercised so as to be acceptable to other Christians in the new ecumenical situation. Furthermore, the leaders of our churches might be encouraged to seek out and implement ways of acting together which are possible even now as they guide our communities at local, regional, national and universal levels.¹⁹⁴

VII. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Finding a common mind

205. In our conversations we have worked together carefully and patiently through the issues that have been previously held to be the most acute ones that divide us (see §4). There is thus a good deal of detail in the sections above in the report, but we do not think that such a sustained attempt has been made before to identify as accurately as possible convergence and divergence between Catholic and Baptist Christians. We think that sympathetic readers will find an astonishing amount of convergence and common mind, not just in the summary paragraphs (in bold type) but when the approaches identified as distinctively Catholic and Baptist are compared with each other.

It emerges that much of the underlying theology is held in common. We began with the theme of the Word of God in the life of the church: 'The Word of God in the church in the fullest sense is Jesus Christ himself who rules in the church in the grace and power of the Spirit' (§7). Our common starting point has thus been that the Word made flesh draws us into the trinitarian communion of God, which creates the communion of the church, so that the *koinonia* of the church shares in the *koinonia* of the Trinity (§§8-10).¹⁹⁵

From this point of departure we have found much that we can own together in theological principles about Scripture, tradition, the sacraments/ordinances, the place of Mary in the life of the church, church order and ministry of oversight (*episkope*). We have tried to draw attention to this as we have reported on our discussions. Divergences are held respectfully, and often lie in the way that our respective communions have developed, in relation to historical conflicts and various social contexts. This exercise together has thus generated a great deal of mutual understanding and sympathy, as well as clearing away of long-held misconceptions. Working together has enabled us not just to re-state our convictions in clearer ways, but to re-think them in new perspectives, so that this has been – in the language of a recent movement of thought – 'receptive ecumenism'.¹⁹⁶ It has truly been an experience of 'exchange of gifts', in the phrase used memorably by Pope John Paul II.¹⁹⁷ Echoing the participants in the first conversations of

¹⁹⁴ An example is given in §196.

¹⁹⁵ The Synod of Bishops in 1985 identified communion ecclesiology as a central theme of Vatican II. Recently, Baptists have been challenged to think about their life together as a World Alliance in terms of communion.

¹⁹⁶ See Paul D. Murray, 'Receptive Ecumenism and Ecclesial Learning: Receiving Gifts for our Needs', *Louvain Studies* 33/1-2 (2008), pp. 30-45.

¹⁹⁷ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Ut unum sint*, 25 May 1995, 28.

1984-88, we thank God for this gift of being together.

Making progress

206. One of the greatest advances we have made together has been in our mutual understanding of the relation between Scripture and tradition. With one exception (the phrase 'like feelings of devotion and reverence' applying to Scripture and tradition: see §65), we believe that we have discovered a common belief in the foundation of Scripture and tradition in the one source of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Differences remain in the practical outworking of this theological principle, either with regard to the respective weight given to Scripture or tradition, or to different exegesis of scripture in church teaching: instances appear in the sections on Mary and oversight (*episkope*) in the church. But since the basis from which we are working is held largely in common, we can talk together meaningfully about these differences rather than simply facing an impasse, and work to come even closer together.

207. Similarly, we have proposed a certain theological convergence on the question of baptism, where we agree in principle that baptism is to be understood not as an isolated event but as part of a whole journey of Christian initiation. This is a common perspective, in accord with that achieved between Baptists and the Anglican Communion. Again, while differences about baptism remain (see §§103, 112), we have a firm basis from which to move forward towards a mutual recognition of journeys of Christian beginning. We may no longer be facing what may have seemed an insuperable gap between the practice of infant baptism and the baptism of professing disciples.

Revisiting old issues

208. As well as the creation of common theological space in which to talk, each delegation has been brought to some re-considerations of traditional positions. Our re-examination of the rich tapestry of the biblical witness to Mary the Mother of Jesus has led us to a common understanding of Mary as a model of discipleship in the *koinonia* of the church. In this way, Baptist participants in these conversations have been led to reconsider the honour they give to her, and to affirm the special place given her by God in the history of salvation. A richer understanding of the relation of Mary to Christ has led Baptist participants to affirm her more clearly as 'God-bearer' (*Theotokos*), since this title is essentially an affirmation of the divinity of Jesus Christ. In these conversations, Catholics were invited to think more deeply about the significance of biblical images of Mary as the foundation of Marian doctrine and devotion. Catholic participants have also become aware that other Christians may experience some popular expressions of the veneration of Mary to be an obscuring of the centrality of Christ and true Christian discipleship. Catholics have discovered the pain that this can cause.

209. On another issue, the Baptist participants have found it fruitful to think about the question of a universal ministry of unity in a new way; though they have not come to a point of affirming the need for it, age-old hostilities have been removed and some serious suggestions have been made for deeper cooperation in making the Christian voice heard today (see §§196, 204). In their turn, the Catholic members of the conversation feel they have been invited to develop a richer theology of the local congregation and to think further about the formation of Christian discipleship in the parish.

Receiving the report

210. We commend this report to our two communions of faith for thoughtful and prayerful reflection. We have tackled issues that deeply affect our respective senses of identity, and we realise that parts of this report may be challenging to our fellow church members. We hope then that it will result in further conversations between and within each of our communions, in which the report will be read with patience, sympathy and charity rather than suspicion. Such conversations may take place in institutions of theological formation, among pastors and priests in the congregations, in local study groups and in regional and national consultations and dialogues. We also hope that theologians of other Christian communions will be interested and informed by this serious and unique attempt to make comparisons and contrasts between the convictions of Baptists and Catholics.

211. While ongoing theological dialogue on doctrinal issues needs continued attention, so does dialogue on ethical issues as well. Our original aims included a desire to 'encourage further action together on ethical issues, including justice, peace and the sanctity of life.' Regrettably, this has been an area we have not been able to explore in this round of conversations. However, our conversations *have* been enlightened by exploring contexts other than Western Europe and North America through the experience of our participants – for instance, those who come from Jamaica, Poland, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Ghana, Singapore, Philippines and Taiwan. In the light of this, we hope that future conversations, in addition to the ethical topics already identified, will also consider the issues of gospel and inculturation, together with the urgent problem of religious liberty. We hope that encouragement of ethical action, in

the context of mission and evangelism, will be deepened by the theological foundation laid in this report.

Recognizing Christ in one other

212. What can we say at the end? We hope that the *koinonia* we experienced together in worship and discussion will be extended in the life of our communions of faith. Though it may not be enough for those who want more, we can at least say that we each discern in the other's communion characteristics of the church of Christ, because we can recognize there the presence of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the church. We enjoy a 'certain, though imperfect communion',¹⁹⁸ though we continue to grieve over the divisions between us. We hope that this kind of mutual acknowledgment may have an effect at local levels of Baptist and Catholic churches in their life and mission, beyond the rarified heights of theological conversations. In the local congregations and parishes, may this discernment of Christ in each other be echoed. May Christ, the Word of God, continue to guide, correct and renew us according to his Word.

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¹⁹⁸ *Ut unum sint*, 11; See *Unitatis Redintegratio* 3.

APPENDIX 1

*Speech of welcome by His Holiness, Pope Benedict XVI, to the Joint International Commission of the Baptist World Alliance and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Rome, 6 December 2007.*¹⁹⁹

Dear Friends,

I offer a cordial welcome to you, the members of the joint international commission sponsored by the Baptist World Alliance and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. I am pleased that you chosen as the site of your meeting this city of Rome, where the Apostles Peter and Paul proclaimed the Gospel and crowned their witness to the Risen Lord by the shedding of their blood. It is my hope that your conversations will bear abundant fruit for the progress of dialogue and the increase of understanding and cooperation between Catholics and Baptists.

The theme which you chosen for this phase of contacts – *The Word of God in the Life of the Church: Scripture, Tradition and koinonia* – offers a promising con-text for the examination of such historically controverted issues as the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, the understanding of Baptism and the sacraments, the place of Mary in the communion of the church, and the nature of oversight and primacy in the church's ministerial structure. If our hope for reconciliation and greater fellowship between Baptists and Catholics is to be realized, issues such as these need to be faced together, in a spirit of openness, mutual respect and fidelity to the liberating truth and saving power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

As believers in Christ, we acknowledge him as the one mediator between God and humanity (1 Tim 2: 5), our Saviour, our Redeemer. He is the cornerstone (Eph 2: 21; 1 Pet 2: 4-8); and the head of the body, which is the church (Col 1: 18). In this Advent season, we look to his coming with prayerful expectation. Today, as ever, the world needs our common witness to Christ and to the hope brought by the Gospel. Obedience to the Lord's will should constantly spur us, then, to strive for that unity so movingly expressed in his priestly prayer: 'that they may all be one... so that the world may believe' (Jn 17: 21). For the lack of unity between Christians 'openly contradicts the will of Christ, provides a stumbling block to the world, and harms the most holy cause of proclaiming the good news to every creature' (*Unitatis Redintegratio*, 1).

Dear friends, I offer you my cordial good wishes and the assurance of my prayers for the important work -which you undertaken. Upon your conversations, and upon each of you and your loved ones, I gladly invoke the Holy Spirit's gifts of wisdom, understanding, strength and peace.

Message of welcome by the Revd Neville Callam, General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, to the Joint International Commission of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Baptist World Alliance, Oxford, 13 December 2010.

Friends in Christ, during this Advent season, as the church waits for the coming of the Lord, you gather to wait for the light that will shine on your deliberations, enlightening your minds as you bring to completion a phase of the valuable work you perform in the service of the kingdom. We take seriously the prayer of our Lord for the unity of the church (John 17:20-26) and we regard, as a vital part of our stewardship, both prayer and work for the realization of the visible unity of the church. We chosen the route of dialogue in the service of the unity for which our Lord prayed.

Dialogue is not only about the partners' sincere search for truth. It is not merely about the discernment of convergences and divergences. Nor is it simply about discerning the ways in which we may learn from each other as we make our way toward *koinonia* in faith, life and witness. Dialogue is also about a constant yielding of the mind to the impulse of the Spirit, a faithful striving to exemplify Christian love in community, and a patient engagement to the glory of the Lord. Partners who engage in dialogue begin by believing that they do not perfect knowledge of the truth. They also believe they possess the capacity to learn from each other in the common search for the will of God. They engage together in a sort of pilgrimage toward the One who is 'the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6). And for this journey, they walk in the light of the revelation of truth as they recognized it in and through their traditions. Meanwhile, they seek the rich benefit of each other's experiences on the Christian pathway.

Gathered today in the great seat of learning that the University of Oxford represents, we call to mind an observation made at the end of the official report of the first round of our Baptist/Roman Catholic discussions: 'We testify that in all sessions during the past five years there has been a spirit of mutual respect and growing understanding. We sought the guidance of the Lord of the church and give honour and glory to him for the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit'. I believe that a similar conviction may be expressed as you gather for the final session of this second round of theological conversations in which laudable ultimate goals do not trump important proximate ones. Seekers after truth can scarce avoid the demands of love in both their common striving and their manner of reporting on it. It is altogether appropriate that such an approach should characterized the proceedings of this second

¹⁹⁹ Reproduced by kind permission of *L'Osservatore Romano*.

round of our dialogue which builds on the previous one (1984-1988). From your dialogue surrounding 'The Word of God in the Life of the Church,' we expect to register progress toward the realization of the aims of our dialogue. These aims were clearly set out before we started on the road together.

In greeting you, at the very start of your meeting here in Oxford, we pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit on the important work you do. We are praying for the wisdom required to shepherd the process of reception that is to follow the publication of the report on your work over the past five years. We also seek the help of the Holy Spirit to discern the next steps in our journey together.

APPENDIX 2

List of Participants in the Joint International Commission

CATHOLIC PARTICIPANTS

Most Revd Arthur Serratelli, Co-Chair
Revd John Radano, Co-Secretary (2006-2007)
Revd Gregory J. Fairbanks, Co-Secretary (2008-2010)
Dr Peter Casarella
Revd Dr William Henn, ofm Cap.
Dr Krzysztof Mielcarek
Dr Teresa Francesca Rossi
Revd Dr Jorge Scampini, OP
Sister Dr Susan Wood, SCL

Revd Dr Dennis D. McManus (Consultant 2006-2007)
Sister Sara Butler, MSBT (Consultant 2008-2010)

BAPTIST PARTICIPANTS

Revd Prof Paul S. Fiddes, Co-Chair
Revd Dr Fausto Aguiar de Vasconcelos, Co-Secretary
Revd Neville G. Callam
Revd Dr Fred Deegbe
Revd Dr Timothy George
Revd Dr Steven R. Harmon
Dr Lilian Lim (2006-8)*
Dr Nora O. Lozano
Revd Dr Tomás Mackey
Revd Anthony Peck
Dr Rachael Tan (2009-2010)
Dr Tadeusz Zelinski

Revd Dr Curtis Freeman (Consultant throughout)
Revd Dr Denton Lotz (Consultant 2006-7)
Revd Massimo Aprile (Consultant 2007 and 2009)
Dr Nancy Elizabeth Bedford (Consultant 2008)
Revd Dr Elizabeth Newman (Consultant, 2008-2010)

*To the great sadness of all participants, Lilian Lim died in June 2009.

APPENDIX 3

List of Papers given at the sessions of the Joint International Commission

Meeting I: The Authority of Christ in Scripture and Tradition

Beeson Divinity School, December 10-15, 2006

'The Word of God: God's Self-Communication in the *Koinonia* of the Trinity and the Church'. Bishop Arthur Serratelli,

STD, SSL.

'Word, *Koinonia* and Church: An Appreciative Response to Bishop Serratelli'. Dr Paul S. Fiddes

'Scripture in the Life of the Baptist Churches: Opportunities for a Differentiated Catholic-Baptist Consensus'. Dr Steven R. Harmon.

'The Use of Sacred Scripture in the Catholic Church'. Dr Dennis D. McManus

'The Relation of Scripture and Tradition: Catholic Discernment of the Authentic Tradition'. Fr William Henn, ofm Cap.

'Scripture and Tradition: An Evangelical Baptist Perspective'. Dr Timothy George

Meeting II: Baptist and Lord's Supper/Eucharist as Visible Word of God in the *Koinonia* of the Church

Rome, December 2-8, 2007

'Sacraments of Initiation in the Catholic Tradition'. Sr Susan K. Wood, SCL.

'Baptist and Initiation: A Baptist Contribution'. Dr Paul S. Fiddes

'The Lord's Supper in Light of Scripture and Tradition: A Baptist Account'. Dr Tomas Mackey.

'Sacraments and Sacramentality: The Crux of Doctrinal Disagreements on the Ecumenical Dialogue'. Fr Jorge Scampini, OP.

'Scripture and Tradition according to *Dei Verbum* 9: A Baptist View'. Dr Steven R. Harmon.

'Scripture and Tradition according to *Dei Verbum* 9: A Catholic View'. Fr William Henn, ofm Cap.

Meeting III: Mary in the Communion of the Church

Duke Divinity School, December 14-20, 2008

'Mary in the Light of Scripture and the Early Church: A Catholic View'. Dr Krzysztof Mielcarek.

'Mary in the Light of Scripture and the Early Church: A Baptist View'. Dr Elizabeth Newman.

'Mary in the Light of Ongoing Tradition: A Baptist View'. Dr Timothy George.

Mary in the Light of Ongoing Tradition: A Catholic View'. Sr. Sara Butler, MSBT.

'Mary and Contemporary Issues of Inculturation and Spirituality: The Sanctity of Life'. Dr Peter Casarella.

'Mary and Contemporary Issues of Inculturation and Spirituality: Mary Challenges the Debate on Women.' Dr Teresa Francesca Rossi.

'A Baptist Reflection on the Virgin Mary'. Dr Nora Lozano

Meeting IV: Oversight and Primacy in the Ministry of the Church

Rome, December 13-19, 2009

'Catholic Ecclesiology'. Sr Susan K. Wood, SCL.

'Baptist Ecclesiology'. Dr Curtis Freeman.

'The Idea of *Episkope*, Local and Universal, in Baptist Tradition'. Revd Tony Peck.

'The Idea of *Episkope* in Relation to Scripture and Tradition: A Catholic View'. Fr Jorge Scampini, OP.

'The Petrine Office: A Baptist Approach'. Dr Tadeusz Zelinski.

'Contemporary Developments of the Petrine Office, including the Ministry of Unity as Outlined in *Ut Unum Sint*'. Fr William Henn, ofm Cap.