

The Society for Ecumenical Studies

Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity:

Recent Directions in Anglican-Baptist Dialogue

Professor Paul Fiddes, Principal, Regents Park College, Oxford

Prebendary Paul Avis, Director, the Council for Christian Unity, the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England

Annual Study, 23 May 2006

Introducing the joint Baptist-Anglican report, *Pushing at Boundaries*, Paul Fiddes observed that its title did not mean a disrespect for limits. Reaching people's limits enables one to see things as others see them. This in itself is needed for deepening fellowship, towards the mission all Christians share.

The report covers two themes which go to the heart of the current and historic separation of Baptist and Anglican Christians: Baptism and Apostolicity.

Baptism: Paul Fiddes

On Baptism, ten questions are posed, the first five to Baptists, the latter five to Anglicans. These enable the partner Churches to consider Christian initiation not in terms of the isolated events characteristic of their respective traditions - and thus courting disappointment when not finding the exact points of equivalence hoped for - but as processes which, considered in their completed form, actually correspond to each other. So the distinctive formative and sacramental features and practices are not only complementary, they can mutually accommodate each other fruitfully.

So the Anglican practice of Infant Baptism is not isolated; it expressly intends a process leading to adult affirmation of discipleship. It is the beginning that immediately moves on to a journey. For Baptists the beginning and ending points of this journey from infancy to adult discipleship are very difficult to define in exactly the same manner as Anglicans can with the sacramental markers of Baptism, Confirmation and First Eucharist. But Anglicans and Baptists can both say that what must be indispensable in the journey, but not as stand-alone events, are:

- the celebration of Baptism
- personal confession of faith
- spiritual growth and nurture (possibly accompanied by or summed up in the laying on of hands or Confirmation)
- reception into the company of the local Church (possibly accompanied by or enacted in the laying on hands of Confirmation)
- Eucharistic communion

Thus none of these are fixed moments, but aspects of a single, integrated process. Different Christians are at different stages; different Christian Churches takes people through the process differently. For instance, Baptism itself could occupy different places in the journey. When occurring in infancy, it leads directly to childhood growth in belief and then the reception of gifts for adult ministry. It could also be something to mark 'the end of the beginning', marking the end of the process of wherein the adult has come to faith and desire for discipleship. Similarly, First Confession and First Communion according to common Roman Catholic practice accompany the child's growing sense of conversion to Christ and the longing for his salvation, to be followed in teenage years by Confirmation in faith and grace needed for discipleship at the opening stages of adulthood. By contrast, the Catholic process known as the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, is strikingly similar to the customary process in Baptist Churches, with a lengthy period of preparation, teaching and nurture, marked by growing personal faith, and completed with the celebration of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharistic communion. In no tradition, therefore, is Christian Initiation marked by a single

point. As God's yes to us and our yes to him, it is preceded, accompanied and followed by grace and faith all along. The actual Baptism itself is like a freeze frame in a video, a snapshot of one flowing movement.

Besides, it is not that there is a 'common Baptism' among Christians that can be reduced from a sort of equation. Baptism in the life of each Church, even in their separation, is nothing less than the 'one Baptism', in which every Christian individually and in company with all other Christians shares in the Baptism of Christ. It is the immersion into his death and foreshadowed in the river Jordan. Primarily it is this which the process in each tradition refers to, leads towards, draws upon, enacts and proceeds from. So the famous Lima Report on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* called for a mutual recognition of *patterns* of initiation, not merely the *acts* of Baptism. Indeed, it envisaged how a unified structure embracing previously separate Christians and the order of their respective Churches could not only accommodate different patterns but be strengthened through a system of mutual recognition. Baptists recognise that for Anglicans, and indeed Catholics, this involves a different way of looking at the sacramental life and Christian Initiation in particular. Without denying the location, achievement and effect of the grace of the sacrament within the act of its conferral, can it be possible to see what precedes and follows them as integral to that act, in a way in which Baptists can make sense of a process very different from their own, which has traditionally and on principle celebrated the location, achievement and effect of the grace of Baptism through the conscious, adult and active confession of personal faith, in a way in which childhood faith is seen as genuine but preparatory and infant Baptism as ineffective?

So for Baptists there are challenges too. They actually have a rich understanding of a journey leading to adult faith from its beginnings in childhood. In building unity with other parts of the Christian Church, it will be necessary to see how that which Baptists have witnessed to in the past does not become a defining issue for justifying continued separation, but a pathway to greater convergence. The process idea, taking in baptism, teaching, reception, and personal confession of faith in adulthood, needs now to grow

and recognise what authentically begins in infancy. And if the 'parity of process' idea is adopted on both sides, a Baptist expectation that Anglicans ought to revise their sacramental theory on Baptism (that it objectively confers an indelible character on the recipient regardless of disposition, is an *ex opera operato* means of grace specific to that sacrament and by definition cannot be repeated) and that they should honour 'second' Baptism (that is a Baptism concomitant with the necessary adult profession of faith, where a previous Baptism having been performed in infancy, but with the essential profession of faith made on behalf of the candidate by parents and godparents), may have to be adjusted for the sake of accommodating the Anglican process in entirety. This could be achieved by resolving to refrain from 'second' Baptism and laying greater weight on the sufficiency of an adult profession of faith – and marking that in some other way - where the rite of Baptism itself has taken place at the earliest stages of human and spiritual awareness and development.

Baptists in good standing and who have acted with complete integrity, having undergone two rites of Baptism at different points in life, also have to be recognised, and not 'disenfranchised', by Anglicans, if the two processes are to be rendered equivalent and mutual in a reconciled structure of Churches, each retaining their distinctiveness but holding in common to the one Baptism. Such questions are not theoretical, as they are part of the day to day experience of Local Ecumenical Projects. In these circumstances there is a strong argument, not for insisting that the Baptist partners cannot celebrate second Baptism, but for asking them voluntarily to refrain for the sake of building unity and understanding. The healing of wounds will benefit from discipline and self-restraint.

Where Anglican partners believe they must refuse to recognise 'second' Baptism, this can obviously pose an obstacle, or even prove disruptive to otherwise good relations in other areas. In the long term, one way round it may be to foster the idea of process before, after and between the fixed points in Anglican life of baptism in infancy and confirmation when old enough to understand, preserving the structure essential to the lives and families of

many Anglicans, while at the same time meeting the concerns of Baptists asked to recognise the value and validity of infant Baptism as integral to a journey into faith. Perhaps there could be a far heavier stress on the essential link between Baptism in childhood and the necessity of its outcome in Confirmation. This could even become a condition. Baptism might also only be offered to children in families committed to bringing them up and encouraging their growth within the Church community. Arguably had these conditions been clearly in place as part of the structure of an ongoing initiation and faith formation process, there may not have been a need for some Christians, who had been baptised in infancy, to seek a 'second' Baptism to express and enact their adult confession of faith.

By the same token, the experience of Baptists can offer to Anglicans the use of a pastoral tool for the care of those to whom the Church of England ministers beyond the gathered parish core community the legitimate service of the Blessing of Infants. Followed by contact, formation, family pastoral work, church children's work and support to community schools and indeed the Anglican network of Church schools, this could powerfully assist faith as it grows in the child, leading in the future to an adult profession of belief and admission to the Church's membership through Baptism. But some Baptists would also caution that, while in principle this is an excellent model, in practice they received no nurture towards Baptism between their blessing in infancy and their coming to faith in adulthood.

Apostolicity: Paul Fiddes

This part of the report surveyed Baptists' and Anglicans' different forms of Church Order, understanding the nature and purpose of the Church, both among Baptists and among Anglicans, in terms of how they see each other sharing in the Apostolic mission. For either community, it is not a question of whether the other does or not. Perhaps it is a question of how things in each Church became settled at different distances from the apostles themselves in terms of different histories, cultures and conditions; indeed this different distances covered mean that Anglicans and Baptists find themselves different from each other, with problems of mutual recognition and perfect compatibility

(for instance, in the practice of Christian Initiation and in the shape of the ordained ministry). But the differences in distance entail no disconnection from the apostles, nor a difference in the degree of apostolicity evident in each Church communion. All Churches are apostolic, whether or not they are episcopally ordered. The episcopal order, as known to Anglicans, makes explicit the apostolicity of the Anglican Church through bishops as the divine signs of it. But they are external signs of the apostolicity which is also recognisable as implicit in Anglicanism, as a community of faith whether or not it has bishops. It is with this in mind that, with Baptists' not having an order of bishops as the external, explicit sign of apostolicity, there are other signs – also divine – and moreover there is the same implicit apostolicity among Baptists as is known among Anglicans. Therefore, even without the episcopate to make a mutual recognition of apostolicity explicit (such as between Anglicans and Catholics, or Catholics and Orthodox), there is no obstacle to a full recognition by both of the implicit apostolicity of the other.

Formal recognition, however, requires of both:

- The comparison of definition of definitive belief – and definitive teaching
- The mutual recognition of patterns of Christian Initiation and their validity
- The desire for closer unity, not inconsistent with the practice and divine sign of episcopal oversight

The survey of Anglicans' and Baptists' understanding of Initiation considered people's limits on both sides; the same is true of apostolicity and order. But Baptists do not define these limits and draw the distinctions between themselves and Anglicans uniformly or in a formal corporate sense. The picture varies from area to area across the country: there is local mutual recognition of Churches, with Baptist Churches participating with others in integrated partnerships, or sharing the same building with another Christian community, or with Baptists living as full members of 'ecumenical Churches', retaining their identity but fully sharing in worship and sacramental life with other kinds of Christians.

It is difficult to translate these varying patterns into a single pattern for the whole country, let alone internationally. Besides, what functions well in one locality may not be appropriate elsewhere; but this does not imply inconsistency, only that the various forms of practice can be complementary and are in practice reconciled. This apparent mismatch and inconsistency, which is nevertheless the reality in a number of places, and is clearly a set of processes of growth and learning, reminds us that apostolicity is an eschatological reality – something known to us and active in the present, but yet still to be realised. It is something that is already, but is not yet.

Part of the discovery of this eschatological reality is that it is truly possible to discern common modes of oversight and pastoral care, despite Anglicans' and Baptists' different structures. Baptists have no episcopate, but there is *episkope*. So, while the two Churches can seem poles apart, there is actually surprising convergence. For instance, for Anglicans the local church is the diocese, not the parish or congregation. With Baptists, who usually see the congregation as the local Church, there is nevertheless an important role for the 'trans-congregationalist' minister, someone who acts as a messenger among and for the churches, who promotes their mission, or who can be a regional minister – supporting and strengthening, as needed by the churches co-ordinating and leading, serving and helping, guiding and exhorting. But whereas in Anglicanism (as in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches) the bishop within the threefold ministry exercises these roles (among others, of course), for Baptists they have been located within a twofold ministry and do not require a third kind of minister specifically for these functions. In the local church – understood as the local Baptist congregation – there are deacons and the minister, who combines what other parts of the Church would see as the distinctive roles of presbyter and bishop.

So is it, after all, an over-simplification to look at Baptists' Church Order as twofold, when it visibly operates in a way that can justly be seen as corresponding with a threefold ministry? Indeed, in the Church of England a bishop exercises all the functions of a presbyter: this exactly how the minister

of the Baptist congregation operates. Arguably the difference between Baptists and Anglicans may simply be one of scale. The Anglican bishop is overseer of the local Church, seen historically in northern Europe as a large region, with the agency of assistant ministers. The Baptist minister is overseer of the local Church, seen as the congregation in a single place. The minister may or may not have assistant ministers. And it has to be remembered that this is the pattern which is familiar in parts of southern Europe where episcopal sees abound, and historically where each city, town or even village had a single Church with a single bishop – a sort of strategic episcopate, rather than a regionalised structure. But from within the ministry serving the local Churches in a fullness of apostolicity, there is scope for calling out a regional, strategic leadership ministry as required, which can at points correspond with the Anglican episcopate and reveal closer unity in faith and action, but without the need for a separate kind of minister.

Anglicans and Baptists have apostolic ministry in forms which both demonstrate the personal, collegial and communal character of ministry and of the Church it serves. If this is accepted, can Baptists and Anglicans not see the one Church of Jesus Christ in each other's Churches? And if they can see this, how can it be made visible to others, and to the world? Is this a boundary at which we can push?

Reflection: Paul Avis

Although *Pushing at the Boundaries of Unity* was published in 2005 within the context of a ten year dialogue in England, in fact it has found its true position within the process begun in 2000, with phases taking place on each continent of the world, engaging the Baptist World Alliance and the Anglican Communion Office. Paul Fiddes and Paul Avis have been closely involved in both processes.

Given this international dimension, the report's title makes an important point. The process behind it differs from other conversations, such as that which led to the Porvoo Agreement between Anglicans and a number of the Lutheran Churches, and the current Church of England-UK Methodist discussions.

These have been about developing new relationships or structures; and there are no proposals here on how these might be achieved for Anglicans and Baptists searching for unity. Nor has it produced Agreed Statements, after the pattern of the ARCIC process. Instead

- It describes the story of interaction between Anglicans and Baptists over the past few centuries, in aspects both hostile and friendly, using historical cameos and recent case studies (such as lessons from Local Ecumenical Projects)
- It explains and interprets to each side of the dialogue the other's beliefs, practice, tradition and Church life, such as how the ministry of oversight works, the basis for ecclesial recognition and the theory of Christian Initiation
- It goes on to probe and question the other's position, being frank about differences and forthright on the challenges the other, and both, face. This can be tough ecumenism, and even a difficult experience at times; but this is enabled by the underlying friendliness and courtesy of the exchange. On the other hand, sometimes there has been a tendency to gloss over some difficulties and differences lest offence be taken and friendships be tested too far, especially in developing the central chapter on Baptism. There clearly remain some important doctrinal differences on individual aspects of how each Church conducts Initiation and what isolated components mean and effect, and Paul Avis and Paul Fiddes were regularly sparring partners on these issues in discussions. But the Report itself was not felt to be the place to rehearse or rehash these old and familiar arguments. It preferred instead to concentrate on a perspective together on each other's practice and teaching on Baptism/Initiation and Nurture, in terms of a total process, involving instruction in the faith; catechesis; the liturgical opportunity for an individual to profess his or her own faith; occasion for 'strengthening for service'; and participation in the Eucharist for the first time and subsequently.
- It challenges assumptions about how another Church's tradition might adapt and develop to embrace one's own – or *vice versa*. For instance:

if the Baptist Church is to respect the Anglican practice of the Baptism of Infants, how can it be sure that preparation and subsequent pastoral follow-up are taken seriously in the context of the integrated long term process the Report envisages? How can Confirmation be rightly envisaged, given the sufficiency of adult Baptism for Baptists, and, for Anglicans, its different roles as a rite of spiritual passage for teenagers towards Christian adulthood and as a mark of communion with the Bishop, especially for newly baptised adults, leading directly into Eucharistic communion and service within and as part of the fellowship of the Body of Christ in and for the world? How can Baptists defend the practice of re-Baptism, if the process is otherwise completed? Thus how can Baptists refuse Church membership if no second Baptism has been celebrated?

- At a deeper level, it asks if Baptists and Anglicans can discern the one Church of Christ in each other? If the answer is, 'Yes, in some sense,' then we are entitled to know what follows. Thus the Report squarely poses before both Churches the Gospel imperative for unity in faith, life and mission, to which the obedient response can only be to come together more closely. But this should not rest on an uncritical assumption that there is an ecumenical equivalence between the Baptist and Anglican Churches. Anglicans have no problems with Adult Baptism, when it is the first celebration of the rite; indeed they observe this practice themselves. But, as Baptism is the sacrament which constitutes the person as a member of the Church, and which thus is the sacrament which continually constitutes the Church in its members in the world, to deny not only the efficacy of Baptism in infancy, but also the Church membership of children and young people who have yet to make a personal profession of the faith of the Church in adulthood, as well as to expect a repeated celebration of Baptism to give effect to it, and expressly not just to symbolise it, indicates more than a difference in baptismal custom, theory and doctrine: it demonstrates a very different conception of what is the nature and purpose of the Church. If recognition of each other's Baptism cannot fully and easily be reciprocated, how can there also be a mutual

recognition of apostolicity, of fullness of faith and order, of the one Church of Christ, without reservation? But the Report, by revisiting the famous approach considered in the 1982 Lima WCC Faith & Order on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Baptists and Anglicans are enabled to speak together in terms of a process in the initiation and nurture of the Christian in the life of the Church, leading to mutual recognition that the process is common to them both, despite the different manifestations of it, and that thus it is possible to move towards a common understanding of what makes the Church the Church, how it is ordered, and in what lies its apostolicity.

The Place of Confirmation in the Initiation Process: Paul Avis

Arguably, one of the theological flaws in the Report is its unquestioned language concerning Baptism as complete in itself. This lies behind the discussion of the 'process', but this view of Baptism is not shared by the two traditions and so should not be the common starting point. The mutual recognition of the overall process at work in the Initiation practice of both Churches may be the right conclusion, but it cannot be the point of convergence unless it is arrived at from the different points from which the different traditions, broadly speaking, have arrived. The difficulty is that, if this question is aired, it tends to put good people's backs up. The point of Baptism is central to the life turning point in the adult profession of faith for a Baptist. It is no less important for the Anglican, Methodist, Catholic or Orthodox; all of their Churches would regard Baptism as essential and sufficient – but for none of them is it the whole story. And looking back to the Report, and further back to Lima 1982, it does not take account of the necessary completeness implied in the common idea concerning an overall, integrated Initiation process, to which Baptism may be the key, but of which it is also only a part. So if progress is to be made along the 'process' approach – which will require development if not change in both Anglican and Baptist thinking and custom – it has to be acknowledged that an idea of Baptism as complete in itself is not part of the Western Tradition to which in other respects Baptists belong. It is not the Fathers' understanding of the Scriptures; it was not the practice adopted by the

Anglican Reformers in the formulation of the Book of Common Prayer. And although the 1886-88 Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral focuses on the dual sufficiency of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, this is in the context of an apostolically ordered Anglican Church life directing itself towards the restoration of the unity of communions 'exemplified by the undivided Catholic Church during the first ages of its existence'. In other words, Anglican theory and practice, acknowledging the necessity and sufficiency of Baptism, does not regard it as complete in itself. It has always assumed growth and nurture into the life of the Eucharist, through Confirmation

- as a personal profession of faith
- as an effective point of communion with the bishop, successor to the apostles (perhaps this is more important for Anglicans even than for Catholics and Orthodox), and
- as an imparting of 'strengthening for service' in the apostolic life, work and witness of the disciple within and on behalf of the Body of Christ of which he or she has become a faithful, communicant member.

Thus it is a mistake to confuse the Anglican belief in Baptism's sufficiency with Baptists' belief in its inherent completeness. In their way, Anglicans have always seen Baptism as part of a process. And if discussions are to proceed on mutual recognition of a common process in both Churches, it is as well to be clear that for Anglicans their form of the process is not one of 'essential Baptism with desirable but optional add-ons'. It is a coherent network of church, family and community nurture before and following Baptism, to which is integral a subsequent life of Holy Communion, itself preceded by catechesis, personal profession of the faith in the Creeds, and Confirmation by the bishop. The dual sacramental process of Baptism and Eucharist finds its completion in the ongoing life of prayer, faith, witness, service and hope that is to be found in the confirmed disciple, living by the Spirit in the community of Christ's love, the Church.

If all this is not borne in mind when speaking of the different things Baptism signifies for Baptists and Anglicans, what can the recent dialogue say about Confirmation, which for Anglicans is an indispensable component in the formation, nurture and discipleship of the baptised? If Anglicans were to be asked, in a move towards mutual recognition of respective processes as in some way common, to abandon their principle that Confirmation is integral to their life in the Church in favour of a Baptist position that Baptism is complete in itself and that Confirmation complements it, rather being effective in its completion – or even that it serves a merely quasi-ministerial function in inaugurating lay discipleship – there would be disastrous pastoral consequences. To the Anglican practice of pastoral care, spiritual development, sacramental life, nurture of children, formation of the adult Christian and the whole handing on of the faith, Confirmation is the indispensable key. If, according to the Report, it can be construed that there is nothing sacramental or initiative about it, it makes no sense in itself other than as an initiation to Holy Communion. But this it cannot be, as no other Communion would share such an understanding. Roman Catholics (and indeed Anglicans in certain provinces) admitting unconfirmed children to Holy Communion have a much loved tradition of celebration and careful preparation for ‘First Communion’, but there is no preceding ceremony or sacrament for admission to this event, other than a prior celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (‘First Confession’, which actually serves as the child’s first profession of faith in the need for Christ’s love, forgiveness and his work of salvation). Rather, for Roman Catholics it is the original Baptism which remains the rite of initiation to the Eucharist, in the midst of a process which will reach completion in the gift of the Spirit in Confirmation some years later. Although many Anglicans would nowadays unite in their minds the moment of First Holy Communion with the moment of the imparting of the gift of faith, personally professed and assisted with grace, by the Holy Spirit in Confirmation at the same liturgical service (or at two distinct services nevertheless closely related to each other in time); and while this in some ways resembles the Baptist ‘moment’, when personal faith, Baptism, the gifts of the Spirit and membership of the Church come

together, nevertheless Anglicans recognise more of who they are and what they do and believe in the process familiar among the wider Catholic world.

All that said, this dialogue between Baptists and Anglicans and the Report in which it resulted have actually been very helpful to the Church of England in re-thinking its thinking, so to speak, and articulating it more clearly. The Report, and the thinking and re-thinking it has stimulated, will now form part of the forward work of the Church of England's Faith and Order Advisory Group.

Discussion: Prevenient & Attendant Grace

Hilary Martin, treasurer of the Society, felt that looking at the Initiation process as a coherent whole, whether through the nurture in faith from childhood leading to Adult Baptism or the process from Infant Baptism to Adult Profession of Faith and Confirmation, failed to take full account of the human condition at the pre-Baptismal stage as actually part of the process. In all traditions, and this is especially emphasised in the Catholic tradition, there is an understanding of prevenient grace which can identify a genuine response in infancy to the gift of faith. If this process of sanctification takes place prior to Baptism or before a person can make a personal profession of faith when older, in the Baptist view of things, can it be part of the process, part of the triumph of grace in victory over sin? For Catholics, Baptism brings this vital activity of grace to fruition: are not Baptists in danger of excluding it from the dispensation of the covenant of grace to which it belongs?

Paul Fiddes replied that this was no more cut and dried for Baptists as it was for Catholics, and that because of Baptists' stress on the role of Baptism in the coming to faith of the adult, it was easy to stereotype and over-simplify their views. Just as for Catholic and Anglicans, for Baptists Baptism is not about faith seen as a human response, but the grace which has caused that faith to grow. Thus the Holy Spirit gives grace to the newly baptised for discipleship. So grace can be given to an infant – whether at

another Church's celebration of an infant Baptism, or through an act of dedication, or in the absence of either – but this does not mean to a Baptist that more grace cannot be revealed in an adult Baptism. Indeed this revelation of grace is both possible and identifiable in that it is vital to the discipleship which proceeds from it. So there is agreement that this is not a question of merely human responses to God, or human expressions of belief, or results of the merely human will. For those on all sides it is foremost a question of grace and God's prior gift, however much in the various traditions these are observed to be working out in different forms, different stages, and different 'flavourings'. At least all Christians are agreed that, whatever they are doing, it is not just about recognising a common process of initiation as to conforming to the one Baptism of and in Jesus himself.

Discussion: Profession & Confession - Service

James Cassidy proposed the importance of the sacrament of Reconciliation in the Roman Catholic Church processes of Christian Initiation as something which could be positively embraced in some way in those of other traditions, especially as it is a personal profession of faith in Christ's love and salvation, and as it always recalls the penitent personally to the innocence of his or her Baptism. John Bradley also observed that in some Church traditions the Footwashing of John 13 was a regular feature at the Eucharist, not just a ceremony for Holy Week – could it too have a role in the process of Initiation, given its close association with the Eucharist and the service expected of the disciple?

Paul Avis agreed that in different ways the various Christian Churches' processes of Initiation offer at some point a necessary public opportunity Christians to own their own Baptism. Thus the strength of modern ecumenical thinking, locating our unity in the sacrament of Baptism, Christ's one Baptism in which we all share, is that it teaches us to remember that our Baptism is 'always with us' and it is to be grown in more and more. This understanding is tellingly conveyed by Martin Luther, but it also forms the underlying of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults

for contemporary Roman Catholics. So Baptism – or Confession, Confirmation, or Communion – is not about our ‘access to God’, but about his gift of grace, his constant gift of himself to us and for us.

Perhaps therefore the use of Footwashing as a symbol, conveying the spirit of Christ’s role as suffering servant and the example of his humility in proceeding to his Passion, would not be the right fit for communicating grace in an effectual process; and certainly not without the other side of the coin - Christ’s high priestly prayer and its work of absolution and sacrifice. The Footwashing is a powerful symbol of both Christ’s diaconal office and his priesthood, but when we re-enact it it remains an external washing. In the Initiation process which the Report maps in Baptist, Anglican and other Churches, we are examining something which also internally totally immerses us in Jesus Christ. So we need to pass through a stage of repentance prior to the profession of our faith in him so that the external act of Baptism accompanies our complete cleansing and new life within. Some Churches use blessed water when they come to the Renewal of the Promises of Baptism: the re-enactment of Footwashing is not about these Promises and is not useful as a symbol in this context.

Discussion: The Church’s Baptism

Maximos Lavriotes observed that many of the saints venerated in the Church were in fact unbaptised: Mary, John the Baptist, Elijah and all the Old Testament saints. Surely this could not mean that they were outside the dispensation of grace. He tended towards viewing Baptism’s most important function as a mark of membership of the community of grace. It is only in later periods that the rules around validity and efficacy of the sacraments celebrated have become so strict. The earlier you go, and this view persists, Baptism’s significance concerns the life of the whole Church, not the personal, subjective experience of the individual member who undergoes it.

Paul Avis felt that, nevertheless, personal faith and repentance were inseparable from each other and from the life of the individual within the

life of the Church. Both aspects were brought together for Anglicans in Confirmation where the personal faith and repentance integral to Baptism were renewed in the individual at the point where their life in and for the Church was strengthened with the gift of the Spirit for service and discipleship and completed in entry into the life of Eucharistic communion.

Paul Fiddes emphasised that the personal journey of the believer, through repentance, faith and Baptism, was not essentially inward looking. One of the stereotypes is that it is long and drawn out, concentrating on deferring admission to the Church to allow time for sufficient spiritual, mental and physical growth for there to be a consciously and deeply internalised decision-making process. But it is not that Baptists are opposed to isolated infant Baptism, but that they propose and practice a mature commitment on which Baptism is the seal of completion. The preceding process can be a shorter or a longer phase, depending on the individual, their state of preparation, their maturity, and so on. This is why the idea of a process actually rings true for Baptists too. For them too, Baptism holds together prevenient grace, the spontaneous human response in faith and the community of grace and Communion to which the new Christian comes to belong. Just as much for Catholics, Orthodox, Anglicans and Methodists, so for Baptists, the culmination of the journey to faith for an individual is a moment in the life of the Church too.

Paul Fiddes acknowledged that in the Baptist tradition the Blessing or Dedication of an Infant was not the equivalent of what Anglicans' or Catholics' Churches do for their infants in blessing and affirming the work of God in the child sacramentally. For Baptists, the work of God in the child is affirmed sacramentally when that child is able to make its own profession of faith as a result and is offered believer's Baptism in their local Church. The blessing or dedication powerfully looks forward to the journey in and towards faith and the hoped for moment of Baptism for the individual Christian and within the history and growth of the community. This illustrates perfectly why it is not helpful to look for points of equivalence in our respective traditions of Initiation. The points are

different and stand, when looked at in isolation, for different things. It is only when looking at the processes as a whole that one recognises the overall similarities and equivalence.

Paul Avis observed that the primacy of the spiritual and mystical reality of the Church and eternal life in Christ is affirmed by Anglicans and Baptists in common as the direction to which Baptism leads. The Report's aim is to explore how the mystical both is and needs to become visible in the everyday sacramental life of their respective Churches, and in how they recognise in each other the one Church of Jesus Christ.

Discussion: Baptism and Christian Unity

Barney Milligan was concerned that Churches talking to each other about Baptism should pay attention in their dialogue to the needs and aspirations of other Churches too.

Paul Fiddes recalled that the Anglican-Baptist discussions were preceded by a multilateral conversation dating back to the days of the British Council of Churches, which led to the publication by Churches Together in England in 1997 of *Baptism and Church Membership*, looking especially at the experience of Baptists and members of other Churches in Local Ecumenical Partnerships, as a phenomenon affecting all the Churches (this is currently in the process of revision). So the recent Anglican-Baptist conversations are a bilateral act on behalf of all the Churches. The Report has thus been commended by the Baptist Union and the General Synod for wide discussion and debate.

Concluding Reflection: Mark Woodruff, secretary of the Society

The study presented the recent Anglican-Baptist conversations as a prism through which to discern consensus among a significant number of Churches on the matter of Christian Churches, being the latest instance of a discussion among Christians most notably recalled in the 1982 Lima WCC Faith and Order Report on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* and the 1997 Churches Together in England Report on *Baptism and Church*

Membership, that the different principles, practices, and ‘flavourings’ (to use Paul Fiddes’ memorable metaphor) concerning Christian Initiation are best seen as set within a process which, to a very great extent, when seen as a whole, is mutually recognisable from Church to Church.

Paul Fiddes discussed how Baptists were more nuanced than sometimes credited in their understanding of the phase of nurture and prevenient grace leading up to the conversion and faith that culminate in Baptism itself. Paul Avis spoke of how it is best to realise that Baptists see the sacrament as complete in itself, setting a seal on the process, whereas Anglicans see it as the key to a process in which other components are no less integral. Misunderstandings on the Churches’ respective theoretical starting points have in the past thus contributed to the continued separation as much as the differences in practice.

In conversation with members of the Society, both speakers firmly located Baptism not only within the context of the individual’s entry into the Baptism of Christ himself, but also within the life of the entire Church, local and universal, as the community of grace – a mystical reality made visible through the sacrament which is every time it is celebrated a moment for the whole Body of Christ, not just its members.

Arguably, too, the Report’s exploration of Apostolicity needs amplification, given that each partner to the conversations appears to use the term to mean different things: The aspect of apostolicity on which Baptists and Anglicans are in tune is the notion of apostolic tradition – the continuity in faith, teaching authority, discipleship, aspects of Church life and ministry. But to Anglicans it is also indispensable to have an apostolic succession, that is, a distinctive body of ministers whose oversight of the Churches continues the work and preaching of the apostles themselves, giving definition to the nature and purpose of the Church. In other words, apostolicity in Anglican ecclesiology, as in the Catholic Church of which it claims to be a part, requires the functioning office of bishop for a Church to be the Church in the sense recognised by Anglicans. Without this

distinctive and continuous office, a Baptist Church is not the Church in the sense recognised by Anglicans and its ecclesiology, while exhibiting 'points' of comparison on apostolicity recognisable to Anglicans and indeed Catholics and other Christians, is not does not embrace fully what Anglicans require that term to comprise.

To Roman Catholic observers, apostolicity requires not only continuity in apostolic tradition but also apostolic succession: in other words, bishops as successors to the apostles, whose physical and spiritual contact and continuity faithfully transmits the apostolic preaching from one age and culture, one person and community, to the next; and who also form the structure of the Church which gives it unity, *koinonia* and access to the communion of salvation. In exploring a common apostolicity, it is as well to note that Baptists do not perceive a need for this distinctive ministry as of the *esse* of the Church, seeing that many episcopal and apostolic functions are served by other means within their fellowship. Many Anglicans too refer to bishops – the merely 'historic' episcopate – as not of the *esse* but of the *bene esse* of the Church, and not necessarily therefore an inherent, essential means of its apostolicity, indispensable for its transmission of apostolic tradition, and demonstrated in apostolic succession. Other Anglicans will share a mainstream Catholic view of the episcopate. But it is interesting how, despite episcopacy or dispensing with episcopacy having been a touchstone of what it is to be the Church in various phases of British Christian history, some Anglicans, in the hope of reconciliation among Christians who are heirs to the Reformation, advocate the episcopate as an institution which need only be seen as serving the wellbeing of the Church, rather than that which is constitutive of its very nature.

Both tradition and succession, however, need more than to be 'historic' or for 'wellbeing' to be apostolic. Recognising apostolicity – recognising the one Church of Christ from one separated Church or Church body to another – requires that it be a making visible, like Baptism, of a mystical reality. This involves not just unity in a common faith, or mutual recognition

of processes of Initiation and sacramental and pastoral nurture, or a succession of authentic ministers, or a mutual recognition of varied patterns of ministry in which there are elements (even all the elements) of *episkope* and apostolicity.

The ecumenical challenge is thus to hold out for more than a reconciled diversity, however feasible, desirable, admirable, even needful that may be – but only as a provisional, temporary staging post on the way. The true prize is to be one as the Father and the Son are one. Organic, visible unity is not only aspirational, it is ineluctable. All Churches will have to change and adapt to discover it and so how to arrive at it. Christ surely incarnated the apostolicity of his Church in chosen and set apart apostles; Pope John Paul II asked in *Ut Unum Sint* how the ministry of the successors of the apostles, typified in the ministry of the Bishop of Rome as successor to Peter, might serve the unity of Christians and the Churches and Church bodies which are not in communion with the Roman Catholic Church. This implies a desire to receive the gift of development to the Catholic Church's apostolicity, and the ministry of the Church's bishop, not least that of the Bishop of Rome who seals their communion. There has to be a corresponding desire in all Churches and groups of Christians to develop apostolicity, its permanent and provisional structures and functions, to enable the discovery of the Church's essential and divinely ordained Unity.

It is interesting that for Baptists the local pastor is not just the minister, approximating to a vicar or a parish priest. More than an elder or presbyter, he also has the oversight of the local Church, any other ordained ministers, the congregation's deacons and the apostleship of the lay people too, exercising thus an episcopal ministry. This structure, incorporating strong features of apostolicity, avoids the 'prelacy' for which Anglicans and Catholics, especially in the past, have been criticised, not least because of perceived conformity to worldly authority structures and failure to provide (in northern Europe which gave rise to the Reformation) direct pastoral oversight and sacramental provision. This is hardly true, however, of the modern day Catholic and Anglican dioceses in this

country. And do Baptists miss out in not having an integrated structure for the 'trans-congregational' minister, facilitating mission, relations, care and development? Yet by the same token is there not something in the structure of the local Baptist Church, recalling not only the pattern of Church life in the towns and villages of the Church around the Mediterranean in the period of the Roman Empire, but also the diocesan structures in modern day Greece and southern Italy which lie in continuity with it? Is there therefore something in the scale of the local Church and its relationship with the episcopal ministry serving it, known to this day in parts of the Catholic Church, but which can be re-received in other parts – and in the Church of England – from Baptists and their own experiences of transmitting apostolic tradition?

The Society records its thanks to Paul Fiddes and Paul Avis for this thought provoking and ecumenically motivating study.