

DOI: 10.15290/rtk.2017.16.2.04

Rev. Mariusz Piecyk
Séminaire de La Castille, Toulon

Ecumenical Dialogue Between Baptists and Catholics in France

Ecumenical Catholic-Baptist dialog in France dates back to 1981. Since then, two delegations have met regularly. The first phase of dialogue took place between 1981 and 1986 and aimed to help the two Churches get to know each other. On the one hand, Catholics and Baptists agreed that they hold in common their faith in the Trinity, the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption, and the relationship between baptism and faith. They differ, on the other hand, in their concept of the Church, the episcopate, the sacraments, and the issue of the baptizing children. During the second phase of dialogue, which took place between 1986 and 1991, dialogue centered on the topics of mission and evangelization. The third and fourth phases of dialogue were dedicated to the issue of baptism, the Eucharist-Last Supper, ministerial office. The document entitled "From Baptism to the Church: Current Agreements and Discrepancies" was the fruit of this dialogue. During the fifth phase of dialogue, which took place between 2001 and 2009, the two groups discussed the topics of Mary, specifically Mariology, based on tradition, dogma, and piety. The current phase of dialogue is focusing on the questions of social ethics. Catholic-Baptist dialogue in France has been very fruitful. The documents that have resulted from these dialogues reveal where the two denominations agree on the fundamental truths of the faith, ethics, and spirituality. The fundamental and dramatic difference between the two Churches, however, remains: their respective concepts of the Church. Based on the tone of the conversations thus far, it is clear that the main goal of the two Churches is not to come to complete agreement, but rather to seek the truth by better understanding each others' doctrines and traditions.

Key words: ecumenism, Baptists, Catholics, dialogue, France, Mary.

The history of Catholic-Baptist relations in France dates back nearly thirty years. The first official meeting between Baptists and Catholics, which took place on June 11, 1981, was the result of an invitation extended to the French Protestant Federation, specifically to Pastor Louis Schweitzer, to participate in the plenary assembly of the French Bishops' Conference in Lourdes in 1980. Since 1981, two delegations have met regularly—usually two times per year—and seven stages of ongoing bilateral dialogue have occurred.¹

The First Phase of Dialogue

In the first phase of Catholic-Baptist dialogue, which took place between 1981 and 1986, the two groups aimed to get to know each other and establish a spirit of fraternal trust between them. While both sides began to address and work on weighty problems from the very beginning, they did not plan to publish the results of their dialogue. From the start, French Catholics and Baptists agreed on their common faith in the Trinity and the mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption. They also recognized the importance they both place on the relationship between baptism and faith, missionary activity, evangelization, the role and significance of prayer, and the development their believers' moral life. Catholics and Baptists in France also addressed the differences between them such as: their concept of the Church, particularly the importance of local communities and of the universal Church; the place of the Episcopate; sacramental realism; and baptism of children. The topics discussed between Catholics and Baptists were quite broad and general: spirituality, ethics, liturgy, etc. On their part, Baptists' were minimally interested in discussions with the Catholic Church, and they did not consider the bilateral talks to be official, despite the fact that the chairman of the Protestant Federation, pastor Robert Somerville, participated in the dialogue. After the first five years, the Catholics and Baptists decided to continue their dialogue and make it official by establishing a mixed committee of four members from each denomination.²

¹ Cf. L. Schweitzer, "Le Comité mixte baptiste-catholique en France," *Unité des Chrétiens* 175 (2014): pg. 9.

² Cf. "Le comité mixte baptiste-catholique en France 11 juin 1981-21 mai 1991," in Comité Mixte Baptiste-Catholique, *Rendre témoignage au Christ* (Paris: 1992): pgs. 12-13.

The Second Phase of Dialogue

In the next phase of dialogue, which took place between 1986 and 1991, the group focused its efforts and included new members and became an official body known as the Baptist-Catholic Joint Committee. At that time, the published documents based on the dialogue that had already taken place between these churches had been dealt with in the world forum. In addition, Catholics and Baptists had already discussed the Lima Document (BEM), dialogued about their mission, and finally debated the document *Rendre témoignage au Christ (Called to Witness to Christ)*, which was the fruit the dialogue that had taken place between the Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance between 1984 and 1988. This stage of dialogue resulted in a document published under the same title *Rendre témoignage au Christ (Called to Witness to Christ)*, which contained translations of the worldwide dialogue about the text, an introduction, as well as the national committee's annotations.³ Since this document has already been discussed in ecumenical literature worldwide,⁴ this paper will present only the dialogue that took place between the two theologians who represented Baptists and Catholics in France and, in this way, update the international document to reflect what has occurred at a local level.

As already stated above, Catholics have great difficulty understanding Baptists as Baptists perceive themselves. Each Baptist community is sovereign and autonomous. Given that there are 35 million Baptists from 45 countries throughout the world, it is not only problematic but also unrealistic to generalize about them.⁵ Despite such diversity, Baptists perceive a certain consistency in their heritage, which began in the 17th century in England and the Netherlands, and even earlier in the 16th century during the Reformation. This heritage was founded on the rejection of infant baptism and the practice of baptizing by immersion adults who truly "believe" in order to create reborn members of a church where all have the same rights and privileges; religious freedom; and guaranteed freedom of conscience through the separation of church and state. Baptist beliefs have their origin in the authority and self-sufficiency of Scripture, the universal priesthood of the baptized, and salvation as a gift of God's mercy that one receives through personal repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Finally, Baptist

³ Comité Mixte Baptiste-Catholique, *Rendre témoignage au Christ* (Paris: 1992).

⁴ See K. Karski, *Od Edynburga do Porto Alegre: Sto lat dążeń ekumenicznych* (Warsaw: Chrześcijańska Akademia Teologiczna, 2007), pgs. 258-259.

⁵ See P. Neuner, *Théologie œcuménique: La quête de l'unité des Eglises chrétiennes* (Paris: 2005), pgs. 191-199.

convictions are based on the missionary commitment to proclaim the Good News through evangelization and unconditional obedience to the precepts of Jesus (Mt. 28: 19-20).⁶

Ecumenism

From the very beginning, Baptists have expressed a strong desire to cooperate with other Christians, especially those from “free churches” and Protestant communities that opposed church control of the state. It is important to note, however, that the Baptist intention to unite with other churches was directed only to “all true Protestants,” as the Baptist Confession of faith of 1678 stipulated. Because of Catholic doctrine, ecclesial structure, and sacramental practice, Roman Catholics were not included among the “free churches;” in fact, Catholics were and continue to be precisely those whom Baptists are called to convert. Because Baptists were politically, socially, geographically, and religiously isolated, separatist tendencies developed in the Baptist Church. As a result, Baptists are more autonomous in relation to other Christian denominations and particular Baptist communities. These tendencies also explain the diversity of ecumenical interpretations, understanding, and practices among Baptists and the reason why only 45 percent of their communities belong the World Council of Churches. Moreover, the very word “ecumenism” makes Baptists uneasy because of how they understand this concept and how they envision certain ecumenical activities.⁷

This dialectic document is based on the theme “bearing witness to Christ.” First, however, it is necessary to understand who Christ is. To this end, during the bilateral dialogue, Catholics and Baptists considered the key question from the Gospel: “And who do you say I am?” (Mt. 16:15). Their responses to this question directly determined and revealed how both groups understand the following: the testimony given to Christ; the proclamation of the Gospel in the modern world; the call to repentance and brotherhood (13-18); the community of the disciples of Christ as a missionary community (17); the Church of Christ as the *koinonia* of the Spirit (19), where the Holy Spirit is the foundation of all dimensions of the Church’s life, since the Spirit continues the work of redemption that God began in his Son in the Church (22); the free human response to the gift of Christ’s grace (41); and the grace of the presence of Christ in the Spirit outside the visible limits of the Church (27-28).⁸

⁶ Cf. T. Stransky, “Baptistes et catholiques romains,” in Comité Mixte Baptiste-Catholique, *Rendre témoignage au Christ*, pg. 80-81.

⁷ See Ibid, pgs. 81-84.

⁸ Cf. Ibid, pg. 89.

The report also contains a list of polemical issues that must be adequately addressed, including: authority and theological methods (45-47); the image of the Church as the “*koinonia* of the Spirit,” especially in local communities (48); the relationship between faith, baptism, and Christian witness (49-51); various forms of evangelization (54); and the place of Mary in the faith and the life of Christians (56-57).⁹

One of the controversial issues are collective witness and proselytization. Baptists and Catholics came to a certain consensus on what it looks like to witness to Christ in the world. For example, they agreed that there are negative aspects of proselytism, particularly the temptation of one group to convert the members of the other group and vice versa. Both denominations expressed remorse for having engaged in proselytism (36). This issue is particularly important with regard to mixed marriages, especially when one of the spouses is part of the religious minority in a given region. In addition, both Baptists and Catholics agreed that local authorities should provide religious education for adults who wish to enter either the Catholic or Baptist Church.¹⁰

In the field of dogmatic theology, two issues emerged that Catholics and Baptists need to consider more deeply. The first issue is the doctrine of the saving work of Christ, which pertains to the fields of Christology and pneumatology (11). Among various Christian traditions (not just biblical), differences exist concerning the mystery of the Incarnation, the sacramentality of the Church, the Church’s historical existence and structure (23), sacraments and other rites (including the baptism of children and adults), inculturation (26), and salvation in and through other religions (29).¹¹ The second issue, which pertains to the field of ecclesiology, is the hierarchical structure of the Church and the theology of local churches. In this sense, one of the fundamental differences between Catholics and Baptists is that Catholics perceive the local church as a diocese (a community whose unity is guaranteed by the ministry of the Bishop of Rome), while Baptists consider the Church as the local assembly (a community of believers who are called to worship and serve God). In addition, within the Baptist Church, the term “Church” is used to define the people of God, the assembly of

⁹ Cf. Ibid, pg. 90.

¹⁰ See Ibid, pgs. 94-95.

¹¹ Cf. Ibid, pg. 98.

believers, apart from church structure. In this regard, it is necessary to precisely apply terms and use the appropriate methodology.¹²

The Third, Fourth, and Fifth Phases of Dialogue

During the third, fourth, and fifth phases of Catholic-Baptist dialogue, discussions regarding baptism (1992-1998), the Eucharist-Lord's Supper (1998-2001), and clerical office in the context of the BEM (2001-2006) took place. Regarding clerical office, the two sides initially focused on theology, but this discussion naturally turned to ecclesiology. This conversation enabled Catholics and Baptists to prepare a more accurate and complete text on the subject of clerical office, which is undoubtedly necessary to understand the ecclesial character of Baptist churches in Protestantism. These three stages of dialogue resulted in the document *Du baptême à l'Eglise. Accords et divergences actuels (From Baptism to the Church: Current Agreements and Discrepancies)*.¹³

Baptism is undoubtedly a very significant and symbolic issue that divides Catholics and Baptists. After Catholics and Baptists discussed this topic for four years, they published a text that presents the commonalities and differences in each denomination's doctrine in 1998. Both denominations believe that Christ instituted Baptism and called all his disciples to go and "make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:19). Baptism, therefore, is the visible sign of the invisible grace that signifies the birth of the baptized into a new life; it ushers the faithful into the New Covenant between God and man, which is expressed by the symbolic transition from death to life, from darkness to light. Through Baptism, the faithful are united with Christ who died for their sins and resurrected for their justification.¹⁴ Baptism by water is a sign of the gift of the Holy Spirit, without which new life can exist. Through Baptism, the Holy Spirit dwells in the believer, making

¹² See R. Somerville, "Catholiques romains et baptistes," in Comité mixte baptiste-catholique, *Rendre témoignage au Christ*, pg. 108.

¹³ Comité Mixte Baptiste-Catholique en France, *Du baptême à l'Eglise. Accords et divergences actuels* (Paris: 2006). Earlier documents on baptism, the Eucharist-Last Supper, and the Church were published separately under the following titles: *Convictions baptistes et catholiques sur le baptême* in 1998, and *Cène-Eucharistie* in 2001. The two latter topics were also appeared in the following publication: L. Schweitzer, ed., *Le dialogue catholiques-evangeliques* (Cléon d'Andran: 2002). You can also find these documents in *Cahiers de l'Ecole pastorale* (Baptist) and in *Documents Episcopat* (Catholic).

¹⁴ Cf. Comité Mixte Baptiste-Catholique en France, *Du baptême à l'Eglise*, nos. 1-2, 4, pgs. 11-12.

him an adopted child of God and enabling him to lead a new life.¹⁵ Baptism is also a Christian's initiation into the Church—the Body of Christ, in which God unites all people regardless of race, sex, or social status.¹⁶ Both Catholics and Baptists acknowledge that Baptism is not a one-sided act. Rather, it requires a response of faith on the part of man (cf. Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38), who promises to submit himself to, live according to, and witness to God's grace from that point forward. This act confirms the original meaning of the word *sacramentum*—an act of consecration.¹⁷

Ecumenism

The second part of the document specifies issues on which Catholics and Baptists disagree. The first issue is the efficacy of Baptism, which Catholics in no way doubt because the Holy Spirit is free, and God is faithful to his promise. Baptism achieves that which it signifies: it is a birth to a new life, a filial adoption. The sacrament fulfills the gift of God that the Word proclaims.¹⁸ The reality of the sacrament of Baptism does not depend on the faith of the baptized person, but rather on the divine Spirit that works in the Church. Baptism, however, must be received in faith. This means that the fullness of the sacrament is baptism itself, a profession of faith, and conversion. According to Catholic doctrine, the justification of man occurs when the sinner converts in faith and hope toward love. It is obvious, therefore, that this occurs not only at the moment of Baptism, but also before Baptism, since the catechumens anticipate the grace of the sacrament while they prepare to receive it.¹⁹ According to Baptist teaching, Baptism celebrates and confirms the believer's new birth from on high; Baptism, however, does not actualize this birth. Instead, the grace of God is offered to people during the proclamation of the Word, which is a call to faith and to receive God's gift. Baptists do not believe that any rite has power to enact in man such radical changes as conversion or birth to life in the Spirit. This kind of change and rebirth occurs only through one's personal relationship with God through faith. Baptism celebrates this relationship and confirms that the promises of God are given to those who believe. Baptists emphasize that Baptism in the New Testament occurs when people have personally professed faith in Jesus Christ.²⁰

¹⁵ See Ibid, no. 5, pg. 12.

¹⁶ Cf. Ibid, no. 6, pg. 12.

¹⁷ Cf. Ibid, no. 7, pg. 12.

¹⁸ Cf. Ibid, no. 8, pg. 13.

¹⁹ Cf. Ibid, no. 10, pgs. 13-14.

²⁰ Ibid, no.11, pgs. 14-15.

Baptists also believe that God's gratuitous gift is threatened when it is connected with a human ritual. According to Baptists, when what they perceive to be a human ritual takes place, faith is no longer a pure acceptance of gift, but rather the result of an act of the Church. From here it follows that, if the Church baptizes with water, then Christ baptizes with the Spirit.²¹

Both denominations have different beliefs about baptizing young children. The logical consequence of Baptist doctrine is that only a believer (someone capable of freely professing his faith) can receive Baptism. Baptists emphasize that baptizing young children is not explicitly confirmed in the New Testament; therefore, baptizing children obscures the proper meaning of baptism by separating it from the baptized person's profession of faith. If, like a child, a baptized person is unable to make a profession of faith, then this means that the baptized person has been reborn to a new life and receives the Holy Spirit without believing in Jesus Christ. Consequently, baptism would make it possible for the Church to be defined as a "baptized people," even when a large number of baptized persons have rejected Jesus consciously or not. Baptists, therefore, state in one key point of their doctrine that the Church is a community of believers and only faith creates the relationship of belonging to Christ and to the Church.²² The Catholic Church recognizes that the normative form of Baptism involves baptizing believers. However, the Church also considers baptizing children justified because this practice took place during first centuries of Christianity, is rooted in how Jesus treated children, and manifests a common understanding of faith. In Catholic Baptism, the faith of the community is expressed in the faith of the parents and, in this way, supplements or supersedes the faith that the child has but cannot express. Thus, the baptism of infants and children emphasizes the priority of God's call in relation to the faith of man; the child's parents are committed to bringing the child into the catechumenate, which confirms that post-baptismal catechesis, which results in a personal profession of faith, is necessary.²³

The third dispute between Catholics and Baptists centers around which forms of Baptism they recognize. For example, the Catholic Church recognize as valid Baptist baptism by water that is made in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Baptists, on the other hand, recognize only baptism of a *believer* by water in

²¹ Cf. Ibid, no. 12, pg. 15.

²² Cf. Ibid, no. 13, pg. 15.

²³ Ibid, no. 14, pg. 16.

the name of the Trinity. This is a painful problem that does not forbid Baptists from recognizing other Christians who believe in Christ and who have received the Holy Spirit as brothers in Christ, even if they have not been baptized by personally confessing their faith.²⁴

The last part of the document presents the following issues that must be discussed in greater detail in the future: sacramental causation, the relationship between Baptism by water and Baptism in the Spirit, the place of unbaptized children in the Baptist Church, baptizing school-age children, and Catholic Baptism by immersion.²⁵

The joint committee continued by discussing issues such as the Lord's Supper—the Eucharist,²⁶ which was addressed in the 2001 document. This text consists of four parts: 1) the institution of the Last Supper-Eucharist; 2) the Last Supper-Eucharist: memory; 3) the Last Supper-Eucharist: Christ's sacrifice; 4) and Eucharistic hospitality.

Both denominations recognize that the Last Supper-Eucharist was instituted by Christ as the feast of the New Covenant, as a sign of communion among his followers, and as the celebration of the beginning of the Kingdom. Theologians on both sides agreed to use the word "sacrament" when referring to this celebration, even if both churches do not have the same understanding of sacramental reality, and some Baptists are even reluctant to use this term.²⁷

Both Catholics and Baptists acknowledge that the Last Supper-Eucharist is a reminder of the death of Christ; therefore, it is not so much the remembrance of the Last Supper as it is Christ's sacrifice on the cross—of His "body given for you" and His "blood poured out for you." The faithful who participate in the Eucharist proclaim the death of Christ as the source of their life and their unity in His Body. In this way, they profess a truth that they live out in two ways: 1) doxologically, meaning their worship, which includes thanksgiving (*eucharistia, eulogia*), and 2) sacramentally, meaning their celebration emphasizes the believers' involvement and their renewal of their baptismal promises. Baptists consider the Last Supper a spiritual memorial (*anamnesis*),

²⁴ Cf. *Ibid*, no. 15-16, pgs. 16-17.

²⁵ Cf. *Ibid*, pgs. 17-18.

²⁶ The Commission adopted a double expression in order to recognize the Baptist tradition of the concept of the "supper" or "holy supper" known as the "Last Supper," as well as the Catholic tradition of celebrating the "Eucharist." Catholics use the term "Last Supper" when referring to the evening Mass that takes place on Holy Thursday and commemorates what it signifies: the institution of the Sacraments of Eucharist and Priesthood during the Last Supper. Cf. *Du baptême à l'Eglise*, no. 3, pg. 19.

²⁷ Cf. *Ibid*, nos. 4-5, pg. 20.

during which they commemorate, profess, and proclaim the events of the cross. Therefore, the Last Supper must be celebrated as a feast that awakens in believers a deeper awareness of the true presence of the risen Jesus among His followers and of their participation in the fruit of His sacrifice on the cross. Catholics believe that the Eucharist re-presents the paschal mystery of the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ and that the Lord, therefore, is truly present. Since the paschal mystery will be fulfilled at Christ's second coming, the Eucharist is the anticipation of His second coming in glory.²⁸

Catholics and Baptists like-mindedly profess faith in the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross, which leads to the resurrection, takes away sins, and enables communion with God. In contemporary theology of redemption, Catholics emphasize the unity of the paschal mystery and the radical newness of Christ's sacrifice in relation to the sacrifices of the Old Testament. It is an existential sacrifice that is, at the same time, spiritual and corporeal. It is a sacrifice made to the Father as the boundless witness of His love for His people. Baptists, in turn, emphasize the substitutionary and expiatory nature of Christ's death, including His resurrection from the dead and atonement offered to God for our sins.²⁹ The Catholic Church teaches that, if the Eucharist is indeed a Sacrifice, then it is the only Sacrifice on the Cross achieved once and for all and completed in the resurrection. Therefore, during the Eucharist, the power of the Holy Spirit is made present in a sacramental manner, under the forms of bread and wine. This also means that the Sacrifice of Christ is not "renewed" during the celebration of the Eucharist; rather, it is a re-presentation of the Sacrifice on Calvary that renews believers through their filial belonging to Christ in faith and love. Baptists consider the sacrificial dimension of the Last Supper as Christ's self-sacrifice and a sacrifice of praise.³⁰

While both Catholics and Lutherans agree on the "certain form" of Christ's presence in the Eucharist-Last Supper, they both disagree on its meaning. Catholics believe in the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist and believe the Lord's words: "This is my body" to be literal and true. Therefore, Catholic tradition upholds that Jesus truly offers His body through the gift of bread and wine. These gifts undergo the mysterious "transformation" that Catholic theology calls transubstantiation. Baptists, on the other hand, believe that Christ, who resurrected and ascended into Heaven, is not bodily present during the celebration of

²⁸ Ibid, nos. 7-10, pgs. 21-22.

²⁹ Cf. Ibid, nos. 11-12, pgs. 22-23.

³⁰ Cf. Ibid, nos. 13-14, pgs. 23-24.

the Last Supper; it is for this reason that symbols of His Body (bread and wine) are necessary. According to this theory, the bread and wine are not transformed into the Body and Blood of Christ, and the words “this is my body” are understood only metaphorically. Jesus is present in Spirit as a sign of His presence with His disciples until the end of the world, especially when Baptists gather in His name. During the celebration of the Last Supper, Jesus’ presence is true, and Baptists encounter Him through faith, but the bread and wine are merely signs that symbolize this grace.³¹

Although Baptists do not have a permanent and binding form of the celebration of the Last Supper, their worship usually includes thanksgiving, *anamnesis* and St. Paul’s words on the institution of the Lord’s Supper (cf. 1Cor 11:23-29), followed by the epiclesis (calling the Holy Spirit down upon persons, not things), and intercessory prayer. The pastor usually presides over the supper, and those who profess Christ as Lord and Savior are invited to communion. In the Catholic Church, the celebration of the Eucharist is subject to specific liturgical norms. The bishop or priest presides over the celebration, which consists of three essential parts: the Liturgy of the Word, the Offertory and Liturgy of the Eucharist, and the Communion Rite.³²

With regard to Eucharistic hospitality, Catholics must be in full communion of faith with the Catholic Church in order to fully participate in the Mass and receive the Eucharist. This is so because, within Catholicism, Eucharistic communion and ecclesial communion are inseparable. In addition, the Catholic Church requires that only a priest ordained by a Bishop within in the apostolic succession validly preside over the Eucharist. Presently, this means that Eucharistic hospitality is only possible in exceptional circumstances, where many conditions must be met and respected.³³ Baptists, however, do not think that there are any profound differences between the two creeds; consequently, they emphasize that, since the celebration of the Last Supper is an act of a community of faith, every believer can decide in his own conscience whether or not to participate in it.³⁴

³¹ See Ibid, n. 15-17, s. 24-26. See G. Müller, *Dogmatyka katolicka*, Kraków 2015, pgs. 721-722.

³² Cf. Comité Mixte Baptiste-Catholique en France, *Du baptême à l’Eglise*, nos. 19-20, pgs. 27-28.

³³ See *L’hospitalité eucharistique avec les chrétiens des Eglises issues de la Réforme en France*, w: *Directoire pour l’application des principes et des normes sur l’œcuménisme* (Paris: 1994), pgs. 179-184.

³⁴ Ibid, no. 21, pgs. 28-29.

After discussing the issues of Baptism and the Eucharist, the Joint Committee worked out a document on the Church, which was published in 2006 and consists of four essential parts: 1) common points on Church teaching; 2) basic characteristics of Baptist ecclesiology; 3) basic characteristics of Catholic ecclesiology; and 4) the results of their collaborative study.

During their dialogue, Baptists and Catholics primarily examined the founding of the Church by exploring the New Testament, especially the Acts of the Apostles, which describes the birth and initial structure of the Church.³⁵ On the one hand, the source of the Church is Jesus' ministry, which was fulfilled in the paschal mystery and, on the other hand, the gift of the Holy Spirit to all believers. Begun by Jesus on the foundation of the Apostles, the Church is one, present everywhere in local communities, and constitutes (in the forgiveness of sins) an assembly of believers who profess their faith, receive baptism, celebrate the Eucharist, and live in community with each other. The faithful bear witness to the salvation accomplished in Christ, and the communities to which they belong are entrusted to the care of the Apostles, the Apostles' collaborators and successors, and to the clergy called to serve them. Clerical office is a gift of the Holy Spirit as well as the fruit of the cooperation between the Apostles and the communities. In this case, Baptists and Catholics are referring to primitive churches and to all those who have witnessed to Christ over the centuries.³⁶

The document broadly demonstrates the relationship of Christ to the Church, which, through His words, actions, death, resurrection, and gift of the Holy Spirit, was historically called into being. Referring to the Old Testament, which speaks of the People of God (*qahal*), the document points to the person of Jesus, who called His followers to form the Church (*ecclesia*) as the People of God of the New Covenant.³⁷

In the second part of the document, the Joint Committee outlines Baptist ecclesiology, the formation of which began in the 16th and 17th centuries. Baptists understand the Church as a community of believers who convert, profess their faith, and receive Baptism with God's help. The gift of the Holy Spirit initiates this process. In past centuries, this concept of the Church departed radically from the traditional concepts of the churches, which did not distinguish between civilian and ecclesial communities. Therefore, since the 17th century,

³⁵ See Ibid, nos. 1-19, pgs. 31-35.

³⁶ Cf. Ibid, nos. 20-21, pg. 35.

³⁷ See Ibid, nos. 21-32, pgs. 35-40.

Baptists lobbied for freedom of conscience and separation of church and state for ecclesial reasons.³⁸

According to Baptists, since the person and teaching of Christ are the source of the Church, people come to know Jesus only through the testimony of the Apostles, and this determines the apostolic dimension of the Church. Jesus chose the Apostles. Since another Apostle was chosen in place of Judas to maintain the symbolic number twelve, this signifies that apostolic ministry is not transferable and the twelve cannot be succeeded. Therefore, according to Baptist doctrine, the Church's apostolicity rests on the faithfulness of the apostolic tradition transmitted by the Scriptures.³⁹

Baptists believe that the congregation of the Church is called to discern the vocation of their pastors (ecclesial office). Therefore, over the centuries Baptist churches have separated the functions of the elders from pastors. In Baptist tradition, elders participate in pastoral ministry in the heart of their local church, by whom they are elected; whereas pastors may serve in different churches. In addition, there are deacons in the Baptist Church who are chosen by a local church to serve in it for a specific amount of time.⁴⁰

According to Baptists, the Church of Christ is manifested in local communities (local Baptist churches are equivalent to Catholic parishes) that, living in mutual communion with each other, form the complete Church of Jesus Christ. Each community enjoys a great deal of autonomy and is responsible for itself, for giving witness, and for freely influencing its worship. Ministers and a council govern local Baptist communities. All members of a local church assembly consider and make important decisions regarding the life of the Church. Both regionally and nationally, local churches form the Federation of Evangelical Baptist Churches in France; nevertheless, the autonomy of each local church is always an overriding feature.⁴¹

The third part of the document was devoted to Catholic ecclesiology, which was presented in the same manner as the Baptist ecclesiology and elaborated on based on the Second Vatican Council's *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium*. According to the Catholic

³⁸ Cf. Ibid, nos. 35-38, pgs. 40-42.

³⁹ See Ibid, nos. 39-41, pgs. 42-43.

⁴⁰ Cf. IBid, nos. 42-45, pgs. 43-44.

⁴¹ See Ibid, nos. 46-50, pgs. 44-46. You can read more about the structural organization of the Baptist Church in: K. Karski, *Symbolika. Zarys wiedzy o Kościołach i wspólnotach chrześcijańskich* (Warsaw: Chrześcijańska Akademia Teologiczna, 2003), pgs. 199-200.

Church's teaching, the revelation regarding the Church was handed down through the teaching of the Apostles contained in the New Testament and through Tradition under the protection of the Holy Spirit (cf. Vatican II, Constitution *Dei Verbum*, 8).⁴² The Church is primarily the People of God, made up of Jews and Gentiles, according to the eternal plan of God the Father, who appointed us to become like the image of His Divine Son (cf. Rom. 8:29). The People of God were brought together into one through the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. He is our salvation, and He is the head of the Body of Christ. The People of God are sanctified by the Holy Spirit, through whom they have access to the Father through the Son. Inclusion in the People of God is accomplished through the sacrament of faith and the gate to the other sacraments: Baptism. All believers belong to the common and universal priesthood, through which they participate in the function of the Christ the High Priest by witnessing to their faith in word and deed. The common priesthood of the baptized participates in the sanctifying function of Christ the High Priest and is manifested in devotions, the celebration of the sacraments, and involvement in the saving mission of the Church. Finally, in the common priesthood, the People of God share in the dignity of Christ the King and have stewardship of creation for the glory of God and the good of the people. The universal priesthood empowers the People of God to fulfill their specific baptismal ministries according to the variety of charisms each person respectively receives (cf. 1Cor. 12: 28-31).⁴³

According to the Scriptures, the Church is apostolic. And as Scripture, the letters of St. Paul, and the testimony of Clement of Rome affirm, the Church has apostolic succession. The apostolicity of Christ's ministry serves and guarantees the apostolicity of the community of believers as the Body of Christ. Needless to say, however, not everything pertaining to the Apostles' original responsibility is communicable to the faithful; for, those who have not seen the Risen Christ cannot testify in the same way as the Apostles because they have no founding authority. Therefore, those who are called to the apostolic ministry must submit to the Apostles' teaching. The determination of the canon of apostolic writings best expresses this necessity.⁴⁴

Like Orthodox Churches and in accordance with Tradition, the Catholic Church recognizes seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance and Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick, Holy

⁴² Cf. *Du baptême à l'Église*, nos. 55-57, pgs. 47-48.

⁴³ Ibid, nos. 58-61, pgs. 49-50.

⁴⁴ Cf. Ibid, nos. 62-67, pgs. 50-53.

Orders, and Marriage. This means that the source of every sacrament is Christ's will. The responsibilities of the priesthood: proclaiming the word, celebrating the sacraments, and leading the community of Christians in their pilgrimage of faith, are all forms of apostolic ministry. For this reason, the authority to exercise such ministry is given to an individual through a sacrament of Holy Orders, which confers the gifts of the Holy Spirit and continues the apostolic succession. The sacrament of Holy Orders has three ranks: the episcopate, the presbyterate, and the diaconate, the functions of which are hierarchical. The episcopate and the presbyterate confer on men the authority of the ministerial priesthood, which is distinct from the universal priesthood. These three degrees of priesthood do not exhaust the ministerial ministry proper to the whole Church; for, Baptism and the universal priesthood of believers confer on each member of the Church the responsibility to serve the Church according to the appropriate charisms.⁴⁵

According to Catholic doctrine, the universal Church is present in every church that is in communion of faith, of the sacraments, and of ministry. The universal Church is not, however, a simple conglomeration of particular or local churches since communion comes from Christ, is alive, and is expressed in the ministerial structure that supports the faithful who are members of these churches in two dimensions: 1) the vertical dimension—the faithful's relationship with God, and 2) the horizontal dimension: the faithful's relationship with each other. The one and universal Church is not the result of the communion of local churches, but it is nevertheless expressed and revealed in these churches.⁴⁶

Within the Catholic Church, communion among local churches is simultaneously visible and invisible: its privileged expression is the Eucharistic celebration presided over by the bishop, whose ministry plays a special role in the relationship between the local churches and the universal Church. Even when it is not assembled, the Bishops' Conference has a specific responsibility toward the universal Church. The visible communion of the whole Church is expressed in a special way in the Bishop of Rome's unifying role. The Successor and Vicar of Peter—the symbolic guardian of Apostles Peter and Paul—presides over a double communion of faith and of love between all the churches.⁴⁷

The final section of this document contains a summary of the commonalities and differences in Catholic and Baptist ecclesiology. These

⁴⁵ See *Ibid.*, nos. 68-72, pgs. 53-56.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, no. 73, pgs. 56-57.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, nos. 74-75, pgs. 57-58.

commonalities and differences are based on the four attributes of the Church contained in the Creed: one, holy, universal, and apostolic, since both denominations adhere to these attributes, even though the way that they understand them differs.⁴⁸

Ecumenism

The Church is *one* in her multiplicity and diversity of communities. This unity in diversity reflects the unity of God as a Trinity of Persons. For Catholics, this unity is invisible (as a gift of God) and visible (in the communion of all believers, in their mutual love, and in the collegial community of bishops and the Successor of Peter). This visible unity includes the profession of one and the same faith, the celebration of the same sacraments, and obedience to and of the hierarchy of ordained ministers. In the Baptist Church, unity encompasses all true Christians whose number only God knows. In the diversity of its local communities, the Church is called to unity. In this way, every local church must seek communion with neighboring churches to manifest their fundamental unity. This unity is invisible, on the one hand, because of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit, and visible, on the other hand, in an imperfect and partial way insofar as God is present in it.⁴⁹

The Church is *holy* because it is founded on the holiness of Christ, who gave Himself up to make the Church holy “by cleansing her by the bath of water with the word” (Eph. 5:26). For Catholics, the Church radically sanctified becomes a sanctuary because its mission is preaching the Gospel, justification, and sanctification, which it receives from Christ Himself. The Church is holy because the hierarchical ministry unwaveringly leads the People of God to salvation. The Church is aware, however, of the sinfulness of its members, who must constantly continue on the path of conversion. Therefore, reform and purifications are necessary in the lives of the Church’s members and in her institutions. For Baptists, it is evident that the Church is sinful because Christians are sinners.⁵⁰

Since Pentecost, the Church has been *universal* because it is brought to all people throughout history. According to Catholic doctrine, the Church is universal in every particular or local church because each church lives in visible and institutional communion with the rest. Baptists believe that the Church is universal because it has lasted throughout history, in various cultures, and in extremely diverse forms.

⁴⁸ Cf. Ibid, nos. 78, pg. 59; See C. Bartnik, *Kościół* (Lublin: 2009), pgs. 254-264.

⁴⁹ See *Du baptême à l’Eglise*, nos. 79-81, pgs. 60-61.

⁵⁰ Ibid, nos. 83-84, pgs. 61-62.

The catholicity of the Church is expressed through the fullness of faith and teaching that transcend particular forms.⁵¹

The Church is *apostolic* because it is built on the foundation of the Apostles. The Church's apostolicity is concerned particularly with its mission, because in it every Christian has a missionary duty. In Catholic terms, the Church is characterized by apostolic succession through the service of its bishops, priests, and deacons. Baptists believe that all members of the Church are called to proclaim the apostolic word.⁵²

The last part of this document deals with a number of differences that must still be addressed during later stages of dialogue: the Christian's mission and involvement; the relationship between Christ and the Church; the role of the Church in the work of salvation; the problem of service and authority; and the sacraments.⁵³

Ecumenism

The Sixth Phase of Dialogue

From 2001 to 2009, Catholic-Baptist dialogue addressed the very extensive and delicate topic of Mary. This issue simultaneously touched on the issues of the authority of tradition and dogma, as well as on the fields of Catholic and Baptist spirituality. Paradoxically, the text based on this dialogue was published under the title "Mary" and provoked a widespread response and discussion among Catholics, Baptists, and Protestants.⁵⁴

Unlike the previous documents on Baptism, the Lord's Supper-Eucharist, and the Church, the document on Mary does not focus solely on the commonalities and, sometimes very deep, differences of Catholic and Baptist mariology. Instead, it ends with an invitation addressed to Catholics and Baptist to concentrate on biblical testimony regarding this subject, so that both sides can achieve a better mutual understanding and put aside their greatest differences. To this end, the document does not present spectacular Catholic-Baptist progress in the field of ecumenical mariology, especially since it strongly inspired the Dombes Group's final report published in 1997: "Mary in the Plan of God and the Communion of Saints."⁵⁵ Numerous differences between Catholics and Baptists remain to this day, including: Mary's

⁵¹ Cf. See *Ibid*, nos. 85-87, pgs. 62-63.

⁵² *Ibid*, nos. 88-90, pg. 63.

⁵³ See *Ibid*, nos. 91-102, pgs. 64-68.

⁵⁴ "Marie," *Document épiscopat* 10 (2009).

⁵⁵ See Groupe des Dombes, "Marie dans le dessein de Dieu et la communion des saints," in *Communion et conversion des Eglises* (Montrouge: 2014), pgs. 341-495.

cooperation in the work of salvation, Mary's perpetual virginity, the Immaculate Conception, the Assumption, Marian devotion, and Mary's relationship to the Church. Nevertheless, after having read the biblical texts pertaining to the Mother of Christ together, French Catholics and Baptists agree on particular points of doctrine.⁵⁶

The first part of the document presents the issues that are common to both denominations in the light of the Holy Scriptures. First, Mary is shown as an Israeli woman, blessed above all women, and numbered among the holy women in the History of Salvation and of Israel: Sarah, Rebecca, and Anna (Mt 1:16; Lk 1:28, 30, 42).⁵⁷ Then Mary is portrayed as Virgin and Mother, who was betrothed to Joseph and miraculously became the Mother of the Son of God while remaining a virgin through the supernatural action of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁸ Another aspect of Mary that the document presents is her divine motherhood, which was formulated theologically in the 5th century at the Council of Ephesus where the council fathers approved the title of "*Theotokos*" (God-bearer) for Mary. Mary is not the mother of the human nature of Christ, but she is the mother of the person and eternal Word that assumed a human body.⁵⁹ The fourth title of Mary is the "Handmaiden of the Lord." This title emphasizes Mary's obedience of faith even unto her Son's death on the cross. Mary's physical motherhood is always subordinate to the mission of Christ, who often refers reservedly to His Mother in the Gospels, thereby showing the importance of believing in Him (Lk 1:38, 2:19, 33, 50; John 2:4-5, 11).⁶⁰

The second part of the document presents six mariological issues where Baptists and Catholics differ. The first issue concerns Mary's cooperation in salvation. Catholic doctrine does not uphold that it is a contradiction to say that Mary cooperated with Jesus Christ in the salvation; for, by expressing her "*fiat*" to God and accompanying her Son to the cross, Mary collaborated with God. This truth of faith in no way negates the exclusive character of Jesus' saving work because Mary does not add anything to the global economy of salvation. Instead, she is its first beneficiary because she, like all men, also needs redemption. Mary helps the faithful to receive the grace of salvation, since it is always a gift of God that requires man's acceptance. In this sense, Mary participates in the work of salvation, but, as the Second Vatican

⁵⁶ See B. Sesboüé, *La patience et l'utopie* (Paris: 2006), pgs. 169-178.

⁵⁷ Cf. "Marie," nos. 5-9, pgs. 4-5.

⁵⁸ See Ibid, nos. 10-12, pgs. 5.

⁵⁹ Cf. Ibid, nos. 13-15, pgs. 5-6.

⁶⁰ See Ibid, nos. 16-19, pgs. 6-7.

Council confirmed, the only Mediator is Jesus Christ. It is for this reason that Mary has not been given the title “Co-Redemptrix.”⁶¹ Baptists approach Mary’s “cooperation” in the work of redemption with caution; for, they believe her role to be dangerously ambiguous. They do, however, agree with Second Vatican Council’s decision not to call Mary “Co-Redemptrix.” According to Baptists, there is only advocate in heaven—Jesus Christ, who is extremely close to the faithful.⁶²

Both the Christian East and West uphold the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary. This doctrine has existed since the 4th and 5th centuries, during which opposing views were considered heretical. A faith-filled reflection on the particular tie between Mary and Jesus, which was possible through her divine motherhood, leads the faithful to believe that Mary’s virginity was not limited only to the time of Jesus’ conception and birth; rather, her virginity expressed her eternal commitment and total consecration to God. If Mary is the Mother of Jesus, and if Jesus is the only Son of God (i.e., as God himself), then Mary is the *Theotokos*. In the same sense, the virgin Mother of God was understood as being the Perpetual Virgin and Mother of God on doctrinal grounds. For she, in whose womb was knit together the humanity of the Son of God, completely devoted herself to her Son. Consequently, she could no longer be open to marital relations and subsequent children. In the Christian East and West, Mary is always lauded under the title of “Virgin” (*aei parthenos, semper virgo*). The Catholic Church and Orthodox Church recognize the perpetual virginity of Mary, who, both full of grace by her miraculous motherhood and revered by Joseph, never had other children. Luther and Calvin also upheld this traditional doctrine of the faith.⁶³ Baptists have differing opinions on Mary’s perpetual virginity; on the one hand, some affirm Protestant orthodox theses on the topic, while other Baptists, on the one hand, contest that there is a lack of relevant New Testament arguments to support this claim.⁶⁴

The third part of the document takes up the question of the Immaculate Conception and the Mary’s holiness in light of her divine motherhood. The document presents a brief history of the development of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception in the East and West, emphasizing that Catholics mentioned the term “Immaculate

⁶¹ Ibid, no. 26, pg. 9.

⁶² Cf. Ibid, nos. 27-28, pg. 9.

⁶³ Ibid, nos. 29-32, pgs. 10-11.

⁶⁴ See Ibid, nos. 33-35, pg. 11. See also: S. Napiórkowski, *Spór o Matkę. Mariologia jako problem ekumeniczny* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2011), pgs. 36-56.

Conception” at the Council of Basel in 1439, but it was not until 1854 that Pope Pius IX definitively declared it as a dogma of faith. God preserved Mary from sin and damnation; in Mary, God initiated the economy of grace, blessing, and holiness in an anticipatory way. In Mary, “the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27) is announced.⁶⁵ Baptists, however, state that the Bible teaches that all people are corrupt and subjected to sin from their mother’s womb, with the sole exception of Jesus Christ; therefore, they cannot believe in Mary’s Immaculate Conception. Duns Scotus’ proposition that sanctifying grace preserved Mary from the stain of sin from the very beginning—rather than cleansing her later—does not resolve the existing contradiction in Scripture, since Mary *de facto* escaped universal sin. Baptists cannot accept that Mary both needs and does not need redemption at the moment of her conception. According to Baptists, the application of grace on the basis of Christ’s future merits is impossible if Mary was without sin. The Baptists emphasize that the perfection of Mary, who was conceived without sin (even venial sin), contradicts the doctrine of universal sin, which rejects all perfection even among the greatest saints.⁶⁶

Sacred Scripture does not present any facts regarding Mary’s Assumption or the place and date of her death. Only faith-filled reflection makes it possible to seek an answer to this question in light of the conformity between the mystery of Christ and the divine motherhood of His mother. Catholics say that concept of the Assumption of Mary originated before the Council of Ephesus in the 4th century, while the liturgical celebration of this feast evolved from that time from the “Dormition” of Mary to the “Assumption.” The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary—body and soul—after her death is the necessary result of her Immaculate Conception. The one who was free from the corruption of original sin is also free from the corruption of the grave, from spiritual death, and from the consequences of bodily death. This unique destiny flows from Mary’s divine motherhood, for her body belongs to her Son. Christians believed in the mystery of the Assumption of Mary long before Pope Pius XII made it a dogma in 1950. This doctrine has a very powerful ecclesiological significance for Catholics. As the new Eve and image of the Church, Mary anticipates in her body what is promised to the whole Church in the resurrection of the dead. Christ and the Church’s union in one body is fulfilled in Mary. This union is

⁶⁵ Cf. “*Marie*,” nos. 36-41, pgs. 12-13.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, nos. 42-44, pg. 13.

a presage of the calling of the Church and of redeemed humanity.⁶⁷ Baptists cannot ascribe to Mary the privileged of being assumed into heaven without biblical evidence. Some Protestant theologians interpret the description of the dwelling in heaven according to 2 Corinthians 5:1 to mean an “intermediate state” between death and resurrection that exists within an intermediate body. Assumption, which protects a person from the humiliation of death (as in the case of Enoch or Elijah) is also possible to imagine. Baptists, however, state that no biblical text confirms that Mary was assumed into heaven.⁶⁸

In accordance with the Second Vatican Council, Catholics justify Marian devotion based the words of the *Magnificat*: “from now on will all ages call me blessed” (Lk. 1:48). In his Apostolic Exhortation *Mariialis Cultus*, Pope Paul VI affirmed that Marian devotion is always centered on Christ and manifests itself in four ways: biblical, liturgical, ecumenical, and anthropological. Marian apparitions and pilgrimages to Marian sites are also forms of Marian devotion; although, the shepherds of the Church, having *sensus fidei* and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, are to make every effort to prevent practices that deviate from the Gospel. This is why their *sui generis* purification through conversion to Christ occurs especially in the Marian shrines. The Baptist practice of considering the faith and fidelity of Mary only within the limits of the Scripture is far from anything anyone would call “devotion.” According to Baptists, the distinction between *cultus latraiae*, *cultus hiperduliae*, and *cultus duliae* is not found in the Bible; therefore, it only confuses Christians with its sense of the absolute difference between the Creator and the creature.⁶⁹

In modern theology, the Catholic Church considers Mary’s identity and role in relation to the Church, which confirms a certain return to a temperate way of speaking of the Mother of Jesus as dependent on the work of God realized in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. The Second Vatican Council considers Mary a member of the Church, not above it, thereby depicting her as a humble handmaiden, even if her role in the work of salvation is completely unique. The Second Vatican Council rejected the proposal to call Mary “Mother of the Church,” even though Pope Paul VI used this title, which was not dogmatically defined. In the Catholic Church, Mary is portrayed as a model of the Church, virgin, mother, and saint. Virginity signifies the Church’s purity of the faith and total consecration to Christ. Motherhood means the

⁶⁷ Ibid, nos. 45-48, pgs. 13-14.

⁶⁸ Cf. Ibid, n. 49, pgs. 14-15.

⁶⁹ See Ibid, nos. 50-53, pgs. 15-16.

birth of the children of God to faith through preaching and Baptism. Holiness means that Christ has sanctified the Church, “cleansing her by the bath of water with the word, that he might present to himself the church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5: 26-27). According to Baptist doctrine, there is no reason to speak of Mary’s spiritual motherhood and to give her the title “Mother of the Church.”⁷⁰

The final part of the document includes the Joint Committee’s recommendations for the Catholic Church and Baptist Church. The parties’ reflection on mariology revealed profound differences in the the respective Churches’ spiritual sensitivity and theology. Only an idealist would think that this dialogue would result in radical changes that completely remove the differences between Catholic and Baptist devotion and doctrine in the near future. One can hope, however, that an examination of their respective devotions and doctrines in light of Scripture will allow Catholics and Baptists to better understand their greatest differences. To this end, the document recommended that Baptists begin discussing Mary more in order to give her greater consideration in their theological reflections, which find their source in Scripture. In turn, the document recommended that Catholics give Mary her proper place according to biblical hermeneutics in order to avoid deviations in devotion and theology, particularly in ascribing to Mary a role that is proper only to Christ. Both the Catholics and Baptists who participated in this dialogue hope that the document they prepared will be widely received so that the place given to Mary in Catholic and Baptist faith and theology will enable others not only to know Catholic and Baptists’ doctrinal positions, but to also enter into the key impulses of their respective spiritualities.⁷¹

The Current Phase of Dialogue

Since 2009, the current phase of dialogue has been devoted to issues of ethics, particularly social ethics.⁷² Baptist and Catholic dialogue is distinct from dialogues between the Catholic Church and other Christian denominations that arose from the Reformation. For example, Catholics and Baptists are very united in some areas and very divided in others. That which connects the two denominations are: the basic truths of the faith (the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus, His miraculous

⁷⁰ See Ibid, nos. 54-59, pgs. 17-18.

⁷¹ Ibid, nos. 61-65, pgs. 18-19.

⁷² Cf. L. Schweitzer, *Le Comité*, pgs.10-11.

birth, the Resurrection, etc.), ethics, and spirituality (prayer, sanctification, conversion by the power of the Holy Spirit). Baptists are called “Orthodox” Protestants in France, and their “orthodoxy” is particularly evident in the area of ethics, where liberalism has not taken root as it has in reformed churches. Moreover, Baptists are indifferent neither to devotion to the saints, especially Mary, in the personal and collective spirituality of the Catholic Church, nor to contemporary dogmas on these issues. There is one problem, however, that places Catholics and Baptists on opposite ends of the spectrum—namely, the concept of the Church. It is very clear that the Catholic Church is the most structured Christian tradition, and its institutions can seem quite burdensome. On the other hand, the structure of the Catholic Church is part of its strength, influence, and ability to endure difficult periods of history. Baptists, on the other hand, have institutionalized their religion only minimally because they emphasize local communities (parishes) that stand on their own in communion with other local communities. For this reason, Baptists in France do not speak of the Baptist Church, but rather of the Federation of the Churches in France or the World Baptist Federation. Baptist churches are also “professing” churches, which means that a person can become a member of the Baptist Church on the basis of his personal profession, and Baptism is given only to those who can profess their faith. There are great differences between Catholic and Baptist belief, and the way that the faithful experience these faiths is different as well. Therefore, the purpose of Baptist and Catholic dialogue is not to come to a consensus and reconcile their respective creeds, but rather to get to know each other better.⁷³

EKUMENICZNY DIALOG BAPTYSTYCZNO-KATOLICKI WE FRANCJI

Ekumeniczny dialog katolicko-baptystyczny we Francji sięga swymi początkami do 1981 roku i od tego czasu dwie delegacje odbywają regularne spotkania. Pierwsza faza dialogu tocząca się w latach 1981-1986 miała na celu wzajemne poznanie. Ukazano z jednej strony zbieżności w wierze w Tróję Świętą, tajemnicę Wcielenia i Odkupienia, relację pomiędzy chrztem a wiarą. Z drugiej strony wskazano na istniejące różnice, w tym zagadnienie koncepcji Kościoła, episkopatu, sakramentów i kwestię chrztu dzieci. W drugim etapie rozmów (1986-1991) podjęto temat misji i ewangelizacji. W trzeciej i czwartej fazie dialogu poświęcono uwagę zagadnieniu chrztu, Eucharystii/Wieczery Pańskiej oraz urzędowi duchownemu, przygotowując obszerny dokument

⁷³ Cf. *Ibid*, pgs. 11-12.

jako owoc rozmów: „Od chrztu do Kościoła. Zgody i rozbieżności aktualne”. W piątym etapie (2001-2009) wspólnych rozmów zajęto się tematem Maryi, opracowując w szerokim zakresie kwestie mariologii na bazie tradycji, dogmatów i pobożności. Aktualny etap dialogu koncentruje się na zagadnieniach etyki społecznej. Trzeba powiedzieć, że dialog katolicko-baptystyczny we Francji jest dialogiem bardzo owocnym. Wypracowane dokumenty ukazują zbieżności dwóch denominacji w zakresie doktryny podstawowych prawd wiary, etyki i duchowości. Podstawowym jednak problemem jest koncepcja Kościoła, co do której katolicy i baptyści diametralnie się różnią. Z tenoru prowadzonych rozmów można wywnioskować, iż głównym celem postawionym przez dialogujące strony nie jest znalezienie zgody, ale poszukiwanie prawdy poprzez lepsze poznanie doktryny i tradycji każdej ze stron.

Słowa kluczowe: ekumenizm, baptyści, katolicy, dialog, Francja, Maryja.

Bibliography:

1. Bartnik C., *Kościół* (Lublin: 2009).
2. Comité Mixte Baptiste-Catholique en France, *Du baptême à l'Eglise. Accords et divergences actuels* (Paris: 2006).
3. Comité Mixte Baptiste-Catholique, *Rendre témoignage au Christ* (Paris: 1992).
4. Groupe des Dombes, “Marie dans le dessein de Dieu et la communion des saints,” in *Communion et conversion des Eglises* (Montrouge: 2014).
5. Karski K., *Od Edynburga do Porto Alegre: Sto lat dążeń ekumenicznych* (Warsaw: Chrześcijańska Akademia Teologiczna, 2007).
6. Karski K., *Symbolika. Zarys wiedzy o Kościołach i wspólnotach chrześcijańskich* (Warsaw: Chrześcijańska Akademia Teologiczna, 2003).
7. *L'hospitalité eucharistique avec les chrétiens des Eglises issues de la Réforme en France*, in: *Directoire pour l'application des principes et des normes sur l'œcuménisme* (Paris: 1994).
8. Müller G., *Dogmatyka katolicka*, Kraków 2015.
9. Napiórkowski S., *Spór o Matkę. Mariologia jako problem ekumeniczny* (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2011).
10. Neuner P., *Théologie œcuménique: La quête de l'unité des Eglises chrétiennes* (Paris: 2005).
11. Schweitzer L., “Le Comité mixte baptiste-catholique en France,” *Unité des Chrétiens* 175 (2014).
12. Schweitzer L., ed., *Le dialogue catholiques-evangeliques* (Cléon d'Andran: 2002).
13. Sesboüé B., *La patience et l'utopie* (Paris: 2006).
14. Somerville R., “Catholiques romains et baptistes,” in Comité mixte baptiste-catholique, *Rendre témoignage au Christ*.
15. Stransky T., “Baptistes et catholiques romains,” in Comité Mixte Baptiste-Catholique, *Rendre témoignage au Christ*.