CENTRE FOR BAPTIST HISTORY AND HERITAGE STUDIES VOLUME 12

Sharing the Faith at the Boundaries of Unity

Further Conversations between Anglicans and Baptists

Paul S. Fiddes (Editor)

Sharing the Faith at the Boundaries of Unity

This book is quite unlike other reports of ecumenical conversations. In its conversational form it aims to give the reader a flavour of the cut and thrust of friendly debate, on the key theme of sharing the Christian faith today. How do we know what the faith is? How do we receive and grow in the faith? How do we celebrate the faith in worship? How do we share the faith beyond the walls of the church? The conversations reported in this book, seeking to answer these questions, follow up the report published ten years ago under the title *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity*, which was widely recognized to have broken fresh ground in ecumenical dialogue. Once again conversation-partners commissioned by the Church of England and the Baptist Union of Great Britain produce a report which enables readers to stand on the borders of unity between Christian churches, as well as on the borders between the church and society around. Its purpose is to draw in readers themselves to share the conversation.

"Throughout these conversation we accepted one another as Christians, we accepted each other's churches as churches, we acknowledged (and rejoiced in) our unity as believers in Christ. We didn't look for structural solutions to the patterns, traditions and beliefs that separate us. We sought to learn from each other, and to discover to what extent we could worship and witness together. We believe that our conversations can aid our mutual understanding, our mutual love as Christians, and real shared worship and witness."

- *The Rt Revd Donald Allister, Bishop of Peterborough*

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Centre for Baptist History and Heritage Studies
Volume 12

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A Report Commissioned by:
The Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England
& the Faith and Society Team of the Baptist Union
of Great Britain

Edited by

Paul S. Fiddes

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1
Introduction (to be read)

Some readers will notice, we hope, a resonance of the title of this report with an earlier publication called *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity*. Ten years ago representatives of the Church of England and the Baptist Union of Great Britain published a report which they believed was opening up a new way of conducting ecumenical conversations. The conversations they had been engaged in, over some fifteen years, had been without the intention of working towards a formal union of their communions, but those participating thought that they had come to important conclusions that needed urgently to be shared and tested out among their churches. They felt that they were indeed 'pushing at the boundaries' of what seemed possible on the ecumenical scene, and that careful and prayerful attention to the report might take Baptists and Anglicans a great deal further forward on the path of shared discipleship, worship and mission.

The conversations at that time had concentrated on the issues of baptism, oversight, apostolicity and recognition. They called especially for Baptists and Anglicans to recognize that they had all shared a 'journey of initiation' into Christ, whatever their differences about the moment of baptism, and they concluded that 'our different ways of discerning apostolicity should not prevent us' from seeing each other as truly sharing in the apostolic mission of the people of God.[1] The participants in those conversations still hope that others may join with them in 'pushing at the boundaries', not least through using a popular study-guide on the report which is freely available for use among the churches.[2]

Meanwhile, the Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England and the Faith and Unity Executive Committee of the Baptist Union of Great

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[1] *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity. Anglicans and Baptists in Conversation*. The Council for Christian Unity of the Church of England and the Faith and Unity Executive Committee of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), pp. 120–1.

[2] It can be downloaded from the website of the Baptist Union of Great Britain: go to http://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/220853/Ecumenical_Relationships.aspx.

Britain believed, in the light of this report, that it was time to think further about what it means to share in the 'apostolic mission' of God's people. It seemed right to pursue the theme of 'Confessing the Faith Today', and to do so by more reflection on the actual life and experience of our churches than had been possible in the previous report. The group began to meet in 2011, but by the time it had finished its work, in 2014, the wider life of the Baptist Union had made its impact on the project; in a far-reaching re-organization of the Union the Faith and Unity Executive Committee no longer existed, and responsibility for commissioning the report had moved to the new 'Faith and Society' Team.

At the first meeting of members of the conversations, it seemed clear that the questions that needed to be considered were the following. How do we know what the apostolic faith is? How do we receive and grow in the faith? How do we celebrate the faith in worship? How do we share the faith beyond the walls of the church? The report of conversations that follows is structured around those four questions. The first is the foundation for the next three, and so occupies the whole of Part I. Uniquely, it concludes with a joint proposal by all the conversation partners on 'Doing Theology Together as Baptists and Anglicans'. The scene being set, Part II explores the other three questions, and the report concludes in Part III with some reflections on the reasons for the conversations. The report proper is then followed by two pieces of commentary, which also consider how the conversations might be continued in the churches as other partners join in the circle of talk and mutual challenge. The title of the report calls us all to stand at those boundaries which often restrain union between us, and there to make a common witness to our faith.

Ecumenical reports frequently refer to 'conversations' between members of different communions. However, what they offer is not an account of the actual conversations themselves but a distilled account of their conclusions. Readers can often deduce what the cut and thrust of debate must have been that lies behind the 'agreed statement', but for the most part they have to guess at it. This report is different, deliberately. Just as the previous report 'pushed at the boundaries' that inhibit unity, this one also reaches beyond, even breaks, the normal framework of reports. It 'pushes the envelope' of a report in aiming to give the reader a taste of what the participants said to

each other. In so doing it seeks to give insight into the life and ethos of each communion, rather than simply repeating established viewpoints.

The report thus offers an interplay of contribution and response by named members of the group. This written version bears the marks of the way conversation happened. One participant was asked to start reflection on one of the questions by writing a paper, and another person – from the other communion – wrote a companion paper or a direct response. Discussion by the whole group followed at one or more meetings, and in the light of this conversation (carefully recorded in minutes) further contributions and responses were made by the original conversation-partners, and sometimes by others in the group as well. More conversation ensued as the responses accumulated, and earlier contributions were revised as the interchange developed. It was hard to know where to stop the process, and many questions were left open-ended, inviting the readers of this report to join in the conversation.

Inevitably, what is written and said by the participants tends to be a mixture of official representation of their communions, and their own approach and theology. They have tried, honestly and conscientiously, to make the difference clear. We hope that this makes the conversation more interesting, giving a sense of diversity *within* Baptist and Anglican life as well as *between* the two communions.

Different chapters may also appeal to different people, and it may help readers to know that – although there is a reason for placing the chapters in the order they stand here – those interested in some particular subject can begin their reading at any point.

As several conversations included in this report remind us, we are standing at the boundaries of unity in order to share our faith together across another boundary, one between the churches and wider society. Our cover illustration brings this boundary to mind. The East Window of the Anglican church of St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, is an interface between the worship of the church and the busy, everyday life of Trafalgar Square around it. The design, in quite plain glass, can be seen clearly from outside, although the interior view also draws many passers-by and tourists – many without any obvious faith – who are curious to see this work of art. For those familiar with portrayals of the crucifixion the central window evokes the body of Christ with the head leaning in a traditional way to the right. For

others in our secular world the swirling lines of the steel framework between the panes evoke such images as a vortex of energy, a web of connection, a 'cosmic egg' at the centre of all life, and the pains of birth. There is at the same time a sense of fragmentation as the expected straight lines are disturbed. The window presents us with brokenness – in the crucified body of Christ, in the church and in the whole world. It invites us to stand on many boundaries, both within a broken church and also between the church and those beyond its physical walls.

One aim in these conversations is to discern common ground between Baptists and Anglicans in the key matter of confessing the Christian faith in our time, as well as to clarify differences that remain. But our hope goes beyond this mere recording of the situation. Our greater aim is to explore ways in which we can all be more effective in holding, understanding and communicating the faith which was 'once for all delivered' to the apostles, and which is about the power of the gospel of Christ to transform human individuals and society today.

Paul S. Fiddes, *Editor*

Commendation

This is not your usual ecumenical report. Like its predecessor, *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity*, it is not an account of detailed areas of agreement and disagreement between two churches, with the long-term hope or dream of intercommunion, sharing of ministries, or even a merger. Our two Christian communities, the Baptist Union of Great Britain and the Church of England, are too different from each other to contemplate any such outcome. The Church of England, with its archbishops, bishops, synods, and dioceses, its structure and its establishment, its liturgies and its defined doctrine, is nothing like the Baptist Union which is an inter-dependent fellowship of churches united by covenant with each other, working together but with each congregation having its own freedom to order its life and mission.

This report is an account, a writing-up, of conversations held over a three-year period, on the theme of how as Anglicans and Baptists we worship and how we bear witness to Jesus Christ in our world today. Throughout those conversation we accepted one another as Christians, we accepted each other's churches as churches, we acknowledged (and rejoiced in) our unity as believers in Christ. We didn't look for structural solutions to the patterns, traditions and beliefs that separate us. We sought to learn from each other, and to discover to what extent we could worship and witness together.

Of course, we were well aware of a huge range of beliefs and practices within the churches of the Baptist Union and those of the C of E. Some of the typically Baptist ways of worshipping are the norm in parts of the Church of England. Some typically Anglican bits of liturgy are regularly used in some Baptist churches. Some Baptists believe very strongly in the sort of 'public square' witness which may be thought of as typically Anglican, while some Anglicans much prefer a more conventionally Baptist pattern of personal evangelism. And so on.

We enjoyed our meetings, and benefitted from them. We believe that our conversations can aid our mutual understanding, our mutual love as Christians, and real shared worship and witness. We believe that far more unites us than separates us.

The first part of the report is perhaps more theoretical than the rest. If that isn't your scene please don't be put off. Those who like to start with more practical understanding and outworking might like to start at Part II, and finish with Part I. I am very grateful to Professor Paul Fiddes who agreed to edit our conversations, and who has made an excellent job of it, and to our colleagues from both communities for such thoughtful, good-natured and Christian conversation.

Donald Allister, *Bishop of Peterborough*
Ash Wednesday 2015

Part I

2
How do we know what the faith is?

A conversation between Martin Davie and Paul Fiddes

A. An Anglican statement by Martin Davie

1. What is 'the faith'?

A significant feature of the New Testament writings which is often overlooked is the way that they presuppose the existence of a corpus of authoritative teaching which has been handed down to the faithful and which they are expected to believe and uphold.

We can see this idea in the letters of St Paul in a variety of places. For example, in Romans 6:17 he refers to 'the standard of teaching to which you were committed', in Colossians 2:7 he exhorts the Colossians to be 'established in the faith as you have been taught it', in 2 Thessalonians 2:15 he tells the Thessalonians to 'stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter' and in Titus 1:9 he lays down that a bishop 'must hold fast to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also confute those who contradict it.'

The same idea is also put forward by a range of other New Testament writers. Thus in Hebrews 10:23 the writer to the Hebrews refers to 'the confession of our faith' to which he wants his readers to hold fast without wavering, in 1 Peter 1:25 St Peter talks about 'the good news which was preached to you,'[1] in Jude 3 and 20 St Jude refers to 'the faith once delivered to the saints' and 'your most holy faith' and 1 John 2:24 St John's readers are exhorted 'let what you have heard from the beginning abide in you.'[2]

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[1] In context this appears to refer to some form of baptismal catechesis.

[2] For a further discussion of the passages referred to in these two paragraphs and other similar passages see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*. Third Edition (Harlow: Longman, 1972), pp.8–11. New Testament scholars have suggested that

If we ask where this authoritative teaching came from, the answer that the New Testament gives us is that it was given to the church by the apostles and those associated with them such as the Lord's brothers St James and St. Jude. This is made clear by St Luke in his two part account of the origins of Christianity in Luke and Acts. In Luke and at the start of the first chapter of Acts Jesus instructs the apostles and from then onwards it is the apostles and those associated with them who give instruction to those who subsequently become Christians. It is this 'teaching of the apostles' (Acts 2:42) that is the standard of faith for the church. Although St. Paul is not part of the original group of apostles he is commissioned as an additional apostle by the risen Christ himself and his teaching is in line with the teaching of the other apostles.

This last point is also made by St. Paul himself in the opening chapters of Galatians. He emphasizes his own independent commissioning as an a apostle ('Paul an apostle – not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead': Galatians 1:1), but he also notes that what he preached as an apostle was 'the faith he once tried to destroy', the faith that was believed by the church in its earliest days (Galatians 1:23) and that it was recognized by the leaders of the church in Jerusalem that he had been appointed to preach to the Gentiles the same gospel that they had been appointed to preach to the Jews (Galatians 2:6–10). His subsequent argument with St Peter was not because he and St. Peter had a different understanding of what the gospel was but because St Peter was unwilling to behave in a way that was consistent with the gospel (Galatians 2:11–21). There were not two different gospels, a Pauline gospel and a Petrine one, but a single agreed gospel, which St Peter had failed to live out adequately.

It is the sort of New Testament passages to which I have just referred that are in mind when subsequent Christian theologians have referred to 'the faith.' This term has been used as a short hand for 'the apostolic faith' or 'the faith of the church' the agreed content of Christian belief that was first handed down by the apostles and that has been taught, believed and confessed by orthodox Christians ever since.

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elements of the sort of teaching referred to in these verses can be found in the speeches in Acts and embedded in the Epistles in passages such as 1 Cor 15:3–8, 11:23–25, Phil 2:5–11, 1 Tim 3:16 and 1 Pet 3:18 and 20.

When the question is asked 'how do we know what the faith is' this means that what is being asked is how we know what is the content of this body of agreed belief handed down in the church from its earliest days.

In the remainder of this paper I shall give an answer to this question from a Church of England perspective, taking the 'we' in the question to refer to those who belong to the Church of England. I am also giving an answer to this question from the standpoint of the Church of England's official teaching. Individual members of the Church of England might well give a variety of different answers to the question of how we know what the faith is, but for the purposes of this paper I am going to look at the answer officially given by the Church of England as a whole.

2. The teaching of Canons A5 and C15

The two places where the Church of England answers the question 'How do we know what the faith is?' are Canons A5 and C15. In order to understand the answers given in these canons it is necessary first of all to discuss the relationship between 'the faith' and 'doctrine'. The Greek word διδαχῆ (teaching) used by St. Paul in Romans 6:17 was translated in Latin as *doctrina* and from there into English as doctrine. Thus the Authorized Version of Romans 6:17 talks about 'that form of doctrine' to which the Romans were committed. This linguistic development meant that the term doctrine came to be used in English to refer to the understanding of the apostolic teaching held by the Christian church as a whole or by particular churches.

It is this meaning of the term doctrine that underlies what is said in Canon A5. When it talks about 'doctrine' this is shorthand for the understanding of apostolic faith held by the Church of England and means the same as 'the faith' in Canon C15.

Canon A5 declares:

> The doctrine of the Church of England is grounded in the Holy Scriptures, and in such teaching of the Fathers and Councils of the Church as are agreeable to the said Scriptures. In particular such doctrine is to be found in the

> Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the *Book of Common Prayer,* and the *Ordinal.*
>
> Canon C 15 states that the Church of England:
>
> > …professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation. Led by the Holy Spirit, it has born witness to Christian truth in its historic formularies, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, the *Book of Common Prayer* and the Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons.

What we find in these two statements is a threefold answer to the question, 'how do we know what the faith is?' They tell us that we know what the faith is through the Scriptures, the teaching of the Patristic period and the witness of the Church of England's three historic formularies. However, these three sources of our knowledge of the faith do not possess the same authority. The primary authority is the Holy Scriptures, the secondary authority is the teaching of the Patristic period and tertiary authority is the witness of the historic formularies.

In the remainder of this paper I shall unpack the theological logic that has led to the Church of England giving this threefold answer to the question of how we know what the faith is.

3. Why the Scriptures?

Both Canon A5 and Canon C15 see the Holy Scriptures as the primary place in which we gain knowledge of the faith. Although these canons themselves do not say so, when they are seen in the context of other Church of England statements such as Article VI of the Thirty Nine Articles it is clear that what they are talking about is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the thirty nine books of the Old Testament and the twenty seven books of the New.

To understand why the Church of England sees these books as primary the point we have to grasp is that although the apostolic witness was

originally given orally, as in St Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14–36) or St Paul's speech before the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:22–31), the teaching of the apostles and those associated with them also came to be set down in writings which were intended to convey through the written word the same faith that had originally been proclaimed through the spoken word. In Galatians, for example, the gospel that St Paul is seeking to expound through his letter is exactly the same one which he has previously preached to the Galatians and which he fears they are deserting.

As N. T. Wright notes, 'those who read these writings discovered, from very early on, that the books themselves carried the same power, the same *authority in action*, that had characterized the initial preaching of the word.'[3] Because the authority that had characterized the initial preaching of the word was a result of the work of the Holy Spirit given to the apostles in accordance with Jesus' promise (Acts 1:8) the early church drew the conclusion that the fact that these books possessed the same authority as that possessed by the apostles themselves meant that these books were inspired by the same Holy Spirit in order to preserve the apostolic teaching in permanent form in the church. The canonization of the New Testament books that gradually took place over the first four centuries was thus an act of acknowledgement, an acknowledgement that in this particular set of books the apostolic preaching and therefore the apostolic faith was recorded for posterity in a form inspired by God himself.[4]

In the face of the arguments of those such as Marcion who held that these books (or in his case some edited form of them) were sufficient on their own the early church also acknowledged that these books had to be read alongside the books of the Old Testament. This was because the apostles and the New Testament writings consistently taught that the Christian faith had to be understood against the background of the New Testament, because the story of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus was the story of how the God of the Old Testament had fulfilled his promises by sending his Son to free the world from sin and death so that God's people might share life with him for ever (for this see, for instance,

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[3] N. T. Wright, *Scripture and the Authority of God* (London: SPCK, 2006), p. 38, italics in the original.

[4] For the idea of canonization as an act of acknowledgement see John Webster, *Holy Scripture* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp.52–67.

Luke 1:67–79, Acts 2:14–36, Romans 1–8) and because the basic moral law set out in the Old Testament was still binding on Christian believers (Matthew 5:17–20, Romans 3:31, 1 Corinthians 6:9–11).

The early church therefore maintained a dual canon consisting of the books of both the Old and New Testaments, understood according to a scheme of promise and fulfilment, as the basis for its understanding of the faith and the Church of England has continued to do the same.

4. Why the Patristic writings?

The reason that the Church of England has seen the writings of the Patristic period[5] as being the secondary source of our knowledge of the faith is because it has believed that Patristic theologians such St, Irenaeus, St Athanasius and St Augustine, the great orthodox councils of the Patristic period such as the Councils of Nicaea, Second Constantinople and Chalcedon, and the three Catholic creeds that emerged out of the Patristic period, the Apostles', Nicene and Athanasian Creeds,[6] teach us how to understand properly the faith contained in the Scriptures. They teach us, for example, that in order to understand the faith correctly we have to understand that the God of the Old and the New Testament is one and the same, that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that Jesus is both truly human and truly divine and that salvation is a result of divine grace and not human effort.

The reason that the authority of the Patristic writings is secondary is because whereas the Scriptures, being inspired by God, have intrinsic authority, the Patristic writings have derived authority in the sense that their authority is dependent on their bearing faithful witness to the apostolic faith as this is taught in the Scriptures. They are authoritative precisely because they point us beyond themselves to the witness of Scripture. That is why it is specified in Canon A5 that it is only those Fathers and Councils that are

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[5] The Church of England has traditionally counted the first five centuries of the Christian era as constituting the Patristic period.

[6] The Apostles and Athanasian creeds were both produced after the end of the Patristic period as defined in the previous footnote, but they are both seen as embodying the key theological teaching produced during that period and are therefore included with it.

'agreeable to the said Scriptures' that are authoritative for the church of England's understanding of the faith.

5. Why the historic formularies?

The three historic formularies of the Church of England, the *Thirty Nine Articles* of 1571 and the *Book of Common Prayer* and the *Ordinal* of 1662 were produced during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in order to give theological and liturgical expression to the faith contained in the Scriptures and witnessed to by the writings of the Patristic period. The reason the Church of England views them as having authority as source for its knowledge of the faith is that it judges that they fulfil this objective.

Thus Articles I and II of the *Thirty Nine Articles* witness to the Biblical and Patristic teaching concerning the Trinity and the Incarnation, the general confession at Morning and Evening Prayer in the *Book of Common Prayer* reflects the Biblical and Patristic testimony to universal human sinfulness, and the service for the Ordering of Priests in the *Ordinal* reflects what the Bible and the Patristic writings have to say about the nature of priestly ministry.

The historic formularies bear a tertiary witness to the apostolic faith in the sense that they are dependent on the Scriptures as read in the light of the Patristic writings. Like the Patristic writings they have derivative rather than an intrinsic authority, but in their case it is a double derivation.

6. What about nature and reason?

Thus far nothing has been said about the place of natural theology as a source for our knowledge of the faith. This omission is deliberate and is due to the fact that natural theology cannot give us knowledge of the apostolic faith. The Church of England has traditionally given an important role to natural theology in its apologetics as a way of showing that the faith is congruent with our general knowledge of the world.[7]

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[7] Two classic examples of Church of England natural theology are J. Butler, *The Analogy of Religion* (London: Dent, 1936) and William Temple's two works *Mens Creatrix* and *Christus Veritas* (London: Macmillan, 1949).

However, it has not derived its knowledge of the faith from natural theology because while natural theology can show us some things such as, for instance, that God exists, that he is the ultimate source of our awareness of good and evil and that human beings can only find their true fulfilment beyond this world it cannot tell us those things that are at the heart of the faith, what Richard Hooker calls 'those hidden mysteries that reason could never have been able to find out.'[8] It cannot tell us that the creator God is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who has fulfilled his promises to Israel by becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ and dying and rising again for our salvation. It cannot tell us that Jesus has ascended to God's right hand, that he has poured out the Holy Spirit on his people and that he will come in glory to judge the living and dead and to fully and finally bring in God's kingdom.

If we ask, finally, what is the role of reason in relation to our knowledge of the faith, the answer is that it has a twofold role

First, the term 'reason' can mean our God given capacity for rational thought and when this is illuminated by the Holy Spirit it can show us that it is rational to believe that the faith is to be found in the threefold witness of the Bible, the Patristic writings and historic formularies and enable us to understand what this witness means.

Secondly, the term can be used to refer to what the Anglican *Virginia Report* calls the 'mind of a particular culture,' with its characteristic ways of seeing things, asking about them and explaining them'.[9] When reason is used in this sense we have to take reason seriously in the sense of taking seriously the apologetic task of showing how the apostolic faith relates to the beliefs and concerns of a particular culture or sub-culture in order to enable those who belong to that culture to understand the faith more clearly.[10]

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[8] Richard Hooker, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity,* Bk I:15:4.

[9] *The Virginia Report* in *The Official Report of the Lambeth Conference 1998* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 1999), p.244.

[10] It was because the Church of England lay theologian C. S. Lewis did this so effectively in *Mere Christianity* and other works that he was and remains such a successful Christian apologist.

B. A Baptist response from Paul Fiddes

7. An initial Baptist view of the Anglican 'three sources'

My conversation partner has very helpfully set out the Anglican answer to the question 'How do we know what the faith is'? Referring to Canons A5 and C15 he explains:

> They tell us that we know what the faith is through the Scriptures, the teaching of the Patristic period and the witness of the Church of England's three historic formularies. However, these three sources of our knowledge of the faith do not possess the same authority. The primary authority is the Holy Scriptures, the secondary authority is the teaching of the Patristic period and tertiary authority is the witness of the historic formularies.

For Baptists the situation is a little more complicated. Baptists have consistently – not to say emphatically – affirmed the first source (Scripture), and have *implied* the authority of the second source (the Church Fathers), though often not naming it or explicitly appealing to it. Most, but not all have resource to the third kind of authority (a historic formulation of faith). I mean that most Baptist Unions or Conventions in the world have a 'confession of faith' which – while not generally binding on local churches – witnesses to what the churches believe, although this is not the case with Baptists in the UK. Baptists will agree that the latter two sources of authority are dependent on the first, which has priority; they will be less likely to place the latter two in an *order* of authority, with the third dependent on the first through the second, as Martin proposes for Anglicanism. In my part of the conversation I would like to elaborate on the place that these three sources hold in Baptist life.

However, Baptists will instinctively feel that these three sources do not say all that needs to be said in reply to the question 'How do we know what the faith is?' Martin has himself opened up the answer beyond the 'three sources' by appealing to the role of reason, both in terms of 'reasonable' reflection and of relating the Good News of the apostolic faith to the cultural

context of the present day. Baptists will want to say much more about the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the congregation and individuals in illuminating Christian minds to know *how* the scripture should be read, and what the faith 'once for all delivered' *means* here and now. Martin, of course, will also want to affirm this, but how immediately this thought springs to mind may indicate something about the difference between Anglican and Baptist ethos. When asked how they know 'what the faith is', Baptists will be less inclined to turn to historic formularies, and more inclined to assert that they know it from scripture, *and* from the way that they have been helped to read scripture in study groups in church, home or college, or been taught to read scripture by their pastors' sermons, or been led to understand it through trusted teachers in such gatherings as 'Spring Harvest' or 'Greenbelt'. That is – and perhaps they will be surprised when it is pointed out to them – Baptists rely a great deal on tradition, understood as the ongoing interpretation of the Bible in the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is less an official declaration of doctrine by church authorities, and more a dynamic process of 'traditioning'[11] as it goes on in the congregation.

It may be objected that there is a difference between 'knowing what the faith is' in the sense of having authoritative witness to apostolic truth, and 'knowing what the faith is' in the sense of being nurtured by ongoing teaching based on that witness (and Martin might well feel that he was dealing only with the first kind of knowledge). However, the point is that Baptists are generally disinclined to make this distinction. Beyond the witness of the Bible, all tradition tends to be put – at least consciously – on the same level. The positive side of this practice is that it leaves a good deal of room for 'new light' to break forth from the Word of God, suitable for time and context. Negatively, however, grasp on the truth can become uncontrolled, or swayed by influential groups, or dominated by powerful figures in the Christian media. This, I suggest, is a greater problem for 'knowing what the faith is' for Baptists than the often-cited subjectivity of 'private interpretation.' After all, Baptists have always known that individual disciples must check their own interpretation of scripture against the mind of the congregation, and this indeed lies at the heart of the principle of the

[11] See Terrence Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2000), p. 40.

church meeting, gathered under the rule of the risen Christ. This is an issue to which I intend to return.

8. The apostolic faith in the Scriptures

Turning to the first of Martin's sources, the historic confessions of British Baptists underline the statements of the Anglican canons about the authority of Scripture. One example may be taken, from the London Confession (Particular Baptist) of 1644. Having confessed that eternal life is 'to know the only true God, and whom he hath sent, Jesus Christ', the confession continues:

> The Rule of this Knowledge, Faith and Obedience, concerning the worship and service of God, and all other Christian duties, is not man's inventions, opinions, devices, laws, constitutions or traditions unwritten whatsoever, but only the Word of God contained in the Canonical Scriptures. In this written Word he hath plainly revealed whatsoever he hath thought needful for us to know, believe and acknowledge, touching the Nature and Office of Christ, in whom all the promises are Yea and Amen to the praise of God.[12]

This early confession shows a typical Baptist caution about 'unwritten traditions', which we may understand in the sense of refusing them any *primary* authority. Since human 'opinion, laws and constitutions' certainly have some place in church and society, it is not un-Baptist to give tradition a place as well, though always subordinate to Scripture.[13] We notice too that the 'Rule' is not Scripture itself but the Word of God 'contained' or 'revealed' in the Scriptures, and this is equated with Christ 'in whom all the promises are Yea and Amen'. The *Declaration of Principle* of the Baptist

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[12] *London Confession* (1644), VII, VIII, in W.L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1959), p. 158.

[13] See Stephen Holmes, 'The Dangers of Just Reading the Bible: Orthodoxy and Christology' in Anthony Cross and Nicholas Wood (eds), *Exploring Baptist Origins* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2010), pp. 123–138.

Union of Great Britain, first adopted in 1904, similarly declares that the final authority in 'faith and practice is Jesus Christ … as revealed in the Scriptures'. The first clause reads as follows:

> That our Lord Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty to interpret and administer his laws.[14]

It has thus been Baptist practice to read the Scriptures Christologically, to view them from the focus of finding Christ within them, whether in the Old Testament or New Testament. In fact, there is good reason to think that early Baptists understood the Scriptures not only as the Word of God but as the 'Word of Christ'. Though the Confession of 1644 claims that God has 'plainly revealed' the truth of Christ in scripture, in fact a Christological principle of interpretation presumes an ongoing tradition of exposition in the church. The Confession continues, 'Touching the Lord Jesus, of whom Moses and the Prophets wrote, and whom the Apostles preached….' and then places references to Genesis 3:15; 22:18; and 49:10 opposite 'Moses', and Daniel 7:13 and 9:24–6 against 'the Prophets'. There are Patristic instances for these interpretations, but in the communities that produced the confession they are likely to have come from a contemporary tradition of preaching. In modern times, we are more likely to take a Christological hermeneutic to mean that scripture is to be interpreted in the general light of the revelation of God in the person and work of Christ rather than in a strictly typological or 'prophetic' way, but still 'knowing what the faith is' assumes an ongoing interpretation of Scripture in the church alongside the text.

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[14] See *Something to Declare. A Study of the Declaration of Principle jointly written by the Principals of the four English Colleges in membership with the Baptist Union of Great Britain*. By Paul Fiddes, Brian Haymes, Richard Kidd & Michael Quicke (Oxford: Whitley Publications, 1996), pp. 10, 20–23. The words 'God manifest in the flesh' were added in 1934.

9. The Patristic witness

The second Anglican source identified is that of the Church Fathers, including the ecumenical councils and the three Catholic creeds. It is unusual for Baptists to use the creeds in worship, but in Baptist confessions of the past and present the major creeds and statements of the world-wide church have in fact often been explicitly acknowledged. A confession of a group of English General Baptist churches in 1678, for instance, explicitly affirms that the Creed of Nicaea and the so-called Athanasian Creed are to be 'received' and 'believed' and 'taught by the ministers of Christ'.[15] Generally, moreover, the ordering of the early Baptist confessions follows the shape of the creeds (for instance, they all begin with confession of 'God the Father Almighty' rather than with a clause on the authority of scripture), and their doctrinal formulations show credal influence, even to the extent of particular wording.[16] In the later twentieth century the German-language Baptist confession used in Germany, Austria and Switzerland declares that 'it presupposes the Apostles' Creed as a common confession of Christendom'[17], and the Norwegian Baptists in their confession have affirmed 'the content' of both the Apostles' and the Nicene Creed.[18] A 'model' covenant service, recently produced by the Baptist Union of Great Britain for use in churches provides in its main text the alternatives of a selection of Scripture verses and the Apostles' Creed as a means of confessing the Christian faith, and includes the Nicene Creed in further resources. It is also worth recalling that at the First Baptist World Congress on July 12, 1905, all the Baptists attending stood voluntarily and recited the Apostles' Creed, 'as a simple acknowledgement of where we stand and what we believe',[19] and this event was repeated at the Centenary Congress in 2005.

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[15] *Orthodox Creed*, art. 38, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, pp. 326–7.
[16] See Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity. Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), pp. 72–80.
[17] G. Keith Parker, *Baptists in Europe. History & Confessions of Faith* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982), p. 57. So also the Baptist Union of Finland, ibid., p. 111.
[18] Parker, *Baptists in Europe*, p. 111.
[19] *First Baptist World Congress: London, July 11–19, 1905* (London: Baptist Union, 1905), pp. 19–21. The words quoted were those of Alexander Maclaren, in leading the assembly.

More generally, it is clear that Baptist convictions about the Trinity ('three persons in one essence') and Christology ('two natures in one person') draw on the interpretation of Scripture made by the early ecumenical councils. Most Baptists are not aware of the source of these formulations, but they have simply entered the stream of inherited tradition and are assumed to be scriptural. Without reciting the creeds in worship, the influence of the Fathers will reach a congregation and shape its knowledge of the faith by more indirect means – through hymns which echo credal formulations, through the preaching of ministers who have read the Fathers in their theological education, and perhaps through use of modern confessions of faith that have composed by authors who are theologically aware. The work of the Fathers will be one thread of a rich tapestry of an ongoing tradition of teaching and preaching. If Baptist church members were to think consciously about the writings of the Fathers they would probably place them within the great host of 'faithful witnesses' to the Gospel.

10. Baptist 'historic formularies'

Baptists in all parts of the world have created 'confessions of faith', as teaching aids for the churches and as a means of witnessing to their convictions to those outside the Baptist community. Generally these are seen as expressing commonly-held beliefs of the churches rather than acting as instruments of church discipline;[20] as the modern German Baptist Confession defines its status, it 'cannot be a compulsory law for faith…. As a summary interpretation of Holy Scripture it is grounded in and limited by Scripture.'[21] In the UK, too, Baptists once held such confessions: as examples, the General Baptist stream had its 'Standard Confession' of 1660, and the Particular Baptists had the 'Second London Confession' of 1677 and 1688 (largely incorporating the Westminster Confession). The confessions continued to be used by Baptist Associations until the nineteenth century, but at the end of that century the General Baptists (New Connection) and Particular Baptists merged for the sake of engaging in common mission in

[20] Exceptionally, the Southern Baptist Convention has required adherence to its *Faith and Message* (revised 2000) from those teaching in its seminaries, but it has not been able to impose the same obligation on its local churches.
[21] Parker, *Baptists in Europe*, p. 57.

England, and found their unity not in a detailed confession (which may well have proved divisive, given the respective Arminian and Calvinist traditions of the two) but in a short three-point 'Declaration of Principle'. The first article states the supreme authority of Christ as 'God manifest in the flesh', together with the freedom of the local church to 'interpret his laws'; the second states normative practice of believers' baptism and the third the responsibility of all disciples to engage in mission. The Declaration is essentially an expanded form of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16.

Most Baptists throughout the world will thus have a 'confession' to cite, when asked how they know what their faith is. They will regard their confessions, not unlike the Anglican formularies, as 'bearing witness to the apostolic faith in the sense that they are dependent on the Scriptures' (section 5 above), although they are less likely to add 'as read in the light of the Patristic writings'. The German Baptist confession already quoted does read 'grounded in Scripture … it presupposes the Apostles' Creed', but it continues 'as a common confession of Christendom', concluding 'and remains open to the future disclosure of further truth'. Here this catholic creed (not of course literally dating from the apostles) is mentioned less for being a work of the early church Fathers, and more as a contemporary expression of Christian unity in the faith, a point to which I want to return below.

But whether Baptists have a confession or (as in the UK) only a commission for mission, they will tend to regard these documents as *part* of the rich tapestry of teaching and preaching which they have as a resource for understanding Scripture and its demands for today. Rather than an Anglican sense of a progressive threefold order of authority (Scripture, Fathers, formularies), they will see their confession as one tool among many for the understanding of scripture. The earliest Baptist tradition was to understand the members of the congregation as bound to each other, and congregations as bound together in associations, through a 'covenant' rather than a confession – that is, less by a series of articles of faith than by a mutual promise to 'walk together and watch over each other' in faithfulness to God and into an unknown future. Something of that early ethos persists today.

11. Congregational hermeneutics

I have been suggesting that both the Fathers and the 'formularies' (in so far as Baptists have them) are seen by Baptists as gifts to the church to be used by the Holy Spirit, *among many other means*, for illuminating the minds of Scripture readers. Baptists will tend to think that they know what the faith is through Word and Spirit, through the reading of Scripture and the light brought into their minds by the Spirit, though not simply as individuals – they know that they need the assistance of the fellowship of believers. As one historian writes about the first General Baptist congregation of John Smyth (1609 onwards), 'their assumption was that God would reveal his truth to the congregation as a whole, just as the keys and privileges of the church had been committed to the whole congregation'.[22] This conviction fits in with a Christological interpretation of Scripture; the same risen Christ, through the Spirit, is present in the congregation to lead his disciples to know his mind. We may add, in support of what is said above about an Anglican approach to nature and reason, that the risen Christ is present as Lord outside the church as well, and so to understand properly the revelation of God in Christ will also mean setting scripture alongside the contemporary culture and scientific exploration of a world of which Christ is Lord (Colossians 1:15–17).

I have already flagged up the problem with this openness to diverse sources of teaching and interpretation, relying on the guidance of the Spirit. It can lead to what the World Council of Churches calls 'illegitimate diversity', and to being unduly influenced by religious fashions of the moment and the loudest voice in the market-place, by the latest video and the cult based on a popular Christian speaker. Though I hesitate to pronounce on behalf of Baptists in general, I venture to offer what I believe to be a Baptist-like response. The principle of congregational hermeneutics can be extended to ensure that we are listening to the witness of the whole church to the Gospel of Christ. If we listen to the way that scripture is being read in the whole range of the life of the church, in the South as well as North of the world, in poor townships and favellas as well as in middle-class

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[22] James Robert Coggins, *John Smyth's Congregation: English Separatism, Mennonite Influence, and the Elect Nation* (Waterloo, ON/Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1991), p. 120.

suburbs, in churches with ancient liturgies as well as those moved by spontaneity and the need of the moment, then we will experience a check on Christian fashionability and celebrity culture. It will be a Baptist approach, I suggest, to use the creeds of the ancient church not so much as 'second in order of authority' but as an indispenable expression of the mind of the wider church.

A key function of the pastor of the local congregation – whom early Baptists named 'bishop' (overseer) – is to represent the universal church in this way on the local scene, to open the horizons of members of the assembly to the way that the people of God have heard, and do hear, the Word of God in all times and in all places. In 'knowing what the faith of the church is', the living teaching office of the pastor (elder, bishop) has a key place which Christ has given in calling some to this charisma and way of life in the church. The congregation has a final responsibility as the body of Christ to test all teaching corporately (1 Corinthians 14:26–33), but in recognizing a call from Christ the congregation may *expect* regularly to hear the Word of God through the preaching of the minister of word and sacrament, striking into the contemporary moment with the power of 'prophecy'. The author of the Book of Acts gives us a clue here, in portraying Paul as passing on his teaching responsibilities to the local elders as he leaves Ephesus (Acts 20: 26–35). This is not, in a Baptist view, the institution of a strict and unbroken succession of apostolic teaching, but a commissioning of pastors in the local church to stand in the place of the apostles in bearing witness to the faith of the whole church which has been 'handed on' (traditioned). I am sure that an Anglican understanding of 'how we know what the faith is' will also want to include the teaching office of bishops, as part of the ongoing 'traditioning' of the church.

12. An agreement and a tentative contrast

In responding to Martin Davie's presentation, I have suggested that there is much common ground between Anglicans and Baptists in his identification of three sources of authority: Scripture (or apostolic witness), the Fathers and the formularies. Baptists have their own versions of appeal to the last two, though set in the context of a more diverse appeal to Spirit-inspired teaching and preaching, while certainly agreeing on the primacy of the first.

I have ventured to suggest that Baptists in fact rely on the ongoing process of 'tradition' to know what the faith is more than Martin apparently suggests is the case for Anglicans, with their more fixed historical points of authority. As Vatican II expresses it, tradition is a *continuous* loving conversation between Christ and his bride the church.[23]

I detect, in fact, a basic difference of ethos for all the common ground. Martin has emphasized a neat 'order' of authority, a progressive view of tradition, in the handing down of the witness of the apostles (Scripture) through the Fathers and then on to the making of formularies. We know what the faith is through reading the Scriptures, with the Fathers as first-order interpreters and the formularies as second-order interpreters dependent on those of first-order. Baptists tend to have a more 'messy' approach to finding witnesses to the Word of God, resorting (as it were) to a less well-ordered table of spiritual gifts. They stress the Word and the Spirit, and expect the Spirit to work in a more diverse and sometimes (it may seem to us) chaotic ways.

This difference raises a basic point about the nature of the *kerygma* or proclamation about Christ in scripture, and takes us back to the very beginning of our conversation. In his first section Martin presents 'apostolic teaching' in the New Testament as 'a single agreed gospel,' a 'corpus of authoritative teaching', or a 'body of agreed belief handed down in the church'. From this standpoint on the nature of the *kerygma* in the New Testament, it is natural then to think of a unified, agreed deposit of faith as being handed on down into the post-apostolic age, preserved by the Fathers and finally arriving at the formularies. This picture has resonances with Tertullian's understanding of the *regula fidei*. However, many New Testament scholars are less convinced that there is such a single *kerygma* evident in the New Testament, finding more evidence of diversity and fragmentation in the witness to Christ. James Dunn, for instance, draws attention to 'the kerygma of Acts', 'the kerygma of Paul' and the 'kerygma of John', as well as discernible outlines of the 'kerygma of Jesus'. He concludes that there is no 'corpus' of agreed belief, but that there is a

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[23] Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 8, in Austin Flannery, O.P., (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1977), pp. 754–5.

'common element present in these different proclamations'.[24] He identifies this as having three aspects: (a) proclamation of the risen, exalted, Jesus; (b) a call for faith in the Jesus proclaimed; (c) a promise held out to those who have faith, including the gift of the Spirit, forgiveness, and a continuing relation with the risen Christ. This 'common kerygma' is very different from a 'corpus of authoritative teaching'. The various instances of Christian preaching share these common elements, 'but in different proportions' so that 'in the event of proclamation no two kerygmata were exactly the same'. Dunn continues:

> Not only so, but the diversity meant difference and disagreement – differences for example over the significance of Jesus' earthly ministry and his death, disagreement over the continuing relevance of the law, on the eschatological dimension of the gospel, and on its ethical outworking. These differences and disagreements often ran deep, but the kerygmata involved could nevertheless be put forward (and accepted) as valid expressions of the Christian kerygma in the appropriate circumstances.

From this perspective, the work of the Fathers was not so much the reception and preservation of a neat body of teaching, as bringing some order to an often puzzling diversity. While we may certainly regard this work (and sanctified intellectual effort) as response to the ongoing presence of Christ in the church and as inspired by his Spirit, this perspective tends to relativize the work of the Fathers as an important witness *among other witnesses* in the life and history of the church.

I am not suggesting for a moment that the two approaches to the New Testament *kerygma* (Davie and Dunn, as it were) simply align to Anglican and Baptist approaches to 'knowing what the faith is'. Many Baptists would be shocked by the degree of diversity that Dunn suggests. But recognition of a variety in the New Testament kerygma does throw us back more on a Christological approach to Scripture, finding witness to Christ in diverse strands of tradition, and seeking for the Word of Christ to us today in and

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[24] James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1977), pp. 29–30.

through them. It tends to undermine a strict order of authoritative sources, and opens us up to a greater variety of transmitters and interpreters of the faith. The risk that comes with this freedom can only be countered by ensuring that we are not held captive by any one impressive 'performer,' and are always listening for the witness of the whole church. In this the Fathers of the church are indispensable – and not to be neglected, even by Baptists, are the Articles of Religion of the Church of England.

C. Martin Davie continues the conversation

13. The difference in ethos between Anglicans and Baptists

I am grateful to Paul Fiddes for his response to my original paper. It sets out with great clarity both the convergences and the divergences of between the Anglican and Baptist answers to the question 'How do we know what the faith is?' In this section I shall continue the conversation begun by Paul, by setting out the issues that were raised for me as an Anglican by his response to my work.

As Paul notes, the basic difference of ethos between the Anglican and Baptist traditions is that the traditional Anglican view, as reflected in Canons A5 and C15 of the Canons of the Church of England, states that:

> …we know what the faith is through reading the Scriptures, with the Fathers as first-order interpreters and the formularies as second order interpreters dependent on those of first order.

Baptists, on the other hand, tend to turn to an eclectic range of contemporary sources for theological guidance. This means that they:

> …have a more 'messy' approach to finding witnesses to the Word of God, resorting (as it were) to the nourishment of a less well-ordered table of spiritual gifts. They stress the Word and the Spirit and expect the Spirit to work in diverse and sometimes (it may seem to us) chaotic ways.

In reality, the difference between Anglican and Baptist approaches is not as clear cut as this summary suggests. There are many Anglicans who find their theological nourishment from a mixed diet of modern sources and there are Baptist theologians, of whom Paul himself is a prime example, who have a deep knowledge of the Fathers and the writings of the Reformation period and a profound appreciation of their theological importance. Nevertheless, the overall difference in ethos between the two traditions that Paul describes does undoubtedly exist.

From a traditional Anglican perspective the comparative neglect by many Baptists (and indeed by many Anglicans) of the writings of the Fathers and other classic statements of the Christian faith from the history of the church, is a matter of regret. This is for a number of reasons.

First of all, it means that people are ignoring the general importance of tradition. As G K Chesterton once famously put it, respect for tradition is about the 'democracy of the dead.' It is about not disenfranchising those from the past by ceasing to listen to them or take them seriously. In Chesterton's words:

> All democrats object to men being disqualified by the accident of birth; tradition objects to their being disqualified by the accident of death. Democracy tells us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our groom; tradition asks us not to neglect a good man's opinion, even if he is our father. I, at any rate, cannot separate the two ideas of democracy and tradition; it seems evident to me that they are the same idea. We will have the dead at our councils. The ancient Greeks voted by stones; these shall vote by tombstones. It is all quite regular and official, for most tombstones, like most ballot papers, are marked with a cross.[25]

From a Christian perspective the key reason for respecting the democratic rights of the dead is that they are still part of the church. The one body of Christ consists just as much of the faithful departed as it does of

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[25]http://www.pagebypagebooks.com/Gilbert_K_Chesterton/Orthodoxy/The_Ethics_of_Elfland_p2.html

those who belong to the church militant here on earth today, and therefore St Paul's injunction to take seriously the importance of all the other members of the body (1 Corinthians 12:12–26) still applies to them. Respect for the importance of the Christian tradition is an acknowledgement of this reality.

Secondly, by neglecting the Christian tradition people are impoverished in their understanding of what is being said today. Christian theology is a conversation about God that has been going on for over two thousand years and to understand our contemporary part of the conversation properly, we need an understanding of those parts of the conversation that have gone before. For the Western Christian tradition to which both Anglicans and Baptists belong, the Patristic and Reformation eras have been particularly significant in shaping the conversation and that is why we need to give them particular attention.

Thirdly, neglect of the Christian tradition prevents people from benefitting from a perspective on theological issues that transcends the perspective provided by our own age. This is a point made by C S Lewis in his essay 'On reading old books.' He notes that it is unfortunate when people neglect to read 'old books' because:

> Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books… The only palliative is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books. Not, of course, that there is any magic about the past. People were no cleverer then than they are now; they made as many mistakes as we. But not the *same* mistakes.[26]

However, while neglect of the historic Christian tradition may be a matter of regret for these three reasons, this neglect will not necessarily mean that Anglicans have a fundamental problem with Baptist theology. This is because, as I explained in my original paper, for Anglicans the

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[26] C. S. Lewis, 'On reading old books', in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 2001, p.202.

importance of the Fathers and the historic formularies is that they point beyond themselves to Scripture. They are reliable means that the Holy Spirit can use to enable Anglicans to understand Scripture properly so that they can then lead faithful lives in grateful obedience to God.

In insisting on the importance of the Fathers and historic formularies, the real Anglican concern is therefore for the proper understanding of Scripture and nurturing of faithful discipleship based on Scripture. As Paul's paper makes clear, this is a concern that Baptists share and Anglicans cannot deny the possibility that the Holy Spirit has been at work among Baptists, nourishing them through the food available on their theological table and bringing about a proper understanding of Scripture and lives of faithful discipleship.

The only way to test this possibility is to look at the evidence and to ask whether, from an Anglican perspective, Baptists are showing that they have a proper understanding of Scripture and are living lives of faithful discipleship. In the words of Article XIX of *The Thirty Nine Articles*, is there evidence that Baptist churches are congregations of 'faithful men [and women] in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all things that of necessity are requisite to the same'?

If this evidence exists then the difference of theological ethos between Anglicans and Baptists is a matter of secondary importance.

14. Convergence on Scripture

In section 8 of his response Paul outlines the Baptist attitude to Scripture. Four points arise from what he says in this section.

First it is clear that Baptists and Anglicans are in agreement in giving priority to Scripture over what Archbishop Cranmer described as 'the stinking puddles of man's traditions.' [27] However, the Anglican Reformers agreed that the church 'hath the power to decree rites and ceremonies' providing that nothing is ordained 'that is contrary to God's word written' (Article XX) thus allowing the church more discretion than the 1644 Baptist Confession seems to allow.

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[27] 'A Fruitful Exhortation to the Reading and knowledge of Holy Scripture,' in *The Homilies*, Bishopstone: Brynmill/Preservation Press, 2006, p.4.

Secondly, I am not convinced by Paul's exegesis of either the 1644 Confession or the 1901 *Declaration of Principle*. In the 1644 Confession the rule for the church is Scripture. When it says that the 'Word of God' is 'contained in Holy Scripture' it does not mean that in some point, or points, in Scripture we find the Word of God, but that Scripture as a whole is where God 'hath plainly revealed whatsoever he hath thought needful for us to know.' Also, the 1644 Confession nowhere describes Christ as the Word. Scripture is the Word and scripture points us to Christ in whom 'all the promises are Yea and Amen.' The written Word is the medium of God's self revelation and Christ is the content.

Likewise the 1901 declaration does not distinguish between the authority of Jesus Christ and that of Scripture. The Jesus who has 'final authority in faith and practice' is the Jesus 'revealed to us in the Scriptures,' the Jesus who is made known to us by the prophetic witness of the Old Testament and the apostolic witness of the New. It would be impossible to distinguish between the authority of Jesus and the authority of Scripture because it is as witnessed to by the Scriptures, and not otherwise, that Jesus has final authority.

Thirdly, Paul helpfully highlights the way in which the Baptist tradition has read Scripture Christologically. This is a further point of convergence between the Anglican and Baptist traditions, since Anglicans too have read the Scriptures of both the Old and New Testaments as pointing to Christ. A good example would be the opening statement in Article VII of the *Thirty Nine Articles* which states 'The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind through Christ, who is only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man.'

In addition, Anglicans would also be happy with the idea of an 'ongoing tradition of exposition in the church,' with the caveat that this tradition does not add anything to the revelation in Scripture, but rather serves to make plain what is already there. The story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26–40 would be seen as a classic example of this. In this story it is not the case that Isaiah offers an ambiguous oracle about an unknown servant of the Lord and that Philip uses this as a hook to talk about Christ. Rather, the prophet was talking about Christ and all Philip does is make this fact plain.

Fourthly, Paul declares that a 'Christological hermeneutic' is now likely to mean 'that scripture is to be interpreted in the light of the general revelation of God in the person and work of Christ rather than in a strictly typological or 'prophetic' way.' What would the difference between the two approaches mean in practice and why is the former approach now preferred to the latter?

15. The place of the creeds

In section 9 of his response Paul notes that while Baptists do not normally use the creeds in worship they have on occasion 'explicitly acknowledged' their acceptance of the importance of the 'major creeds and statements of the world-wide church.' He also notes the ways in which Baptist convictions about the Trinity and the person of Christ have drawn on the teaching of the early ecumenical councils that formulated the creeds, and that the creeds continue to influence Baptist congregations through a range of indirect means.

In section 11 Paul then goes on to explain why he thinks that the use of the creeds might be important for Baptists. As he sees it, the problem that Baptists face because of their openness 'to diverse sources of teaching and interpretation' is that they can be 'unduly influenced by religious fashions of the moment, by the loudest voice in Christian market-place, by the latest video and by the cultic following of a popular Christian speaker.' He suggests that the way to address this problem is to extend the Baptist tradition of 'congregational hermeneutics,' which expects to hear the voice of Christ speaking in and through the local congregation, by giving attention to the 'witness of the whole church to the gospel of Christ.' As he puts it:

> The principle of congregational hermeneutics can be extended to ensure that we are listening to the witness of the whole church to the gospel of Christ. If we listen to the way that scripture is being read in the whole life of the church, in the South as well as the North of the world, in poor townships and favellas as well as in middle-class suburbs, in churches with ancient liturgies as well as those move by spontaneity and the need of the moment, then we will

> experience a check on Christian fashionability and celebrity culture.

For Paul, then, a Baptist approach to the use of the creeds of the ancient church will be to see them as part of this extended pattern of congregational hermeneutics, 'not so much as 'second in order of authority' but as an indispensable expression of the mind of the wider church.'

Anglicans would have no problem in principle with seeing the creeds as an expression of the mind of the wider church. However, they would want to ask in what way the creeds express the mind of the wider church. Because the creeds are set forms of words produced at particular times in the history of the church, they cannot express all that the risen Christ has been and is saying to his people down the ages and across the world. The Apostles' Creed, for example, cannot tell you what Christ is saying today to Christians in the favellas of South America or to persecuted Christians in North Korea about what it means to be a Christian in their particular circumstances.

What the creeds can do, however, is express the witness of Christians down the ages and across the world to the overall shape of the biblical story as this is told to us in Holy Scripture, to the nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to the nature of Christ as both truly human and truly divine. When Anglicans recite the creeds they are reminded of this witness and they declare their acceptance of it as the framework for their reading of Scripture, and as the basis for their proclamation of the gospel to the world. So for Anglicans the use of the creeds does indeed help to ensure 'that we are listening to the witness of the whole to the Gospel of Christ,' but it does so in a very specific way that Paul's account of why Baptists might want to use the creeds does not quite capture.

16. Confessions of faith

In section 10 of his response Paul notes that down the centuries Baptists in various parts of the world, including this country, have produced confessions of faith akin to the confessions of faith produced by other Christian traditions, although at the end of the nineteenth century Baptists in Great Britain chose to adopt instead, a short three-point declaration of principle. He also emphasizes, however, that for Baptists such confessions of faith will

be simply one among many resources for 'understanding Scripture and its demands for today.' As he sees it, while Anglicans have a three fold hierarchy of doctrinal authority in which the historical formularies have their place after Scripture and the Fathers, for Baptists all resources apart from Scripture sit on the same level of authority.

From an Anglican perspective the question that this raises is why it is that Baptists would want to place all resources on the same level. Why would they find it difficult to recognize that certain resources have more authority than others, because a church or group of churches is able to recognize in them a faithful witness to Scripture that is able to form an agreed basis for Christian belief and practice?

Paul seems to suggest that the reason this is the case is a persistence amongst Baptists today of the early Baptist tradition, which saw individuals and congregations as bound together 'through a covenant rather than a confession – that is, less by a series of articles of faith than by a mutual promise to 'walk together and watch over each other in faithfulness to God and into an unknown future.' Anglicans would not have any difficulty with the idea of a mutual commitment to walk together and watch over each other, but they would ask why this mutual commitment needs to be an alternative to accepting a confession of faith. Could not such a confession provide a mutually agreed doctrinal framework which would help Christians to understand better what walking together and watching over each other should involve? Why not a confession *and* a covenant?

17. The role of the local minister

At the end of section 11 Paul sets out his understanding of the role of 'the pastor of the local congregation' in helping people to know what the faith of the church is. Anglicans would be happy to agree to most of what Paul says here, but they might want to ask questions about what he says about St Paul's speech to the Ephesian elders at Miletus in Acts 20:26–35.

Paul declares that this speech is not 'the institution of a strict and unbroken succession of apostolic teaching, but a commissioning of pastors in the local church to stand in the place of the apostles in bearing witness to the faith of the whole church which has been 'handed on' (traditioned).' From an Anglican perspective the reference to a 'strict and unbroken

succession of apostolic teaching' is rather vague. If Paul is saying that St. Paul did not leave behind him a precise verbal summary of the Christian faith, which he expected the Ephesian elders to pass on whole and entire to subsequent generations, then Anglicans would agree with him. Anglicans have long accepted, for example, the legendary nature of the idea that the Apostles' Creed is literally a form of words created by the apostles themselves and then handed on to the later church.[28]

However, Anglicans would have difficulty seeing Acts 20 in terms of St. Paul's commissioning pastors in the local church to 'stand in the place of the apostles' and to 'bear witness to the faith of the whole church.' Obviously in one sense the minister of the local congregation stands in the place of the apostles in the sense that he or she continues the ministry of pastoral oversight, which began with the apostles and was then passed on by them to others.[29] However, in another sense they do not stand in the place of the apostles because while the apostles were directly commissioned by the risen Christ to be his witness and to teach the faith to the church, subsequent Christian ministers only have an indirect authority in that their commission is to teach the faith that was originally taught by the apostles. We can see this in Acts 20 where the basis for the subsequent ministry of the Ephesian elders is 'the whole counsel of God' (v27) which has been declared to them by St. Paul. It is by remaining faithful to this that the elders will be able to resist the false teachers which St. Paul predicts will soon arise among them (vv 29–30).

If we ask where we find this apostolic teaching today, the answer is that we find it in the New Testament, and so for Anglicans the role of the minister of the local church (whether a bishop or a priest or deacon sharing his ministry) is not in the first instance to bear witness to the faith of the church, but to bear witness to the apostolic witness contained in Scripture. That is why, for instance in the services for 'ordering of priests' and the 'consecration of bishops' in the *Book of Common Prayer* candidates for ordination and consecration are asked:

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[28] See, for example, the discussion in Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, pp.1–6.

[29] Richard Hooker argues, for instance, that in the early church the 'the first Bishops in the Church of Christ were his blessed Apostles' and that 'all others who have it after them in orderly sort are their lawful successors.' *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Bk VII:4:1–3.

> Are you persuaded that the holy Scriptures contain sufficiently all doctrine required of necessity for eternal salvation through faith in Jesus Christ? And are you determined out of the said Scriptures to instruct the people committed to your charge, and to teach nothing (as required of necessity to eternal salvation) but that which you shall be persuaded may be concluded and proved by the Scripture?

For Anglicans the faith of the church, and particularly the faith of the church as expressed in the Fathers, the creeds and Reformation formularies, is theologically important and something that a minister will need to take into account. However, as I have said before, this is only because, and insofar as, it bears faithful witness to Scripture. Anglicans have historically been aware that the visible church can err (Articles XIX and XXI) and so what the church believes and teaches has to be constantly checked against Scripture. It is therefore not the faith of the church to which the minister has to bear witness, but Scripture.

Paradoxically, therefore, from an Anglican viewpoint Paul gives both too little and too great theological significance to the faith of the church. On the one hand, he gives too little doctrinal authority to the Fathers, the creeds and subsequent confessions of faith as classic expressions of the church's understanding of the teaching of Scripture. On the other hand he also sees the function of the creeds and of local ministers as being to bear witness to the faith of the church, whereas in fact their proper function is to bear witness to Scripture.

18. The issue of diversity

In Section 12 Paul relates the Baptist emphasis on making use of a wide diversity of sources of theological nourishment, to the argument of James Dunn and others that there is a basic diversity within the New Testament itself. He questions my suggestion that the apostolic teaching in the New Testament constitutes a 'corpus of authoritative teaching' or a 'body of agreed belief handed down in the church.' On the basis of Dunn's argument in his book *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* Paul contends that what we find in the New Testament instead is 'difference and disagreement'

between the New Testament writers over central matters such as the significance of Jesus earthly ministry and death, the place of the Jewish law, eschatology and Christian ethics. Because there was thus no agreed corpus of apostolic belief (the argument runs), the role of the Fathers was not to receive and hand on such a body of teaching, but rather to bring some order to the 'often puzzling diversity' of the New Testament material. This in turn means that their importance is relativized because their approach is only one among a variety of possible readings of the New Testament witness.

A number of points can be made from an Anglican perspective in response to this argument. First, it is not clear why Paul thinks that his approach points us to a more 'Christological approach to Scripture' by displacing 'the notion of the New Testament as containing an apostolic body of truth in favour of the text as witness to Christ.'

For most of the history of the church the New Testament has been seen both as a witness to Christ *and* as containing a body of authoritative apostolic teaching. Indeed, to put it more precisely, the significance of the New Testament has been seen in terms of it being the collection of writings in which the apostolic witness to Christ has been preserved in written form. Paul does not explain either why the two concepts of witness to Christ and a corpus of authoritative apostolic teaching are antithetical, or why his approach to the New Testament is more Christological (that is to say Christ centred) than the traditional one.

Second, it is not clear that Paul's view of the New Testament and the Fathers is supported by the evidence. James Dunn's diversifying reading of the New Testament has been criticized by other New Testament scholars and the view that the Fathers created an artificial theological unity which did not exist in the earliest days of the church, a view developed by the German writer Walter Bauer in the 1930s, has likewise been challenged by Patristic scholars. It is therefore possible to hold to a traditional view of the unity of the New Testament and the Patristic witness, with a good scholarly conscience.[30]

Third, the suggestion that we should read the New Testament not simply in terms of diversity of presentation and theological approach between the

[30] For a helpful overview of contemporary discussion about unity and diversity in the New Testament and the Patristic period see A. J. Kostenberger and M. J. Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2010).

New Testament writers (something that everyone would accept), but in terms of diversity of theological content raises serious theological problems.

Article XX of the *Thirty Nine Articles* declares that the Church may not 'so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another.' As Oliver O'Donovan notes in his book on the Articles, the reason for this prohibition is because:

> Unless we can think that Scripture is readable as whole, that it communicates a unified outlook and perspective, we cannot attribute doctrinal authority to it, but only to some part of it at the cost of some other part. The authority of Scripture, then, presupposes the possibility of a harmonious reading; correspondingly, a church which presumes to offer an unharmonious or diversifying reading may be supposed to have in mind an indirect challenge to the authority of Scripture itself.[31]

The issue that Oliver O'Donovan raises in this quotation can be seen if we ask how, if we accept Dunn's view, the church can use the New Testament to understand the truth about Christ and God's will for his people today? Paul's argument seems to be that if we are open to a diversity of 'transmitters and interpreters of the faith' who point us to the 'witness of the whole church' we shall be able to hear the 'Word of Christ to us today.'

The problem this proposal raises is that if the New Testament itself is fundamentally inharmonious, then subsequent interpreters cannot resolve its disharmony. If Dunn's reading of the New Testament is correct, then the answer to the question 'How do we know what the faith is' is that there is no such thing as *the* faith because Christianity is plural to its very core. The New Testament kerygmata may have in common the elements which Paul notes, but the kerygmata themselves remain irreducibly plural and offer a range of different and incompatible understandings of Jesus and the nature of the Christian life.

This being the case, the church cannot look to the New Testament as such to understand the truth about Christ and about God's will for us today.

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[31] Oliver O'Donovan, *On the Thirty Nine Articles* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1984), pp. 56–57.

No amount of listening to a range of interpreters, ancient and modern, will enable us to hear a unified 'Word of Christ' in the pages of the New Testament because the New Testament itself does not possess a unified message. Ultimately, therefore, the church will have to find an alternative source of authority which will enable us to discern which parts of the New Testament constitute God's Word to us today.

Paul's suggestion seems to be that we should rely on the 'illumination of the Holy Spirit' but this option of relying on the Spirit rather than the Word is one that was rejected by the mainstream Reformers of the sixteenth century and was rejected in turn by seventeenth-century Baptists when it was proposed by the early Quakers. The historic Baptist tradition, like the historic Anglican tradition, has been to see Scripture as the basic theological authority for the church. As the Baptist *Second London Confession* of 1677 put it, 'The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience.'[32] The trouble with the final section of Paul's paper is that it undermines this belief, in practice if not in intention.

D. Paul Fiddes makes a further Baptist response

19. The conversation so far: how representative is it?

This has been an illuminating conversation, for which I am grateful to my Anglican conversation-partner. However, all such conversations inevitably raise a problem of identity: how far do the partners represent their communions of faith, and how far do they represent particular theological viewpoints that actually cut across confessional divides and can be found in both? Reviewing Martin's account, I am sure that his presentation of three sources of authority in the Church of England – Scripture, the creeds (with other writings of the Church Fathers) and the historic formularies – as well as this order in terms of binding authority, truly represents the Anglican mind. I am less sure that his insistence on the nature of apostolic witness in the New Testament as 'a corpus of authoritative teaching' and 'a body of agreed belief' can be identified as a common conviction in the Church of

[32] Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 248.

England, where the opinion that there is a greater diversity in the New Testament documents can also be found. The canons he quotes do not necessarily require such a view of the content of the New Testament. On the other hand, many Baptists would assume exactly such a unified corpus of teaching in the New Testament (indeed in the whole Bible), although I myself have been more sceptical about it.

To take an example from my own account so far, the way that I have prioritized the authority of Christ over the authority of the written text of Scripture would not be a natural way of thinking for some Baptists. They would rather agree with Martin that it is 'impossible to distinguish between the authority of Christ and the authority of Scripture' (section 14). On the other hand, there will be many Anglicans who will agree with the order of authority I have proposed, which has of course been advocated with the greatest cogency by the Reformed theologian Karl Barth (for whom Scripture 'becomes' the Word of God through witness to Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, whereas Christ 'is' the Word of God without qualification).[33]

For all this, there is a momentum within the beliefs of the two confessions that makes Martin's and my proposals at least consistent with the widely-held convictions of our communions. In Martin's case, if one is to hold the witness of the Fathers to be second in authority to Scripture, and superior to all other tradition and witness in the church, then it makes sense to understand them to be handing down a body of teaching that has already been formed in the apostolic Age as a unified corpus and as a 'standard' account of faith. In my case, the placing of the authority of Christ himself even over Scripture is consistent with the emphasis placed by Baptists on the personal authority of Christ in the congregation.

Early Baptists claimed to have the authority to do things which the established Church denied to them (reinforced by civil punishment) – such as preaching the word, celebrating the sacraments, and calling their own ministry of overseers (*episkopoi*) or elders and deacons – just because they saw their authority as derivative from the risen Christ who stood in the midst

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[33] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. and ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (14 volumes; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936–77), I/1, pp. 107–11.

of the congregation as Prophet, Priest and King.[34] This is an understanding of authority flowing directly from the presence of Christ among his people, which makes it coherent to distinguish between Christ and the written Scripture. But more of this later.

20. The place of tradition

I am glad that we have come to considerable agreement about the importance of tradition in coming to know 'what the faith is', understanding tradition to be the ongoing interpretation of scripture (my phrase), and an ongoing 'conversation about God' (Martin's phrase), in the community of the church.

There is thus no need for Martin to stress that the church today should be listening to the voices of the faithful departed as well as contemporary disciples of Christ (section 13). We are agreed about this. I am a little perplexed that, in the light of my account, Martin has found me to be suggesting that Baptists *only* turn to what he calls 'an eclectic range of *contemporary* sources for theological guidance'. My point about the Baptist 'messy approach to finding witness to the Word of God' was not that Baptists decline to heed voices from the past, but that they generally regard the authority of the Fathers and historic formulations of faith as being *on the same level* as other resources for discerning the faith – that is, below the authority of Scripture. Martin himself seems to recognize this in another section of his response (16). I have fully acknowledged that the understanding of the faith among Baptists has been shaped profoundly by the creeds and the theology of the Church Fathers, not least in the doctrines of Trinity and Christology, although Baptists may not always recognize it. The 'difference of ethos' between Anglicans and Baptists is not whether we should listen at all to the witness of past faithful disciples, but whether there is a strict threefold order of authority in the form and order of Scripture–Fathers–formulations.

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[34] *The Confession of Faith of those Churches which are commonly (though falsly) called Anabaptists* (London: Matthew Simmons, 1644), arts. XXXIII–XXXV, in Lumpkin (ed.), *Baptist Confessions*, pp. 165–6; cf. *Confession* (1677) XXVI.7, in Lumpkin (ed.), *Baptist Confessions*, pp.286–7.

Martin and I are also happily agreed that – whatever our understanding of the relative authority of certain theological resources – we are concerned at the heart of things for 'the proper understanding of Scripture and nurturing of faithful discipleship' (see the last part of section 13). If this exists, then the ranking of resources other than Scripture for knowing the faith is 'a matter of secondary importance'. Baptists are, however, ready to recognize the Church of England as a true church of Christ on the basis of what they already know about its life and witness, without having to set up the kind of 'testing' of the '*possibility*' that the Holy Spirit is at work in it that Martin proposes for Anglicans looking at Baptists. Although this may just be a form of words, Martin's account here may reflect a difference in approach to ecumenical relations, where Anglicans seem to insist on a more formal process of working towards mutual recognition than Baptists do.

21. Christ and Scripture

My conversation partner and I gladly agree that both Anglicans and Baptists give priority to Scripture over human tradition (section 14). I am not sure, however, that the Anglican provision to *legislate* for certain 'rites and ceremonies' that are not contrary to Scripture 'allows the church more discretion' than the Baptist approach. Baptists have always stressed that 'the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his word', so that a church has a good deal of freedom to develop its life in ways that do not contradict the scriptural witness. In the Baptist view, the Anglican requirement that each local congregation *must* practise 'certain rites and ceremonies' might allow discretion to a national body (the established church) to vary them, but it does not seem to give the same liberty in Christ to local assemblies where people gather. The undoubted fact that a large number of Anglican congregations ignore the legal requirement laid upon them, against the wishes of their bishop, only shows that they prefer a more 'Baptist' way!

A more basic difference in Martin's account and mine lies in our understanding of the relation of Christ to Scripture, although I am not completely convinced that this is a difference between Baptists and Anglicans as much as a theological difference transcending different communions (see section 19 above). However, as I have already suggested, I

do think that there is a momentum in Baptist thinking that allows for a distinction to be made between the authority of Christ in *person* and the *written* witness to Christ, and that this has emerged explicitly among Baptists in certain circumstances. Anglicans must answer for whether Martin's argument that this distinction is ruled out by Anglican formularies is correct.

I was not at all suggesting that the statement of the Baptist 1644 Confession that the 'Word of God' is '*contained* in Holy Scripture' (my emphasis) could be made to yield the meaning that we can find the word of God only in 'some points' of Scripture – as Martin alleges in section 14. To distinguish between the authority of the *living* Word and the *written* word does not mean, in a Marcionite way, that we can make our own selection of Scripture and find the living Word only in some parts of it. Scripture 'as a whole' is where we hear the Word of God in Christ to us, in every word of the text. Because we are looking for an encounter with the living Word, we may find that this encounter causes us to find that the word written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in a fallible human context falls short of expressing the whole purpose of God, as Jesus himself found ("You have heard it said of old, 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', but I say to you...").[35] But we still need to pay attention to every part of Scripture in order to *find* the living Word, even where it stands in judgement over the written text (such as where, for instance, the text overtly encourages an 'eye for an eye', or even worse, genocide).

I am not suggesting that this theological distinction was in the minds of our Baptist forebears who framed the 1644 Confession, or indeed any of the seventeenth-century confessions. It is doubtful whether such a distinction would have made sense to them; they would naturally have identified the authority of Christ with the authority of the Scripture. But their conviction that the authority of Scripture lay in its witness to Christ, and that the text was always to be understood Christologically (section 9 above) makes it consistent in other times and places to place the authority of Christ *over* the written text. Despite Martin's quotation of the Second London Confession of 1677 (in section 18), Baptists are not bound to follow its wording that Scripture is an 'infallible rule'; some do so, but others do not, preferring terms like 'trustworthy' and 'reliable'. While regarding their confessions as

[35] Matthew 5: 38–39.

faithful witness which must be heard with respect, Baptists are not committed to the same level of authority for their confessions as Anglicans give their historic formularies, as has become clear in our conversation.

Let me mention three particular circumstances in which a distinction between the authority of Christ and the inspired scriptural witness to Christ has come alive among Baptists. The first is a matter of practice, rather than formulation of doctrine in confessions. The very first Baptist congregations made space for two moments of teaching and preaching the word in their services of worship. The first was a careful exposition of scripture, in which the pastor was expected to be able to resort, where necessary, to the original languages of Greek and Hebrew in order to uncover the meaning of the text. The second was a period of 'prophecy' in which all books – including the Bible – were deliberately closed and 'laid on one side' while the pastor and other elders applied the word as expounded to the life of the congregation.[36] This interpretation would not of course have conflicted with Scripture, but it was regarded as flowing from a heart which was open to the 'rule of Christ' who was present in the congregation through the power of the Holy Spirit. The very act of closing the Bible was a practical, though not a theoretical, statement about the authority of Christ over the written text which witnessed to him. The practice belonged to a cast of mind in which resort to *any* written text could inhibit the sincerity of 'heart-worship', and of course emerged from a period in which Baptists were being required by law to regulate their lives by certain texts under threat of imprisonment (notably the Prayer Book).

A second circumstance is the formulation of the Declaration of Principle of the Baptist Union, first framed in 1904, on which Martin has commented (section 14). He cannot find there any distinction between the authority of Christ and that of the Scriptures, since the Jesus who has 'final authority in faith and practice' is affirmed to be the Jesus who is 'revealed to us in the Scriptures', in the prophetic witness of the Old Testament and the apostolic witness of the New. But his conclusion that it is therefore 'impossible to distinguish between the authority of Jesus and the authority of Scripture'

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[36] See letter of Thomas Helwys 20 Sept 1608, cited in Champlin Burrage, *The Early Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), Vol. 2, p. 167: 'All bookes even the originalles themselves must be layed aside in the tyme of spirituall worshipp…'

rules out the theological idea that Christ is to met *through* the Scripture in the way I have described above. The Christ revealed in the Scripture might show us human weaknesses and fallibilities in the written text, inspired though it is. Conversely, there are boundaries in the text of Scripture for identifying the Christ who is present in the midst of the congregation; talk of the Christ present in the world today must not evaporate into subjectivity.

This first clause in the Declaration of Principle sets out an ordering of authority: first Christ, then Scripture, then the discernment of the mind of Christ by the church assembled together, or 'freedom to interpret [Christ's] laws'. This last phrase, echoing several early Baptist statements, hints that the whole of scripture is to be understood as the word of Christ, not just direct speech of Jesus in the Gospels (against the doubts of Martin on this point). As I have suggested earlier, it is thoroughly in accord with Baptist understanding of authority to extend this discernment of the mind of Christ by the local assembly into discernment by an assembly of churches together.

The three principles enunciated in the 'Declaration' are expansions of the three statements of the risen Christ in Matthew 28:18 ('All authority has been given to me; go and make disciples of all nations; baptizing them....'), and so the whole of this first clause is to be placed under the declaration of Christ 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'.[37] This is thoroughly in line with the historic Baptist conviction that the church stands directly under the rule of the risen Christ, but is also intended to speak into the particular circumstances of the framing of the Declaration, uniting two streams of Baptist life, Particular and General. There had been a demand by some Baptists that the new Union should adopt the Basis of Faith of the Evangelical Alliance or create something similar to it; indeed, the renowned Baptist preacher C.H. Spurgeon had left the Baptist Union after its refusal to do so, declaring a 'downgrade' in its doctrinal soundness. The Basis of the Evangelical Alliance had as its second clause that the Holy Scriptures were 'the *supreme authority in all matters of faith and conduct*' and it seems that by beginning with the statement that 'our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is the sole and *absolute authority in all matters relating to faith and practice*' the authors of the Baptist Declaration were echoing familiar statements about Scripture but intentionally placing *final* authority elsewhere, in Christ

[37] See Richard L. Kidd (ed.), *Something to Declare, A Study of the Declaration of Principle* (Oxford: Whitley, 1996), pp. 20–21.

himself. In fact, the version placed before the Assembly of 1903 made this point with clarity since the whole of the first clause simply consisted in the dramatic sentence: 'The sole and absolute authority of our Lord Jesus Christ in all matters pertaining to faith and practice' (full stop).[38] A second clause went on to affirm 'the recognition of the liberty of every church to interpret and administer the laws of Christ as contained in the Holy Scriptures'. Though the first sentence was subsequently and properly expanded to integrate within it the place of Scripture, it is clear what was in the framers' minds in the circumstances of the time.

A third example of a differentiation between the authority of Christ and Scripture, the latter deriving from the former, can be found in the response of Baptist Old Testament scholars to the development of a critical approach to the Scriptures in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Modern British Old Testament scholarship (and international scholarship as well) was created by such Baptist interpreters as T.H. Robinson, H. Wheeler Robinson, H.H. Rowley and Aubrey Johnson, who led the Society for Old Testament Studies for many years. They were able to take a responsible critical approach to the text, and continue to honour Scripture, precisely because their primary allegiance was to the Christ revealed *in* the Scriptures. Wheeler Robinson in fact declared that critical scholarship was peculiarly Baptist, in that it discerned communities of interpretation in the Bible, each interpreting the Word of God from the past in new circumstances of the present in the context of hostility in the larger society, just as Baptists envisaged communities of disciples faithful to Christ.[39]

In my earlier contribution to the conversation I observed that a 'Christological hermeneutic' is now likely to mean 'that scripture is interpreted in the light of the general revelation of God in the person and work of Christ rather than in a strictly typological or "prophetic" way'. Martin enquires what the difference between the two approaches might be, and in response I could take an example from Old Testament scholarship. The Song of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 would have been understood by the Church Fathers and early Baptists as a direct prophecy of Christ. Now we will want to give weight to Jewish exegesis of the text as well as modern

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[38] E.A. Payne. *The Baptist Union. A Short History* (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1959), p. 161.
[39] H. Wheeler Robinson, *Life and Faith of the Baptists*, p. 20.

Old Testament scholarship in finding an immediate reference not to a future messianic figure but to the nation of Israel; God's people are being challenged to let themselves become a suffering servant, to allow their suffering and humility in exile to be used by God for the redemption of many nations, as others witness their vindication by a faithful God. However, as with many promises in the Old Testament there is an 'excess', an incompletion at the time which opens the way for hope; Israel failed to rise the summons of becoming the suffering servant of God, and the challenge remained for succeeding generations. Christ, we may say, did rise to the challenge, and allowed his own suffering to be made redemptive for many; in the light of the revelation of God's purposes in Christ, we may say that in his obedience he fulfilled the promise of Isaiah 53 without supposing that passage to be any kind of prediction. In the same way, we may see fulfilled in the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus many human hopes and divine promises that remained open beyond their own time. This is a kind of 'typology' in which typical human situations and expectations find their completion in Christ, but not a typology in the sense of exact prediction.

The way that the relation between Christ and Scripture is conceived has an effect on the way that the faith which is to be proclaimed is discerned, and may well account for some difference of direction in the thought of Anglicans and Baptists. In the first place, if we maintain the primacy of the authority of Christ, and honour the Scriptures as uniquely (though not exclusively) bearing witness to Christ, the tendency will be to relativize all other resources of theological guidance after Scripture. The relation between Scripture and other writings will be that of primary witness to many secondary witnesses. By contrast, if we equate the authority of Christ and the authority of Scripture, the tendency will be to make a hierarchy of writings, ranking those higher that are thought to be earlier or just better interpreters of Scripture. Some resources will be recognized as having had a strong impact on the reading of Scripture in the history of the church, and will be privileged. In the second place, an equating of the authority of Christ with Scripture might well lead to the desire to find a 'unified corpus' of belief in the New Testament, where prioritizing the authority of Christ leaves open the possibility of a more diverse witness to him. I say 'tendency' and 'might well', because I am not convinced that Martin's identification of the

authority of Christ and Scripture as being on the same level is characteristically Anglican, or required by Anglican canons.

22. Creeds, confessions and covenants again

In my earlier contribution, I suggested that Baptists will look to the creeds and other teaching of the Church Fathers as an extension of 'congregational hermeneutics', hearing in them the witness of the wider church to the gospel of Christ. I am not entirely sure where Martin thinks that our difference might lie here, since he agrees that the creeds may be understood as an expression of the mind of the wider church (section 15). What they express, he affirms, is the witness of Christians down through the ages to the overall shape of the biblical story, not to what Christ is saying today in various places of the world. Of course, creeds do not tell us (at least directly) how Christ is speaking today, but I placed them *alongside* contemporary reading of scripture by Christians in different parts of the world because, like contemporary examples, they offer a reading of scripture in the context of their own time and place. By using terms like *homoousios*, *phusis* and *hypostasis*, Nicaea and Chalcedon make their faithful witness to the gospel of Christ in the context of the philosophical culture of their time. Despite this contextualization, the Spirit of God has used these formulations to reveal to the church the meaning of Christ and the triune God.

My own view, as expressed earlier, is that the creeds (with the Christological definition of Chalcedon) are indispensable to knowing the faith of the church in a way that some contemporary witnesses are not, since the former are witnesses that come from the period before the division of the church between east and west and so are uniquely ecumenical. However, I do not think this could be claimed to be a general Baptist view. I also think that *some* contemporary reading of scripture *will* remain indispensable witness to Christ, such as the understanding of Christ as liberator in situations of oppression, and I think this would be a general Baptist view.

In explaining the function of confessions among Baptist churches in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, I distinguished them from the church 'covenant' (section 10). Martin has understandably taken this as a statement that churches did not avail themselves of confessions as a doctrinal framework within which members could understand better 'what walking

together and watching over each other should involve'. He asks, 'why not a confession *and* a covenant?' (section 16). I meant that the covenant was *binding* on a member in a way that the confession was not, although the confession was available precisely as *guidance* for what fellowship and mission meant. The confession was held by the Association of churches, and individual churches corporately would often (though not always) assent to it. But individual members would enter the covenant of the local community without having to ascribe individually to the confession. What mattered was mutual commitment to each other and to God in Christ, in ways 'already known and yet to be made known'.

Indeed, this might not even mean the signing of a covenant document: being baptized as a believer was a sufficient event of being joined to Christ and each other. Covenant thinking did not exclude confessions, but the covenant idea, with Christ as covenant mediator, meant that Baptists held confessions as guides rather than obligations that bound the conscience, as is still the case among most Baptists who retain confessions as part of their life today.

23. The role of the Christian minister in teaching the faith

With regard to the teaching office of the Baptist minister, or the Anglican bishop and priest, I do not think that an essential difference of viewpoint exists, despite Martin's comments. In answering the question, 'how do we know what the faith is?', I am glad that he has now added the role of the Christian minister in teaching 'the faith that was originally taught by the apostles'; this was oddly missing from his opening statement. However, he finds a difference between us in that I wrote of 'teaching the faith of the church' where he wants to speak of 'bearing witness to scripture' or teaching the faith originally held and taught by the apostles (section 17). I wonder how much difference there really is here, since we both agree that the faith of the church always rests on scripture as the normative *written* source of authority. No one can teach the faith of the church without faithfully teaching and preaching Scripture. I preferred, however, to refer to 'the faith of the church' for a number of reasons. The first and most obvious is that the apostles were part of the church, and so the faith held by the apostles is also the faith of the church.

A second reason for referring to the 'faith of the church' is that the minister must surely teach not only the content of the New Testament (the apostolic witness) but the way that the church has come to a common mind about interpretation of scripture, and the way that the apostolic witness might come alive in new ways today in our contemporary world. In the first case, for instance, a formulated doctrine of the Trinity (three persons in one God) is actually the faith of the church, though based on New Testament fragmentary and experimental material. Martin's very concern for the authority of the creeds, as secondary only to scripture, means that the minister's responsibility is to teach the faith of the *church* in its witness to scripture. In the second case, it is the task of the minister of the gospel to perceive imaginative and creative ways in which the church can proclaim its faith in our late-modern world with all its challenges. What is Christ saying to our world of political confusion and social need today? Discerning this is also the faith of the church, and part of a teaching ministry.

A third reason for referring to the 'faith of the church' is that the minister has a special responsibility for representing in any local situation the faith of the whole church of Christ, lest a community's grasp on the faith becomes limited and parochial. When I related the handing over of responsibilities of ministry by the Apostle Paul to the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20, I certainly did not intend to say that the elders held the *same* authority as Paul and the other apostles. But one of the functions they inherited, necessary when the generation of apostles died out, was to witness to the faith of the whole church in any local congregation, saying as did Paul that 'if you are disposed to be contentious, know that all the other churches believe this' (e.g. 1 Cor. 11:16) . Anglicans will readily perceive here that Baptists attribute to every ordained minister of word and sacrament the responsibility of a ministry of unity that is given by episcopally-ordered churches to the diocesan bishop. Baptists in fact called the minister in a single or town congregation either 'bishop' or 'elder' throughout the seventeenth century. While several members of the church, not only the minister, will be gifted in teaching and interpreting scripture, the ordained minister has the special responsibility of setting this teaching in the context of the whole mission of God in all time and space; this is based on her or his ordination in which her/his calling is recognized by as wide a part of the whole body of Christ as is possible within the limits of a tragically fragmented church.

I repeat, however, that I do not actually think that Martin and I are at odds in our understanding of the teaching office in the church, nor that there is any essential difference to be remarked between Baptist and Anglican understandings here, except for the fact that Baptists will give some of the responsibilities of the diocesan 'bishop' to the 'bishop' of the local congregation (who, if an Anglican priest, in any case represents and shares in the ministry of the diocesan bishop as the minister of the 'local church').

24. Unity and diversity in the Scriptures

The basic disagreement between Martin and myself on whether the New Testament contains a 'body of agreed belief' and a 'corpus of authoritative teaching' probably cannot be resolved in this conversation. In any case, I am not convinced that our difference represents an actual difference between Anglicans and Baptists, but rather a theological difference that might be found in both communions. All I wish to claim with regard to Baptists is that a view of a greater diversity of witness to Christ in the New Testament than Martin recognizes is at least coherent with a Baptist understanding of Scripture as witness to Christ, and with Baptist recognition of a diversity of transmitters and interpreters of the faith after the apostolic age. Nor, on the other hand (*pace* both Martin and Oliver O'Donovan), does a reading of Anglican theology yield the united view that assenting to the Thirty-nine Articles requires Scripture to offer a 'unified outlook'. One notable dissident would be the doyen of Anglican theology, Stephen Sykes, who describes Christian faith as a 'contested concept' from the very beginning:

> … the disagreements which the writers of the New Testament had to encounter are not accidental. Even if all these disagreements were resolved by identical solutions (which in the light of the data seems implausible), it would still be the case that it was the very nature of Christian profession itself which provoked those disagreements. Internal conflict inheres in the Christian tradition, even in its earliest forms. It is not therefore in the least surprising that

> conflict and debate should continue to characterize the Christian movement as it expanded into other cultures.[40]

Rather as I have been suggesting myself, Sykes finds that this diversity or 'contest' of witness is held together in one identity because 'the contest has a single origin in a single, albeit internally complex, performance … the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,' [41] and that diversity also has a boundary in 'participation in communal worship.'[42] Moreover, Sykes significantly finds that Anglicanism is a similarly 'contested concept', that a willingness to live with this contest lies at the very heart of the Anglican temper, and that a recognition of this situation does not prevent the formulation of doctrine.[43] The internal debate within Anglicanism that a comparison of Sykes with O'Donovan (as quoted by Martin above) reveals cannot be further pursued here. I would, however, like to clear away some confusions that might have arisen in my own conversation with Martin.

I am not suggesting that an understanding of Scripture as witness to Christ *requires* the diversity of which I write, as Martin seems to understand me to say (section 18). My point is that an impartial study of the New Testament text – and similarly the Hebrew Bible – shows as a matter of fact a considerable diversity of theology, but that this diversity is not disastrous for the truth of the Christian gospel just because all these strands, in their various ways, point to the revelation of God in Christ – incarnate, crucified and risen. As I wrote, a recognition of a variety in the New Testament kerygmata 'throws us back' on a Christological approach to scripture. The unity of Scripture lies, not in any supposed lack of 'diversity of theological content' (as Martin suggests in 18) but in its witness throughout to Christ, as perceived through the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Thus the church can, as Martin wishes, 'look to the New Testament as such to understand the truth about Christ and God's will for us today' but it may need to exercise more faith, and to take more risks in interpretation, than would be the case if we were presented with a comforting unified body of teaching. A 'canonical reading' of Scripture *interprets* Scripture harmoniously from the perspective

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[40] Stephen Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity* (London, 1984), p. 23.
[41] Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity*, pp. 251–4.
[42] Sykes, *The Identity of Christianity*, p. 283.
[43] Stephen Sykes, *The Integrity of Anglicanism* (London: Mowbrays 1978), pp. 60ff.

of the whole canon, and so from the viewpoint of the developed faith of the church; it does not suppose that all parts of the New Testament have been *written* from that perspective.

What I wanted to question was Martin's argument that the Church Fathers must have second-order authority for us after Scripture, *on the grounds that* they received and preserved an already unified 'corpus of agreed belief' first handed down to them by the apostles (section 1). My point is that the more diversity is discerned in the New Testament, even if it is not as great as scholars such as Dunn propose, the less convincing this argument becomes, and the more the Church Fathers are to be placed among a host of faithful witnesses to Christ and Scripture whom the Spirit has raised up in the church.

I have never suggested that the illumination of the Spirit, which will help us to navigate the diversity of witness in Scripture, *replaces* the authority of the word, as Martin supposes (19.54). It is a red-herring then to appeal to early Baptist rejection of the Quaker 'option of relying on the Spirit *rather than* the Word'. Taking the diversity of Scripture seriously means taking the word seriously, with the expectation that Christ can be encountered through it, and through every part of it. Baptists, as I wrote earlier, have been a 'Word and Spirit' movement, open to the disturbance which the Spirit brings. In answering the question 'how do we know what the faith is?', Baptists to be true to their origins must include the illumination of the Holy Spirit, who is the gift of God the Father through the Son in the love of the Trinity.

E. Proclaiming the faith today: Martin Davie, Paul Fiddes and others

25. Doing theology together as Baptists and Anglicans

As the partners in this particular conversation, we have asked ourselves what benefit it might have for the wider project of conversations between Anglicans and Baptists on the theme of 'proclaiming the faith today'. Conventional ecumenical practice at this point would be to attempt a summary of convergences and divergences, but we have already indicated some of these as the conversations have developed. It is also clear to us that

we have not only identified some differences in approach between Baptists and the Church of England, but between members in *each* communion. The diversity we have identified exists among the fellow church-members of both of us, though each communion may well show a 'trend' or 'momentum' in one direction.

We think, then, it is better for us to draw on our conversation in conclusion to recommend ways of working together at what it means to know, teach and proclaim the faith today, taking account of the different perspectives we have discovered. In proposing such a process of 'ecumenical theology', we have drawn on further, wider conversation with other members of our study commission so that what follows represents contributions from many conversation-partners, not just from the two who have worked at this particular theme. We might even dare to say that it reflects a common mind.

26. The coherence of faith

If we are to proclaim the Christian faith effectively today, it seems essential that it must have some inner coherence. We certainly want to avoid giving the impression that we think we have the answer to everything, or that we want to impose fixed formulas that take no account of a person's own situation and their own local story. Above all we want to confess that we live in the presence of a God who remains Mystery, although this God has graciously made God's self known so that God is not a secret but is the Mystery of the one who loves personally and in freedom. Nevertheless, the faith we hold and offer must 'hang together' to make a consistent story that fits the story of our lives and that of our universe. A humble provisionality and coherence are not at odds with each other.

Our conversation has shown two grounds for this coherence. One is that the written material we have inherited in Scripture and tradition has, at its core, a whole web of interconnections. Scriptural ideas about creation, human fallenness, suffering, redemption, a new life here and now and new creation to come are all mutually supportive and illuminative, and are interwoven with the belief that through Jesus of Nazareth we find our way into the communion of a God who lives eternally in relations of love. Both conversation-partners affirm this coherence. But one person believes that

this coherence amounts to a 'unified viewpoint' and even a unified 'corpus of authoritative teaching' which has been given in the New Testament and preserved in the church, guaranteeing its integration, so that witnesses who have taught it most clearly (the Fathers, the makers of the historic formularies) are to be given special attention. The other person is not urging total disharmony, but is confident that tensions and conflict within the witnesses in church and Scripture do not prevent, and even enrich, the way that all things 'hold together in Christ' (Col 1:16). Thus the second ground for coherence is in Christ himself, whose story is traced in the Gospels, in whose light all scripture can be read, and who is present in the midst of the congregation today. This Christ brings a unity and wholeness to the faith held by all the saints that is also dynamic and flexible, so that faith (while not contradicting the witness of scripture) may take new and unexpected forms in new times and places.

The difference between the conversation partners has been one of emphasis in holding to these two grounds of coherence, textual and Christological. Although the difference in emphasis is as much represented *within* each communion, Anglican and Baptist, as *by* the communions, there is a tendency to give a different weight to each ground due to the stories of the communities as we have traced them in the preceding conversation. We should be able and willing to recognize the coherence of faith in each other, even though one has 'historic formularies' of much greater content and substance than the other, and one has been thrown more than the other upon the claims of the 'rule of Christ' in the local congregation in order to defend its liberty of worship in word and sacrament.[44]

The way that members of each communion have drawn together the pieces of Christian teaching that sustain them into a whole has been more than a concept; it has been a way of life, a drawing together of the fragments of life into an integrity of living as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. There is, then, a particular richness in exploring our different stories to discover the ways in which various Christian beliefs have been connected with each other in our distinct experiences. To take just one example, the different ways in which Baptists and Anglicans have connected baptism, faith, grace and the human condition of sinfulness, remain as a gift for the treasury of theology.

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[44] For this key Baptist idea of 'the rule of Christ', see section 21 above.

In seeking to express a coherent faith which may be a persuasive world-view among the many on offer today, we need to explore these connections as they have been embodied in faithful lives. To put it another way, we need to learn to tell the Christian story in a way that is not dominating or coercive, meeting the accusation of our late-modern era that all metanarratives (grand narratives, or comprehensive stories) are oppressive. We will learn to tell a connected and coherent story with loving persuasion only when we enter with sympathy into each other's stories of faith, learning how each thinks they hold together in Christ.

27. Christological exegesis

This brings us to the need to revive a Christological reading of the whole of scripture. Recent conversations between the Baptist World Alliance and the Roman Catholic Church have firmly identified this approach as characteristic of both traditions, declaring that 'Baptists and Catholics insist that the Old Testament and the New Testament together form a coherent story that requires a Christ-centred interpretation'.[45] In further explanation, the report continues:

> In the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 'Christians...read the Old Testament in the light of Christ crucified and risen'.[46] The *Catechism* further quotes from Hugh of St. Victor, that ' "All Sacred Scripture is but one book, and that one book is Christ, because all divine Scripture speaks of Christ, and all divine Scripture is fulfilled in Christ"'.[47] Baptists likewise read the Bible in this Christocentric fashion. For example, the 1963 version of the Southern Baptist Convention's *Baptist Faith and Message*

[45] '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', *American Baptist Quarterly* 31 (2012), §§47–48.
[46] *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, p. 129. Available at: www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015.
[47] *Catechism*, p. 134.

> declares that 'The criterion by which the Bible is to be interpreted is Jesus Christ'.[48]

Significantly, the report goes on immediately to insist that the Bible should not only be read and studied privately by each believer, but corporately in the congregation whose members together have the hermeneutical task of finding the 'Christ-centred interpretation'. Indeed, the norm of interpretation is 'congregational', not private interpretation. A similar affirmation is made in the Cyprus Agreed Statement of the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue, which affirms that 'Reception of the Gospel, the creeds, and authoritative teaching is the work not of individuals but of communities'. The central place for this reception is the eucharistic assembly. The report recalls that in the 'classical model of reception' the bishop who taught the faith was 'the focus of a dynamic community [with a] charism of reception', so that 'the bishop had to receive the "Amen" of the community.' 'This was a profoundly eucharistic approach to reception, since the "Amen" of the people was always indispensable in the celebration of the Eucharist'.[49] Thus, the *anamnesis* of the death and resurrection of Christ, where 'the whole church is taken into the movement of Christ's self-offering'[50] is the appropriate place where faith, based on scripture, is to be given doctrinal form.

In different ways, Anglican, Baptist, Orthodox and Catholic further agree that this community of reception and interpretation cannot be confined to the local assembly but belongs to the communion of the church universal. Baptists, for instance, spoke from earliest days about the need for 'communion in each others' gifts and graces' beyond the local church in order to find the mind of Christ.[51] A Christological interpretation of Scripture – uniquely among valid and worthwhile hermeneutical tools that are employed within the academy (such as historical criticism, form criticism

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[48] *Baptist Faith and Message* (1963), p. 2, accessed at: www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/history/bfam.stm.txt

[49] *The Church of the Triune God.* The Cyprus Agreed Statement of the International Commission for Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue 2006 (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2006), pp. 101–102

[50] *Church of the Triune God* , p. 70.

[51] See the *Confession of Faith* (Second London Confession) 1677, ch. 27.1, in context of ch. 26.14–15, in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, p. 289.

and literary criticism) – thus requires ecumenical consultation within the churches. This is because 'Christological exegesis' is not simply a matter of what a passage might tell us about Christ, but a matter of *what Christ tells us* about this passage. We can only know this when we gather as wide a representation of the church of Christ as we can, in a situation of the historic brokenness and fragmentation of the churches.

While as conversation partners we have differed about the exact way that the relation between Christ and Scripture is conceived, we agree that Christological exegesis is not only discerning the way that Christ fulfills past Scripture, but the way that Scripture is to be read in the light of the unveiling of God in Christ. This requires serious New Testament study, so that 'Christ' is not evaporated from history into an ongoing 'Christ principle' in the church; but it also calls for serious conversation between communions about the way that they hear the demand of Christ on their lives today, and how this shapes the way they read scripture.

28. The guidance of tradition and office

In developing Christological exegesis, we need the guidance of faithful disciples of the past as well as the present. In our conversation we have noticed differences between our communions over whether, and how much, this guidance can be placed in an order of priority. Is there a ranking, for instance, between the Church Fathers, later 'historic formularies', and influential Christian voices today? We recommend that each of our traditions should ask itself serious questions about *what* elements of the tradition (sources secondary to scripture) we privilege, and *why we do so*. There is always a danger of becoming static in the reception of the faith. Baptists should ask whether their reluctance to use creeds – which has never been an outright rejection – is rooted in nothing more than prejudice. It might, we think, be helpful in the process of confessing the faith today for the Baptist Union Council formally to affirm the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as a faithful witness to the truth of the Gospel. Anglicans might undertake serious enquiry into how their 'historic formularies' might take effect in the new Christian communities that are coming into existence through the 'Fresh Expressions' movement to which they have given birth. There seems to be a challenge, both about how to communicate the content of the formularies,

and how their principles (such as the relation of church and sacramental ministry) might be worked out in new ways in new forms of church.

Although historic Baptist confessions of faith are not, as explained above, binding on local churches or their members, we came to the conclusion that reading such confessions of the seventeenth century alongside the 'historic formularies' of the Church of England does at least demonstrate a remarkable convergence in faith. The judgement from the Anglican side of these conversations was that the widespread consensus on doctrine in confessions of both the Particular and General English Baptists placed them 'in the mainstream' of Protestant theology of the period, and in particular in agreement with the historic Anglican formularies, allowing for distinctively Baptist traits such as only baptizing those who could make a profession of faith, a twofold ministry of elders (or bishops) and deacons, the calling of ministers by the congregation and the right to resist the civil magistrates over matters of religious conviction. While admitting the non-credal character of the confessions we think that they could still act as a useful theological resource for constructing a statement of doctrinal agreement between Anglicans and Baptists, such as would be needed for any further steps towards official mutual recognition of our communions.

Both Baptists and Anglicans also need, it seems, to recover the gift of the teaching office of the 'bishop' in finding the appropriate confession of faith for today. There is a trend at present to regard the bishop (as diocesan or suffragan bishop in Anglican terms, and as local minister or regional minister in Baptist ecclesiology) exclusively as a 'leader in mission'. The congregation should expect the minister/bishop to have the Christ-given role of teaching the faith, rather than looking – as so often happens – to flamboyant figures of the Christian media whose ministry seems to consist of circuits for speeches and conferences and whose addresses are given the 'buzz' of contemporary marketing. On the side of the bishop, there must be a sense of responsibility to know how the faith is being confessed in the worldwide church. We would like to see Baptist regional ministers and Anglican bishops deliberating together regularly on the meaning of the faith for our present day and society, and local churches giving time and attention to their proposals.

A recovery of the teaching responsibility of the bishop should not, of course, undermine the need for congregations in the local church to do

theology together, to explore what is increasingly being called 'everyday theology'. Our reflections earlier had a good deal to say about interpreting scripture for our present day as a corporate rather than a private activity. Our experience is that there is an appetite within our congregations for theological reflection in depth on current issues that touch us all, such as welfare provision and food banks. This appetite calls for response, and congregations need to be treated seriously as places where the nature of faith for today can be shaped.

29. Gospel and culture

The development of the Gospel message for today will seek inculturated forms, in an attempt to 'translate the essential meaning of Christianity from the terms of one historical and cultural milieu into another ... proclaiming the Gospel in terms of people's own culture, so that it may permeate their personal and social life', as the Anglican-Orthodox Theological Dialogue puts it.[52] Such inculturation will not be without a critique of culture from the perspective of Scripture and tradition.

But the model of 'translation' is hardly enough, as we consider the self-giving and self-offering of the triune God within the life of the world. It must be possible to hear the voice of the Spirit of God in and through (not *as*) our cultural context. As Karl Barth, one of the doughtiest defenders of the uniqueness of Scripture as witness to the Word of God remarked, while there is no place for the sanctifying of cultural achievement, 'there is even less place for a basic blindness to the possibility that culture may be revelatory, that it can be filled with promise.'[53] The church will not identify the coming of the Kingdom of God in any cultural achievement, but 'it will be alert to the signs which, perhaps in many cultural achievements, announce that the kingdom approaches.' Culture, then, has a sacramental, or signifying, role. It can be a witness to the promise of God. Thirty years later, in the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth was affirming Jesus Christ as the Light of Life, the One Word of God alongside whom there is no other. But precisely because this is the case Barth writes, 'the sphere of his dominion and his

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[52] *Church of the Triune God*, p. 47.

[53] Karl Barth, 'Church and Culture' in *Theology and Church*, trans. L.P. Smith (London: SPCK, 1962), pp. 343–4.

word is greater than that of the kerygma, dogma, cultus, mission and the whole life of the [Christian] community.'[54] There are true words spoken in human culture, true because through them the Word of God can be heard. They are witnesses to the Word itself, who is Christ. 'Even from the mouth of Balaam' writes Barth, 'the well-known voice of the Good Shepherd may sound, and it is not to be ignored in spite of its sinister origin.'[55] Or again, Christ can 'make use of human beings [inside or outside the Bible] in such a way that to hear them is to hear him'.[56] In seeking to hear the Christ who was marginalized in his society, we must pay particular attention to the voices on the margin today for whom others in our culture have little time.

Of course, the church must also not allow itself to be taken in captivity to culture. It was the same Karl Barth who was a major author of the Barmen Declaration when churches spoke out courageously in the Nazi era, insisting that 'Jesus Christ, as he is testified for us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God which we have to hear, and which we have to trust and obey in life and in death.'[57] The church needs critical discernment to know when God in Christ is speaking through culture, and when human culture is simply fostering its own survival, leading the church at times to say 'no' as well as 'yes' to cultural developments.

Our concern here is not with the large questions of Gospel and culture in general, but with the formulating of Christian faith for our present-day culture through the working of our communions together. Here we have significant resources in each other. Our conversations have thrown up differences between our own cultures as Christian communions. The situation is not a simple polarity between 'church' and 'culture', but that of many cultures in the church of Christ as well as outside it. Sympathetic engagement in the way that the Gospel has been inculturated among us in history, and still is differently embodied today, will make us sensitive to hearing the voice of the Spirit in culture beyond the walls of the church. Only as we hear the Word of God through each other, in our distinct cultural forms, will we be able to discern it elsewhere. The spiritual faculty of

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[54] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3, pp. 116–117.
[55] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3, p. 117.
[56] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3, p. 101.
[57] See Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Church's Confession Under Hitler* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 239. Compare the first clause of the *Declaration of Principle* of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.

judgement of culture will also be better formed as in our different contexts we listen for the Word of God in Christ, as witnessed in scripture, and share our insights together.

Finally, we each have experience of conflicts in the interpretation of the faith within our own communities, and have developed skills in listening to minority as well as majority voices. These are experiences which we are prone to hide away as domestic matters, but to share them with each other can be a positive gain in the task of teaching and communicating the faith in a conflicted world. Where many voices contend, the voice of the Good Shepherd will still sound out.

Part II

3
How do we receive and grow in the faith?

A conversation between Margaret Swinson, Stephen Keyworth and Paul Fiddes

A. Margaret Swinson, speaking as an Anglican

1. The context

The Church of England is at the same time a national church, a church with its focus in the parish, and a church which has a life at diocesan and even at deanery level. The reception of faith, however, tends to happen at the extreme ends of the spectrum, in its national and parochial aspects, with the former setting certain parameters through its central institutions and structures.

As with other areas of the life of the Church of England the canons – particularly B15A (Admission to Communion), B22 & 24 (Baptism), B26 (Teaching the young), and B27 (Confirmation) – together with the Book of Common Prayer identify certain circumstances where preparation and nurture are required. Indeed they are specific about the content of the instruction for those preparing for confirmation.

More recently the General Synod Regulations for the 'Admission of Baptised Children to Holy Communion' (2006) were agreed. These not only specify that preparation must take place, but also require ongoing spiritual development for baptized children if a parish scheme for the admission of baptized children to Holy Communion is to be approved. The requirement for continuing instruction is an indication of a change in emphasis from event-based instruction to an ongoing process of spiritual development leading, eventually, to confirmation.[1]

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[1] See the Report *On the Way. Towards an Integrated Approach to Christian Initiation.* GS Misc 44 (London: Church House Publishing, 1995), and the commentaries in *Common Worship: Christian Initiation: Services and Prayers for the Church of England* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005).

2. Children and the church

The Church of England has always placed an emphasis on educating its children and Canon B26 requires that this takes place, preferably on a Sunday but 'if need be at other convenient times'. As the number of children and young people within Church of England congregations has fallen the relationship between the church and young people has been the matter of national debates and reports. These reflect a growing understanding that children, young people and young adults have different needs, engagement patterns and contributions to make to church life, and they also look at opportunities which are presented to the church through education.

The reports over the last 25 years have seen a distinct change in the attitude of churches to the children and young people in their midst.[2] Children were historically seen and spoken of as 'the church of the future' but these changes have recognized their place as members of the church of the present. Obvious indications of this change are the increasing number of Youth Councils at diocesan level, the representation of the Church of England Youth Council at General Synod and the more recent national events like the Regeneration Summit which set out to engage the Church of England with the vision and energy of the young people who are part of it.

However, many congregations have few if any children attending Sunday or midweek activities and increasing numbers of children are only present occasionally due to access arrangements following divorce and the growing number of parents who are working on Sundays. This presents new challenges to the church, not just in respect of ministry to children but also with regard to the growth and development of ministry to adults.

A major opportunity for the church to initiate relationships with children has come through changes in education policies. Significant work with children is being undertaken through the increasing number of church schools but alongside this, churches are also involved in many other schools. Many churches regularly engage with hundreds of children each month who do not attend church, simply through taking regular assemblies. In addition a number support Christian Unions in secondary school settings, lunchtime or

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[2] See, for example, *Going for Growth. Transformation for Children, Young People and the Church*. GS 1769 (London: Archbishops' Council, 2010), section 1, 'Changing Childhood'.

after school clubs in primary schools and church members are volunteers providing learning support. As contact on Sunday with young people has diminished, these other avenues of contact which have actually existed for many years have recently become increasingly important, enabling the church to engage with children and those caring for them during the day. How this will bear fruit in the life of the church is yet to be fully assessed.

3. Initiation (the beginning of life in Christ)

The Anglican canons specify that preparation should take place before each stage of what is regarded as a process of initiation. This responsibility is generally recognized in parishes with the requirement for families to receive preparation for the baptism of their children. Further, individuals receive preparation for admission to Holy Communion, whether they are children or older believers. Individuals also receive preparation for baptism, if they are old enough, and for confirmation.

The Church of England incorporates a range of practices for initiation, but there is now a common understanding within the church that it is a process not a series of events. This process may begin with a service of baptism as an infant, or sometimes thanksgiving for the birth of an infant; but, with a population more generally estranged from rather than engaged with the church, it increasingly begins with the baptism of children or adults where many of the baptized enter the church with little or no 'foundational' knowledge.

The 'syllabus' set out in the Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer, with its emphasis on knowledge of certain texts, is therefore no longer paramount as it assumes an engagement with the Christian faith which is no longer a reality for most. Many courses and programmes have been written with this new reality in mind, notably courses like the Alpha Course, and these are now commonly used for initiation preparation.

The Admission of Children to Holy Communion is, for the Church of England, a new element in the initiation process and has been a significant agent for change in both the relationship of children to the church and in the nature of confirmation. The practice thus demands some consideration.

In the past, confirmation was an event which generally took place at a particular age, which was any time from about 8–14 depending on the policy

of the particular church or school concerned. Children or young people often viewed it as a route to receiving Communion. Churches which held confirmation to be the making of an 'adult' commitment to the promises made by parents and godparents at baptism did not prepare children for confirmation until they were in their teens; this often meant that a number had left the church by this time and were thus never confirmed, while for others it was more of a 'passing out' event than an initiation event. Those confirmed at age 8 or 9 were generally still attending church with their parents but many later either left the church or, as discussions in the Church of England Youth Council (CEYC) in April 2010 showed, regretted having been confirmed so young, as they were then unable to use confirmation as a mark of adult church membership and of commissioning for life-ministry.

The discussions at CEYC were very revealing in regard to confirmation, reception of faith and nurture. Most of those present were disappointed at the level of ongoing spiritual development which was provided post-confirmation and counselled against the 'event-based' nature of confirmation preparation. The majority valued the separation of first communion from confirmation through the admission of baptized children to communion at an earlier age, before confirmation. They felt it put a higher value on both events; on the one hand it recognized the membership of the church, the spiritual insights and the contribution of children as a full part of the church community at the Eucharist, and on the other it recognized the transition to adulthood and commissioning for lifetime ministry which confirmation offered.

4. On-going nurture

The more general appreciation that receiving faith is not a 'once and for all' life event but is a life-long process is in theory part of Church of England culture in the twenty-first century. I say 'in theory' because although there is a common intellectual understanding that this is the case, most churches still face a serious challenge when trying to reflect this understanding in the numbers of church members who actively engage in church-based teaching programmes outside Sunday worship.

There are many possible reasons for this, a number of which are outside the control and influence of the church. These include different working

patterns, the greater availability of entertainment in the home, a greater felt need for parents to be available to take their children to events by car, and the more fragmented nature of society.

Another possible reason is what I will call the 'Alpha effect'. Alpha has been used, and continues to be used, as a teaching programme in the Church of England and it is a very valuable resource. However, there is a danger that, for a number of churches, it is used as the measure of Christian maturity and it is therefore seen as the end of the learning process rather than as a mechanism for reaching the starting blocks of a lifetime of learning. This has, in my experience, led to people regarding other teaching offered as unnecessary or inferior to Alpha.

The picture is, however, not all negative. Many churches have begun to emphasize training for 'whole-life' discipleship and are publicly placing greater emphasis on the ministry of their members in the home, workplace, and places of socialization. This emphasis brings the lens of faith to bear on daily ethical and moral challenges which many face and makes faith more relevant to life. This can help members to see the need for development in these areas, in the same way as they receive development through other vocational and professional training in their work-places.

Another positive aspect is the greater hunger for 'training' and challenging theological study shown by a growing number from our churches. This is reflected in the increasing numbers of diocesan short courses in various aspects of ministry, and the number of lay people undertaking Masters degrees through distance learning or part-time evening courses and those attending other in-depth theological education, or one-off teaching events provided locally.

If the Church of England is to take Christ's command 'to make disciples of all' seriously, the matter of ongoing development has to be addressed. This has recently been underlined by a report on Discipleship commissioned by the Archbishops' Council, and adopted by the General Synod in February 2015 as the basis for a group of reports seeking to re-focus the attention of the Church on growth for the future in the face of historic decline. The report[3] offered 'Ten Marks of Developing Disciples', drawn from research on good practice from dioceses, as a model for a church which is called to be

[3] *Developing Discipleship*. GS 1977 (London: Church House Publishing, 2015), mainly authored by Stephen Croft, Bishop of Sheffield.

a 'community of missionary disciples.' Grounded in exegesis of scripture, the report described discipleship as 'an invitation to the strongest hope, the deepest joy, the most authentic pattern of living, the highest adventure known to humanity.' Synod agreed to develop in each diocese an action plan for implementing the 'Ten Marks' at every level, to prepare a revised Catechism, and 'to identify and commission other resources to help the whole Church to live out our common discipleship'.

B. Stephen Keyworth and Paul S. Fiddes respond from a Baptist perspective

5. The Baptist context

Baptists recognize the same social factors that Margaret describes, and they share the same aims for Christians not only to receive the faith for the first time but to grow in the faith throughout their lives. Some differences do arise in the way this is to be worked out in a distinctively Baptist environment, and there is room here for Baptists to learn from Anglican practices as well as to offer their own experiences, as we hope will become clear in our response.

Immediately we have to note that there is not the same central 'setting of parameters' for Christian nurture as Margaret records for the Church of England. The Council of the Baptist Union has over the years received and commended reports and study documents such as *Believing and Being Baptized*, *The Child and the Church*, *Knowing What We Believe*, and *Something to Declare. A Study of the Declaration of Principle of the Baptist Union of Great Britain*.[4] However, the 'reach' of these materials into the church on the local scene is limited, and congregations tend to follow their own convictions on matters such as age of the baptism of a believing

[4] *Believing and Being Baptized. Baptism, so-called re-baptism, and children in the church.* A discussion document by the Doctrine and Worship Committee of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (London: Baptist Union, 1996); *The Child and the Church. A Baptist Discussion* (London; Carey Kingsgate Press, 1966); *Knowing What We Believe.* A paper presented to BUGB Council exploring issues of Baptist identity and theological authority (London: Baptist Union, 2009); Fiddes, Haymes, Kidd and Quicke, *Something to Declare. A Study of the Declaration of Principle.*

disciple, or admission to the Lord's Supper, and they will use discipleship courses from a range of Christian providers.

Baptists might then learn from Anglicans in making the process of Christian nurture as much of a key issue as evangelism for discussion at national and at regional (associational) level. As in the Church of England, there has been a growing sense among Baptists that initiation into Christ does not simply happen at one point, such as a conscious moment of conversion, but is a process over a period, leading into a larger journey of discipleship throughout life. This conviction has certainly been expressed by Baptist representatives on the ecumenical scene in a range of conversations with other churches, and not least with the Church of England in the recent report *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity*.[5] It is another matter to say how much it has as yet shaped a sense of 'being Baptist' today. We will say more about this 'journey of initiation' in our response below.

6. The child in the church

Once Baptists, at the beginning of their life as an identifiable Christian movement, had resolved not to baptize very young children, they faced the challenge of how to include children in the life of the church. This challenge still remains to some extent today, as Anglican friends often point out. Baptists rejected infant baptism because, in the first place, they believed it to be the New Testament practice to baptize only Christian disciples who could offer their own confession of faith, so that a believer's faith was thoroughly integrated with God's transforming grace. In the second place, they refused to believe that infants were damned until they were baptized. General Baptists thought that salvation in Christ extended to include all children until

[5] See *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity*, pp. 29–57. See also conversations with the Anglican Communion and the Catholic Church: *Conversations Around the World 2000–2005: The Report of the International Conversations between The Anglican Communion and The Baptist World Alliance* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2005), pp. 44–8, and 'The Word of God in the Life of the Church', paras. 102–6. An important Anglican contribution has been made here by Paul Avis (ed.), *The Journey of Christian Initiation.* The Faith and Order Commission of the Church of England (London: Church House Publishing, 2011).

they were of an age to trust or refuse to trust in Christ for themselves,[6] while Particular Baptists looked to the mystery of election in Christ, which would become more evident to the human eye when those 'born in the bosom of the church'[7] reached the age of discernment. These two motives tended to work against each other: the appeal to the need for personal confession tended to leave children in an uncertain position in the covenant community, since they had not yet made covenant promises for themselves, while the appeal to the grace of God in Christ tended to incorporate children into the community within the all-embracing love of God.

Overall, Baptists have lived with these tensions and in one way or another have welcomed children into the life of the congregation. Increasingly, from the seventeenth century onwards, Baptists have practised a rite of blessing of infants, based on the Gospel account that Jesus 'took up children in his arms and blessed them', so making clear that they belong within the fellowship of the church.[8] In the act of blessing (normally using the blessing of Aaron in Numbers 6:24–6) there is included the naming of the child, prayer for the child which 'provides a channel for the grace of God to work'[9] in his or her life, and an acceptance of the child into the sphere of God's gracious influence in the community. The church prays that children who are blessed in its midst may come to faith in Christ for themselves, be baptized, and so become members of the body in due time. The words used in the act of blessing will not use baptismal language which declares them *to be* 'members of the body of Christ', as is the case in churches that practice infant baptism, but this rite has more 'sacramental' content (while not being one of the two 'sacraments' instituted by Christ) than the alternative 'Service of Thanksgiving' in Anglican Common Worship.

At the same time there is an opportunity for the parents to offer thanks to God for the gift of the child, and to make whatever promises about the Christian upbringing of the child they can conscientiously undertake. This act of blessing can then be adapted for the different situations of committed

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[6] See Thomas Helwys, *A short and plaine proofe … that all men are redeamed by Christ. As also, that no infants are condemned* (Amsterdam?: 1611).

[7] John Tombes, *Examen of the Sermon of Mr Stephen Marshall about Infant Baptism* (London: 1645), pp. 32–3.

[8] See R.L. Child, *The Blessing of Infants and the Dedication of Parents* (London: Carey Kingsgate, 1946).

[9] *Believing and Being Baptized*, p. 46.

Christian families in the church and those more remote from belief outside the church. The blessing of God and the offering of thanksgiving will be the same, but the promises can differ. In any case the church gathered for the ceremony promises to share in the Christian nurture of the child.

Baptists have not always been clear about the theology of covenant which underlies this practice, but in recent years a general understanding has been as follows. Children who are nurtured within the church but have not yet come to any kind of faith for themselves are regarded as being 'embraced' in the body, held, valued and supported in the household of the covenant, but not yet members of it. Children who *have* come to faith (however simple a trust in the love of God and allegiance to Christ this may be) are members of the body of Christ in the sense that they help to make Christ visible in the church and in the world. Christ becomes manifest through his members, and this will include faithful children. However, people are not commissioned as believing *disciples*, active members who make covenant promises and who share in God's mission in the world until they are baptized at an age when they can take on this responsibility. This last stage seems to correspond to what Margaret identifies as a 'commissioning' in confirmation.

All this sets the scene for the teaching of the faith to children, which has in the past mostly taken place in the context of Sunday School, usually from the age of about 5 upwards. In earlier generations, the afternoon Sunday School was a key element of a Baptist congregation's mission and educational ministry, often having far more attenders than the number of the congregation itself (a phenomenon partly due to the social factor that sending the children to Sunday School gave working parents the only opportunity of the week to be alone with each other). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Sunday School provided literacy and a general education to children deprived of it, in addition to teaching the faith. Among Baptists, this sometimes existed alongside day-schools, often run by Baptist ministers.[10] When a series of Education Acts established a financial partnership between the state and the churches in the provision of schools, Baptists refused to enter the arrangement, believing that churches should not

[10] By 1844 there were 73 Baptist day-schools. See Stephen Orchard, 'Nonconformists and Education' in Robert Pope (ed.), *T & T Clark Companion to Nonconformity* (London; Bloomsbury, 2013), pp. 322–3

be privileged in this way by the state and that neither should children be required to observe religious practices in school.[11] Unlike the Church of England, Baptists as a denomination have thus not founded state-maintained schools, and at the time of the 1902 Education Act mounted political opposition and a campaign of passive resistance to church schools. Instead they have poured a huge amount of energy and commitment into the Sunday School movement.

In recent times the Sunday School, for reasons recounted by Margaret, has collapsed. Its replacement by 'family church' has provided teaching in the faith to children of church families, but to a far less degree to children of non-church-going parents. Without church schools, the avenues for education in the faith of children outside the church have increasingly become the leading of school assemblies by Baptist ministers and support of school Christian Unions (as already described by Margaret) together with the holding of 'holiday bible schools' in the churches. Against their historic convictions, a number of Baptists have also now helped to found 'Christian Schools', and many are of course glad to send their childen to highly-regarded Church of England schools. But the lack of historic involvement in church schools means that there is insufficient reflection among Baptists on the proper relation between primary and secondary education and nurture in the faith. The Church of England has built up a wealth of experience here from which Baptists might well benefit.

7. A journey of initiation

Our Anglican conversation partner remarks that 'there is now a *common* understanding within the church that [initiation] is a process not a series of events.' Our own impression is that while this understanding may be *widespread* among Anglicans, we still come across many situations in which Anglicans either insist or imply that initiation is complete in the single moment of baptism.[12] Nothing further, it often seems, is believed to be

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[11] Orchard, 'Nonconformists and Education', pp. 322–5.

[12] Even the excellent report *Developing Discipleship* which is referred to above speaks of baptism as 'both initiation into Christian faith and life and commissioning for Christian service' (para. 14), without any mention of confirmation. Some Anglicans affirm that initiation is a process which is not completed in baptism while

necessary for beginning the new life in Christ. Many Baptists too seem uncertain about a 'journey of initiation'. For them the single significant moment is likely to be not baptism but an experience of conversion, and we perceive that this belief is often shared by those in the evangelical wing of the Church of England. Among these latter two groups there may consequently be some downgrading of the moment of baptism, whether that of an infant or a believing disciple.

Already, in our previous Anglican-Baptist joint report (*Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity*) we had commended an understanding of initiation as a process or a 'journey of beginnings'.[13] This, we suggested, might take different forms but these could all be recognized as the same kind of journey. For everyone the journey must begin in the preparation of human hearts by the Holy Spirit, whether of the individual concerned or the community around them. But then for some it might take the form of infant baptism and nurture in the faith, leading in due time to confirmation and thus commissioning to share in God's mission in the world. For others the journey might stretch from blessing as an infant, through nurture in the faith, to baptism as a believer and commissioning similarly as a disciple. For still others who do not grow up within the church, the journey might be from the dawning of faith (whether sudden or gradual), through Christian instruction to baptism as a believer and laying on of hands for service in the world. A first sharing in the Eucharist or Lord's Supper belongs to initiation, but might take place at different stages in *each* of these journeys. In the light of the work done in *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity* we do not need to say more in commending this approach of a shared but diverse journey. Here we want to draw attention, as Margaret does, to the need for formation in the faith at every stage of the journey.

Perhaps among Baptists the greatest effort has been put into instruction in the faith in preparation for baptism and church membership. Classes are regularly organized for those seeking baptism, to which those enquiring about the Christian faith might be also invited. The very gap between coming to faith and baptism as a believer ought to make clear that initiation

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still insisting that nothing further which is *sacramental* needs to be done: see Colin Buchanan, *Baptism as Complete Sacramental Initiation*, Grove Worship 219 (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2014).

[13] *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity*, pp. 41–57.

is a journey and not simply one moment, and formation in the faith should include instructing the candidate that baptism will be the place where God's grace completes the phase of beginning, and opens the way for a life of discipleship in which the believer continues to experience the saving grace of God, continually offering transformation at every stage.

Where Baptists need to provide much more formation in the faith than they do at the moment is where children are admitted to the Lord's Supper *before* baptism. Baptist churches differ in their practice about reception of the Lord's Supper, some requiring that baptism and covenant promises should always come first, others offering an open invitation to 'all who love our Lord Jesus', regardless of whether they have been baptized in any mode. In these cases, some churches also welcome children to receive bread and wine with their parents, and this practice is increasing among Baptists today. It is not simply parallel to the Anglican practice of welcoming baptized children to the table before confirmation (as discussed by Margaret), but some of the same social factors may be at play behind both practices, including the desire to include families as a whole at this deepest point of sharing fellowship in the body of Christ. A recent Baptist study-guide offers several patterns for welcoming children at the table,[14] although the Baptist Union has no authority to require a local congregation to follow any of them.

One good practice we ourselves commend, however, is that children who are to receive bread and wine should have been first blessed in the midst of the congregation and so welcomed into the covenant community, should profess a faith of their own (however simple), and should be recognized by the church as intending to be baptized in due time. It is not enough for parents to make their own – often sentimental – decisions. Children at the table, we suggest, should be what the early church called 'catechumens', learners in Christ on the path towards baptism. It is appropriate for them to share in the body of Christ at the table because they are members of the body of Christ, helping to make Christ visible in the covenant community and in the world. Communion can, for them, be part of the journey of initiation. But in this case special care should be taken that they do 'receive' the faith. Preparing to receive the Lord's Supper, and thinking about its meaning (at a suitable level for children) when it becomes a regular experience, offers

[14] *Gathered Around the Table. Children and Communion* (London: Baptist Union, 2012).

special opportunities for being nurtured in the faith which are unlikely to be offered in the wider context of 'family services'. Baptists may have been reluctant so far to take up this challenge because they lack theological reflection on initiation as a journey.

Initiation is, of course, only the opening phase of a much longer journey of discipleship which is to occupy earthly and eternal life. We appreciate the widespread appeal of the 'Alpha brand' and the effective way it has introduced many people to the Christian faith. The course does not, however, in its strict form help people to understand why and how they are being formed within a *particular* church tradition, in our case a Baptist identity; neither, conversely, does it open participants' eyes to the riches of other Christian communions beyond their own. Of course, it should be recognized that many Baptist churches adapt the Alpha Course to their own needs, sometimes against explicit instructions that Alpha issues for legitimate use of the brand.

Like Anglicans, Baptists also provide several courses that might be called 'Beta courses' – training courses in scripture, in the doctrines of the Christian faith, in leading worship and in pastoral practice – suitable for every member of the congregation. Responsibility for these courses is taken by the several Baptist colleges, working together with the Regional Associations in their locality, which has the advantage that a transition can be made from elementary studies to accredited qualifications in theology. Our impression, however, is that so far too little effort has been put into forming church members' understanding of a Christian perspective on their daily work, whether in the home or outside. Training is often directed into equipping members to be surrogate ministers in the church rather than sharing in God's mission in the world and the wider Kingdom of God.

8. A gathering community

If the Baptist notion of a 'gathered church' is understood purely as a matter of deciding to join a particular community and being committed to its beliefs whole-heartedly, there may seem to be little room for a receiving of the faith by those who are 'half-believers', or on the way to faith. Unlike the 'parish principle' of the Church of England, it may appear that there is no space for those who might be described as 'belonging without believing', or at least

believing little. Baptists hold to the conviction that the church is a 'fellowship of believers', a covenant community whose members have made covenant vows, or an agreement sealed in baptism to 'walk together' with each other and with God. But our previous discussion about a 'journey' of initiation, and the holding of some people (not only children) in the loving embrace of the covenant community before they are 'members' of it, implies that there is plenty of room for the half-believer and even the non-believer who is curious or wistful about believing. The Spirit of God may be taking people on a journey which we do not always perceive and whose destination we cannot be certain about.

In fact, Baptists have often misunderstood what is meant by a 'gathered' community. It does not primarily mean that believers *choose* to gather, but that they recognize they have been gathered by Christ. Baptist confessions of faith have usually held together the voluntary 'gathering' of the church with its being 'gathered' or called together by Christ as the covenant-mediator. Two seventeenth-century confessions, for example, describe believers as 'consent[ing] to walk together *according to the appointment of Christ*' and affirm that churches '*are gathered* by special grace... according to His mind'.[15] A more modern English statement, *The Baptist Doctrine of the Church* (1948), declares that 'churches are gathered by the will of Christ and live by the indwelling of his Spirit. They do not have their origin, primarily, in human resolution.'[16] We may, then, discern that Christ is gathering some into his community who cannot yet make covenant pledges for themselves, and perhaps – in this life – never will.

Further, Baptists are increasingly talking about a 'gathering' community, which has a more inclusive and open tone to it. It is a community *in process* of gathering, generously taking many with it towards the final end of being gathered, accepting many within its fellowship who cannot yet make vows of belonging. It is 'gathering up' the seekers after meaning in life, those who at the moment just want to express gratitude and thanksgiving for the riches of life (including their children, as they share in an act of blessing), and

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[15] See *Second London Confession* (1677) XXVI.6–8; *The Orthodox Creed* (1678) XXIX–XXXI; in William Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1959), pp. 286–7, 318–19. Our italics.

[16] Repr. in Roger Hayden, *Baptist Union Documents* 1948–1977 (London: Baptist Historical Society, 1980), p. 6. Our italics.

those who need to know that they are accepted when they have been rejected by authorities in society and even their own families.

If this is the Baptist understanding of a gathered and gathering church, then it should be offering many opportunities for receiving the faith at the point to which people have come, in a way which fits their life-experience and does not ask too much too soon. As Baptists we should examine our worship and preaching to see whether it does have room for all, or whether it happens at a level of intensity that makes all others than committed disciples puzzled and uncomfortable. Without failing to deliver appropriate challenges which may prompt a moving on in the journey of faith, we should ensure that those who simply want to express a sense of thanksgiving, or bewilderment at the horror of suffering, or lament for loss, or protest at the unfairness of life, can do so. When we reflect from a perspective of Christian faith on these human experiences, this too is Christian nurture.

C. Margaret Swinson concludes, for the Church of England

9. Responding to change

It is evident that a number of challenges face both our churches which reflect changes in wider society and, since I first offered my thoughts on this subject, the gap between society and the church has widened in a number of respects, particularly in the way our children and young people are used to learning and being engaged. If we are to be perceived as communities attractive and relevant to them, and if we are to engage those who come to us so that they receive the faith, we need to develop more contemporary mechanisms through which we present the faith. In a number of our conurbations the churches which are growing are those which take changes in teaching and learning seriously and embrace the use of technology, many of them newer independent churches. Keeping pace with these developments is a challenge to the Church of England with our historic buildings, our already stretched financial resources and the level of technological skills represented in many of our congregations.

These hurdles are exacerbated by a lack of UK-produced resources, resulting in much of the input available to the average church coming from

the United States. The development of more locally, or UK-based, resources needs to be encouraged for children, young people and adults. From a Church of England perspective, the new *Pilgrim* course, for adult learning, is producing video material on its website,[17] but it is the young in our congregations who are most used to interactive and visual learning. Local material which meets their need is not plentiful.

10. Children, Communion and confirmation

A number of Baptist reflections on admitting children to Holy Communion before baptism resonate with debates at parish level within the Church of England about admitting children to Communion before confirmation. Although at a national level Communion before confirmation is properly authorized, individual churches in the Church of England will take different views on it, as do member churches of the Baptist Union about their issue of children at the table. One of the reasons is that some clergy and laity are concerned that those admitted to Communion prior to confirmation will never actually come to confirmation, either because they do not see the need to take that step in light of their admission, or because they will have drifted away from the church before confirmation. It is indeed the case that not all those admitted to Communion before confirmation are confirmed and not all remain in the church, and it would be interesting to know whether those children admitted to the Lord's Supper are eventually baptized and do carry on 'receiving' the faith and growing in it.

11. Receiving the faith and denominational formation

Paul and Stephen point out that 'receiving the faith' may not necessarily include formation in a particular church tradition, correctly identifying the lack of formational material in the 'Alpha brand' in spite of its Church of England origins, together with its lack of material to support ecumenical understanding. Whilst training in the basics of the Christian faith and ongoing engagement with the range of more advanced courses remains

[17] See www.pilgrimcourse.org. *Pilgrim*, published by Church House Publishing, offers two stages, each in four books with associated sessions: 'Follow' introduces the Christian faith, while 'Grow' aims to develop a deeper sense of discipleship.

essential to the journey of initiation, the loss of denominational self-understanding and the ignorance of other traditions is a regret, particularly in a more mobile society.

As the children and young people in our churches reach adulthood it is the norm for many to move away from home and friends and enter a phase in their lives during which they move home and even town frequently as they study and seek work. Their lack of denominational identity could be one of the factors which weakens their ties to the church, in contrast to their having faith, and which results in many not establishing themselves in a worshipping community again for many years, if at all. This is exacerbated, as Paul and Stephen point out, when formation within the church fails to provide a Christian perspective on daily life outside worship.

As our Baptist conversation-partners recognize, both Baptist and Church of England congregations reflect very different levels of understanding the faith and commitment to belonging to a local worshipping community. How the church offers nurture to meet the different needs of its members so that all are encouraged to recognise their need for continual growth is clearly a challenge facing us all.

D. A conclusion from Baptist participants

12. Technology and nurture

At the end of this conversation, Margaret has rightly introduced an issue that deserves much greater discussion than we can, unfortunately, give it. People generally, and young people in particular, are increasingly dependent on technology for the formation of their attitudes, values, priorities, world-view and life-style – in short, all that might be contained under the heading of 'nurture'. Often they are shaped in their habits of life more by relations made in social networks such as 'Facebook' and 'Twitter' than by face-to-face encounter. The Christian church might respond in at least two ways to this challenge. First, it should seek to complement the virtual world in which people increasingly live by fellowships offering relationships that challenge people's 'comfort-zones'. In place of relations that people choose for themselves from among the myriads on offer in cyber-space, and which they

at least think they can control, churches offer disturbing meetings with the 'other' that will in the end enrich experience.

Second, rather than attempting to extract people entirely from their virtual, online worlds, the church should seek to meet people there, and help them to grow in faith where they are. This does not only mean 'extending' the church into the space of the internet, using technological tools to transplant church preaching and church services into the web. It means learning to use the medium of the internet to embody the gospel *there* in a way that is suitable for the particular form that the social network takes. There is a theological task here to learn how the Christ who is present in all time and space, who treads all the streets and paths in our world, takes form in *the virtual* society as well as in the everyday society around us.

Here Baptists as well as Anglicans might learn some lessons from the experience of the Anglican cathedral which is situated in the virtual world of the programme 'Second Life', with its congregation of 'avatars'. But no single Christian confessional body is likely to have all the skills necessary to commend the faith in the complicated arena of the world-wide web, or to have the global presence to cope with the bewildering connections it embraces within itself. Here is a practical area in which Anglicans and Baptists can, and must, work together to share the faith.

13. Sharing faith at the boundaries

Both Anglican and Baptist participants in this segment of the conversations have identified the need to include a knowledge of their own church tradition in the nurturing of people in faith, and have lamented that this knowledge is increasingly being lost or undervalued. A similar theme appeared in the conversations among us about worship, conversations that will be recalled in the next section. Talk about a 'post-denominational age' is not the same as talk about Christian unity. The claim to be 'post-denominational' seems adventurous, but in fact often becomes a new conformity to a certain rigid style of worship and mission which is in all but name a new denomination, strongly influenced by contemporary culture, and without the richness of tradition – or missing the story of God's working with a community across the ages, such as we explored together in the first segment of our conversations.

Knowing our story of faith is not in contradiction to the desire to 'push at the boundaries' that separate us. It is only by knowing our own stories that we can see how they actually belong together in the one story of God. Stories define the boundaries, and it is at the boundaries that we can reach out and join hands across them. We can also pass across the boundaries to live in each other's space, in local covenants or ecumenical partnerships. This is what ecumenical conversations have been calling a visible unity characterized by 'reconciled diversity', a 'common life' and 'mutual recognition', rather than by a monolithic structural unity in which differences and 'otherness' are suppressed.[18] So we can bring together the spiritual riches that God has given us each in our own histories, and grow in faith together.

[18] See the contributions of an Anglican – Mary Tanner – and a Baptist – Neville Callam, to the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, ed. Thomas Best and Günter Gassmann (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), p. 19–30. Baptists recognize, however, that some Anglicans in ecumenical conversations share the strong reservations of Methodists about the concept of 'reconciled diversity': see *The Challenge of the Covenant: Uniting in Mission and Holiness*. Final Report of the Joint Implementation Commission (London: Church House Publishing/Methodist Publishing House, 2013), chapter 8, paras. 31–33.

4
How do we confess the faith in worship?

A conversation between Bill Croft, Mary Cotes and Ruth Bottoms

A. Bill Croft, speaking as an Anglican

1. A variety in worship

My aim is to give an account of the variety of worship across the Church of England as it is experienced by congregations, and to draw out the way this relates to the confession of Christian faith. Most Church of England worship is 'liturgical' – I mean it is authorized, structured worship, led by an authorized minister. There is, however, a variety of liturgical traditions in the Church of England. Some traditions place more emphasis on the word, so the reading of scripture and preaching predominates. In other traditions sacramental worship, the Eucharist, is the main act of worship, although it does incorporate both word and sacrament.

2. The Eucharist

Just as there are different traditions in the Church of England, so the style of the Eucharist, and the frequency of its celebration, varies. It should be noted that canon law requires that Holy Communion is celebrated in each parish or benefice every Sunday and on major festivals. Risking a generalization it would be true to say that the liturgy provides a balance between word and sacrament in Church of England worship. Listening to scripture and hearing it expounded in the sermon gives members of the congregation the opportunity to learn about the faith and how it applies to their individual lives and in the mission of the parish church. Preaching is not only didactic but also kerygmatic, seeking to convince the hearers and convert them, through the preached word, to ever-closer fellowship with the living Christ.

Both preaching and sacrament provide the opportunity of personal encounter with the divine.

The modern form of the authorized prayer-book, *Common Worship* (CW), indicates for the Eucharist, and indeed for all services, the basic structure of each service. This 'deep structure' has the pattern of gathering, liturgy of the word, either liturgy of the sacrament or other prayers, and the dismissal. This indicates the dynamic of Church of England worship, at any rate the intended dynamic, whereby the congregation is formed for a particular occasion of worship, is confronted and engaged with the Word of God in Scripture, has transforming communion with God in prayer and/or sacrament and is sent out in mission.

The CW rite for the Eucharist provides for four readings: an Old Testament reading followed by a psalm, a New Testament reading and a reading from the Gospel. It is probably unusual for all of this provision to be used, but the CW provision is scripturally generous. Most would understand that the reading is cumulative reaching a climax in the Gospel reading. The congregational acclamations which precede and follow the Gospel reading are addressed to Christ himself and so make clear that Christ is present in the reading of the Gospel ('Praise to you, O Christ', 'Glory to you, O Lord'). The earlier *Alternative Service Book* by contrast had third person acclamations ('Glory to Christ our Saviour', 'Praise to Christ our Lord').

Most Church of England churches use the prescribed lectionary in their main Sunday services, although it has to be said that some churches do not. The lectionary is linked to the Christian Year with its two foci of the Christmas and Paschal (Easter) celebrations. The Christian Year and the accompanying lectionary and collects convey a great deal of Christian teaching and shape the Church's worship through each annual cycle. It goes some considerable way to providing a balance of teaching since its purpose is to embody in worship the whole saving purpose of God. The Sunday lectionary, based on the ecumenical *Revised Common Lectionary*, gives a broad range of readings across scripture, linked to the season of the church's year. That said, what might be termed 'difficult readings', especially from the Old Testament, are only very rarely encountered if at all. The daily lectionary, including a daily eucharistic lectionary, gives a much more through exposure to scripture. This would only be experienced by those attending a daily Eucharist or the daily office, and even among the clergy,

for whom the daily office is a canonical requirement, this is becoming a rarer experience.

The calendar of the church's year includes feast days which can be kept on Sundays; for example, 25 January 2015 could have been kept as the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul, and could alternatively be kept as Epiphany 3. Churches vary on whether such feasts are observed on the Sunday, probably depending to what extend it is thought important to expose the congregation to the 'communion of saints'.

At all Sunday services there is preaching. The usual length of sermon is about 10–15 minutes, but this varies from tradition to tradition, and for some, especially in the evangelical tradition, sermons can actually be up to 45 minutes. It may be a result of the parish communion movement, through which the Eucharist has become the main Sunday act of worship in many churches, that the length of the Sunday sermon has been considerably shortened. Unless the service as a whole is going to be well over one hour in length, the sermon has now to be kept to about 15 minutes. This may have resulted in a lessening of Christian teaching through the medium of the sermon. Often sermons focus on the New rather than the Old Testament. Clergy are sometimes challenged with the question, 'When did you last preach on the Old Testament?'

It is a requirement for a creed to be said at the Sunday Eucharist. The normal form would be the Nicene Creed, although other confessions of faith are allowed, such as The Apostles' Creed or a various contemporary credal forms. There is a strong sense that 'this is the faith of the church', a statement of what is to be believed. Bolder members of congregations occasionally voice their difficulties in sharing certain aspects of the creed – for example, the Virgin Birth.

Most Sunday worship will have music. Parts of the service itself may be sung, such as the *Gloria*. Classic hymns remain part of the repertoire and are greatly loved by many, especially older members of congregations. Worship songs have increased in popularity, providing a more personal (some would say individualistic) devotional aspect. Chants from Taizé and songs from Iona have widened the repertoire in more recent years. In churches influenced by charismatic renewal repeated singing of worship songs will be common, sometimes leading into a time of free praise including speaking in tongues. Hymn and song singing provide a strong congregational form of

worship for Church of England congregations and their verbal content and musical style convey a great deal about Christian faith and devotion.

In the Eucharist the liturgy of the sacrament comes as the climax. The authorized eucharistic prayers (eight in CW) convey a great deal of fundamental Christian teaching. This is often seasonally related in the prayers' prefaces. The unchanging parts of the prayers convey the teaching that through the action of God the Holy Spirit, the bread and the wine of the Eucharist become for the Christian community the body and blood of Christ. The liturgy of the sacrament reaches its own climax in the reception of Holy Communion. All those who have been confirmed or prepared to receive communion will come forward to receive. Those who do not receive communion, for whatever reason, are often encouraged to come forward for a blessing.

Although it is rare (apart from early morning Sunday services) for congregations immediately to disperse at the end of the worship (coffee and chat after the service is very common), the concluding prayer of thanksgiving for holy communion with its missionary thrust ('Send us out in the power of your Spirit') is well known and loved. The Eucharist ends with the missionary dismissal 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord' or an alternative form of words.

3. Other forms of worship

As I have already mentioned, the precise pattern of Sunday worship varies from parish to parish and tradition to tradition. In some churches 'Services of the Word', either in the tradition forms of Morning and Evening Prayer according to *The Book of Common Prayer*, or in modern forms, provide the opportunity for longer preaching.

In recent years there has been an increase of somewhat informal services, called for example 'Family Services', or 'All Age worship' which are often lay led. The liturgical book, *New Patterns for Worship*, is an authorized resource for such services. Besides providing particular resources, e.g. prayers of thanksgiving, confession, intercessions and blessings, it importantly provides recommended structures which indicate where authorized forms must be used (which include confession and creed). From time to time concern about the quality of these services is expressed.

The 'occasional offices' of baptisms, weddings and funerals are opportunities for the congregation and more infrequent churchgoers to engage with issues of Christian initiation and Christian teaching about major moments in human living.

In recent years there has been an increase in services of 'Wholeness and Healing'. There are authorized forms of worship for this. Some churches might hold services completely dedicated to this ministry, while others might incorporate some rite of healing (e.g. anointing, laying on of hands and prayer ministry) in the Eucharist or some other service. Some churches provide prayer ministry during or after services to meet pastoral needs on a more individual basis.

There are certain services which, although not an essential part of the Christian Year, will be marked in most parishes. These include Mothering Sunday, Harvest Festival and Remembrance Sunday. These provide opportunities to give Christian teaching on human relationships, creation including the Christian response to environmental concerns, and matters of war and peace. Many parish churches would see these occasions as important mission opportunities picking up a substantial 'fringe' of people.

4. The environment of worship

The environment of worship must also be included in a consideration of how in the faith is confessed in the worship of the Church of England. Many local congregations worship in medieval buildings which are usually linear structures orientated on an east-west axis. At the east end is the altar providing a powerful symbolic, indeed sacramental focus. There are other prominent foci, including places for the ministry of the word (lectern and pulpit) and the font. Churches sometimes engage in re-ordering projects as they seek to adapt a building constructed to house the medieval mass to modern forms of liturgy. Issues of congregational involvement in the liturgy, fundamental to modern rites, and the visibility of sacramental worship (especially the presiding minister facing the congregation) have resulted in re-ordered seating and altars brought further into the body of the church. These issues are closely related to important ecclesiological concerns: these include the place of all the baptized in worship, the church as the body of Christ, and the relationship between the whole body and authorized and

ordained ministers. Even with radical re-ordering plans the symbolic nature of the building, both in its whole structure and in its parts, remains as an eloquent environment for worship conveying powerful messages about Christian faith.

Churches vary in the amount of particular symbolism that is used in the church and in worship. Most churches would use lighted candles, for example. A minority of churches use incense. Churches also vary in their use of vestments although canon law requires those leading worship to wear vestments. To what extent there is an agreed understanding about such things, and to what extent there is an articulate understanding of this in congregations is a matter of debate. Nonetheless, most congregations are strongly attached to such customs. Crosses and crucifixes are also found, although the particular church tradition would govern to what extent these were present and of what nature such symbols would be. There has been a quite widespread increase in the use of icons in Church of England worship, drawing on the Orthodox tradition.

It is with considerable hesitancy that I offer this picture of Church of England worship today. The variety of worship is considerable and one's own tradition within it colours one's appreciation of the state of Church of England worship. I hope nonetheless that this offering will contribute to a continuing conversation.

B. Mary Cotes makes a Baptist contribution to the conversation

5. No 'authorized' forms

How do we confess the faith in worship? What are the vehicles of proclamation? These are hard questions to answer from a Baptist perspective, not least because as Baptists we have no set service book. We do not have what Bill has stressed throughout his account as 'authorized' worship. His presentation of variety among Anglicans can be greatly extended among Baptists. It is not possible to say that all Baptist worship is 'like this' or 'like that', or proclaims the faith in this particular way or that. Whilst resources for worship are produced and quite widely used, such as the

more recently published *Gathering for Worship*[1] which offers guidelines for good practice, there is no obligation for a minister or congregation to use them. However, there are certain characteristics of Baptist worship which suggest how we confess the faith in worship, and these are what I shall try to outline here.

6. Confessing the faith through reading and attending to Scripture

For Baptists, one of the principal ways in which faith is proclaimed in worship is through the reading of Scripture, and through the community's attentiveness to it. As the Bible is read, the story of our salvation is rehearsed, and the gospel is proclaimed. In listening attentively to the Word, the community of the disciples of Christ proclaim Christ's call upon them to respond and to commit themselves anew to following his way. Although practices vary, the greater number of services of worship in a local Baptist church are 'Services of the Word'. Through their attentiveness to the reading of Scripture, the disciples of Christ demonstrate their openess to the dynamic Word of God who transforms human life.

An important part of the proclamation of the faith through the Word lies in preaching. Through the preaching and teaching of the Word, connections are made for the worshippers between the passage of Scripture and the lives of the disciples. The particular congregation is addressed by God in a particular way, and the invitation to follow Christ is extended to these particular disciples who are exhorted to apply the teaching of the Word to the particularity of their daily lives, both as individuals and as a community. It is still the case in some places that services of the word are referred to as 'preaching services'! It is also the case that in some places the sermon, which can be of considerable length, is placed towards the very end of the service as the culmination of all that has taken place, and is followed simply by a prayer and hymn of response and a blessing.

While it is difficult to generalize, today in many Baptist churches there are relatively few Bible readings as such, and many church services will have only one formal reading, probably from the New Testament. However,

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[1] *Gathering for Worship. Patterns and Prayers for the Community of Disciples,* edited by Christopher J. Ellis and Myra Blyth for the Baptist Union of Great Britain (Norwish: Canterbury Press, 2005).

the emphasis on the necessity of attending to Scripture will still be apparent, through the singing of lines from Scripture in spiritual songs and hymns, through Bible verses hanging on banners, and through reminders to those who are baptized into Christ that they are expected to engage with Scripture daily in their private devotions. Equally, the theme which emerges from the one reading of Scripture might well 'sound' through the opening prayers of adoration, confession and thanksgiving, and might well be used also to shape the prayers of petition and intercession. Even the prayer of thanksgiving offered at the Lord's Table might tell the story of salvation through the lens of the particular Biblical theme which has emerged from the central scripture passage.

Over the years the length of the sermon has in general gradually decreased, from an hour or more to a mere twenty minutes or so! However, this does not necessarily indicate that proclamation through the word has been reduced. 'Proclamation-time' within the sermon may well have been replaced by a number of 'mini' sermons, testimonies, or power-point presentations, for example. While such changes may mark significant cultural shifts, from the auditory to the visual and from the longer to the shorter inputs, and whilst the form of the 'sermon-slot' may well reflect developments in teaching-style, the emphasis on the place of Scripture remains as one of the central loci, if not *the* central locus, of the proclamation of faith.

7. Confessing the faith through a devotional relationship with God and an openness to the Holy Spirit

For Baptists, faith is proclaimed as we open ourselves to the work of God's Spirit who leads us into all truth. Not only is our worship prompted and inspired by God's Holy Spirit, but also the regular gathering into a community for worship is a work of the Spirit. As we worship, we are called to be open to the work of the Spirit who draws us into a closer relationship with God. For Baptists, openness to the prompting and transforming power of God's Spirit is demonstrated in our concern for freedom and spontaneity.

This concern expresses itself in a number of ways. Firstly, it is expressed in the widespread use of extempore prayer. The practice of prayer in public worship for Baptists varies enormously, from the use of 'set' prayers gleaned

from the resources of the wider church and appropriately relevant to the particular Scripture or theme of the day, to prayers which have been written in advance by the minister, under the guidance of the Spirit, and which 'sound' extempore and which can be altered as the Spirit leads at the moment of praying. Usually these are offered without the congregation seeing the written version. But the place and possibility for the extempore, prompted by the Spirit, remains crucially important. Extempore prayer is most often offered by the minister, but can also be joined by members of the congregation during times of open prayer. Even the prayer of thanksgiving at the Lord's Supper may be offered extempore.

Having said this, there is nonetheless in general a pattern of prayer which follows the underlying shape of the worship. Thus, although there is no rule to be followed, worship usually begins with prayers of adoration, confession and thanksgiving, as the community is reminded of the forgiving love of God. Usually later in the service there are prayers of commitment and response to the Word in scripture and in the sermon, and prayers of petition and intercession. So it is not the case that 'anything goes', and we live with a tension between the call to be open to the promptings of the Spirit who calls us to proclaim the faith in spontaneous movements of worship, and the call to be faithful to the story of God's saving love as told in the Word, proclaiming it through the prayers as we journey through the service.

Secondly, our openess to the Spirit of God is demonstrated in the freedom of the one leading worship to select, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the passage(s) of Scripture which will represent the 'key' proclamation. Whilst every worship service is the moment to recount the saving love of God through the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Spirit prompts the reading of a scripture which is for *this* people in *this* place on *this* particular day. This sense of particularity encourages the congregation to receive the Word as specially for them. Whilst in past times, the liturgical calendar would have impacted very little on a Baptist congregation it is likely that today most British Baptists would mark at the very least Christmas, Holy Week, Easter and Pentecost, and also perhaps Advent and Lent, with thematically appropriate readings. Meanwhile, Baptist churches that have been particularly influenced by the ecumenical movement might well follow a lectionary. However, the freedom to diverge from such patterns remains. Whilst this freedom is clearly open to the abuse

of the leader who can choose a hobby-horse passage, a Baptist church remains open to the Spirit who through the leader draws the attention of a particular community at a particular time to a particular proportion of Scripture, and who is at work amongst that people through that Word.

Thirdly, openness to the Spirit is demonstrated by the community's willingness to engage their whole selves in the act of worship, not just their minds but also their religious affections and their emotions. This is particularly apparent in the music through which the congregation can be touched deeply and invited both to proclaim and respond to the saving love of God by singing. The place of music in proclaiming the faith has always been important for Baptists. Many of our Victorian church buildings gave central place to the organ pipes – even displacing the pulpit in order to do so – and today the central role of music is underlined by the way that many of our music groups occupy central place in the worship area, and are referred to as the 'worship group.' Whilst the particular emotional response which can go hand in hand with the music may well be understood as a prompting of the Spirit, there is also a danger that the worship can be taken over by empty emotionalism.

However, for all that Baptists might sense music as an instrument of the work of the Spirit, it is nonetheless the case that probably the music itself has been well planned and rehearsed by the musicians leading. In days gone by, a gifted organist might well have been able to rise to the challenge of leading a hymn suddenly and spontaneously requested by the leader of worship. Nowadays, however, where music is led by groups or by less gifted single musicians, preparation and rehearsal is important. Equally, of course, the words of hymns and songs are not extempore but either read from book or screen, or known by heart. Hymns and songs are often chosen to fit the pattern of the worship and again, a tension exists between the need to be open to the moving of the Spirit and the importance of an order of worship faithful to the movement of the gospel story.

8. Confessing the faith through the gathering and sending of the community

Belonging to Christ involves belonging to Christ's people. The Baptist way of being church has always emphasized the importance of the local

congregation and its fellowship. In and through worship, God gathers together the disciples of Jesus Christ into one place where together they hear again the good news of the gospel, are renewed as they rejoice in God's forgiving love in Christ, open their lives to the work of the Holy Spirit and commit themselves again to following Christ in the world. As they worship together, as they seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as they discern the will of God for them as a local congregation, so they are drawn together, and through the closeness of the community life they share they express something of the love of the triune God. That reality, expressed in worship, then finds expression in the life together of that local congregation. In Baptist life, pastoral care for others and prayer for others is the way in which each one proclaims their belonging to the body.

One of the greatest ironies of our Baptist life is that although we strongly affirm the priesthood of all believers and assert the call of each baptized disciple to participate fully in the life of the church community, in recent times there has been a tendency to move away from the implications of this in practice. Worship has, in many places, been led by the one minister, and even Bible readings and all prayers have been led by the same person. Equally there have been expectations within congregations that pastoral care is the task principally of the minister, or of the deacons, or of the 'pastoral care group'.

Gathering is also exemplified by the church meeting. Traditionally, the Baptist church meeting is the gathering of the disciples of Christ, where members of the local church discern together the mind of Christ for that church. All baptized members are called to be part of that process of discernment through their presence at the meeting. However, in recent years there has been an erosion of commitment to the church meeting. Attendance has been seen in many places to wane and discernment and decision-making has by default fallen to a smaller number of disciples. One of the 'solutions' to this eventuality has been, in some cases, to bring the church meeting onto a Sunday where it can be incorporated into the worship or can take place immediately after it. The effect of this is to emphasize all the more strongly the proclamation that as disciples of Christ we are called into the community of disciples, to discern together the mind of Christ and to live faithfully in God's world.

Worship is a continuous dynamic of being gathered together as a community reconciled through the saving love of God in Christ, and then of being sent as disciples to serve. As disciples listen attentively to the Word, as they are open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, so they long for a world in which God is fully known and commit themselves to participating in the renewing, recreating love of God poured out for the world. There has been in recent years a renewed emphasis in Baptist life on our calling to be 'missionary disciples' and on the inseparability of discipleship to Christ from the call to serve and witness to God in daily life. For Baptists each and every baptized believer is a missionary, called to service and witness as a way of proclaiming the faith through every aspect of life.

9. Confessing the faith through the Lord's Supper and the baptism of believers

Although the Lord's Supper will usually be celebrated by Baptists either once or twice a month, the presence of the communion table at the front of the church or even in the middle of a congregation seated in the round, is a constant reminder to disciples of their belonging to the body of Christ, to the community brought into being by the death and resurrection of Christ. The practice of the Lord's Supper varies widely among Baptists as does the theology underpinning it. However, in general, worship around the Table will nearly always begin with worship around the Word. The resource book *Gathering for Worship* puts it like this:

> Gathering at the table is an act of remembrance; but remembering is more than simply looking back. We remember that we are the body of Christ divided and dismembered – yet to be re-membered as one. We remember the promised feast of the Lamb when those who hunger and thirst will be filled. We gather to hear the story of Christ's death, resurrection and coming in glory. We gather to give thanks for the good work that Jesus began and that God will bring to completion. We gather to seek the Spirit's

> indwelling and energy as we take our place on the road to the new heaven and the new earth.[2]

Whilst there is considerable diversity between churches, the form of the Lord's Supper tends to be fairly simple. It will begin with an invitation to the community to gather round, probably using words of Scripture; the story of the supper is told, usually again by reading Scripture; a prayer of thanksgiving is offered for the body and blood of Christ, followed by the breaking of bread, the pouring of wine, and then the distribution. Most probably deacons (and elders if the church has them) will serve the members of the congregation as they remain seated in their places. When bread and wine have been shared, the community gathered as a family around the table may well say the Lord's Prayer together, or offer prayers of intercession, before being sent out to serve and witness. Here the mystery of faith is proclaimed at each stage of the supper – all underpinned by generous portions of Scripture, and possibly interspersed with extempore prayer.

For Baptists, a baptism – which will follow a gathering round the Word – offers a rich and wonderful opportunity for an evangelical confession of faith, where gathering and sending, commitment to Christ through the covenanted community and missionary witness go hand in hand. This proclamation is not only present in the act of baptism itself when the candidate, entering the water, identifies with the death and resurrection of Christ. *Gathering for Worship* outlines several features of the baptismal service, through which the faith is confessed.[3] At the heart of baptism there is the act of repentance, faith and commitment, made not just by the person being baptized, but by the whole community. The baptism of a believer offers an opportunity for all to encounter again the grace of God who promises to change our lives. Before entering the waters of baptism candidates are often asked to respond to structured questions, confessing faith and promising to follow Christ all the days of their life in traditional formulas, and the congregation may well also be asked to respond. The faith is further proclaimed through the testimony of candidates who will often, before entering the waters of baptism, tell the story of how they came to faith or express in their own words something of their trust in God. This moment,

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[2] *Gathering for Worship*, p. 10.
[3] *Gathering for Worship*, pp. 64–6.

establishing a strong connection between baptism and confession, can be moving and profound, and may have a strong evangelistic impact on members of the congregation.

Proclamation in baptism also occurs through the preaching of the Word, and through a call to follow Christ which – as the candidate emerges from the water – is often offered by the preacher to those who have not yet been baptized. Through the laying on of hands the church confesses the God who calls us into participation in divine purposes for the world through the Spirit. As the newly baptized person is received into membership, so the community confesses again the God who calls them into a covenant relationship with God and with each other through Christ.

C. Ruth Bottoms adds to the Baptist contribution

10. What does 'freedom in worship' mean?

When Bill's and Mary's contributions were discussed by the whole group of Anglican and Baptist participants in the conversation, someone commented that 'in the past, using a book in worship (Anglican) was seen as fundamentally opposed to worship that was free (Baptist). Now the ethos has changed.' The question was then asked, 'What difference in ethos can be identified now?' It seems to me that the distinctive ethos present among Baptists now when they confess the faith in worship is still 'freedom', but that there are a number of different nuances in what might be meant by 'free'. These give rise to questions that Baptists need to face in their present situation, and which here I can do little more than note. I look to the Anglican response to open up possible answers.

First, when appeal is made to 'freedom', people may mean being 'open to the Spirit'. The Baptist tradition has been hugely influenced in recent years by the renewal movement. Times of open extemporary prayer by the congregation, the move to worship bands and more modern music in many Baptist churches, together with the exercise of charismatic gifts of the spirit in some would all be seen as signs of seeking to be 'open to the spirit'. Mary has already charted this development. Further, at national and regional gatherings the introduction of 'comment walls', and use of other means of feeding back opinions (including 'Twitter') are all ways in which everyone

is invited to share with the gathered company what they believe God might be saying to the meeting. The question that arises for me is how the gathered church then discerns what is of God rather than just from an individual's viewpoint.

Second, when people speak of 'freedom' in worship they may mean sharing the leadership of worship, and they may see this as an expression of the deeply-held Baptist idea of the 'priesthood of all believers'. Baptist worship is increasingly multi-voiced: there may be a 'worship leader', someone else responsible for a 'children's slot' and a preacher, together with open times of sharing in prayer and testimony to experience by the whole congregation. Presidency at communion may also be shared by those other than ordained ministers. The question that arises for me is then who carries responsibility for the worship overall, ensuring that over time it is rich, balanced and comprehensive?

Third, when people appeal to 'freedom' in worship they may mean an emphasis on the personal faith-experience of the individual. There is a strong sense in which people expect to find shared worship personally *fulfilling*, as evidenced by seeing baptism essentially as a witness to personal faith where each candidate shares his or her testimony in some way, by people expressing what they 'get out of a service', and by numerous stories of people moving church to go where (as they put it) 'they will be fed'. The questions then are how personal faith links to the corporate faith of the church, and when personal faith becomes unhelpfully individualistic.

Fourth, 'freedom in worship' may mean making space to experiment and draw on multiple traditions. Amongst Baptist churches, and at national and regional gatherings one can find worship that draws on many different traditions: from the new monastic communities of Iona and Taizé, from the world church, from 'messy church' and from 'café church', to name but a few influences. Set prayers from other traditions have found their way into the worship resource *Gathering for Worship*, as they did into former Baptist manuals such as *Patterns and Prayers for Christian Worship*. But there is evidence of a new embracing of symbols and symbolic acts in worship – from banners on walls and 'visual prayers' by means of a video projector, to using stones, candles, sacred mazes, response cards and so on. However these tend to be for a specific instance or season, rather than becoming permanent fixtures or rituals. There is still a suspicion of anything becoming

too fixed lest people no longer understand the meaning. The question for me is whether such experimentation and openness to multiple spiritual traditions weakens or strengthens Baptist identity.

Finally, and summing up previous nuances, 'freedom' in worship may mean that 'we do it our way'. Any local church will often tell me as an itinerant preacher either that they are a 'normal' Baptist church or on the other hand that they are 'not a typical Baptist church'. Actually both who say this may look remarkably similar to me in terms of their worship! But these comments point to some sort of sense that each local church determines its worship patterns for itself and it will not accept being told what to do by those outside it, or even by those in the wider Baptist structures. The question that arises is this: when does such an understanding create a local church bubble in which the congregation struggles to look beyond itself to the world in need, or struggles to understand itself as part of a wider church, whether Baptist or universal?

D. Bill Croft responds from an Anglican perspective

11. The place of creeds

I am very grateful for the Baptist contribution to this conversation, and I want now to respond to Mary Cotes' paper and to more informal conversations with Ruth Bottoms. In conversation with ecumenical partners one always asks, 'What are the common threads?', 'What are the points of difference?' and 'Where are the differences which are really matters of emphasis?' One point of real difference seems to be that creeds do not form an intrinsic part of Baptist worship. In the Church of England, the catholic creeds (especially the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed), together with other 'authorized affirmations of faith', form part of all acts of worship on Sundays. They may be omitted, however, at smaller, weekday services. For Anglicans the saying, or indeed singing, of the creeds is a way of sharing in the one faith of the church. The faith is one (Ephesians 4:5) and by incorporating the creeds the Church of England deliberately links itself with the rest of the church, worldwide and through time, in professing the faith of the church. The Anglican tradition is that worship and belief are inextricably linked (*lex orandi, lex credendi,* or 'the rule of praying is the rule of

believing') so the saying of the creeds gives confidence that the living, professed faith of the Church of England is indeed the faith of the one great church. The saying of a creed also gives an opportunity for the whole scope of Christian confessing to be heard and owned. As has been said, 'What the Scriptures say at length, the Creed says briefly'.[4] The service may have a particular focus (as Mary describes it), but the creed provides the wider faith context. From an Anglican point of view, this use of creeds goes some way to answering Ruth's questions.[5]

12. The use of Scripture

Mary Cotes' paper makes the point that 'today in many Baptist churches there are relatively few Bible readings as such, and many church services would have only one, probably from the New Testament.' This raises a number of issues about the place of scripture in worship, how and to what extent it is read, heard and expounded in worship. Then there is the issue of how this affects the actual reception and profession of the faith. On a personal note I quite recently had the privilege of attending a Baptist act of worship at which a new minister was being licensed. Owing to other commitments I was not able to attend the whole of the service. On leaving I reflected that after a little over one hour of worship I had not heard scripture read. I subsequently learned that there had been one reading prior to the sermon.

There is some informal evidence that this pattern of worship, namely extended 'praise' with the singing of worship songs and only one reading prior to the sermon, is also evident in the Church of England. Estimates vary but it may be between one quarter and one third of worshippers in many dioceses. This shows that issues between our churches are sometimes also issues *within* our churches.

This pattern of scripture reading, if it is widespread, as Mary suggests, is in marked contrast to the Anglican pattern as set out in authorized forms. Scripture is to be read quite early on in the worship forming a basis for whatever happens later, whether prayers, reception of the sacrament or some

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[4] Nicholas Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God : A Reading of the Apostles' Creed* (London: SCM Press, 1992), p. 121.
[5] See further chapter 2, sections 4, 13.

other act such as healing ministry, a licensing or ordination of a minister. The Bible, read, heard and expounded, provides the authoritative basis for the church to act.

There is also the issue of the amount of scripture and from which part of the Bible it comes. In my own earlier contribution I mentioned that the Old Testament can be dropped more frequently than might be desirable. However, authorized forms of Anglican worship, such as the Eucharist, provide for the whole scope of Biblical witness: specified are the Old Testament, a worshipping response through the saying or singing of a psalm, a New Testament reading from one of the Letters or *Acts* or *Revelatio*n, and then the Gospel. It is the whole of the scripture which constitutes the 'Word of God'. What is that telling us as churches about how scripture should be read and heard in worship?

The lectionary-based reading of scripture in the Anglican tradition is also a difference from the Baptist tradition, where the scripture reading(s) appear to be chosen by a worship planning group or minister. The lectionary, shared not only by other Anglicans but also other church traditions (the current lectionary is based on the *Revised Common Lectionary*), means that Anglicans hear the same readings as each other Sunday by Sunday. These scriptures are also being heard, for example, by Roman Catholic brothers and sisters. This again is an expression of the unity of the faith in the church of Jesus Christ.

The lectionary also provides breadth and balance in the hearing of scripture. The lectionary is intrinsically connected to the church's year, which itself guides the church through the drama of salvation. It would be interesting to hear more about the extent to which the church's year is reflected in Baptist worship. The lectionary, reflecting the seasons of the church's year, helps ensure that all the various aspects of Christian belief are received. The question for our churches (as perhaps indicated by Ruth) is this: to what extent in our worship do we hear and profess the great range of Christian faith and avoid distortions? Lectionaries, the church year and the creeds are all relevant to this question for us as Anglicans.

13. A tension between liturgy and Spirit?

Listening to the conversation thus far reveals that there is a something of a tension between worship which is liturgically based and worship that is 'Spirit-led'. Mary's contribution notes the Baptist concern for 'being open to the work of the Spirit who draws us into a closer relationship with God'. There is also a concern for 'openness to the prompting and transforming power of God's Spirit'. Mary identifies at least three ways in which this openness is expressed: extempore prayer, the selection of scripture under the guidance of the Spirit by the worship leader, and a 'willingness to engage … not just minds but religious affections and emotions.' In this latter activity, Mary notes that 'the role of music has an important part to play.'

First, extempore prayer is of course practised in Anglican churches but not to the extent that it appears to be in Baptist churches. Nor would it be seen as having a privileged place in the various forms and styles of prayer. A number of well-used Anglican prayers have references to the work of the Holy Spirit in worship; for instance, the 'Collect for Purity' includes the words 'cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit that we may … worthily magnify your holy name.' Here the Holy Spirit is understood as the transforming inspiration of Christian worship. At the end of the Eucharist, as a further example, the standard post-communion prayer includes the words, 'Send us out in the power of the Spirit, to live and work to your praise and glory.' Here the Spirit is called upon as the divine energy at the heart of mission.

Clearly there are pitfalls in every form of praying. The liturgically-honed words of an Anglican rite may become mere lip-service for the worshipper, no longer speaking to the heart. Extempore prayer may become over wordy and repetitive, recalling the Lord's warning, 'When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words' (Matthew 6:7). Each style of praying can be used, misused or abused. Also our churches can stereotype and misconstrue each other's styles and this clearly should be avoided. But a key question remains, 'Is extempore prayer a privileged form of praying, and if so, why?

I have already addressed to some extent the second kind of 'openness to the Spirit' mentioned by Mary, the selection of scripture in worship.

Anglicans need to hear, however, the importance laid on the selection of the scripture reading as an important instance of being led by the Holy Spirit. Can Anglicans offer in response the idea that the church's year, with its accompanying lectionary, can also in itself be understood as a gift of the Spirit? The Church of England does allow for departure from the lectionary. As is explained in the notes to the Lectionary 'During Ordinary Time, authorized lectionary provision remains the norm, but, after due consultation with the Parochial Church Council, the minister may, from time to time, depart from the lectionary provision for pastoral reasons or teaching purposes.'[6] It has to be said that this has a rather different feel to the freedom in the Spirit given to Baptist preachers! On the ground, sermon courses, using specially selected readings, would not be uncommon, and they would probably be decided upon rather more informally than as envisaged in the official lectionary notes. Nonetheless, these notes enshrine some ecclesiological emphases including the need for the minister, whose responsibility the preaching is, to consult with the wider church because the wider church has a voice in the way scripture is read. The Baptist procedure appears individualist compared to this. Is that a fair observation?

Third, the role of music in mediating the transformative power of God in worship is clearly a key issue for both Baptists and Anglicans. It is widely recognized that the style of music has a deep impact on the experience of worship. In the Church of England there are differences in the style of music. This may be for practical reasons, such as the availability of an organist or instrumentalists willing to form a worship band. It may also be for liturgical reasons, including the belief that modern worship songs bring a new and valued dimension to worship.

This issue can cause disagreement. The term 'happy–clappy' can be used pejoratively when people feel uncertain about the place of openly-expressed emotion in worship. What is surfacing here is the role of experience in worship. To what extent is experiencing God's presence a necessary element of authentic Christian worship? The Psalms and references to worship in the New Testament certainly witness to the joy of worship, felt in the individual worshipper's heart and shared within the congregation (Ps. 42:4; Ps. 122; Col. 3:16). Uncertainty in the face of overtly emotional worship may stem

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[6] *The Christian Year: Calendar, Lectionary, and Collects* (London: Church House Publishing, 1997), p. 36.

from inexperience of this form of worship, cultural factors and the fear of embarrassment. Also, there may be a concern that emotion takes over when in fact the whole of the personality, the will and the intellect are of equal value in being employed in the worshipping experience.

In connection with worship songs, the criticism has been made that they are individualistic and contrast with more traditional hymns in this regard. This raises the issue of whether our worship is genuinely a shared experience, which clearly it should be given the New Testament's vision of God's salvific formation of his people, the body of Christ, or whether worship can become an experience for a mere collection of individuals. The critique of this individualism has been levelled equally at the 8.00 a.m. Holy Communion service in the Church of England, where typically the rather few worshippers spread themselves out in the worshipping space at a safe distance from each other; this is no less an individualism than that of worshippers caught up in their own experience oblivious of others as they sing a popular worship song.

14. Baptism and confessing the faith

Unsurprisingly the place of baptism in worship is experienced differently in our two traditions. Reading Mary's paper I gain a strong sense of the importance of baptisms within the worshipping community. This contrasts with the Anglican experience. Baptisms are often, though by no means exclusively, of infants and may well be of children of parents who are not regular members of the worshipping family. Baptism may also take place outside the main act Sunday act of worship. This means that although one of the reasons for having baptisms within the regular act of Sunday worship is so that the congregation may be 'put in mind' of their own baptism, this is not in any way comparable to the Baptist experience of receiving a new member into the life of the church as a confessing disciple. The question arises: to what extent in our churches is there a conscious awareness of baptism, and the nature of the baptismal calling, amongst the congregation?

15. Responsibility for worship

Another issue that has arisen in this conversation is where responsibility for the form and conduct of worship lies. It appears that in Baptist churches this lies formally with the minister, but that it is increasingly passing to a group which plans the worship with a music band. In the Church of England the minister has rights reserved to him or her concerning worship which places the minister in a position of great influence. In some parishes, people may simply defer in all matters of worship to the parish priest. In all main acts of worship, however, the priest is required to use authorized forms of worship. This means that forms of Anglican worship are shared and authorized by the whole Church of England. Ministers, together with those they wish to consult, are then at liberty to shape what is given in a particular style. Indeed this is encouraged. The ethos of *Common Worship* (which was authorized from 2000) is a balance between given forms of worship and freedom to adapt to local circumstances. It could well be argued that the direction of travel is towards greater diversity and local adaptation. This places greater responsibility, regardless of whether it is perceived and owned, on those who devise and shape worship at the local level.

For the purposes of this conversation the issue then for both Baptists (already raised by Ruth) and Anglicans is to what extent the faith of the church is being shaped, or even potentially distorted, by this kind of freedom. Among Anglicans, the theological and liturgical expertise of the local priest is being called upon more and more. Can it be relied upon? If responsibility for worship is delegated to others, as it is with lay-led 'family services' in the Church of England, these issues become more acute. How are these issues experienced on the ground in Baptist churches? Can we helpfully share an approach to this issue?

16. A Church of England perspective

From the conversation so far, a number of issues about confessing the faith in worship seem to be emerging from a Church of England perspective:

- The importance of expressing in worship a Christian faith which is shared by the wider church (e.g. in the saying of creeds);

- The importance of hearing the full range of Christian faith through the choice of scripture readings in worship;
- The need to explore the role of the Holy Spirit in worship and what this means for the forms and styles of worship;
- Finding means to increase an awareness of baptismal vocation in the Christian congregation;
- Considering where responsibility lies for the planning and leadership of worship, in the light of its implications for the profession of the faith in the church.

I look forward to the continuation of this conversation, and especially to hearing whether Baptist conversation-partners think that these are indeed the key issues before us.

E. Ruth Bottoms offers some concluding reflections from a Baptist perspective

17. A shared concern for good worship

Can one ever really conclude a conversation around worship? Most of us, from whatever tradition, will recognise that in our current time one thing you can guarantee is that everyone who attends church will have an opinion about the worship! We are well aware that people who move and look for another church are as likely to settle somewhere out of their liking for the worship style on offer as for any allegiance to a particular denominational tradition. I have a sneaking suspicion that it will be this section of the conversations that will generate the most animated discussions among those who read them.

In our conversation together whether in 'matched pairs' or in the whole group, we must acknowledge that we have been bringing our own particular preferences, theologies, and personality types to the discussion. It was perhaps in discussing worship more than any of the other areas that we found ourselves united, and this may have been because we brought our own commitment as ecumenists to the table. We have, over a period, come to appreciate one another's traditions and enjoyed experiencing one another's

worship. So together in these conversations we could all bemoan those times when we felt any service had jerked along rather than flowed, when scripture was lacking or taken completely out of context, or when the praise was so strident there seemed little room either for lament or for those who might be hurting and doubting in the midst. We can, and did, give a good theological reason for our critique, but hardly as dispassionate observers.

18. Confessing the faith not only in words

We have not, however, forgotten that the question we have been seeking to address is 'how do we confess the faith in worship?' not just 'what is good worship?' Clearly the actual words that are used all convey something of the faith we profess, be they set liturgy, extemporary prayer, crafted sermon, personal testimony, charismatic tongue, or ancient creed, and whether they are set to traditional or modern music. The meaning of these words themselves can all be deliberated, and have been in our discussions.

However, it has become clear that *which* elements of worship (such as praise, confession, and intercession) are used and *how* they are presented (for example, in what pattern or sequence) also convey something of the faith we are confessing. Similarly, *who* is entrusted with the planning and leading of different elements of worship affects the kind of faith that is being conveyed. The faith, of course, is not only expressed by leaders but through the participation of the congregation, be it by their thoughts, or their joining in with words, or actions such as the movement of their bodies. Further, the *where*, or the architecture and placement of fixtures and fittings, is also an expression of what is important in our faith. Explicitly or implicitly we confess the faith in our worship, and we have tried also to tease out the reasons *why* we do this in certain ways, deriving from our traditions. As Bill remarks, on-going conversation is key for going forward together, and I suggest that such conversation needs to be in two directions.

19. A challenge for Baptists

First, each tradition needs to talk within itself. Partly this is about education, all of us learning *why* our tradition is as it is. I have lost count of the number of Anglicans to whom I have explained why in their tradition the

Gospel is processed down into the nave to be read amongst the people. Meanwhile, as an itinerant preacher amongst Baptists, I am more concerned that there should be more than one scripture reading in a service, than debating about the place in the church it is read from. My Anglican conversation-partner has helpfully summarized a number of issues about confessing the faith in worship that seem to emerge from a Church of England perspective. In response, I would largely echo his list while adding some nuances which will challenge Baptists. We face:

- the importance of expressing in worship a Christian faith that is aware of and informed by the universal church, past and present, and its expressions of faith;
- the importance of hearing the full range of Christian faith through the choice and extent of scripture readings in worship;
- the need to explore how the Holy Spirit might be at work in worship not just in the spontaneous but in the planned and prepared;
- the urgent need to find ways that connect worship with the world, rather than being an escape from reality;
- a serious consideration of where the responsibility lies for the planning and leadership of worship, in the light of its implications for the profession of the faith.

20. An effort of understanding

The second direction of conversation needed is to continue talking to each other in each locality where Baptists and Anglicans seek to worship, witness and serve together. It is conversation – mutual, respectful, listening, questioning and sharing – that will take us beyond stereotypes and easy dismissal of the other. Baptists need to hear Anglicans say that their prayer is more than the set words, that the liturgy provides the initial framework for entry *into* prayer. On the other hand, Anglicans need to hear Baptists speak of the joy of being able to pray out loud, straight from the heart, as friend to friend, child to loving, attentive parent.

On this very matter of liturgy and spontaneity, there is a need to get beyond an easy polarity. It was pointed out in our conversation in the wider group that the directness Baptists prize in prayer, and to which I refer above,

is not necessarily totally spontaneous, against the impression held by many Anglicans. The congregationalist Isaac Watts drew a distinction between 'extempore' prayer and 'free prayer', both of which he saw as proper within dissenting worship.[7] Watts defines 'free' or 'conceived' prayer as 'done by some work of meditation before we begin to speak in prayer'. Such prayer is 'when we have not the *words* of our prayer formed beforehand ... but we conceive the *matter* or substance of our address to God, first in our minds...'[8] It is widespread Baptist practice to meditate like this on the subject and aim of a prayer before speaking it, even if the exact words are not always composed (though most Baptists feel free to use written prayers on occasions, and especially write their own, as Mary makes clear in paragraph 7 above). On the other hand, Baptists need to be aware that the 'Service of the Word' in *Common Worship* gives Anglicans latitude for a wide range of styles of praying.

Maybe when we understand the reasons behind our practice in worship, whether we agree with them or not, and whether they work for us personally or not, we will be moved to a more generous heart toward the other. So we will deepen the recognition of Christ, who is present within each of our traditions. Then too, I hope we will all be better placed to enable others exploring faith to enter into the mystery of worshipping the triune God.

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[7] See Ernest A. Payne and Stephen F. Winward, *Orders and Prayers for Church Worship. A Manual for Ministers* (London: Baptist Union, 1967), p. xv; Paul S. Fiddes, 'A Theology of Public Prayer', in Karen E. Smith and Simon P. Woodman (eds), *Prayers of the People* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2011), pp. 13–15.

[8] Isaac Watts, 'A Guide to Prayer' in J. Doddridge (ed.) *The Works of the Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts, D.D.* (London: J. Barfield, 1715), pp. 125–8.

5
How do we share the faith outside the walls of the Church?

A conversation between Donald Allister, Graham Sparkes, Martin Davie, Jeremy Worthen and others

A. Donald Allister, speaking as an Anglican bishop

1. The public role of the Church and the marks of its mission

The Church of England has always had a public role nationally and locally, with deep involvement in the public square. Bishops are expected to be involved in many aspects of civic life, to act as leaders of communities, to chair inquiries, commissions or local strategic partnerships. They are expected to speak out on national and ethical issues, and the senior twenty-four bishops join the two archbishops in the House of Lords. The Church puts significant resources into this work, ensuring bishops are briefed and supported for this role. The Archbishops in particular have this public role, including the leading of national services, commemorations and celebrations. The Archbishop of Canterbury can expect a very public role with much media attention, and regular complaints when he does speak into the public square. All this is seen as part of the Church of England's mission. It is generally appreciated, not least by other religious communities and by the many national and civic leaders who are supported behind the scenes by the bishops. But there are some who criticize this work, either because it takes bishops away from their dioceses or because it is assumes a 'Christendom' model of society when the real need is for the bishops to give a lead in direct evangelism and church building.

In 1984 the Anglican Consultative Council began to develop a mission statement for the worldwide Anglican Communion. The bishops of the

Lambeth Conference adopted these 'Five Marks Of Mission' in 1988. They were adopted by the General Synod of the Church of England in 1996.[1]

- To proclaim the good news of the Kingdom
- To teach, baptize and nurture new believers
- To respond to human need by loving service
- To seek to transform unjust structures of society
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and to sustain the life of the earth

There is occasional talk of revising these five marks, but they have attained near-shibboleth status in many parts of the church. That is however far from saying that every Church of England parish or minister is actively engaged in all five. In terms of the ways in which they relate to the world, our parishes are remarkably diverse and independent-minded. The theory might state that Church of England dioceses, parishes, clergy and lay ministers will all be committed to and busily engaged in holistic mission under these five general headings.

There are still broad strands of emphasis within the Church of England, though many of the boundaries are blurring. At the risk of oversimplification, but in order to give some framework to a very diverse picture, this paper will look briefly at how the three traditionally recognized movements go about what they see as their mission.

2. Evangelical Anglicans and mission

In practice evangelical clergy and parishes often give much more weight to the first two marks of mission, proclamation and nurture, though in the last generation or so many evangelicals have rediscovered the commitment to service and to justice which their forbears exemplified, and they have been as influenced as everyone else by the 'Green' movement.

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[1] *The Five Marks of Mission*, issued by the Anglican Consultative Council. The ACC amplified the fourth mark in 1999 in its 15th meeting (Auckland, New Zealand) to read: 'To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation.'

Even the language of the first mark, speaking of 'the good news of the Kingdom' is treated with suspicion by some evangelicals who would prefer a return to the more traditional 'preaching the Gospel' language exemplified by the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910. On the whole, evangelicals tend to believe that any congregation which is not seeing new converts regularly, growing numerically, and sending people out into evangelistic work, is failing in its mission. They do not always see it as failure in the same way if their church soft-pedals on issues of justice or environmental concern. Evangelicalism is a very broad movement even within the Church of England, and in recent years it seems that the more charismatic evangelicals have been happier with the five marks of mission, including the kingdom-language and the social, justice and environmental concerns. On the other hand, more reformed evangelicals have continued to focus rather more on preaching for conversion and on discipling believers.

Evangelical parishes, mission agencies and societies continue to be very heavily involved in mission in their communities. Courses, camps and conferences loom large. 'Alpha', 'Christianity Explored' and other courses see thousands find faith each year. Childrens' and youth camps and activities influence very many young people. Week-long conferences and camps such as Keswick, Spring Harvest, Word Alive and New Wine are evolving but are very much part of the scene particularly for nurturing and training of younger believers. Festivals such as Greenbelt and Soul Survivor see many thousands braving the mud not just for Christian music but for teaching, seminars and debates on social and cultural issues.

Many parishes run groups for parents and toddlers, parenting classes, baptism and marriage courses, activities for men, women and the retired – all with a more or less obvious evangelistic subtext. Evangelistic guest services tend to happen within the walls of the churches rather than without, but encouraging regular worshippers to bring friends to them, and to pray faithfully for those friends to be converted, is still common. Support for overseas mission, especially with an evangelistic or church-building emphasis, is still strong, though not as much so as in earlier generations. Evangelicals still see training for mission or ministry as beginning in the local parish long before the wider church gets involved. Sending a stream or even a trickle of people out from the parish to train for mission work or

ordination, many of those people already well experienced in ministry within their congregation, is still a badge of honour for many evangelical clergy.

Evangelicals have a history of church-planting and there has been a resurgence of this in recent years, particularly through larger churches taking over smaller churches or empty church buildings and sending a team of lay people there, often with a relatively junior priest, and with an expectation of significant growth. In some cases these have been on or beyond the margins of the canon law of the Church, but recent legislation allows bishops to authorize this sort of activity and in parts of London and some other areas it has become relatively common. These new or revived churches tend to fill with younger professionals; their worship is informal and their structures light, and they tend to be either charismatic or reformed rather than open evangelical.

3. Catholic Anglicans and mission

Anglo-Catholics (who usually prefer to be called catholic Anglicans) have traditionally been very strong in the areas of nurturing their own flock, mainly through carefully crafted and well led formal worship, in reaching out to and serving the poor, and in fighting for social justice. Catholic outreach in the poorest inner-city areas and through overseas missions was hugely powerful and successful for about a hundred years until probably the 1960s. This has been well documented and is very impressive. It is still there and faithful in many places, but not in the same strength of numbers and certainly without the flood of young men willing to give their lives to serving Christ among the poor at home or abroad.

Anglican Catholicism has of course changed, and the always-present differences between the more theologically conservative and the more radical have become major dividing lines. The arrival of women clergy has seen some highlighting of differences within evangelicalism, but this is as nothing compared to the splits in the Anglican catholic world. Catholic ecclesiology tends to give the bishop a more important place than does evangelical, as the source of valid sacramental ministry and as the focus of unity, and catholic clergy who think their bishop has gone astray on a major doctrinal and sacramental issue can find themselves in a very difficult place. This inevitably means loss of morale and of confidence about a future or the

possibility of flourishing within the Church of England. A spiral of decline can seem inevitable barring miracles.

A major difference between evangelical and catholic mission within the Church of England is seen in the involvement of the laity. There have always been significant and highly placed lay leaders in both movements, but for various reasons catholicism has not motivated or trained the large numbers of lay people which evangelicalism takes for granted. Members of the religious orders are an honourable exception to that general rule, but the decline in their numbers in the last fifty years has been steep with many houses closing and much exemplary work and presence now residual at best. There are now signs of a mobilization of catholic Anglican lay people, not least through the Caister Conferences which ran from 1996 to 2008 and much of the work of the Anglican Shrine at Walsingham, but it remains the case that most of the mission done in the more catholic parishes is clergy dominated or at least strongly clergy-led. Evangelical clergy tend to see themselves as exemplars but primarily as trainers in mission: catholic clergy still all too often see themselves as the primary missioners.

However evangelism (or evangelization to use the term preferred by Rome and those who take a lead from Rome) is now back on the agenda in the world of catholic Anglicans. The realization that we are at least moving into post-Christendom, and that the default position in the western world is now for Christianity to decline, has come later to catholics than to evangelicals (who have anyway tended to doubt the existence of Christendom), but it has arrived. Through Walsingham and other catholic movements, through often close contacts with Rome, and through charismatic renewal's inroads into catholic thought and practice, catholic Anglicans are now beginning to engage in various forms of evangelism. This is still clergy dominated, but there are signs of a new confidence for the laity in sharing their faith.

4. Liberal Anglicans and mission

Liberalism within the Church of England is as broad as evangelicalism or Catholicism. There has been a decline in 'middle of the road' or classical liberalism, but there are many liberal (or 'open') evangelicals and many liberal (or 'affirming') catholics. This is a difficult area to describe, because for some 'liberal' is an insult and for others a badge of honour. Liberal used

to mean credally radical, but nowadays the radical orthodoxy movement means there are growing numbers of credally orthodox clergy who approach ethical and social matters with less constraint than evangelicals or catholics.

Liberal clergy and churches have tended to major on what are now described as the third, fourth and fifth marks of mission, especially support for the poor, social action and justice issues. There is a long and noble history of effective engagement in these areas with clergy often sitting on committees and local councils, setting up credit unions, tenants' and housing associations, leading opposition to racism and oppressive employment practices, and in other ways acting as significant agents of social change. For many liberal clergy this has been at the heart of their ministry. Again this has been a clergy-dominated movement. The first and second marks of mission, as now described, have been much less prominent in classical liberalism, but are seen among more liberal catholics and open evangelicals.

5. New expressions of mission

The five marks of mission are of course meant to describe holistic mission. As the Anglican Consultative Council notes, 'The first mark of mission... is really a summary of what *all* mission is about, because it is based on Jesus' own summary of his mission (Matthew 4:17, Mark 1:14–15, Luke 4:18, Luke 7:22; cf. John 3:14–17). Instead of being just one of five distinct activities, this should be the key statement about *everything* we do in mission.' In practice many churches and clergy who may be committed to mission do not give significant weight to all five.

In the current generation there have been a number of major missional initiatives which are to be seen across the spectrum, or at least most of it, rather than concentrated within one strand of churchmanship. The origins may be from one strand, but the practice has spread remarkably. Examples are: fresh expressions of many kinds, messy church, café church, Back to Church Sunday. These are not restricted to Anglicanism, and are not welcomed within all Church of England parishes, but Dr Rowan Williams' advocacy of, and support for, a 'mixed economy church' while the Archbishop of Canterbury has been a significant factor in their widespread acceptance and spread. It is probably too soon to assess the longer term significance of these initiatives, but some at least seem to be here to stay.

B. Graham Sparkes, responding as a Baptist

6. Baptists as a missionary people

The German Baptist of the nineteenth century, Johannes Oncken, was known for his motto, 'Every Baptist a Missionary'. During the course of his life he committed himself to evangelism, founded and grew a large number of churches throughout the eastern part of Europe, and established a publishing house to distribute Bibles. In many ways both his words and his life encapsulate a core Baptist conviction: that the task of sharing the faith – of engaging in mission – is a fundamental responsibility of every Christian.

Mission is a central emphasis within Baptist life wherever it is found. It is there within Thomas Helwys's insistence in 1612 that exiled believers should return from the Netherlands to England despite the threat of persecution in order to evangelize their own people. It is present in the modern missionary movement begun by the Baptist, William Carey, with his insistence that the gospel be shared with the whole world. It is found within the current Declaration of Principle of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, with its statement that 'it is the duty of every disciple to bear personal witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to take part in the evangelization of the world.'

At times this strong emphasis on sharing the faith has unfortunately led Baptists to regard mission as something done by us on behalf of God. It has been seen as the core activity of Christians, such that the measure of discipleship is the time and effort dedicated to evangelism. But at their best, Baptists have recognized that our calling is to participate in the mission of God (*missio Dei*) – that as the Father sends the Son, so we are sent out as disciples to witness to that which God has done and continues to do through the Spirit.

7. Mission as the essence of the church

Of course, all Christian traditions would want to acknowledge the importance of mission – of sharing our faith – but its centrality for Baptists arises from their understanding of the nature of the church. Mission and

ecclesiology are closely connected. The commitment to the practice of believers' baptism is an affirmation that faith can never be inherited and nor can it be assumed. It has to be owned by each individual who is then incorporated into the body of Christ. This vital evangelical experience – although it may take many different forms – underlies the concept of the church, for it is only those who come to faith who make up the believing community. Amongst Baptists there is a suspicion, if not an outright rejection, of 'Christendom' and its understanding that all living within a certain territory belong within the spiritual jurisdiction of the church. Rather, Baptists believe that people must make an active choice to profess the faith and to gather with others who have also freely made that same choice, recognizing at the same time of course that this 'gathering' is response to the Christ who gathers his church.[2]

Thus the essence of the church has to be missional because it can only survive by continually sharing the faith, inviting people to become believers, and so bringing them into the life of God that is the gathered community of faith. Covenant relationships sustained in freedom and liberty are core to this missional way of being church. It is about communion and community – drawing people into the life of the Trinitarian God, and also drawing them into the life of God's people. The church as the gathered community is, on the one hand, dependent for its existence on the love and initiative of God in Christ who reaches out and invites us to respond in obedience, and, on the other hand, is sustained by the relationships of those who come together in faith and seek to embrace all who in freedom want to belong.

At times Baptists have closed off the community and limited the reach of God's grace, adopting a doctrine of election that resulted in mission losing its place at the centre of what it means to be church. But the dominant tradition has been a much more open view of covenant, where all have the liberty to believe and to place themselves under the rule of Christ, and equally all should have the liberty to share their faith within society and the world. It is noticeable how this emphasis on mission as of the essence of the church plays out in the life of the community. It results in Baptists holding together a strong sense of the church as the community of believers, while also seeing it as a place where people outside its walls are invited to come and be at home, in order that they also may encounter the faith. Thus:

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[2] See the discussion above on the 'gathering church', pp. 52–3.

- A service of baptism will include (alongside the receiving of God's grace) a believer's affirming of his or her faith and so becoming part of the church, but it will also be an opportunity to *share* the faith as testimony is offered in a way that is designed to present the claims of Christ to those who are not yet believers.
- In sharing communion, Baptists normally use the words of institution as a narrative to be told rather than as part of the prayer of consecration to be made to God, so reciting the great saving acts of God before the congregation and world as a missional act.
- The dynamic within a congregation is to see itself as both a gathered and a scattered community. It gathers in order to worship, learn and care; but it then scatters to witness and serve, as salt and light in the world.
- There exists an inherent tension within all of Baptist life, where an emphasis on the need to call each individual to a personal decision of repentance and faith in Christ is balanced by an affirmation that believers 'walk together and watch over one another' as part of a community.

Nowadays it is recognized that there is increasing fluidity in the way people discover faith. For some, first becoming a believer then leads them in turn to commit to being part of the church. For others, it is first the experience of belonging to a Christian community that enables them to journey towards faith. This interplay between believing and belonging, alongside the continuing emphasis on the importance of mission, has increasingly shaped the way Baptists understand the church. The ethos is one of looking for new forms that will respond more flexibly to the need to share in the faith in a predominantly secular environment.

The word 'mission' can be so overused that it ends in losing any content. In their undoubted commitment to being a mission-centred people, Baptists at times give the impression that anything and everything can be regarded as 'mission' if one tries hard enough! But, of course, greater clarity is needed about what it actually means to share the faith with those beyond the walls of the church. The 'Five Marks of Mission' already mentioned by Bishop Donald has been a helpful way for many Baptists to give a coherent account

of what mission might look like. It provides a breadth of understanding that many would want to endorse, and sets an agenda that many would identify with. At the same time, the ethos amongst Baptists is to stress certain aspects over against others, and to want to offer distinctive perspectives on particular dimensions of mission.

8. Mission as evangelism and church planting

What then does it mean to share the faith? For Baptists, it has always been about evangelism and planting churches. A key text has been Matthew 28:19–20, with its command to make disciples and baptize, and the familiar characteristics of evangelicalism have featured strongly in Baptist life, namely the importance of conversion, the centrality of the Bible, the stress of the Christ's sacrifice on the cross, and the need to actively engage in giving expression to the gospel. All this has shaped a sustained commitment to sharing the faith in ways that challenge and change the heart of an individual.

A look at the story of the discussions and debates that have taken place within Baptist structures – both formal and informal – over the past 50 years reveal these dominant concerns. As numerical decline within churches gathered pace, both charismatic renewal and the church growth movement exercised considerable influence, leading in 1979 to a report adopted by the Council of the Baptist Union entitled *Signs of Hope*, together with initiatives designed to renew evangelistic and evangelical life. Today, features of Baptist life continue to illustrate this ongoing engagement in evangelism and church planting, including:

- A President in 2012–13 who made engagement in evangelism the focus of the year.
- The development of 'evangelists' as a category of recognized and accredited ministry, enabling those in training to follow this particular pathway.
- A growing commitment to forms of pioneer ministry, also providing particular patterns of training that resource this calling.
- An emphasis on work with children and young people, expressing the conviction that each new generation needs to encounter the faith.

- A series of resources produced by the Baptist Union that are about equipping the church community for evangelism (including 'Door to Door', '50 ideas for Mission', 'Church Planting: Strategic Pathways').

In summary, Nigel Wright suggests that Baptists 'are most truly ourselves when we are an evangelistic people… Of all the mission imperatives laid upon us evangelism is at the top.'[3]

9. Mission as Social action

Though history tells a mixed story, Baptists today generally recognize that engagement in social action is both a sharing in the mission of God and an important way of sharing the faith. Attention can be drawn to such past activities as provision for general education in the early development of Sunday Schools, cooperation in the reform of labour laws, support for the temperance movement with its concern for the associated problems of poverty and deprivation, and active involvement in the anti-slavery movement by Baptists such as William Knibb.

It has to be admitted that often such engagement in social action was seen as a covert way of engaging in evangelism. It must also be recognized that at times social action has been regarded with suspicion, as if it draws energy away from the central evangelistic calling of Christians. Thus, from the early twentieth century onwards the rather loose phrase 'social gospel' (though largely developed in the USA by a Baptist, Walter Rauschenbusch) was used dismissively by a number of evangelical Baptists to refer to those within the church who had lost a proper focus on what it meant to share the faith.

But amongst Baptists today, community engagement through a wide range of projects, social campaigns and social provision is regarded as an important witness to God's concern for the poor and marginalized. No doubt there are a number of reasons for this growth in social action, including the need to reach out to people because they no longer naturally reach out to the church. But the Baptist emphasis on the local congregation naturally leads to an involvement in the local community. Whereas a national voice on issues

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[3] Nigel Wright, *New Baptists, New Agenda* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002), p. 94.

may be difficult, a congregation with initiative is free to orientate its life and witness to quickly respond to needs it identifies within its locality. Initiatives such as Faithworks and Street Pastors have been seen as particularly appropriate forms of social action, not least because they are unashamedly faith-based while at the same time offer practical support to those in need.

10. Church and state

Baptists find their origins in the lives and faith of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, both of whom had fled to Amsterdam under threat of persecution in England. Helwys returned to establish the first Baptist church on English soil in Spitalfields in 1612, and the experience of persecution and discrimination at the hands of the state during subsequent centuries has profoundly shaped Baptist attitudes.

As has been clearly argued,[4] Baptists should not be regarded as sectarian. They do have a strong objection to state interference in church matters, and also reject the church's being given special privileges by the state, but they do not see themselves as separate from society. Sharing the faith includes an engagement with state structures and a participation in the wider life of the nation, so as to witness to the truth and meaning of the gospel. But the issue of state interference, together with the existence of an established church, is one that continues to matter to Baptists.

While for other traditions the origins of Christendom, with its conferring of state patronage on the Christian faith, was a welcome development, Baptists tend to regard it as a mistake. Perhaps it was an inevitability – but a mistake nonetheless. Contrasting views on this issue can be seen played out in the writings of Oliver O'Donovan[5] and John Yoder.[6]

- O'Donovan argues for a political theology based on the upholding of monarchy and kingship in the Old Testament as divinely appointed.

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[4] See Paul S. Fiddes, 'Church and Sect: Cross-Currents in Early Baptist Life' in Anthony R Cross and Nicholas J. Wood (eds), *Exploring Baptist Origins* (Oxford: Regents's Park College, 2010), pp. 33–60.
[5] Oliver O'Donovan, *The Desire of the Nations. Rediscovering the Roots of Political Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
[6] John Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

Jesus, he says, laid claim to this tradition when he entered Jerusalem, taking up role of monarch. So Christendom is the working out of this political tradition found within scripture, with the secular powers becoming subject to Christ. This, he believes, should be welcomed. The church's political task is one of participating in government. The essential nature of the church should therefore remain hidden, to be perceived only with the eyes of faith, and the political powers be seen as mediators of God rule.

- Yoder argues for a political theology that has at its centre Jesus' offering of the coming of a new kingdom. He argues that Jesus repeatedly refused the way of kingship offered to him. But this was not because he was refusing to be political, but only because he was choosing the radical political option – ruling through suffering service, and gathering a community to witness to an alternative way. He sees the church as the embodiment and anticipation of God's ultimate triumph. It will not look like sovereignty to the world because it is so radical, marked by non-violence and servanthood. But it is a foretaste of the kingdom and points to the new world to come. It is not apolitical but transcends normal politics. Thus Christendom, according to Yoder, was a mistake because empire becomes the visible sign of God's rule on earth and the church becomes invisible – simply dealing with spiritual matters. He says the rule of Christ should be seen in the life and politics of the church, even though it will not be recognized by the rest of the society.

Though there may not be many Baptists who can actually quote Yoder, they are very likely to take his side! Baptists regard freedom to be the church – to worship and to practise the faith – as a fundamental right. It was this desire to be free that resulted in persecution in the seventeenth century, and a surrender of this freedom to state authorities seems unthinkable. Christ alone is regarded as head of the church. It is not a human view of autonomy but a liberty to respond to Christ's leadership that is central to church governance, and to allow a monarch or parliament a voice in decisions within the church seems inappropriate.

The freedom to live the faith and to share the faith that Baptists have always stood for extends to people of all faiths and none. Thus, Baptists would generally be content with a secular state. Not, it should be said, a hard secularism that refuses faith any place in the public square, but a soft secularism whereby the state allows the voices of all to be heard and to share in the task of seeking the common good.

The Anglican theologian, Chris Rowland, argues that despite the different strands of scripture, the evidence from the New Testament and church history is that the main elements of Christian identity 'are nonconformist and based on the principle that "we must obey God rather than any human authority" (Acts 5:29)'.[7] Christianity is fundamentally subversive, offering a different vision of the world, and no New Testament writing shows this more clearly than the Book of Revelation. It rejects any accommodation with state power. It unmasks the nature of this power and calls us to follow the Lamb. It contrasts the Beast with Christ, Babylon with Jerusalem. It encourages followers of Christ not to compromise, for the sake of making a faithful confession of the faith.

At a ministers' meeting in 1786, William Carey raised the question of whether it was the duty of all Christians to spread the Gospel throughout the world. By 1792 he had published his missionary manifesto, *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*. This short book argues that sharing the faith is binding on all Christians, and in so doing it captures a fundamental aspect of the ethos that guides and sustains Baptist life.

C. Martin Davie makes an Anglican response

11. Christians as a missionary people

Anglicans agree that the task of sharing the faith is the fundamental responsibility of each Christian and that the Christian calling is to participate in the *missio Dei*. Thus the *Anglican-Methodist Covenant* of 2001 declares 'mission is the vocation and responsibility of all baptized believers, the *laos*,

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[7] Christopher Rowland, 'Scripture: New Testament' in Peter Scott and William T. Cavanaugh (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 22.

the redeemed and sanctified 'people of his own' (Titus 2:14; cf 1 Peter 2:9), without distinction between ordained and lay Christians'[8] and the 2012 General Synod report *Making New Disciples: the Growth of the Church of England* states that 'The mission of the Church is its calling to share in the mission of God the Father to restore the fallen creation to Him through Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit, making manifest his Kingdom. Mission is about being sent – sent by a God who is a missionary.'[9]

12. Mission as the essence of the church

Anglicans also agree with the point made by Graham that faith cannot be inherited and that the church is a body that is made up of those who have freely chosen to belong to the gathered Christian community. The Anglican belief is not, as is often thought, that everyone in the area where the Church of England is established is part of the Church. Everyone in a parish is a parishioner and as such is the *responsibility* of the Church, but being a baptized communicant member of the body of Christ is a matter of individual decision by the people concerned.

The practice of infant baptism does not mean the faith is automatic or inherited. It means that the prevenient grace of God is bestowed on an individual prior to their response of faith, but this response of faith is still required once they are in a position to make it. That is why in the classic Anglican scheme of Christian initiation infant baptism is followed by catechesis and confirmation, at which point the faith of the person who has been baptized is confessed and confirmed.

There would be further agreement among Anglicans in seeing each local congregation as both a gathered and scattered community, one which gathers for worship and then scatters to witness and to act as salt and light in the world. That is what is meant when Anglicans are told at the end of their services 'Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.' They have met with God

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[8] *An Anglican-Methodist Covenant* (London and Peterborough: CHP/Methodist Publishing House, 2001), p.29.

[9] General Synod Misc. Papers 1054, *Making New Disciples: The Growth of the Church of England*, 2012.

and with each other and are now being sent out to serve God and their neighbour in the world.[10]

13. What then does it mean to share the faith?

Anglicans agree with Baptists that sharing the faith is about evangelism and planting churches. They have been doing both for hundreds of years (which is why there are church buildings dating from every decade since the Reformation) and continue to do so today. The Fresh Expressions initiative following on from the *Mission Shaped Church* report of 2004[11] is just the latest example of this.

They also agree with Baptists that social action is an important way of sharing the faith and Anglican congregations engage with their local communities in ways that are similar and in many cases identical to those undertaken by local Baptist churches. The recent growth in food banks would be a case in point.

14. Church and state

Anglicans would agree with Graham's statement that 'sharing the faith involves an engagement with state structures and a participation in the life of the nation so as to witness to the truth and meaning of the gospel.' That is precisely the rationale that Anglicans would give for establishment of the church. It gives opportunities for precisely this kind of engagement.

Anglicans also agree with Baptists that it would wrong for the state to go beyond its remit and interfere in an unwarranted fashion in matters of religion. The statement in Article XXXVII of the Articles of Religion, that 'we give not to our Princes the ministering either of God's word or of the Sacraments', is key here. The state cannot go beyond its proper remit. Thus if the state were to try to take the ministry of the church into its own hands, or to stop the church from performing its God-given calling, or to insist that it did it in an ungodly fashion the church would have to say 'no.' As Acts 5:29 says, 'we must obey God rather than any human authority.' That is why

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[10] See, for example the end of the service of Holy Communion, Order One, in *Common Worship*.
[11] *Mission Shaped Church* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004).

the Church of England, unlike, for instance, the Church of Sweden, has said that it cannot allow state sanctioned same-sex marriages to take place in its churches. They have been introduced by the state, but the Church of England believes that they are contrary to the character of marriage as ordained by God.

However, on the other hand, Anglicans do not see an absolute distinction between the state and the church. This is because they have traditionally had a vision of a united community in which there was one people who viewed in one way were subject to an earthly monarch and to his or her laws, but viewed in another way were subject to God and to his laws. This united community, prefigured by the people of Israel in Old Testament times, would confess the faith both by living according to God's ways in everyday life and by assembling together for the preaching of the word and the celebration of the sacraments.

The proper relationship between the state in its temporal aspect and the church is viewed as one of mutual accountability. The church brings God's word to the state and through its ministers challenges the community and its government to live according to God's ways.[12] Having heard and freely accepted God's word, the state and its government then holds the church accountable for undertaking its proper role in God's economy by preaching, celebrating the sacraments and providing pastoral care in a properly Godly fashion. On this view of things it is entirely appropriate that the monarch and parliament of a Christian society should have a voice in the life of the church. The Anglican challenge to the Baptist position would be to say that while the state can become the beast described in the Book of Revelation, just as a church can become apostate, it is not of the fundamental nature of the state to be the beast and governing powers within states have their own proper God given role, as Romans 13, 1 Timothy 2:1–4 and 1 Peter 2:13–14 make clear.

The state is a community of human beings and since all human beings are the subject of God's saving activity in Jesus Christ they are all called both individually and collectively to confess their faith in him and submit to his rule in the way that they live together. Thus a Christian state is not an oxymoron. It is how things should be.

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[12] That is the rationale, for example, for having bishops in the House of Lords.

Because the freedom that God has given to human beings means that faith has to be a personal and voluntary response to God, it is right that that the state should give freedom to be part of the corporate life of the state to those who are not yet Christians and allow them to worship according to their consciences, providing their behaviour does not actively contradict God's law. In a situation where the church is divided, the state could also properly recognize a diversity of different ways of confessing the Christian faith. What the state cannot properly do is to say that religious matters are not its concern. That would be for a community to turn its back on God. Admittedly, the Church of England took time to recognize the need for the state to allow freedom to those of all religions and none (which is why the Church of England has a shameful record of colluding with the state in the persecution of non–Anglicans), but freedom of religion is now a conviction Anglicans would see as axiomatic.

In summary therefore, the Anglican position would not normally be to think in terms of 'state interference' in matters of religion. Anglicans would instead ask two questions. How can the state appropriately encourage people to confess the faith individually and corporately in their everyday lives, and what is the proper degree of accountability between the church and the state in seeking to bring this about?

D. Jeremy Worthen offers an Anglican reflection on the conversation so far

15. Mission and politics

The issue of the right relationship between the Church of Christ and political authority is one that Anglicans and Baptists have been discussing for a long time. Indeed, we might say it is one of the central reasons why Baptists and Anglicans parted company in the first place, rehearsing in the seventeenth century the fundamental divergence between what modern scholars sometimes call 'magisterial' and 'radical' reformations in the first half of the

sixteenth century.[13] It remains an issue that can still make us feel like strangers to one another, even when we can be comfortably at home together on so many other issues.

It is no accident that one other central reason for the original separation of Baptists and Anglicans, as earlier between magisterial and radical reformers, was the baptism of infants. At stake in both issues was a fundamental question about how people come to share in the body of Christ. Do they always already stand in some kind of relationship to the church as the body of Christ, by virtue of belonging within a society decisively shaped by the cultural, social and political power of the institutional church? Or are human beings outside the body of Christ until the point where they in their freedom make a decisive response of welcome to the gospel?

In that sense, the debate that we can see continued in Graham and Martin's exchange in the chapter so far, usually tagged as one about 'establishment' and 'church-state relations', has always in fact been a debate about mission as well as politics. Indeed, it has been fundamentally about mission rather than politics. The heart of the matter is: how do people come to faith, and where are they coming from in their journey towards it? Assertions about the right relationship between the church and political authority were really always secondary to that. Because Baptists believed certain things about how people respond to the mission of God, they came to certain conclusions about political theology. Because Anglicans have – by and large – believed different things about mission (without wishing to overstate that – Martin rightly reminds us of the very extensive common ground), they have come to different conclusions about political theology.

Are those differences still important today? It seems to me that the answer has to be yes, but they may well have become much less significant than they used to be, and in reflecting on how we can share the faith together in the twenty-first century it would be important to be as clear as we can about that. Three factors are perhaps especially significant here: the weakening of Christendom, the influence of political liberalism, and the recognition of social and cultural diversity.

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[13] The 'magisterial' Reformers included Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin. The 'radical reformation' was promoted by those who believed the Protestant Reformation had not gone far enough, and included Anabaptists such as the Swiss Brethren and the Hutterites and the Mennonites from Northern Germany and the Netherlands.

16. The weakening of Christendom

The weakening of Christendom is obvious enough. I tried to avoid introducing the term too soon, as it can be a little slippery in its meanings, but I referred earlier to a situation where society is decisively shaped by the cultural, social and political power of the institutional church. No one – including Baptists – denied that seventeenth-century England was such a society; they were just divided on the theological interpretation of this state of affairs. Defenders of the Church of England saw the gracious work of Christ in the shaping power of the institutional church on society; opponents did not, and thought that to do so was to make a very serious mistake, either because the institutionally powerful church (in this case the Church of England) was not the true church of Jesus Christ, or because such power however pervasive could not in fact affect the true situation of each person faced with the gospel of eternal life. Yet it is not at all evident today that society in England is decisively shaped by the cultural, social and political power of the Church of England. It is of course possible to construct an argument to that effect, but the point is that no one needed to argue about it three hundred or even a hundred years ago. Moreover, it is difficult to argue against the view that the power of the Church of England in society has been in long term decline that is unlikely to go into reverse any time soon.

In this context, which has been clear enough for close to a century, Anglicans have had to think carefully about what mission might mean in this changed and changing social situation. Should they be focusing their energies on reversing it, strengthening what remains of Christendom and seeking to recover lost ground, on the basis that a Christendom situation, however weak and imperfect, is simply the best political setting for the fruitfulness of God's mission? Do they devote their energies to dimensions of the culture where Christendom appears to retain considerable traction – the monarchy and the House of Lords, county towns and some villages where the parish church remains focal for the community, and institutional chaplaincies where the Church of England can still be the key 'broker' for the abiding place of faith in a pluralistic society? Or is it time to acknowledge the end of the Christendom era and start preparing for a different approach to mission with a different configuration of church, for the very different era that is now unfolding?

17. The influence of political liberalism

At the risk of an abrupt change of gear, let me now say something about the second key factor I identified, the influence of political liberalism. The important point here is that political liberalism seeks to reduce our expectations of the state. Christendom models of church and state tended to assume that the state has a responsibility to promote truth and goodness – hence the state's need for the church's assistance. But what if we in our society do not agree on substantial questions about truth and goodness, and are unlikely ever to do so? And what if we do not, in any case, think that promoting particular view on truth and goodness – and thereby inevitably promoting the power of one group against others – is the proper task of the state?

To put it in very rough and ready terms, political liberalism in its relatively pure forms would say that the role of the state is to maximize the freedom of all individuals by minimizing those actions by some that limit the freedom of others. In a liberal state, the fact that something is believed to be *morally* wrong is no reason in itself for making it illegal. This applies even where something is universally believed to be morally wrong, if that situation were possible. Rather, the coercive force of the state should only be used to prevent actions that impinge directly on the exercise of freedom by other individuals.

This is an integral part of the background to the debates in our society in recent decades over abortion, assisted dying and same-sex relationships. And it is very clear which way the tide is flowing. Political liberalism, in one form or another, is increasingly seen as providing a kind of moral common sense within our society. The only evil we are united in rejected is the evil of limiting the free choice of others – which is precisely what the church appears to be doing when it tries to do the 'Christendom' thing and exercise political, social and cultural power. Let people make up their own minds!

Political liberalism understood in this way tends to erode the foundations of the kind of traditional defence of Christendom sketched out by Martin and commented on by Graham. But it may also undermine approaches that seek to define the church by its opposition to 'worldly' power and which tend towards a constant suspicion of the state. Political liberalism assumes that the norm in human life is some version of competitive individualism.

Individuals compete with each other for the desirable things of life. This situation makes the state necessary in order to prevent destructive anarchy as individuals are drawn into inevitable conflict with one another for goods. What happens when this kind of state structure collapses is shown by current events in the Middle East, which sadly remind us of the space vacated for evil by the loss of an effective state. On this view, we ought to be properly grateful that the state is there, and even be prepared to use violence to protect it, but we should also maintain low expectations of what it can actually contribute directly to human flourishing beyond establishing some minimal conditions. In such a perspective, finding our identity as the church in being *against* the state makes little sense. It also makes little sense to locate our identity in a particular partnership *with* it.

We do not need to agree that political liberalism is right or unproblematic to see that in a culture where it is hugely influential, the historic debate about church and state makes less and less sense to most people – including members of our churches. As Anglicans and Baptists seek to engage with society as it is for the sake of the mission of God, they may discover that historic fault lines here have ceased to be relevant, because we are no longer standing on quite the same ground. A more pertinent question, for instance, may be about how we respond to the individualism that pervades contemporary culture, both giving plausibility to and gaining plausibility from what I have termed political liberalism. Does it really speak the truth about who we are as human persons?

18. Social and cultural diversity

Finally, the third factor I singled out was the recognition of social and cultural diversity. The much-disputed term 'postmodernity' may no longer have the currency it did in the 1990s, but the assault it indicated on claims to give strong, universal descriptions and explanations of human phenomena remains potent. In many different contexts, we are highly conscious of diversity and likely to be somewhat pragmatic in trying to work with it and from it rather than reduce it to some ideologically determined uniformity. Grand claims about Christendom do not have much purchase in this environment – but neither do sweeping critiques. The effects on thinking about politics and society are clear enough, but what about mission?

As noted earlier, there are dimensions of our society where it is still the case that there is some kind of implicit recognition of the church's place that presents significant opportunities for missional engagement. Perhaps I am wrong, but my sense is that ministers and congregations from the historic 'Free' Churches who come into contact with those residual Christendom dimensions are probably attuned to the opportunities they present and happy, by and large, to mine that seam where it exists. That is not to say, of course, that they may not be able to learn from and share with Church of England colleagues as they do so.

Conversely, there are areas where that recognition is more or less completely absent, where Christendom has effectively vanished. The Church of England knows, at various levels, that if it is to remain the Church *of* England it has to find ways to build bridges into those areas in new and creative ways, ways that may change it so that it takes on forms quite different even from a generation ago. Where it looks to the past for precedents and the present for partners in such work, it needs to be attentive to other churches in this country as well as to significant elements of its own multi-stranded tradition, outlined by Bishop Donald in his opening reflection for this chapter. As Graham emphasizes, the long-standing emphasis by Baptists on the responsibility of every member for evangelism means that as this conversation opens up – and it can only become more urgent in the years ahead – Anglicans will have much to talk about with them.

E. Concluding thoughts from Graham Sparkes and other Baptist voices

19. Mission and belonging to the body of Christ

This has been a rich discussion, reaching deeply into both our histories. Jeremy is right to remind us, from an Anglican perspective, that politics and mission are intertwined. The Baptist 'political' situation of being separated from the established Church of England has issues of mission at its heart; the question is *how* people are to be drawn, or drawn deeper, into the community of the triune God. Put at its most extreme, Anglicans have stressed the influence of a church working in partnership with the state as a force for mission, shaping society; Baptists have stressed mission as inviting the

exercise of personal responsibility in making a choice in matters of faith. It is right that we should all be reminded of this difference, though our conversation has also shown that Anglicans and Baptists actually work with more of a spectrum between these two views, rather than simply existing at the extremes. Jeremy has also rightly pointed out that the social context in which we live has changed drastically since the beginnings of both the Church of England and the Baptist movement at the time of the English Reformation. There are new challenges which should prompt us to modify both approaches.

In fact, the conversation has shown that Anglicans and Baptists are already engaged in this fruitful re-thinking. If we begin with the Anglican contributions, they seem to be at quite a distance from the dictum of the classical theologian of Anglicanism, Richard Hooker, that since the monarch is the supreme Governor of both the church and the state within his or her own dominions, 'there is not … any man a member of the commonwealth, which is not also [a member] of the Church of England'.[14] In our own times, Martin seems to have modified this 'membership' in terms of a 'responsibility' of the Church of England to care for everyone in a parish, while affirming that 'being a baptized communicant member of the body of Christ is a matter of individual decision by the people concerned'. Jeremy has adopted a somewhat different language, in proposing that all those who live in a parish 'already stand in *some kind of relationship* to the church as the body of Christ'.

This modern view of 'establishment' comes remarkably close to what Graham has called an 'interplay between believing and belonging', which he sees as increasingly shaping the way Baptists understand the church. For some people, he remarks, first becoming a believer leads them in turn to commit to being part of the church; but for others, it is first the experience of belonging to a Christian community that *enables* them to journey towards faith. In the past many Baptists have admittedly tended to adopt a clear demarcation between who is 'in' and 'out' of the covenant community, between those who have made a personal confession of faith in baptism and those who have not. But Graham's contribution, and the discussion earlier

[14] Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Bk VIII:1:2. Hooker maintains, of course, that Christ is the 'universal Head' over the whole Church and over all human heads: *Laws*, Bk VIII.4:7–9.

about the nature of a 'gathering community' (see above, pages 52–3) shows a more flexible approach to 'belonging to the body of Christ'. Baptists cannot view people who have no personal faith as '*members* of the body', but they *can* and *do* envisage many other ways of belonging within the community which is the body of Christ, in tune with Jeremy's phrase of having 'some kind of relation' to that body. They also live with an increasing openness and overlap between the 'covenant community' and the wider community of society.

In short, this seems a most suitable moment in the life of our churches to work out what the 'interplay between believing and belonging' means for sharing the faith. Our different historic experiences should enable us each to bring something distinctive to this conversation, including a contesting of the individualism that Jeremy rightly sees as a destructive force in modern society. Both Anglicans and Baptists need to find a way of integrating the corporate life of the gathered community with the corporate life of society, and we may helpfully come at the task from different angles in ways that allow for more fluid and dynamic relationships than in the past. As churches together we see our mission calling as enabling people to journey towards making a commitment to discipleship within the community of faith. For Anglicans, this needs to go beyond a relationship with members of wider society characterized only by the legal obligations of the church whereby people can make a claim to be baptized, married or buried within the Church of England. Baptists, for their part, need to go beyond a relationship characterized by a suspicion about people's spiritual state which keeps people at a distance from engagement in Baptist life until they have completed the journey into faith.

Jeremy astutely makes the point that 'Free Churches', including Baptists, are happy to take the opportunities for mission that the 'residual dimensions' of Christendom still present. The accepted position of the church in the community, the acceptance of clergy as chaplains in hospitals, industry, shops and prisons are all remnants of an age when the Christian faith had a more central place in society than it has now. This place was, however, occupied not only by the established Church of England but also by nonconformist or dissenting faith, chapel standing alongside church on the streets of our cities, towns and villages. It is, perhaps, too early to announce that 'Christendom' has entirely passed away.The opportunity is there to turn

this lingering consciousness of Christian faith into new forms of 'belonging', and then to pass from there to 'believing'. At the same time, the Free Churches, including Baptists, have a long experience of operating 'from the margins' of society, and this may give them a particular sympathy with new cultural and ethnic groups who also feel marginalized, standing alongside them and helping them find their identity.

20. Mission and the activity of the state

Baptists agree with Martin that 'the state cannot go beyond its proper remit' which God has given it. Differences between Anglicans and Baptists in the past have been over what the limits of that remit actually are, and where responsibilities properly begin and end. Baptists certainly saw the rule of God in the world being worked out in the powers of king and parliament, which is why they believed – unlike Anabaptists – that church members could be magistrates and occupy other public offices (though they were largely excluded from them by law until the nineteenth century). Being members of the covenant community and members of the state were both matters of obedience to Christ.

The differences between the Church of England and English Dissent were over the *way* that the state and the church were understood to participate in the rule of God in Christ. The early Baptist Thomas Helwys wrote that 'God hath given to the king an earthly kingdom with all earthly power against the which none may resist', but 'Christ alone ... sits upon David's Throne, and the King ought to be a subject of his Kingdom'. The king simply 'can have no power to rule in this spiritual Kingdom of Christ,' – that is, in the church, of which Christ was the only head.[15] Where the state *exceeded* its mandate from God, or ceased to fulfill it, it became – in the colourful language of scripture – the 'beast' and could be resisted and even overthrown. Baptists and Anglicans have thus had different views about what can be expected from a state which is fulfilling its divine responsibility. Defining *what* the mandate given by God to the state might be is still the issue today.

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[15] Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the mistery of iniquity* (n.pl.:, n.p., 1612), recto; and p. 49. Spelling modernized.

Wanting to illustrate the limits of the state, Martin writes that 'if the state were to try to take the ministry of the church into its own hands ... the church would have to say "no".' This was, of course, exactly what early Baptists saw king and parliament as doing, and they duly said 'no'. The appointment of spiritual leaders in the church (bishops) by the king, and the requirement that congregations should use only the forms of prayer authorized by parliament (the prayer-book) were understood to be infringing the sole rule of Christ in his church. Christ alone called disciples to the ministry of oversight in the church, and the church meeting recognized them as being so called. Christ alone, through the Spirit, inspired a spirit of prayer in his people. Moreover, the relation of a person to God was the sphere of conscience, shaped by the Holy Spirit. Whether a person were obedient or disobedient to God in matters of faith, whether they were Christian (Protestant or Catholic), Jews, Muslims or atheists was not the concern of the state.[16] Each, Baptists thought, must answer at the Last Day to their own master (Romans 14: 4, 10–12).

Baptists understood the state, under God, as having the right (including the use of the sword) to resist evil and to maintain peace, justice, security and the rule of law. Jeremy rightly reminds us, however, that all these concepts have a moral content to them, and that our society today is not as agreed upon what they mean as was the society of the seventeenth century. In a 'liberal' view of the state, they can all be reduced in essence to not infringing the freedom of others. In discussion of the pieces presented in this section of the report, Baptists admitted that many fellow-Baptists want the state to encourage, through legislation, the kind of behaviour that they believed to be according to the will of God, but which is often contested in our society.

With their different historic experiences, Anglicans and Baptists are well equipped together to explore what a proper moral basis for law might be. They are bound to resist a *strict* political 'liberalism' which reduces all issues to that of freedom, but they must also recognize that moral values in law need to have the consent of members of society in all their cultural diversity. When law is based on consent and a common (if not a unanimous) mind of the people it will not *exactly* correspond to the purposes of God as discerned within the church as it reads Scripture. But law can still point

[16] See Thomas Helwys, Helwys, *Short Declaration*, p. 69, cf. p. 46.

towards the values of the Kingdom of God, and Christian churches should be active in the public square in putting the case for these values as making for the flourishing of life.

This activity is in fact mission, and can be a means of sharing the faith with others; it is part of the mission of the state to provide freedom of space in which it can happen. The state does not, in the Baptist view, collaborate in the mission of God in the *way* that the church does. It does not encourage right belief in God by the offering of inducements or the sanctions of punishment. Nor does it (in the words of Martin) hold the church 'accountable for undertaking its proper role in God's economy by preaching, celebrating the sacraments and providing pastoral care in a properly Godly fashion'. In a Baptist view, the church is only accountable to Christ for its faithfulness in these areas. There is a slippery slope, history has shown, between requiring uniformity in an established church and imposing religious conformity on all citizens.[17] The state does cooperate in the mission of God by encouraging the values of God's Kingdom in society, though it will always be limited in this activity by gaining the consent that is necessary in a liberal democratic society. It also needs a partnership with the churches to discover what those values might be.

It is important to acknowledge that for both Anglicans and Baptists this will not be easy! Not only is society less agreed on a moral basis for law and political action, but the churches – as part of that society – also find it very difficult to achieve consensus in and among themselves. As already suggested, the fault lines may not follow historic denominational divisions, and we together face the challenge of trying to determine exactly what Kingdom values we want to proclaim and live out, and how we most effectively witness to such values. Perhaps it is a theologian who stands within another tradition, the Catholic Karl Rahner, who offers a way forward when he declares that, 'The Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist at all.'[18] Our shared mission will, in the end, need to be rooted in a deep encounter with the living Christ who points us beyond all earthly forms of both church and state.

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[17] The Act of Uniformity (1662), requiring uniformity of practice in the Church of England, was quickly followed by Conventicle Acts (1664, 1670) forbidding any other kind of religious practice by anyone.

[18] Karl Rahner, 'The Spirituality of the Church of the Future', in *Concern for the Church. Theological Investigations* XX (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 149.

Part III

6
Reasons for conversations: reflections from an Anglican late arrival

Jeremy Worthen

There are hazards in joining a conversation that has been going on for some time. There might come a moment when we would like to ask for clarification of a point that seems confused, or wonder why no one has mentioned a particular issue that strikes us as obviously important. Will such an intervention be appreciated, however, or will it be borne as a distraction? Will it help everyone move forward in understanding, or take us back to matters other participants had worked through thoroughly some time ago?

The second round of formal conversations between the Church of England and the Baptist Union of Great Britain had already extended for well over two years when I joined them for the final two meetings, in the first half of 2014. I was acutely aware of having a great deal of catching up to do – with the conversations themselves, and with the wider scene into which they fitted, as I moved into a new post as Secretary for Ecumenical Relations and Theology with the Church of England. As I read through papers and minutes, I was also conscious that such texts are only traces of the living conversation that takes place when people meet face to face, conversation that has a particular depth when we are conscious of the presence of Christ in our midst.

Being a newcomer to a long-standing conversation brings its limitations, but perhaps it also grants a certain permission to ask again the sort of questions that were considered at the outset but whose answers may have become obscured or forgotten. One of the questions I wanted to ask almost immediately to others involved in the formal conversations was ‘Why?’: what is the purpose of this conversation, what is its goal? In any human context, that can sound like a blunt and even rude question: we talk to one another because relationships matter, and because we are only human in relationships with others, and conversation is a vital way of inhabiting and sustaining such relationships. To ask why we are doing it suggests a kind of

tone deafness to these truths. So it is also in the life of the church: we are members one of another, to borrow a phrase from the New Testament, and therefore meeting one another to speak about the things of Christ is just a normal part of life in Christ, and reaching out to do that across the walls that inevitably tend to rise up between us is a fundamental Christian duty. Is that not reason enough? Indeed it is, reason enough for a conversation, but perhaps not entirely satisfactory for conversations – a formal process agreed between two national church bodies, and to which they have allocated precious resources.

As I looked through the documents already generated and participated in my first meeting of the group, I was struck by how much attention was given simply to explaining to one another who we are. Anglicans needed to learn about Baptist churches – how they worship, what they teach, how they receive and share the gospel. Baptists needed to learn in turn about the Church of England. It will be evident from the main chapters of this report how we have sought to do that over the three years we have been meeting. Initially, I found this a little surprising. Are we still at such a relatively early stage in our relationship that this kind of sharing of information is still needed? There are at least three answers to that question.

The first is that we are indeed at a relatively early point, in comparison with some other ecumenical partnerships. From the perspective of the Church of England, our dialogues in this country often take place in the context of long-standing engagement at international level, through the Anglican Communion. While in many cases such engagement stretches back through several decades, there has so far been only one published report on 'conversations' (that word again) with the Baptist World Alliance, covering 2000–2005.[1] The first round of conversations between the Church of England and the Baptist Union started almost a decade earlier but also only led to a report in 2005 *(Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity)*. Building relationships between national and international church bodies takes time, time that needs to be measured in decades and generations rather than the life cycles of assemblies, synods and departmental business plans, and within that scale of things we do indeed remain at the early stages, for all the

[1] Anglican Communion and Baptist World Alliance, *Conversations around the World 2000-2005*.

long history of hospitality and partnership between local churches in this country.[2]

A second explanation for the need to share information with one another might also be given. We all tend to be highly conscious of the changes, differences and conflicts within the communities and institutions to which we belong, and we all are prone to projecting an unhelpful continuity and homogeneity onto those communities and institutions to which we do not. My sense of the conversations – which are between people likely to be far more aware of one another's churches than would the case for ordinary members – is that we have been regularly surprised by what we have heard from one another. For instance, Anglicans have had to explain to Baptists that although public worship in the Church of England is carefully regulated by canon law, many elements of these regulations are routinely set aside by parishes of varying kinds every week, with no obvious sanctions ensuing. Our assumptions about one another, it becomes clear, are sometimes ill-founded but more often out-dated. Church culture, for all Christians in this country, has been in a process of rapid change over the past half century, and there is no sign yet that we are approaching a period of relative stability. In this context, what we learnt in college or from Christian friends twenty years ago about Baptists or Anglicans may turn out to be quite unreliable in terms of building relationships with our neighbours here and now. Because of the pace of change, we need to keep talking – and keep sharing our experiences and perceptions – simply in order to make sure we stay in touch with how it really is for one another.[3]

There is also a third reason for taking time to listen carefully to what each side in the conversations wants to say about itself, and that is to do with the issue of what we might term ecumenical translation. Because we grow from so many common roots and our lives continue to be in all kinds of ways intertwined, we have a great deal of overlapping vocabulary. Yet this can give us a too simplistic confidence that when we say the same words, we must mean the same things. This is a familiar enough issue for anyone who has engaged in sustained ecumenical conversation. Sometimes it can be relatively easy to untangle – clarifying, for instance, the differences between the way Anglicans and Roman Catholics in this country use the shared term

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[2] For an account of this history, see *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity*, chapter 1.
[3] On this, see for example Margaret Swinson, pp. 45–7 above.

'parish'. For the most part, however, the task is a more subtle one: it concerns the way that what Graham Sparkes described to me as the characteristic 'ethos' of a particular denomination shapes the way its members understand common words, so that we can end up talking past each other when we think we are happily agreeing or indeed more or less unhappily disagreeing. For Anglicans and Baptists, this might be true of such apparently neutral terms as church, member and liturgy. This is a concern that participants in the conversations have had in mind from the beginning, and one that they hope their work as summarized in this report can help to address.

As I have already said, the latecomer to the conversation may ask questions that were considered carefully when it started and perhaps returned to regularly at various points since. An important section of the report on the first round of conversations summarizes four questions that will need to be addressed as Baptists and Anglicans seek to relate more closely to one another, and the second one of these was identified as a particular focus in setting up the current conversations:

> The second is the issue of confessing the apostolic faith together. The Church of England is a church that gives expression to its faith through the recitation of the catholic creeds, and its ecumenical agreements have included relatively detailed statements of what the churches involved agree on in matters of faith. Baptists, on the other hand, do not regularly recite the catholic creeds as part of their worship, and although they have produced statements of faith in the past, more recently Baptists have not seen detailed agreement in faith as a necessary condition for the development of relationships between churches. As before, this is an area in which Baptists and Anglicans would need to explore how their different approaches relate to each other and their significance for the further development of the relationship between the Church of England and the Baptist Union of Great Britain.[4]

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[4] *Pushing at the Boundaries*, pp. 102–3.

Yet while this gives a clear steer as to the substance of the conversations – what we are to talk about – It does not directly address the question of why we should talk about it, other than because it is a necessary requirement if the Church of England and the Baptist Union of Great Britain are to grow closer together. What would such growth look like? How would we know it is happening? At one of the meetings of the conversations that I attended, this was expressed in terms of enabling us to 'do more together', and I have come to appreciate that there has been a strong sense throughout their history that this is central to our purpose. Indeed, one of the reasons for focusing on this question from the 2005 report, rather than the others, was precisely that the connections to shared action in mission are so very clear in this case.

That remains one of our main hopes for this report: that as we become more able to recognize in one another's churches the confession of the one apostolic faith, so we will be able to work together with renewed confidence and energy in apostolic mission and ministry. In tackling some of the things that might seem to be obvious differences between us – use of creeds, forms of worship, relationship to the State, attitudes to evangelism – in terms of how they relate to confessing and sharing the apostolic faith, we can begin to appreciate the real rather than imagined differences as varying articulations of our common life of faith. Once that happens, they no longer need to be barriers to the kind of mutual trust and welcome needed to underpin real, committed partnership in the gospel between Baptist churches and Anglican parishes wherever this may take root and bear fruit for God's glory. Moreover, as is indicated by chapter 5 of the report, the more a sense of the urgency of the task of evangelism permeates the whole of the Church of England, the more widely collaboration with Baptists for whom this has always been acknowledged may begin to spread.

We live in a time when the need for intentional evangelism is becoming a common theme across different church traditions, as is evidenced not least by Pope Francis' remarkable and inspiring Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium*.[5] As it does so, those who are committed to making Christ known rather than simply seeing their own organization survive will want to work alongside all those in a given context who share that one desire. If they are to

[5] Available at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

do so, however, they will sooner or later have to face the question of the faith that they hold in common – how it is received, how it is confessed, how it is shared. We hope that our report can be a resource for the wider ecumenical conversation here that is so crucial for the church of Christ in this country.

That is why we are releasing this report and also planning other resources and events that can bring it to people's attention: because we do not see these conversations as being primarily for the benefit of those of us who participated, but as enabling new and good things to happen in the life of Christ's church. That is their fundamental purpose, while it is also something that remains, for a variety of reasons, out of our hands. We cannot guarantee that others will take an interest in what we have done. Nor can we guarantee that those who do will be moved to take action in seeking to build new kinds of partnerships between Anglicans and Baptists in their locality. Finally, we cannot guarantee that those who are so moved will not meet obdurate resistance from their own church body, or indifference and even hostility from the other. Yet there are rarely guarantees in Christian life. We can only hope to sow good seed, knowing that it will not always meet good soil, but when it does, God will give lasting growth.

Growing closer together will surely mean a greater willingness and freedom to work together in the communities that we serve: to do things together in the name of Christ. We might also hope, however, that it involves some other dimensions as well. One of these is learning. Over the past decade, there has been international interest in the idea of 'receptive ecumenism' pioneered by, among others, Professor Paul Murray from the University of Durham.[6] Receptive ecumenism involves asking, 'What can we as a church receive from you as a church? What are the gifts we can offer to you and what are the gifts we can embrace from you, so that we grow further together into the fullness of the stature of Christ and thereby closer to one another?'

My inclination would be to let my Baptist colleagues judge what are the gifts that they might receive from the Church of England at this time, but for my part, as an Anglican, it seems that we have much to learn from the place

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[6] Paul D. Murray (ed.), *Receptive Ecumenism and the Call to Catholic Learning: Exploring a Way for Contemporary Ecumenism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

given to freedom in Baptist theology and practice. This is a theme that runs through Baptist contributions to all the main chapters of the report,[7] and while Baptist perceptions of the lack of freedom in the Church of England may sometimes be misplaced, behind the more superficial contrasts lie some powerful insights.

At the deepest level, the reason Baptists treasure freedom is not because they want to be able to decide for themselves, to be released from external constraints, to 'do their own thing' – the kind of discourse about freedom that is hugely powerful in our contemporary culture.[8] Rather, the freedom of the believer and of the church is articulated in relation to both the sovereignty of Christ and the responsibility of the believer and of the church. It is freedom to let Christ reign that is being sought here, not the freedom of modern autonomy.[9] At the same time, the freedom to let Christ reign does mean that a serious question mark has to be placed against anything that might seem to constrain Christ's own freedom to act as Lord of the church – such as restriction to authorized forms of words in public worship, or binding appointment of some Christian ministers to the mechanisms of the state. Now, I still believe that those question marks can be answered by Anglicans, but I wonder whether we have really appreciated their force, and whether if we did the way we answer them might not shift in significant ways.

It also seems to me that Anglicans might well want to ponder the relationship between freedom and responsibility in Baptist understanding.[10] For the corollary of the Baptist emphasis on the freedom of the believer and of the church is that believers should have a vivid sense of their responsibility before God for the way they exercise that freedom. Through the church meeting, they have to make decisions for themselves as to what it means to live under the rule of Christ and accept judgement for that – even if

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[7] See e.g. ch. 2.21, ch.4.7, ch. 4.10, ch. 5.10.

[8] Jeremy Worthen, *Responding to God's Call: Christian Formation Today* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2012), pp. 5–16.

[9] See e.g. ch. 2.19, ch. 2.21, ch. 5.10, ch. 5.20. See also *Conversations around the World*, paras 59–61.

[10] For instance, the first clause of the 'Declaration of Principle' of the Baptist Union of Great Britain moves from a declaration of the final authority of Christ to the freedom and responsibility of the local church to interpret 'his laws', and then to the third clause about the responsibility of every disciple for evangelism.

some absent themselves.[11] They cannot very easily claim to be only following orders, or tradition, or what might be called 'normative theology'.[12] The dispersed nature of authority in the Church of England – Archbishops, Bishops, Synods, Dioceses, Parishes, Incumbents, Parochial Church Councils, Wardens – can encourage everyone who holds formal authority to have a rather weak sense of responsibility, as the others appear so able to thwart us, to say nothing of the great majority of Anglicans who have no formal role in church governance at all beyond annual elections of PCC and Wardens. Without losing our deep commitment both to catholic order and to synodality, are there ways in which we can encourage people at all levels of the Church of England to recognize the freedom they have in Christ and therefore the responsibility they have before Christ for their participation in the life of the church and in shaping its counsels and practices?

Finally, the theme of freedom in the Christian tradition inevitably and also problematically invokes the complex inheritance we have from Scripture regarding law and the traditional lenses through which we read it. At various points in the report, the sense is just about discernible (beneath our ecumenical courtesies) that the theological tension between law/letter and spirit found in Pauline writings of the New Testament might map onto the divergence between an Anglican reliance on written formularies – e.g. creeds, canon law and lectionaries – and a Baptist insistence on openness to the work of the Holy Spirit here and now.[13] Anglicans, I would argue, need to find ways to resist such a move, although it is hardly unknown within the Church of England itself, without simply seeking to legitimate a denial of the Holy Spirit's unpredictable agency in the life of the church in every age. How might we recover a theology of law from our own traditions that can overcome the characteristically modern opposition between law as authority and freedom as autonomy, in order to articulate how responsible and faithful

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[11] See ch. 3.8.

[12] See Helen Cameron, et al., *Talking About God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM, 2010).

[13] See the conversation between Paul Fiddes and Martin Davie (ch. 2.7, 12, 12, 24) on the interpretation of Scripture and discernment of right doctrine, and the conversation between William Croft and Mary Cotes on how Churches decide on the scriptural readings that will inform the weekly ministry of preaching.

adherence to church law, including the canons, might actually liberate us to welcome the work of the Holy Spirit?

The origins of receptive ecumenism lie within Roman Catholicism in particular, and perhaps it is no coincidence that there should be particular purchase for this idea in church relations where mutual trust and respect are well-established, but significant, large-scale movement towards the integration of congregations, ministries and structures does not seem likely. Is the situation of the Church of England and the Baptist Union of Great Britain of this kind, in our case because our ecclesiologies are so impossible to compare and so incompatible that 'visible unity' must be acknowledged as an unrealistic if not indeed inappropriate goal? The contribution by Paul Fiddes to chapter 2 of this report suggests that incompatibility overstates the differences of emphasis between us: the necessity for the church always to be both local and universal is clear on both sides, however differently it may be enacted in our structures and traditions.[14] Moreover, both the Church of England and the Baptist Union of Great Britain are members of the World Council of Churches, and it would be interesting to compare their formal responses to the convergence text from the WCC's Commission on Faith and Order, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, as these emerge. Might it be possible that reflection on this document together could enable us to see with fresh eyes what we hold together about the doctrine of the church and where the most profound differences between us lie? Could it provide us with a new basis to consider where the imperative to live the communion we share in Christ might be leading us, what might be the remaining walls between us we are now being called to take down?

Finally, I have been become very aware as an Anglican of the extent to which calling ourselves a 'church' generates expectations from other Christians – entirely properly – of a degree of unity and mutual accountability that can on certain occasions appear somewhere between fragile and fictitious in the contemporary Church of England. One of the legitimate reasons for being sceptical about applying the term 'church' in a full-blooded sense to groupings and structures beyond the local community of believers is that the reality of life as one body holding disagreement in love and making choices which all truly own is inevitably attenuated when

[14] See the conversation between Paul Fiddes and Martin Davie, ch. 2. 11, 23, 27. See also *Conversations around the World*, paras. 55–56.

the Christians concerned do not in fact have any kind of regular, face to face contact around worship, discipleship and witness. It is not as though Baptists think that the local church is entirely sufficient unto itself, with nothing to learn of the mind of Christ from participation in assemblies of churches; but the point is that they hesitate to call those assemblies 'church' in part because of the combination of jurisdictional authority and common life that is taken to be the normal accompaniment of such a theological description. If Anglicans are theologically serious in wanting to claim that the Church of England is truly a church and not just an association of churches (dioceses and/or parishes), do they also need to be more serious about fostering corresponding habits of meeting together as a national body that are not simply related to governance? While there are important questions to be asked here, it is perhaps also worth remembering that the dispersal of authority within the Church of England permits significant initiative and, to return to a word used earlier, responsibility to be taken at the levels of diocese and parish. That too belongs to our ecclesiology, and it not only makes us perhaps a little more like our Baptist colleagues than we might sometimes care to admit, but also leaves us with much freedom to travel with them on the way of Christ, with open hearts for whatever further conversions and transformations that journey may entail.

So why have we been having these conversations? There are many reasons, and this reflection will not have done justice to them all. To learn more about one another, to be more able to work alongside one another in the service of Christ, to receive gifts from one another that can build us up as churches and to discover more about the unity to which we are called – those are more than sufficient reasons, and reasons too for wanting to share what we have been doing with our churches as fully as possible.

Members of the Further Conversations between the Church of England and the Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2011–2014.

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Revd Ruth Bottoms, Chaplain to the Social Work of the West London Mission and Deputy Convenor of Churches Together in England Directors (2012–2014).
Revd Dr Mary Cotes, then Ecumenical Moderator, the Churches of Milton Keynes (2011)
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