

## BAPTIST-CATHOLIC DIALOGUE.

In 2012, the international dialogue commission of the Baptist World Alliance and the Roman Catholic Church published its second report, an extremely wide ranging document entitled *The Word of God in the Life of the Church*.<sup>1</sup>

Four aims were set for the dialogue. The first was to increase mutual understanding and appreciation of each other. The second was to foster a shared life of discipleship within the communion of the triune God. The third was to develop and extend the common witness of both communions to Jesus Christ. Fourth came the encouragement of common action on ethical issues.

In the Preface, the Commission made the significant claim that 'while we do not expect our readers to be surprised by the differences that remain, we do think they will be surprised by the common mind that has been revealed'. In their concluding reflections, they go further, arguing that readers will find an astounding amount of convergence not just in the commonly agreed paragraphs but even in those comparing distinctively Catholic and Baptist approaches to particular problems<sup>2</sup>. They claim their working together has helped them rethink their respective convictions in new perspectives<sup>3</sup>. Finally, they argue that 'we each discern in the other's communion characteristics of the Church of Christ because we recognise there the presence of Jesus Christ, the Lord of the Church'<sup>4</sup>.

These claims will, I think, resonate with readers of other communions who study the report<sup>5</sup>.

### **Baptists and Roman Catholics.**

This report, following up an earlier dialogue that took place in the 1980's deepens the conversation between two Christian communions commonly supposed, both by their own members and by adherents of other Christian traditions, to be at very considerable variance. The traditions of present day Baptists go back to the radical Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Baptists largely accepted the theology of the classic continental reformers such as Luther and Calvin but went further from them in rejecting all forms of state establishment as well as those elements of traditional church structure and liturgy that were retained by the Anglicans and Lutherans. They adopted an 'independent' ecclesiology, in which each congregation was regarded as autonomous with all decisions as to local church government being decided by the meeting of all the members

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<sup>1</sup> Available on the Vatican website, but unfortunately only in hard copy in the shape of a special number of the *American Baptist Quarterly*, vol 31, September 2012, no 1. The first report of the dialogue, entitled *Summons to Witness to Christ in Today's World*, was published in 1988. It marked out for further exploration three of the key themes surveyed in the more recent report, viz- the relationship between faith and baptism, koinonia and the place of Mary in faith and practice. See Gros, J et al (eds) *Growth in Agreement*, vol II (2000), pp. 373-385.

<sup>2</sup> *The Word of God in the Life of the Church*, para 205. Hereafter, cited simply by paragraph.

<sup>3</sup> para 205.

<sup>4</sup> para 212.

<sup>5</sup> The indebtedness of the report to work done in other ecumenical dialogues, and in particular to the increasing adoption of Church as communion as a central theme, is evident. I understand that it had originally been intended to attach a short chapter situating the report within the general context of the other ecumenical dialogues.

seeking the guidance of Christ. Thus they repudiated all hierarchy whilst still valuing association with other like minded churches<sup>6</sup>.

A key characteristic was their emphasis on churches as formed not in institutional continuity with the past but as a result of groups who covenanted together to form churches in response to the call of Christ, the invisible Head of the Church<sup>7</sup>. Baptists believe that this reproduces the pattern of the first churches of the apostolic age. The other key stress was on the replacement of infant baptism by believers' baptism, baptism of people on profession of faith, the practice that they believed had obtained in apostolic times and for some generations afterwards.

The contrast in all of these things with Roman Catholicism was particularly strong. The early Anabaptists suffered persecution from both the Roman Catholic Church and the established state Protestant churches, a persecution which influenced their subsequent attitudes right up into the ecumenical era.

However, despite their common ecclesiology, there are significant differences within the Baptist family. Some are Arminian, some Calvinist in theology, though this distinction is now less important than hitherto. Some hold rigidly to everything in the seventeenth century confessions, others are liberal Protestants, scarcely differing in approach from their equivalents in the churches that baptise infants. Some Baptist churches welcome women ministers, others don't. Some 'strict and particular' Baptists hold aloof even from more liberal Baptists let alone other denominations. Many other Baptists enjoy good ecumenical relationships. One thinks for example of such British Baptists as J.H. Shakespeare, Morris West, Ernest Payne and, most recently, Keith Clements.

The Baptist team in the recent dialogue realise they have to represent a wide constituency. From time to time, the diversity of Baptist positions is explained in this report<sup>8</sup>.

What is significant about the present report is the extent to which Baptist and Roman Catholic members have come to acknowledge important commonalities in their understanding of Church as communion, oversight within it and the relationship between local church, albeit differently defined, and universal Church. Attention has also been given to the position of the Mother of Christ within the life of the Church, a subject previously avoided in international dialogues except for ARCIC<sup>9</sup>.

After the initial scene setting preface, the Report is divided into six sections. Section II deals with the koinonia of the Triune God and the Church, Section III with the authority of Christ in Scripture and Tradition, section IV with Baptism and the Lord's Supper or Eucharist, the Visible World of God in the Koinonia of the Church, section V with Mary as a model of discipleship within the communion of the Church and section VI with the Ministry of Oversight and Unity in the Life of the Church. Finally, section VII gives some concluding Reflections and commends the Report to the prayerful attention of both communions.

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<sup>6</sup> Excellent introductions to Baptist ecclesiology can be found in Walton, Robert C. *The Gathered Community* (1946) and Fiddes, Paul S. *Tracks and Traces. Baptist Identity in Ecclesiology* (2003). A quick reading of Fiddes' book alongside the report will quickly reveal his profound influence on the latter.

<sup>7</sup> paras 16,17.

<sup>8</sup> As e.g. over whether women may be ordained ministers.

<sup>9</sup> Dealt with, however, in two national dialogues, the American Lutheran-Roman Catholic and the British Methodist-Roman Catholic and, most notably, in the French *Groupe des Dombes*.

Two very useful features of the Report are, firstly, that statements fully agreed by both sides are clearly indicated in bold type, secondly, that a full list is given of the particular papers presented by individual members of the group.

I also, at this point, acknowledge the kindness of a British Baptist participant in the dialogue, Rev. Tony Peck, secretary of the European Baptist Federation, who discussed both the dialogue in general and a draft of this paper with me, any remaining errors or misjudgements being purely mine!

### **The Koinonia of the Triune God and the Church**

Section II begins with the statement that 'Jesus Christ is thus God's revelation, who draws us into communion with God's own life and with each other...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'<sup>10</sup>. This is followed by a mutual acceptance of the language of koinonia which 'has become our common language, whether Catholic or Protestant'<sup>11</sup>, a testimony to the generally developing ecumenical consensus of the last fifty years. Communion ecclesiology expresses the heart of the nature of the Church<sup>12</sup>. It applies at all 'levels' of church life. It also resonates with the *sensus fidelium* across the churches which has always held to the co-inherence of each Christian and each local church within the Universal Church<sup>13</sup>.

There follows a discussion of the relationship between local and universal Church, local being understood differently in the two traditions, as congregation by Baptists and as diocese under a bishop by Roman Catholics. It is agreed that the three constituents of a local church, however defined, are the celebration of the gospel sacraments, the authentic preaching of the word and an apostolic ministry<sup>14</sup>. The last and its source are differently interpreted, the ministry for Catholics being necessarily threefold in strict apostolic succession in office. For Baptists, a ministry of preaching and oversight is seen as important to full churchly life, but its authority emerges in the mutual submission of congregation and minister to the authority of Christ present in the local congregation. Episcopate or oversight flows between the communal, the personal and the collegial, a minister being chosen as one to whom the community is led to entrust oversight<sup>15</sup>.

One of the key remaining differences between the traditions relates to authority, seen as hierarchical within the Catholic tradition but as flowing between minister and congregation in the Baptist tradition. One should add, however, that this report does show signs of developing closer convergence. Baptists, while insisting that the authority of wider assemblies cannot over rule that of local churches, nevertheless accept that their pronouncements are to be taken seriously within member congregations<sup>16</sup>. It is perhaps surprising that more is not said from the Catholic side about increasing consultation with the laity.

A matter of considerable satisfaction for Baptists, especially British Baptists who stress this strongly, is the common understanding of Church as *covenant community*, a concept received by the Catholic

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<sup>10</sup> para 7.

<sup>11</sup> para 8.

<sup>12</sup> para 11 and, be it noted, a fully agreed one.

<sup>13</sup> para 12 stresses this relationship as common to both Baptist and Catholic ecclesiology. I have added the reference to the common *sensus fidelium* across the churches.

<sup>14</sup> para 13.

<sup>15</sup> para 25.

<sup>16</sup> para 15.

participants and accompanied by the statement that though the two churches do not enjoy perfect communion, they cannot be said to be out of communion on account of their common sharing in the fundamental koinonia of the triune God<sup>17</sup>. It is stressed that covenant does not imply a purely human agreement, but is a response by those covenanting to form a church to the prior initiative of Christ in so calling them.

Both Roman Catholics and Baptists accept that in the eucharist the communion of the local church with the wider Church is signified and effected<sup>18</sup>. They do not agree on presidency at the eucharist, Catholics insisting that this must always be in the hands of a priest ordained by a bishop in apostolic succession. Baptists accept that it is most appropriate that an ordained minister should preside as representing the wider Church within the local, but they insist that the local church may, on occasion, decide otherwise<sup>19</sup>.

From this, it will be seen that the way in which local churches can arise and be integrated into the wider fellowship remains an issue. For Catholics this integration must always be effected through the relevant Catholic hierarchy. For Baptists, it is a matter of voluntary association with the wider Church<sup>20</sup>. One traditional Roman Catholic misunderstanding may, however, be laid to rest. Baptists do believe that the unity of Christians must be visible. They also accept that the Universal Church has a real visible existence and that it consists of all who have true faith in Christ<sup>21</sup>.

Para 26 underlines the view of both communions. 'Local churches and congregations have communion with each other in order to hear the word of God and find the mind of Christ together'. A significant point is made about the role of the Holy Spirit who 'opens the koinonia to ever-new dimensions of relationship...God always fulfils his purpose in unexpected ways. It follows that our perception of God's purpose always needs to be renewed'<sup>22</sup>.

Finally, both communions express their catholicity as 'not a static possession of the Church', but one that is 'actively sought in mission which aims at the proclamation and reception of the fullness of the Gospel throughout time and space'<sup>23</sup>. 'Catholicity is expressed when the message of Christ is proclaimed in a wide variety of languages and thought forms, when the eucharist is celebrated by peoples of many cultures...when ministry enjoys and serves communion both locally and at wider regional and world-wide levels'<sup>24</sup>.

### **Scripture and Tradition**

The next section deals first with the place of Scripture in the Church and then with the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. Significant agreement is recorded on some points and an

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<sup>17</sup> paras 16, 24

<sup>18</sup> para 18 notes the strong relationship between the Church and the sacraments/ordinances.

<sup>19</sup> paras 21,22.

<sup>20</sup> paras 21,22. In this context it is helpful to refer to the article in *One in Christ* (1994) by Jean-Marie Tillard, entitled, 'We are Different', in which he contrasts the way in which in the Catholic and Orthodox churches, new churches are always integrated into an existing structure, whereas amongst many Protestants (not just Baptists), new churches can develop spontaneously even though they then seek union with wider structures.

<sup>21</sup> para 25.

<sup>22</sup> para 10.

<sup>23</sup> para 29.

<sup>24</sup> para 30.

important degree of convergence on others. Scripture is central to the life of the Church<sup>25</sup>. The criterion by which it is to be interpreted is Christ<sup>26</sup>. It is the divinely authorised norm for faith and practice, canonised as such by the believing community. Both churches recognise that the canon of scripture is related to the tradition forming process of the first centuries of the Church<sup>27</sup>.

The term 'sacramentality of the word' is used<sup>28</sup>. One may add that, though not normally used by Baptists or other Protestants, it does testify to a truth deeply held in the *sensus fidei* of all Protestants. It is a truth beautifully expressed by Charles Wesley in his hymn, 'Come, divine interpreter' with its lines,

'Come divine interpreter

Bring me eyes thy book to read

Ears the mystic words to hear,

Words which did from thee proceed,

Words that endless bliss impart

Kept in an obedient heart<sup>29</sup>.'

Both churches accept the need for a teaching office in relation to the expounding of Scripture. It is, however, located differently, in the magisterium of Pope and bishops for Catholics and in the 'congregational hermeneutics' of the local church, a process that developed in the radical Reformation<sup>30</sup>.

The Baptists begin the second part of this section by stressing the extent to which modern Baptist scholarship shows a greater appreciation of tradition than previously. The next para marks the agreement that 'the Bible is a written embodiment of a living tradition handed down through the work of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the people of God'<sup>31</sup>. 'There is a certain co-inherence of Scripture and living tradition in the sense of a mutual indwelling and interweaving of each other'. Scripture and Tradition should not be seen as two separate sources, but rather as 'two streams flowing together from the same source, the self-revelation of the triune God in Christ'<sup>32</sup>. It is, however, important to distinguish Tradition from ecclesiastical traditions which can be regarded as alterable<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> para 35.

<sup>26</sup> paras 46 and 47, which cite Hugh of St Victor and a Southern Baptist confession.

<sup>27</sup> paras 37, 44.

<sup>28</sup> para 40. It is also used by Congar. See his *The Word and the Spirit* (ET, 1986), p.25.

<sup>29</sup> *Singing the Faith*, (the current official British Methodist hymnal), no 154.

<sup>30</sup> paras 36,49.

<sup>31</sup> paras 55,56.

<sup>32</sup> para 58.

<sup>33</sup> para 59. However, it should be added that this does not solve all the problems. Thus, some things that Catholics regard as Tradition in the *unalterable* sense, Baptists would regard as *alterable* tradition with a small 't'. The threefold ministry is strict succession would be an example.

Particularly significant for further dialogue, and, indeed dialogue between Catholics and Protestants in general is the dictum of Joseph Ratzinger that 'Scripture *is* the word of God consigned to writing. Tradition is only described functionally in terms of what it *does*, handing on the Word of God, but not actually being the Word of God'. Alongside this, a Baptist theologian proposes that 'Baptists who insist on the articulation of the Trinity, using patristic phrases would do well to assert *suprema scriptura* rather than an unqualified *sola scriptura*. These two theologoumena, one from each tradition would seem, in a particularly neat manner, to maintain the primacy of Scripture in Christian teaching alongside an acceptance that other, later formulations, consonant with Scripture but not immediately derivable from it, may be validly used in the subsequent exploration and exposition of the Christian faith<sup>34</sup>.

Finally, stress is placed on the need to reconcile the traditional teaching that revelation ended with the last apostle with the belief that God still speaks in acts of preaching<sup>35</sup>. There is a need to distinguish between legitimate development and illegitimate accretion in subsequent theological thinking<sup>36</sup>.

Quite rightly, this section is regarded both by the dialogue team and two subsequent Catholic commentators as a particular achievement. The initial para asserts the increasing degree of convergence<sup>37</sup>.

### **Sacraments and Ordinances**

The fourth section relates primarily to the sacraments. Significantly, the terms sacraments and ordinance, the latter more often used by Baptists, are both employed. The ensuing discussion will prove of wider ecumenical use since the term ordinance is also used by some other radically Protestant communions rather than sacrament which they feel bears too many 'catholic' connotations. An attempt to bridge the gap between the two concepts held in tension has been the aim of the WCC Faith and Order ecclesiological process, culminating in the recent report *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*.<sup>38</sup>

Though the Baptists admit that some of the use of the term ordinance has been to hold perceived Catholic errors at arms' length, the Baptist participants in the dialogue assert that, in practice, Baptists often approach the ordinances in a way that may seem very sacramental to other Christians<sup>39</sup>. They accept that Christ offers grace *through* the sacraments/ordinances, thus distancing themselves from any *ex opere operato* concept that may deny either the sovereignty of God or the

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<sup>34</sup> para 62.

<sup>35</sup> para 67. A recent Catholic account is cited, 'God who spoke of old still maintains uninterrupted conversation with the bride of His Son.' c.f. also *The Apostolic Tradition*, the fifth report of the international Methodist-Roman Catholic dialogue (1991), para 13, "The church is sustained by a conversation, initiated by the Lord.' See *Growth in Agreement* (vol 2), op cit, p. 600.

<sup>36</sup> para 67.

<sup>37</sup> para 34. It welcomes 'a more appreciative approach to the value of tradition in interpreting Scripture on the part of the Baptists and a more critical approach to tradition on the part of the Catholic participants'. This section also acknowledges the effect of historical factors in polarising attitudes to scripture reading on the Catholic side and the absolutist stance on sole scriptural authority on the Baptist.

<sup>38</sup> *The Church Towards a Common Vision*, para 44. See also my commentary in ET, June 2013.

<sup>39</sup> para 75.

need for a fruitful human response (the latter a stress the Catholics heartily endorse)<sup>40</sup>. The following points are jointly endorsed, that the two terms express both God's own gift and a fruitful human response, that the sacraments are central to the life of the Church, that they proclaim what God has done in Christ and that 'they are experiences of encounter with Christ that transform the lives of those who enter into them by the presence and power of the Spirit.'<sup>41</sup>

One wonders whether the remaining Baptist hesitations over the concept that the sacraments 'confer grace' could be resolved by a consideration of the eternal faithfulness of God to his plan of salvation, which includes the continued proclamation of Christ's death 'until his coming again' as a means of grace to which a blessing is *always* attached when faithfully received .

The subsection on baptism begins with the agreement that baptism is in accordance with the command in Matt 28:19-20 and that through it 'we are brought more deeply into the communion of the triune God and we share in the life, death and resurrection of Christ'<sup>42</sup>. It must be performed with water and only once<sup>43</sup>. Significantly, it is also agreed that 'initiation into Christ is a process wider than the act of baptism'<sup>44</sup>. From the Baptist side, this reflects the fruits of their conversation with other partners, particularly Anglicans, in which they have come both to speak of a *process* of Christian initiation and ways of recognising patterns of such initiation other than their own, patterns that can begin with infant baptism<sup>45</sup>. The Commission argue that, in their relationship, they feel it would be better to work towards mutual recognition of patterns of initiation rather than a common baptism, since, for Baptists, infant baptism cannot have the same meaning as believers' baptism on profession of faith<sup>46</sup>.

It is worth adding that this approach is felt by some Baptists to be very helpful in all their conversations with churches that practice infant baptism<sup>47</sup>.

It is also important in this context to understand that though all Baptists insist that Baptism should be on conscious profession of faith, they do not have an absolutely uniform attitude to those who join them from a background in other traditions. Many Baptist churches practice open communion, regarding the table as the Lord's Table and believing that they have no right to prevent other professing Christians from sharing at it. Of these, some churches also practice open membership, admitting as members those who may have been baptised in infancy but without later undergoing believers' baptism. Others are stricter and there are both 'closed membership' churches, where membership is only open to those first baptised as believers.

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<sup>40</sup> paras 75-85.

<sup>41</sup> para 85.

<sup>42</sup> para 93.

<sup>43</sup> para 107.

<sup>44</sup> para 101.

<sup>45</sup> See e.g. *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity. Anglicans and Baptists in Conversation* (2005), published jointly by the Faith and Order Executive of the Baptist Union and the Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England. It is increasingly realised across many communions that Christian life goes on developing as each person lives out the consequences of their baptism.

<sup>46</sup> para 103.

<sup>47</sup> I owe this point to a conversation with Rev. Tony Peck, already referred to at the end of the section 'Baptists and Roman Catholics.'

Both traditions regard the eucharist/Lord's Supper as essential to church life. Baptists do not use the expression 'the eucharist makes the Church', but accept that in the Supper Christ unites the communicants with all the faithful<sup>48</sup>. The trinitarian pattern inherent in the eucharist is stressed.

'In it, the Church prays to the Father in thanksgiving 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 on the Holy Spirit (epiclesis) to make the presence of Christ real to his disciples'<sup>49</sup>.

This would seem, thanks to the overall modern ecumenical consensus, to draw the two traditions very close to each other. However, some distinctions and caveats are made from both sides. The Catholics reiterate the traditional Tridentine teaching that the Mass is 'one and the same sacrifice with Calvary, not a multiplication or repetition of sacrifices'<sup>50</sup>. The Baptists say that they cannot agree with aspects of the Catholic sacrificial teaching, even though, tantalisingly from a Catholic point of view, they say that they find some resonances with that teaching; nevertheless, they accept that they are participating in the very events of the death and resurrection of Christ and sharing in all their benefits. However, they believe that only Christ rather than the Church can present Himself to the Father<sup>51</sup>. This point raises the whole question of the degree of identity between Christ and His people, a point on which the New Testament evidence is variable with the Church sometimes being totally identified with Christ, as in the question of the risen Christ to the persecutor Saul on the Damascus Road<sup>52</sup>, sometimes dissociated from Him as in the condemnations of various local churches in the Book of Revelation<sup>53</sup>. This question clearly merits further discussion in this dialogue as in some others.

This subsection ends with recording the differences over presidency at the eucharist, Baptists asserting that they find the necessity of a sacrificial office of ministry as being in tension with the belief that the Church is formed by the presence of the risen Christ<sup>54</sup>. Further work is clearly required on this and on the way in which both president and people may be said to celebrate together and with the rest of the Church Universal at each eucharist<sup>55</sup>.

#### Section V. **Mary as a model of discipleship in the Church.**

The degree of consensus in this section is almost certainly well in advance of the thinking of most Baptists as of most other Protestants, who tend to think about Mary only at Christmas. Nevertheless, the consensus statements are well supported from the text of the New Testament. It is agreed at the beginning that Mary has a significant place in the New Testament, a point that might have been further reinforced by stressing that, though little in terms of number of words is said

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<sup>48</sup> para 117.

<sup>49</sup> para 121.

<sup>50</sup> para 13.

<sup>51</sup> para 124.

<sup>52</sup> Acts 9:5. 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?'

<sup>53</sup> Revelation, chs 1-3.

<sup>54</sup> para 129.

<sup>55</sup> The first point needs exploration in terms of the royal priesthood of all the faithful, the living stones (1 Peter 2:9,5) and the second in terms of the Eucharistic which expresses praise together with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven'. Congar, Y in *Lay People in the Church* (ET, 1957), p.212, stresses that the eucharist is the offering of the *whole* Church.

about her in it, that little is said at very significant stages in the history of Christ. Mary is a witness to the saving acts from his conception and birth through to his death and resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit<sup>56</sup>. She is a hearer of the Word, a woman of faith, not merely a passive instrument, but one who grew in faith and understanding, actively engaged in and freely consenting to God's purpose<sup>57</sup>. She had a special calling, but needed first to be elected, justified and sanctified. She was a model of faithful listening and obedience to God. She is not only the first disciple of her Son, but also a representative figure of the Church of Christ<sup>58</sup>. It is strange that more is not made of her 'pondering' and contemplation, as recorded by Luke<sup>59</sup>.

All the above is agreed as is the common belief that doctrine about her should be securely anchored in Scripture. However, Baptists are insistent that the doctrines of the perpetual virginity, the immaculate conception and the bodily assumption at her death into heaven have no biblical warrant<sup>60</sup>. By contrast, Catholics, as a result of their different understanding of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition do see the disputed three doctrines as consonant with it<sup>61</sup>. Baptists fear that the doctrine of the immaculate conception and thus of Mary's total life-long freedom from sin may make it more difficult for others to identify with her as a model of discipleship<sup>62</sup>. Concerns were also expressed by some Baptists and Catholics that too great a stress on Mary's virginity and motherhood might obscure other features of her prophetic ministry, as shown in the Magnificat<sup>63</sup>. A common concern for a balanced approach is made in para 159.

'Because Mary always witnesses to Christ, the representation of her which is received in various cultures is subject to the Gospel as the norm which is centred on Christ'.

Effectively this sub-section invites Baptists to a much fuller appreciation of Mary, though always within what they can see as clear biblical limits. Catholics also accept that 'exaggerated veneration of Mary obscures the centrality Christ'<sup>64</sup>. In conversation with me, Tony Peck accepts that many Baptists are happy about prayer *with* the saints, while continuing to have strong reservations about prayer to the saints.

#### Section VI. **The Ministry of Oversight in the Church.**

This section starts with the common affirmation that 'Christ, the Head of the Church, her founder, creator and cornerstone...nourishes and sustains her with the proclamation of the Gospel and the celebration of the sacraments and ordinances...through these means the Church grows in communion with God'. It continues 'episcopate is a gift of Christ to the Church to enable the ministry

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<sup>56</sup> para 133.

<sup>57</sup> para 139.

<sup>58</sup> para 154 'Mary is a representative figure of the Church of Christ...her faithfulness at the cross represents that of Christ'

<sup>59</sup> Luke 2; 19, 52.

<sup>60</sup> para 148. Note that Rom 3:23 'all have sinned' is cited against any belief in an immaculate conception. Several other New Testament texts are also cited to the same effect.

<sup>61</sup> To use the term adopted in the ARCIC document, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ* (2005).

<sup>62</sup> para 153.

<sup>63</sup> para 153.

<sup>64</sup> para 160.

of the whole people of God. The episcopate of some is a gift to enable and equip the body of Christ as a whole<sup>65</sup>.

The differing views of ministry of oversight are then set out. 'For Baptists, Christ creates *koinonia* in the Church...episcopate flows from this as Christ and the community together, Christ calling, the community recognising, appoint some to personal oversight'. For Catholics, episcopate derives from the succession of those installed in strict succession to the original apostles<sup>66</sup>. Both churches claim that traces of their respective patterns of oversight can be discerned in the NT<sup>67</sup>. Both accept that their patterns reflect the modern consensus in oversight as exercised in personal, collegial and communal ways that are 'not exclusive but bound together in network of dynamic relations'. However, a later paragraph indicates that amongst Baptists, it tends to be communal episcopate that is stressed, amongst Catholics personal<sup>68</sup>.

Oversight is primarily exercised in the local church, but always in communion with the wider Church. Both traditions agree that personal episcopate is exercised for the good of the Church, but for Catholics the oversight of bishops is of the *esse* of the Church whereas for Baptists personal oversight is of the *bene esse*, of the well being of the Church, without being absolutely essential<sup>69</sup>. Most Baptists believe that a minister of a local church is a minister in general and that he or she represents the wider Church to the local congregation which is wholly church but not the whole of the Church<sup>70</sup>. It is agreed that the ministry of episcopate is a service of unity, a unity which is both spiritual and visible<sup>71</sup>. Baptists distinguish between the responsibility of ministers for maintaining within the local church an 'overall vision of the body', in contrast to the responsibilities of the deacons which are purely local<sup>72</sup>.

The Baptist stress on the priesthood of all believers is held to correspond to the Catholic stress on the common priesthood<sup>73</sup>, a statement which perhaps slightly overlooks the difference between the Baptist and general radical Protestant stress on the priesthood of each *individual* believer and the greater catholic stress on the whole body of the Church as a *corporate* priesthood. Nevertheless it is to be noted that such theologians as Congar stress the privilege of filial access to the Father, based on Paul's teaching in Romans 8<sup>74</sup>. It is perhaps surprising in view both of the traditional stress in independent ecclesiology on the responsibilities of all church members and of Catholic thinking about the laity at and since Vatican II, that not more is said about the responsibility of the laity and the means by which the ministers of the Church may consult with them and receive their insights.

In the latter part of this section, there are some important reflections on the apostolicity of the Church. This is said to be expressed both in faith and ministry, the latter being apostolic in so far as it hands on the apostolic faith and fulfils the missionary mandate<sup>75</sup>. A difference as to the use of the

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<sup>65</sup> paras 162,165.

<sup>66</sup> paras 163,164.

<sup>67</sup> para 168.

<sup>68</sup> para 194.

<sup>69</sup> para 180.

<sup>70</sup> para 178.

<sup>71</sup> paras 182,184.

<sup>72</sup> para 178.

<sup>73</sup> para 167.

<sup>74</sup> Congar, Y. *Lay People in the Church* (ET 1957).

<sup>75</sup> para 186.

creeds is discussed, their common witness being admitted<sup>76</sup>. A key difference is recorded in relation to the possibility of infallible teaching, Baptists believing that infallibility belongs only to Christ, the Word of God<sup>77</sup>. Para 192 presents a very carefully nuanced view of the respective roles of pastor and people within a Baptist congregation for apostolic teaching, the pastor's authority sometimes giving him the right to give words of prophetic warning over against his congregation, this being balanced by an emphasis on the fact that the congregation never abandons its own responsibility, which can include the right to discern that a pastor is no longer called to continue as such amongst them.

This section concludes with some remarks on the petrine ministry. Baptists doubt that the three key gospel petrine texts provide any basis for an ongoing petrine ministry<sup>78</sup>. They argue that the history of the papacy involves both positive and negative facets that need re-evaluation today. They admit that many Baptists were impressed by the ministry of John-Paul II and can see advantages in there being a world spokesman for the Christian faith. Perhaps the time has come for a Baptist response to *Ut Unum Sint*, a response, one may add, that would now also be influenced by a Baptist assessment of the ministry of Pope Francis<sup>79</sup>. Interestingly, it is suggested that, 'for the moment', Baptists cannot envisage a universal ministry; at another point, there is a suggestion that ministries of wider episcopal might, for Baptists, best take a communal form<sup>80</sup>. It is clear that the Baptists in the dialogue do not wish to close the issue of a universal ministry of oversight permanently. Para 204 strikes a notably more positive note (from a Roman Catholic point of view) than some of the previous ones. It suggests that a helpful step might be to make formal responses to *Ut Unum Sint* and consider ways in which a ministry of unity might be exercised in a manner acceptable to other churches. Church leaders might consider how they could act together to guide our communities at all levels, including the universal. Because of the widely recognised position of the Pope, he might be in a position to initiate common approaches to theological, ethical and other problems by the churches. than some of the preceding ones

It is clear that much work remains to be done on the topic of ministry and oversight. English Baptists and Catholics will remember the *Called To Be One Process* in ecclesiology in which all participant churches were invited to re-examine the both the theological basis of their bonds of communion and their practical outworking in terms of relationship between all levels of church life, local, regional and universal<sup>81</sup>. For Catholics there might be much to be learnt about greater unity and consultation at the parish level from Baptist practice and ecclesial consciousness, for Baptists, there might be much to be learnt from Catholics about unity and consultation at wider levels.

### **Final Reflections.**

In sum, this is a thought provoking report which should, granted an adequate reception process, lead to much greater mutual respect between Baptists and Catholics. The members of the dialogue commission rightly claim three particular achievements. The first is that all the continuing divergences between the traditions have been examined in an irenic and respectful manner. The

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<sup>76</sup> para 188. The Creeds are rarely used in Baptist worship, though their doctrinal witness and faithfulness to Scripture was admitted in early English Baptist confessions.

<sup>77</sup> para 188.

<sup>78</sup> para 198.

<sup>79</sup> para 202.

<sup>80</sup> para 196.

<sup>81</sup> A process initiated by Churches Together in England in 1991, issuing in the report *Called To Be One* in 1995.

second is that both partners have been led to reconsider, on a strongly biblical foundation, the degree of honour that they give to the Virgin Mary. Baptists need to consider whether they have done adequate justice to what scripture teaches, Catholics to see why some other Christians may find certain aspects of Catholic marian devotion off putting. Finally, there is the very considerable convergence over the old issue of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition.

The Commission complete their own reflections by stating that 'we each discern in the others communion characteristics of the Church of Christ because we recognise there the presence of Jesus Christ, Lord of the Church'. This degree of recognition, following on an earlier reflection that, within the universal koinonia their churches cannot be completely out of communion with each other, merits further reflection and mutual exploration of each other's life and work in a process of sharing the fruits of faith and learning in a mutual process of receptive ecumenism. If all this is carried out in the spirit of mutual edification shown by St Paul when he expressed his desire to visit the Church in Rome and share encouragement in faith<sup>82</sup>, then surprising discoveries might be possible.

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<sup>82</sup> Romans 1:12.