

COMMENTARY ON
THE WORD OF GOD IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

A CATHOLIC REFLECTION ON THE REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THE
CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE BAPTIST WORLD ALLIANCE 2006-2010

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I. INTRODUCTION

The document of the International Conversation between the Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance is a fine example of both the discipline of ecumenical theology and as a particular theological method. When I say "ecumenical theology" I am referring to the method whereby two ecclesial communities ask some of their theologians to engage questions of importance for the promotion of Christian unity together. While deputized by their community for this task, the theologians do not speak as church office holders. They speak for themselves with the authority of their arguments, but do so in a *koinonia*, a fellowship, which seeks to explain and explore the truths of Christianity from the perspective of dialogue. As members of their communities, they represent its faith and life. As theologians, they bring their own faith and scholarship to bear on the ecumenical questions before them. In their work product, they address the communities that sent them from the *koinonia* of the dialogue.

The task of a commentator is different. Selected by one of the communities, his or her task is to write from and for that community. In my case, the community is the Catholic Church. My task is to review the work of the dialogue commission from a Catholic perspective and offer an evaluation of the document. The commentator's purpose, then, is to assist in the reception process.

II. CONTEXT OF THE COMMENTARY

The customary task of a commentator is to provide an assessment on how the ecumenical document reads from the point of view of his or her church. As such, the commentary has a different goal than the document itself. The commentary is not one more word on the topic. It is a different word. The concern of the commentator is to offer an evaluation of the document for the sake of promoting reception in his own community.

Reception is a process of encounter between ecclesial communities in which, according to Frederick Bliss,

[. . .] because of *communio*, [Catholics] look beyond themselves to the 'ecclesial communities separated from us,' to enter into relationship with them. . . . Through representative gatherings, diverse traditions meet in fraternity for dialogue and hoped for consensus. Into such dialogue each community brings a history, a way of believing and a lifestyle for scrutiny. What is brought should not be pitched against one another, but should be offered with openness to an honest appraisal in the light of the apostolic Tradition. The hoped for outcome would be a mutual exchange of gifts."²

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² See Frederick M. Bliss, S.M., *Understanding Reception: A Backdrop to its ecumenical use* (Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 1993), 147-148.

One of the approaches I shall use in my commentary is the distinction between doctrine and theology.³ As a Catholic I believe or hold those doctrines proposed by the Magisterium of the Church. Additionally for those matters which have not been settled by solemn judgment, it is for theology to explain and explore them.

[. . .] revealed truth beckons reason - God's gift fashioned for the assimilation of truth - to enter into its light and thereby come to understand in a certain measure what it has believed. Theological science responds to the invitation of truth as it seeks to understand the faith. It thereby aids the People of God in fulfilling the Apostle's command (cf. *1 Pet* 3:15) to give an accounting for their hope to those who ask it.⁴

Theologians operate out of different schools, such as the five traditional schools in the Western Church: Augustinian, Thomist, Bonaventurian, Scotist and Christian Humanism. Catholics need to recognize that there are different schools of thought among our separated brethren as well. I want to call on Catholics to recognize that there exists a "Baptist school of thought" as a distinct way of approaching theology. As Thomas Stransky noted in his commentary on the first report:

Baptists do see a cohesiveness in their heritage. It began in their 17th century explicit origins in England and in Holland, and in their prior roots in the "radical phalanx" or "left-wing" of the 16th century Reformation: the denial of infant baptism and acceptance only of adult "believers" (by immersion) to form regenerated church membership where all possess equal rights and privileges; civil freedom of religion and the separation of church and state as the best guarantees of liberty of conscience for every citizen. For Baptists, such beliefs are founded on their understanding of the authority and sufficiency of Scriptures; the priesthood of the believers; salvation as God's gift of divine grace received through a person's repentance and faith in Jesus Christ; and a zealous commitment to share this Good News through direct evangelism at home and abroad, in unquestioned obedience to the Great Commission of Jesus (*Mt* 28:19-20).⁵

My own reading of history suggests that such a "Baptist School" emerges from the Augustinian School as read by the 16th century Reformers and a reaction to the Protestant state churches and issues of religious freedom for non-conformists. I believe that such an approach will make it easier for theologians to sort out which differences between our two communities emerge from true differences in doctrine and which are related to differences between theological schools. Pope Benedict XVI has noted "doctrinal questions that still divide us should not be overlooked or minimized."⁶ The report shows a greater sophistication in methodology which is welcome in ecumenical theology. An ongoing goal for ecumenical theologians is to test whether the capacity lies within a specific school of theology to articulate the truths of the Faith in a manner which is at the same time consistent with one community's self-understanding and acceptable to another community. This has been the successful approach between the Catholic Church and the churches of the East on the resolution of doctrinal questions.⁷ A similar approach could profitably be used with the communities of the Reformation. My proposal on methodology, i.e., acknowledging schools within the communities of the Reformation, seeks such an application.⁸

III. APPRECIATIONS

³See "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). Here after referred to as WGLC. No. 4 of the report notes "areas of church doctrine and life, where serious differences may remain The 'differences' that remain are identified in the earlier report as 'theological authority and method' (relating to scripture and tradition) . . ."

⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction *Donum Veritatis: On the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian* (May 24, 1990), no. 6.

⁵ Thomas Stransky, CSP "Comments on "Summons to Witness to Christ in Today's World: A Report on the Baptist-Roman Catholic Conversations". *Information Service* N. 72; 1990 (I).

⁶ Benedict XVI, "Ecumenism: Walking Beyond Borders" Allocution of Pope Benedict XVI at the Ecumenism Service at Saint Paul Outside the Walls, January 25, 2013. In *Vatican Information Service* (Jan. 25, 2013).

⁷ See *Common Christological Declaration of His Holiness, Pope John Paul II and His Holiness, Mar Dinkha IV* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1992).

⁸ This approach would be similar to the proposal made by Blessed Pope John Paul II asking for recommendations on the articulation of the doctrine on the primacy as well as suggestions on its exercise. See John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint, Encyclical Letter on Ecumenism* (May 25, 1995), nos. 89-96.

An appreciative inquiry into the document's various claims suggests that the following points might be suitable for reception by Catholics.

A. *Koinonia*

The trinitarian starting point of the document is a significant strength. The Agreement Statement in no. 7 continues a theological trajectory, so strong at the Second Vatican Council, to move away from the propositional approach to truth employed by Neo-Scholastic theology and to favor instead the personalist approach where Truth is ultimately the divine person of the Logos.⁹ I also appreciate the emphasis on Christ himself as the ruler and governor of the Church in no. 9. Recognizing Christ's presence through the power of the Spirit, provides the basis for some of the essential elements of ecclesiology as the Catholic Church understands them.¹⁰ Revelation can thus be situated in salvation history and the Church as is taught by the contemporary Magisterium.¹¹ Another appreciation is that the agreement on personal Trinitarian relationships protects against the modalism which is reappearing in some feminist and process theologies. The unique claims of Christianity about God are inseparable from a strong Trinitarian theology.¹²

The Trinitarian origin of mission in no. 10 is also a point to be appreciated. The caution about conceiving the Spirit acting apart from Christ is also important for a correct soteriology and ecclesiology.

I also appreciate the precision shown by the authors in treating terms such as "local church" which have vastly different meanings in the Baptist and Catholic communions. The dialogue is advanced by such careful precision.

The comparison of covenant ecclesiology with communion ecclesiology in no. 17 is very helpful. It illustrates how different schools of thought in theology can treat the same questions using their distinctive methods. It helps to sharpen where there are doctrinal differences as distinguished from differences in schools of thought.

No. 27 on discernment is especially good in its treatment of *sentire cum ecclesia*, reception and *sensus fidei*. The *sensus fidei*, being a grace from the Holy Spirit given in baptism, highlights the role of the church in the transmission of the truth. Without the Holy Spirit, the scriptures are a closed book. This paragraph clarifies how the Church mediates the transmission and conservation of the Truth once delivered to the apostles and the place of the Holy Spirit in the reception of the same.

B. Authority of Christ in Scripture and Tradition

One element of the document's theology which is of particular note is the Christological approach to understanding the relationship of divine and human authorship in the Scriptures. This is a useful analogy which addresses directly the controversy over the historical-critical method in biblical studies. Like the Christological controversies of the early centuries, the disputes over historical-critical studies arise from concerns that one authorship is absorbing the other. The mystery of how the incarnate Logos can be "true God and true man" is analogous to how the human author of the sacred page can be a "true author" while "conveying all and only what God desires him to."¹³ The analogy has the value of reminding us that the authorship of the Scriptures is a mystery and that the various affirmations which our two communities make will not be able to exhaust the meaning of the unique book with is the Holy Bible. No. 47 is especially to be appreciated in this regard for its Christocentric approach to interpretation. The application of the third mark of the Church, catholicity, to interpretation "according to the whole" is a good approach.

Perhaps one of the most important statements by the dialogue comes in no. 59 where the authors note, "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." It is important that the dialogue face this issue directly. More conversation on this point is needed, for reasons I will describe below.

The suggestion in no. 62 to reformulate "*sola Scriptura*" as "*suprema Scriptura*" is a very interesting one which

⁹ See Emery de Gaal, *The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI: The Christocentric Shift* (San Francisco: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2011).

¹⁰ See *Dominus Jesus*, no. 16.

¹¹ See Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini, the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Word of God in the Life and Ministry of the Church* (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2010), no. 6.

¹² Current theological controversies over the question of monotheism highlight this point. See Robert Barron, *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Postliberal Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2007). See Also, Edward T. Oakes, *Infinity Dwindled to Infancy: A Catholic and Evangelical Christology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011) and Thomas Norris, *The Trinity, Life of God, Hope for Humanity: Towards a Theology of Communion* (Hyde Park, New York: New City Press, 2009).

¹³ *Dei Verbum*, no. 11.

should be pursued by ecumenical theologians in all of the dialogues.¹⁴

C. Baptism and Lord's Supper

The first observation regarding this section is the useful introduction which situates the discussion of sacraments in the larger context of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition.¹⁵ This statement reinforced the Catholic understanding that tradition is not a mere body of content but a living transmission whose first instance is liturgy. The document helpfully notes that the terms "remembrance" and "symbol" are more highly nuanced in the Baptist school of thought. Catholics should avoid any reductionist readings of these two terms.¹⁶

The affirmation in no. 87 of "God, through Christ, by the cooperation of the Holy Spirit sets forth in justification in the penitent faithful soul," is helpful in broadening Catholic understanding of the Baptist view. It shows the action of the Trinity in the sacrament/ordinance. It is also important for Catholics to know that Baptists do not draw the conclusion that the sacraments/ordinance "in and of themselves" confer grace. No. 92's expression of the sacrament/ordinance as "the word of God expressed in sacramental form" highlights the sacraments as actions of Christ.

The careful description in no. 95 about the Baptist understanding of the moment of salvation will be important for Catholics. The separation between the moment of achieving saving faith in Christ and the moment of the celebration of the sacrament/ordinance of baptism is clarifying of the Baptist understanding of ordinance.

One of the things which this document does well is explain the diversity of views within the Baptist school of thought. Nowhere is this more evident than in the descriptions in no. 110 of the variety of views on the relationship of baptism to membership in the church. This same approach is to be appreciated in the section on the real presence.

The explanation of the relationship of the priesthood to the Eucharist is also to be acknowledged. The careful nuance of the priest acting both *in persona Christi capitis* and *in persona ecclesiae* is well presented. Regarding the Eucharist/Lord's Supper, the connection of the word *anamnesis* with "participation" is helpful for Catholics to understand the more nuanced sense of remembrance which characterizes the Baptist school of thought.

While not enumerated, the five modes of Christ's presence in the Eucharist are all treated in the document. The presence of Christ in the ordained priest receives a good explanation.¹⁷ The concluding section on ethics and eschatology also contains an important affirmation of the five dimensions of the Church, *kerygma*, *koinonia*, *leiturgia*, *diakonia* and *episkope*. These are less models of the church than they are constituting dimensions of the Church and explanations of her essential nature.¹⁸

D. Mary in the Communion of the Church

There is much to appreciate in the section on Mary. The text offers a reading of the New Testament which allows the person of Mary and her role in salvation history to shine forth. Of special note is paragraph no. 135 and the emphasis it places on Mary's membership in the Jewish people. The document presents well the dogmas of the Catholic faith of Mary as Theotokos, her immaculate conception, the virgin birth, her perpetual virginity, and her assumption. The section in no. 147 is among the best articulations of the theology of the immaculate conception. By situating the immaculate conception in the context of preparing Mary of Nazareth to make a free response to grace, the document moves the discussion out of speculative theology and into a biblical theology which shows God preparing Mary to fulfill her role in salvation history as the New Eve.

E. *Episkope*

A significant appreciation lies in the section on *episkope*. If one were to compare this statement with the Lima text in 1988, the significant development of thought is clear. Ecumenical theology has matured over these many years, especially in the articulation by Catholic theologians of the various dimension of the episcopal office in the Church. I

¹⁴ This formulation is consistent with the teaching of Pope John Paul II in *Ut Unum Sint* where he calls scripture the supreme norm. See John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint, Encyclical Letter on Ecumenism* (Rome, Libreria Vaticana, 1995), no. 54. However, see footnote 30 below.

¹⁵ No. 72.

¹⁶ For a treatment of the application of the notion of anamnesis to the sacrament/ordinance question, see Russell Moore's essay "The Baptist View: Christ's Presence as Memorial" in *Understanding Four Views on the Lord's Supper*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 29-33.

¹⁷ See Avery Cardinal Dulles, "How Real is the Real Presence?" in *The Church and Society: The Lawrence J. McGinley Lectures 1988-2007* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 455-467.

¹⁸ See Thomas A. Baima, "Models of Church" and its Contribution to Ecclesiology and Ecumenism," in *Chicago Studies*, Vol. 47:2 (Summer 2008)

also appreciate that no. 172 on the ordination of women, the authors situate the issue in the lack of authority in the Church to change the apostolic tradition.¹⁹ The approach, based on *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* describes in practice how the Catholic Church understands that the Magisterium operates under the Word of God and serves it.²⁰ This argument from authority helps clarify the relationship of Scripture and Tradition as well as the development of doctrine about which I will say more later in this commentary.

IV. QUESTIONS FOR CLARIFICATION REGARDING CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

In this section, I will identify those few items which I feel need further clarification and after some commentary to aid in reception. I will also identify questions which might profitably be treated in future rounds of the Baptist-Catholic Dialogue.

While appreciating the significant developments which this document offers to ecumenical theology, the following points call for clarification.

A. *Koinonia*

The document correctly notes the unicity and universality of Christ in the single salvific economy. From a Catholic viewpoint, however, there is no mention of the role of the Church in that unique and universal mediation. The reader of paragraph no. 10 may not realize that the Catholic doctrinal claim includes ecclesial mediation.²¹

In no. 12, some greater clarity would be needed about the relationship of the particular church to the universal church. In Catholic doctrine, there is a priority of the universal. Historically, the Church of Jerusalem constituted at Pentecost was from the first moment of her existence universal. She included all the nations in seminal form. The missionary efforts of the apostles brought the faith to Semitic Syria, into Asia Minor and West into Europe as well as back into Mesopotamia and the East. As the apostles founded local churches, the one Church of Christ particularized herself in those places.²² Historically, then, the statement "the local fellowship does not derive from the universal church" may require greater nuance. Later in the document, there is an adequate explanation of the nuances, but the lack of clarity in the agreed statement remains. The Catholic statement in no. 14 is clear that "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 other particular churches." But would a Catholic or Baptist reading the agreed statement, understand that meaning from the statement "the local fellowship does not derive from the universal church?" The Baptist explanation in no. 15 of "communion . . . directly through Christ who rules in other expressions of the church" is helpful, as is the assertion that Baptist local churches are inter-dependent. I would suggest that the headship of Christ might be a rubric under which to harmonize statements about ecclesial *communio*. The concluding sentence that Christ's rule in the local church . . . embodies and manifests the universal" might be a better way to state the agreement in no. 12. At issue is both a theology of mission and the question of ecclesial mediation.

The section in no. 21 might profitably note that part of what is missing in the Eucharist celebrated in an ecclesial community lacking the apostolic succession is not only the absent element of ecclesial communion, but also the full reality of the Eucharist.²³ Explanation could be deferred to the section on Baptism and Lord's Supper. There is mention of the Baptist notion of the presence of Christ in no. 22, but there is not a parallel mention of the Catholic belief about the real presence in par. 21.

B. Authority of Christ in Scripture and Tradition

One area which I wish the dialogue commission has engaged more directly lies in the distinction between revelation and inspiration. There is a growing consensus in Catholic teaching to locate the revelation, especially that of

¹⁹ A complete treatment of this complex question can be found in Sara Butler, *The Catholic Priesthood and Women: A Guide to the Teaching of the Church* (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2007).

²⁰ See *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* no. 4.

²¹ See *Dominus Jesus*, no. 16.

²² Johann Auer uses the doctrine of the visibility of the Church to explain the relationship of universal to particular. The particular church is the image of the universal church in that place. This conveys the simultaneous nature of the qualities of universal and particular. If the local church is the image, there can be no local church apart from the universal. Yet at the same time, the sole way in which the universal church has visibility in the world is through all of the local churches. See Johann Auer *The Church: Universal Sacrament of Salvation*, trans. Michael Waldstein, ed. Hugh M. Riley (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 112

²³ See "Roman Catholic Church" in *Churches Respond to BEM: The Official Responses to the Lima Text, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1988).

the New Covenant, in the person of Jesus and in everything he said and did until the day he was taken up in to heaven. Inspiration refers to the conservation and transmission of the revelation and is closely related to the Catholic notion of Tradition. This distinction helps us to overcome the more rational notions of propositional revelation which were current in the manualist period in Catholic theology, but which found similar expression throughout the Protestant world at the same time period. The document does a good job of moving beyond the idea that the Bible is the revelation. I would suggest, however, that the important distinction between revelation and inspiration could further clarify this important point.

This point has important pneumatological and ecclesiological dimensions. The phrase, “scripture and tradition,” suggests to most people two bodies of written content. In fact, Tradition is, in the simplest form, interpretation of the Revelation in the Church.²⁴ More specifically, the same Spirit who guided the sacred authors to compose the Scriptures is also present in the Church and acts continually to conserve, transmit and interpret the sacred page.²⁵ Tradition does possess content, but it is first of all an ongoing action of God in history. While no. 44 does treat the “traditioning process” with regard to canon, the dynamic dimension of Tradition does not come out as strongly as it could in the document.²⁶

Western theology, as Yves Congar has noted so well, lacks a robust pneumatology. Consequently, while both communities presume the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation of the Scriptures, and, indeed both understand that the role of the community in interpretation is an expression of discernment of the Spirit, there is no mention of it in the otherwise fine description in no. 49. Given the emphasis on the Holy Spirit in the third phase of the Reformation, and in Baptist theology, further study by the dialogue on the activity of the Holy Spirit might encourage greater convergence.²⁷

An important point for clarification lies in no. 59 where the dialogue commission asserts that “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.” Catholic teaching is slightly different on this point. A comparison between the texts of *Ut Unum Sint* and *Verbum Domini* shows the magisterium of the church still struggling with this issue. Various theories have been advanced by theologians around the issue of the material sufficiency of scripture.²⁸ A popular theory in the early twentieth century, in the twenty-first century there is growing opinion that material sufficiency is bound to the propositional notion of revelation. *Ut Unum Sint* offers a clear statement, but without clarification or application.²⁹ In *Verbum Domini*, Benedict XVI states “Indeed, the word of God is given to us in sacred Scripture as an inspired testimony to revelation; together with the Church’s living Tradition, it constitutes the supreme rule of faith.”³⁰ It should be acknowledged that the authority of Scripture over tradition is still a developing doctrine.

The treatment of tradition in no. 63 deals with the distinction between apostolic tradition and ecclesiastical tradition. While correct in and of itself, the article and those which follow it seems to narrow the definition of tradition to its content. This is a more narrow reading of the term “tradition” than is used in the rest of the document. In this paragraph there is some sense of the older Catholic way of speaking of “two sources” of revelation. No. 64 names the real issue, which is the development of doctrine. The switching between tradition as content and tradition as transmission can be confusing, but also attests to the unsettled nature of this point of doctrine.

One point of consideration in relationship to no. 68 would be the recovery of patristic exegesis in the Catholic Church. The Fathers did most of their theology not in technical manuals, but through sermons and essays. In other words, theology was inseparable from proclamation. This *ressourcement* could be a valuable avenue to further the conversation on Tradition, since proclamation is such a value in the Baptist community. The living dimension of Tradition would be better exposed.

²⁴ Fernando Ocariz, *Fundamental Theology* (Woodbridge, Illinois: Midwest Theological Forum, 2009), 98.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁶ Yves Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1964), 74-75

²⁷ See Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, no. 7.

²⁸ Ocariz, *Op.cit.*, 105.

²⁹ John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, no. 54.

³⁰ Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini*, no. 19. See also *Dei Verbum*, no. 21. Note that whereas John Paul II focuses on the distinction between Scripture and Tradition in *Ut Unum Sint*, Benedict XVI stresses the relationship between the two. Benedict XVI, in turn, makes the distinction between the Word of God (the Logos) and the transmission of the Word of God in Scripture and Tradition. This indicates to me that Catholic teaching on the “supreme rule of faith” is still developing.

C. Baptism and Lord's Supper

The agreement on "a coinherence between sacraments/ordinances and the preaching of the Word of God" is stated in liturgical form. If preaching is cast as proclamation and Word of God understood as Christ, there may be some possibility for further convergence in an exploration of "divine command." In Catholic theology, this notion is one aspect of moral theology. The Baptist school of thought seems to be applying a similar theory to the sacraments/ordinances. If the sacraments/ordinances are divine commands, there is a way of understanding the command as effecting that which is commanded. When God speaks in creation, the word brings about what is spoken. If an ordinance were understood as an anamnesis of command, then the remembrance, by virtue of being brought about by the Word of God, could be understood as having effectiveness prior to the human response. The Catholic doctrine of sacramental efficacy might be better understood by our Baptist brothers and sisters by exploring such an approach.³¹

One area I believe needs some clarification is the matter of grace and faith. The document seems to present faith as the human response to grace (which, of course it is).³² But Catholic doctrine has a more complex understanding of faith. Faith is gift and response. Faith is a theological virtue. Faith is gift, in that it is "a divine call," and a response where the person "lives and thinks according to God's word and love."³³ As such, it does not originate in the human person, but in God's free gift. While there can be no experience of grace apart from faith, faith can be implicit, or reflex. The response can be prior to faith being thematized in the individual believer. In Catholic theology, going back to Saint Robert Bellarmine, the possibility of unconscious desire is recognized. Hence, no. 85 while emphasizing the importance of a conscious, thematic act of faith, seems more restrictive than Catholic doctrine.³⁴

Implicit in the commentary in no. 89 and 90, however, are unresolved issues around the doctrine of God. The personal freedom of God according to the Baptist school of thought presented here seems broader than common Catholic teaching. The volitional emphasis of God's freedom could be read this way. Catholic theology asserts that God can do anything, except that which involves a logical contradiction. As being-itself, God cannot will to cease to exist. Consequently, since God is love, the acts of God necessarily conform to his nature. As Robert Barron has noted:³⁵

The central affirmation of classical Christianity is that in Jesus of Nazareth God and humanity met in a non-competitive and nonviolent way. According to the formulation of the Council of Chalcedon, the human nature of Jesus is not compromised, truncated, or undermined in the process of becoming united to a divine nature. Rather, the two come together "without mixing, mingling, or confusion" in a hypostatic union, producing one who is perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity.³⁶ [. . .] If the incarnation is an accomplished fact, then the presence of the true God is not invasive or interruptive but rather non-competitive. In light of this coming together, we must say that there is a rapport of coinherence between divinity and humanity, each abiding in the other in such a way that humanity is elevated by the proximity of the divine . . .³⁷

Divine freedom should not be set against the divine nature. As Thomas Norris has said:

Since a divine Person is "a nothingness of love" in order to be, the incarnation of "One of the Trinity" will involve an economy of kenosis. Christ as the revelation of the design, plan and mystery hidden from all eternity in the Trinity will love the Father to the point of the kenosis and the forsakenness of the Father but precisely to give us access through the Holy Spirit to the life and the bliss of our lasting homeland. The very wonder of the hypostatic union, which brings to the eyes of our minds a new and radiant vision of the beauty-glory of the Holy Trinity so that we are caught up in the love of the Trinity we cannot see, opens up a vision of unity and

³¹ This comment also applies to No. 106.

³² Later in the document, in no. 97, there is a more nuanced treatment which better addresses my concern.

³³ Ocariz, op. cit., 148.

³⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Jesus*, no. 20.

³⁵ See Robert Barron, *The Priority of Christ: Toward a Post-liberal Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Books, 2007), 17.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, See also Norman Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 1:86.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, See also Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 39.

communion that fascinates and attracts.³⁸

The concerns about the sovereignty of God need to be seen in the light of the profound developments in the theology of the doctrine of God. Future conversations around the communion of saints from the view of contemporary theology of God could assist in overcoming the Baptist objections to the Catholic understanding of the communion of saints as challenging the sovereignty of God.

No. 92 continues the more narrow use of the term “faith” to mean human response. From a Catholic viewpoint, saying “belief and trust is essential for the meeting to happen, although this human act is always enabled through the work of the Holy Spirit” would be a good way to address the concerns I raised above.

My concern about the term faith is more helpfully addressed in no. 97. By saying “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” better defines faith as more than solely a human response. Also, Catholic doctrine understands the sacrament as imparting faith, especially the *sensus fidei* (the capacity to recognize the revelation). The matter is adequately treated in the section on Confirmation where the authors say “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.’”³⁹

The question of “sprinkling” as a form of administering baptism is not treated. While rejected by both Catholics and Baptists when the term refers to the practice of throwing water over a number of people without certainty that a particular individual is actually touched by the water, the term is also used by Baptists to mean “non-immersion” including effusion. The addition of some treatment of sprinkling would have been a helpful clarification.

Another issue implicit in the document is the priesthood. In the excellent treatment of the sacrificial character of the Eucharist, lies an unmentioned issue: the nature of the priesthood of the New Covenant.⁴⁰ It is a difficult question to engage in an ecumenical document on Eucharist. I, myself took the same path of bracketing the question in my own study on Eucharist. While it may not be possible to raise this complex issue in the context of a dialogue on the Eucharist, for the Catholic, it is nevertheless inseparable. I wrote:

I raise the point about sacrifice solely because is it bound up in the Catholic notion of sacrament. So to adequately understand our belief, you must posit this point. The biblical pattern, or model of sacrifice, involved offering, priestly mediation and meal.⁴¹ The application of this Old Testament notion to the New Covenant by the sacramental model entails the use of biblical images which revealed the action of God in salvation history, to frame, interpret and throw light upon the final and definitive act of God in Jesus Christ.⁴²

As McGuckian has noted, the Old Testament model of sacrificial worship is perfectly replicated in the sacrifice of Jesus. His self-offering, his mediation as the sole priest of the New Testament and the meal he commanded for the reception of the offering (his body and blood) follow this pattern. At issue between Catholics and Baptists is how to understand the New Testament priesthood. I would suspect that the dialogue could achieve an agreed statement on the priesthood of the baptized, but not on the ministerial priesthood. Nevertheless, the work in this report on *anamnesis* provides a starting point for an eventual conversation about New Testament priesthood. It would be interesting to test this by re-writing No. 123 and substitution “priesthood” for “Eucharist.”

Catholics understand memorial (*anamnesis*) and the invocation of the Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*) in a strong sense. The church not only calls to mind the passion and resurrection of Christ Jesus in the [Priesthood], but also ‘presents to the Father the offering of his Son which reconciles us with him.’ Catholics believe that the [Priesthood] . . . represents (makes present) the once-for-all [priesthood of Jesus]. . . . In the liturgical celebration of the events of Christ’s passion, they ‘become in a certain way present and real.’ Catholics believe that the [priesthood of Christ . . . and the [ministerial priesthood] one single [priesthood], not a multiplication or repetition of [priesthoods]. Representing (not repeating) the [priesthood] of Christ by means of anamnesis, the Church is united to the [priesthood] of Christ by Christ himself acting through an ordained minister. The church invokes the

³⁸ Norris, op. cit., 108.

³⁹ No. 105.

⁴⁰ See “Roman Catholic Church” in *Churches Respond to BEM: Official Responses to the ‘Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry’ text*, Vol. IV., ed. Max Thurian (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1988), 31.

⁴¹ See Michael McGuckian, S.J., *The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass* (Chicago, Hillenbrand Books, 2005).

⁴² Thomas A. Baima, “Roman Catholic View: Christ’s True, Real and Substantial Presence” in *Understanding Four Views on the Lord’s Supper*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2007), 24-25.

Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*) to transform [a baptized man] into [a ministerial priest]. . .⁴³

I think this experiment shows that the Baptist-Catholic conversation reported in this document offers some rich possibilities for exploring other unanswered issues. I would encourage further exploration on the topic of priesthood in a future dialogue.

The issue of implicit problems in the doctrine of God returns in no. 130 over the office of the priesthood somehow limiting the sovereignty of Christ. Barron writes:

What has been misconstrued (or in most cases altogether forgotten) by modern thinkers is that dynamic biblical view of God which had held sway in Christian thought through the high middle ages and which allows one to affirm both the full godliness of God and the full flourishing of the human subject in relation to God. This is the understanding of God the Creator of all that is, a reality existing in a modality different from any creature or collectivity of creatures, otherly other than the non-divine and hence capable of the most intimate and non-invasive relationship with the non-divine.⁴⁴

I think Barron's approach may provide a way out of the difficulty presented by trying to protect the sovereignty of God. I will return to this possibility later in this commentary.

D. Mary in the Communion of the Church

Key Catholic concepts such as the development of doctrine and the *sensus fidelium* are presumed to be understood by the reader. This is a weakness in the text. I would have liked to see more discussion in the document about the controversy over the Immaculate Conception. Specifically, I don't think the document explains the working of controversy in the development of doctrine. As presented, the Baptist reader could assume that controversy is simply disagreement. In fact, controversy is part of the working out of doctrinal formulations. The footnote no. 138 is good, but also assumes that the reader understands the development of dogma. I will offer some suggestions about the development of doctrine later in this commentary.

E. *Episkope*

In the section on our differing patterns of episkope in no. 168, an historical nuance would be helpful on the matter of the three-fold ministry. The document asserts that "The church in both East and West embraced the three-fold order of ministry until the Reformation . . ." While the statement is true, more nuance would be helpful. The East maintained the notion of the early church articulated in Ignatius of Antioch of the three orders of ministry.⁴⁵ In the West, however, because of the influence of Jerome, a trend of thought developed which saw episcopacy as simply greater jurisdiction to exercise the sacramental powers given in sacerdotal ordination.⁴⁶ On the basis of this argument, the scholastic theologians denied that episcopacy was a sacrament.⁴⁷ The canonical tradition, as distinct from the theological tradition, stressed this point. The Roman Catechism issued after the Council of Trent represents the final development of the Western notion of seven orders and five offices.⁴⁸ The shift emerges in the post-Tridentine theologians who

⁴³ No. 123 paraphrased. The reason this point is so important is that the issue of one sacrifice/many sacrifices is the same fundamental concern in the question of the Catholic understanding of ministry as priesthood. The Baptist school of thought is not comfortable with anything which challenges the uniqueness of Jesus priesthood, and rightly so. The ecumenical solution proposed on the Eucharist seems also to be applicable to the question of the priesthood.

⁴⁴ Barron, *op. cit.*, 203.

⁴⁵ Ignatius of Antioch is famous for his sacramental/Eucharistic ecclesiology where he images the local church as a Eucharistic synaxis: the bishop, surrounded by his presbyters, assisted by his deacons in the midst of the baptized, offering doxology to God and intercession to those in any kind of need.

⁴⁶ Jerome, *Epistle 146* in *Ep. Ad Tit.1*, 5.

⁴⁷ Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, trans. James Canon Bastible (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books and Publishers, 1974), 453.

⁴⁸ *The Roman Catechism*, trans. Robert I. Bradley, S.J. and Eugene Kevane (Boston: Saint Paul Editions, 1985), 307-326. See especially footnotes 42, 45, 51, 52 and 53. The seven orders were porter, lector, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon and *sacerdos*. *Sacerdos* was further understood as having five offices: priest (meaning presbyter), bishop, archbishop, patriarch and pope. One can see in this formulation to notion of the canonical tradition that episcopacy was merely more jurisdiction.

overwhelmingly reject the canonical tradition and recover the patristic three-fold understanding of the sacrament. After that, in the intervening years, a recovery of the Eastern notion of three orders begins and finds its fruition in Pius XII and the Second Vatican Council's teaching on the sacramentality of the episcopal consecration.⁴⁹ The Baptist view of a two-fold ministry, then, is more similar to the medieval Western Catholic view and should be understood in this historic context. The issue for ecumenical theology is to journey together in a deeper appropriation of the patristic teaching on the three-fold ministry.

V. ISSUES FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION IN THE DIALOGUE

A. The Communion of Saints

From my perspective, no. 24 par. 2 opens an important conversation which has the potential of bearing much fruit. The Baptist definition of the invisible church being made up of all persons regenerated by the Spirit of God . . . opens an interesting possibility for discussion on the Communion of Saints as an integrating doctrine for ecumenical agreement on ecclesiology. The idea of "seeing the evidence of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual . . ." might allow us to expand our ecclesiological framework to include those members of the Church who are enjoying heaven and wait for the new heavens and the new earth.

No. 158 also shares in this point. Fear of detracting from the uniqueness of Christ impels the Baptist school of thought to make no claims about saintly intercession. I wish that the dialogue would have taken up the differences in attitude toward Mary's present place in the Church. The Catholic sense of the immediacy of the communion of saints and the Baptist sense of distance from this communion is a root difference in the life and practice of the two communities.

B. Tradition

I previously mentioned that the document seems to presume that the reader understands the Catholic notion of tradition. I'm not sure that the careful nuance the commission intends in a number of places will be properly apprehended. So, for the sake of reception, one contribution I should like to make in this commentary is to offer a different word on the matter of tradition.

In my experience working in ecumenical dialogue, the most difficult part of any discussion on tradition lies in communicating to non-Catholics that tradition is more than an additional source. I can recall when I was at university once when a Protestant student asked me if I would meet him in the library of the local Catholic seminary and "show him where he could find the tradition." After some discussion, I offered to take him to Mass at the cathedral that Sunday and then to a devotional service at a parish during the week. After that, we could go to the library. My point was to open for him the understanding that tradition to Catholics is more than a documentary source. It is also a living, contemporary reality. This notion was very difficult for my fellow student to grasp. He wanted tradition to be something like the Book of Mormon - another set of documents to which he could refer as he refers to the Holy Bible. Our actual notion of tradition is unsettling and unsatisfying to our separated brethren. Yet, the goal of dialogue is to accurately present ourselves to one another, so this exploration of tradition is vital to the goals of dialogue.

Yves Cardinal Congar, O.P. is the magister of the theology of tradition. Congar would begin by noting that tradition should be spoken of as "transmission of an object to another person."⁵⁰ We can speak of tradition in the "active sense: the act of transmitting" or in "the objective sense: that which is transmitted."⁵¹ The content of tradition includes more than just written documents.⁵² So it is important in any discussion of tradition to clarify both the mode of the transmission (orally) and the content of the transmission (oral tradition) allowing us to speak of tradition in a narrow sense as distinct from Scripture.⁵³

Within the tradition, further distinctions can and must be made. Most important is the distinction between apostolic and ecclesiastical traditions. This is a more subtle aspect of the whole matter of tradition. At issue is the difference in the subject of tradition, as distinct from the object. Congar identifies three subjects: Christ, the Apostles

⁴⁹ Pius XII, *Sacramentum Ordinis: Apostolic Constitution on the Orders of Diaconate, Presbyterate and Episcopate* (November 30, 1947), par. 5. See also Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium: The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, no. 21.

⁵⁰ Yves M.-J. Congar, O.P., *Tradition and Traditions: An Historical and a Theological Essay* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1966), 307.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

and the Church.⁵⁴ It is precisely the third subject which is the point of discussion in ecumenical dialogue. Much of the writing in the official dialogues has focused on the first two subjects, yet the third is where the controversies of the Reformation lie.

Congar notes that the Church is both the transmitter of the Apostolic Tradition and herself the origin of traditions. In the first case, the act of transmission of a tradition as Apostolic by the Church gives that tradition its authority. An example here might be the canon of Scripture. The judgment by the Church that a particular book has the status of Sacred Scripture is what gives that book its normative value.⁵⁵ Such a judgment, however, is an act of the Church and such acts are what give Tradition its living character. This character can extend to the development of the content, both in writing and in unwritten form and here unwritten form includes the meaning of the deposit of Faith. Said another way, authoritative judgment about the content of the Tradition is itself an act of Tradition. Consequently, a third term needs to be added to the discussion of Scripture and Tradition, and that term is Magisterium.

The complexity of the term tradition which includes the idea of an action, a content, development and authoritative judgment is what makes ecumenical dialogue so difficult around this subject. That said, all is not lost. Within the Baptist school of thought is a rich understanding of the Holy Spirit as standing behind correct interpretation of the scriptures. At its essence, this is the Catholic view as well. For a revealed religion to endure across time, Christ must have provided a means by which the truth of the Revelation could be conserved and transmitted. Catholics understand the apostolic succession of bishops as the instrument of conservation and transmission. The active subject is the Holy Spirit in the Church. A future exploration of the pneumatology on Tradition would be of great value to the ongoing Baptist/Catholic conversation.

VI. EXHORTATION TO MISSIONAL ECUMENISM

A. Appreciating the attributes

One of the main goals of the ecumenical movement is to develop a spirituality among Christians which allows them to see the Spirit of God moving in and among the churches and ecclesial communities. The ability to recognize the Spirit at work is fundamental to an understanding that ecumenism is fundamentally about conversion. The conversion of which I speak is first of all to Christ and his will for the Church expressed most clearly in his high priestly prayer in the Gospel of John.

Seeing the Spirit of God at work in another community calls us to deeper *koinonia*. Seeing the reception of the spiritual gifts in ways perhaps better than our own community stands as a testimony against us. The only response is praise to God for his marvelous gifts and prayer to God for forgiveness that we have not used certain gifts as well as our separated brothers and sisters.

B. Standing together for Christian culture

In the recent years, there has developed alongside of the official ecclesial dialogues a set of informal dialogues or conversations among scholars and pastors which show much promise. Called the *new ecumenism*, it is becoming a permanent part of the ecumenical movement. I see it as a reception of the one hundred years of dialogue and a new work of the Spirit. I prefer to speak of a "missional ecumenism." When I use this term, what I mean is an ecumenical engagement of Pope John Paul II's view of mission, which is to proclaim the gospel with the aim of conversion, to baptize and form Christian community and to promote gospel values and transform culture.⁵⁶ The new ecumenism has taken up this third aspect of mission. Baptists and Catholics have unique opportunities for such engagements.

The New Evangelization also offers us a challenge. Can the insights which theologians have offered on the doctrine of God and the non-competitive nature of God offer insights which will help us collaborate in shared efforts at evangelization? This is an enormous question, given the history of relations between the two communities. But I have to believe after reading this document and seeing the great advances in understanding which it represents that John Paul II's third element of mission could provide a common ground for missional ecumenism between Baptists and Catholics. I would urge all who read *The Word of God in the Life of the Church* to reflect on how their community might collaborate with other Christians to promote gospel values and transform culture.

[*Information Service* 142 (2013/II) 66-76]

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ See John Paul II, *A Catechesis on the Creed*, Vol. IV: *The Church, Mystery, Sacrament and Community* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1998), 638-641.