

**THE BAPTIST-ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL CONVERSATIONS  
1984-1988**

**Preface**

This report which we here present is the result of five meetings between Baptists and Roman Catholics in the years 1984-1988. The conversations were sponsored by the Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation of the Baptist World Alliance and the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity. They were the first international conversations between our two bodies.

Our overall theme was "Christian Witness in Today's World". Our primary goal was to come to a mutual understanding of certain convergences and divergences between the Baptist and Roman Catholic world confessional families. Additional goals included:

1. To establish relations and maintain a channel of communication through conversation for mutual as well as self-understanding.
2. To identify new possibilities as well as to clarify existing difficulties in regard to a common witness in view of the current world situation and the mandate of Christ to proclaim the gospel.
3. To address existing prejudices between our two world confessional families.

During these initial conversations, where we experienced God's presence and God's blessings, these objectives were in large part fulfilled. What we achieved in these conversations is an encouragement to similar efforts at various levels in church life.

At each session the main work was theological discussion. Scholarly papers were presented and discussed by participants. Bible studies related to the selected themes, and visits to local communities in the places where the meetings took place, enriched our conversations. In each location leaders of the Baptist and Roman Catholic communities visited the group and shared with them the support of their good wishes and their prayers.

We offer this report, with thanks, to the bodies that sponsored our conversations. The sixteen of us who have been participants have been conscious of the Spirit of God at work among us, and have formed in the course of these years friendships that have been full of encouragement and edification. As this report is completed, we remember fondly one of our members, Rev. Jerome Dollard, O.S.B., who was suddenly called from this life on December 26, 1985.

Those of us who took part in the conversations regard our experience together as a great gift from God. We hope other Baptists and Roman Catholics will have the grace of a similar experience. In that spirit we offer this report to Baptists, Roman Catholics and others for their study and their prayerful reflection.

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*Atlanta July 23, 1988*

## **SUMMONS TO WITNESS TO CHRIST IN TODAY'S WORLD: A REPORT ON THE BAPTIST-ROMAN CATHOLIC INTERNATIONAL CONVERSATIONS**

### **I. The Conversations in Review**

1. Since the [Second Vatican Council](#) (1962-1965), Baptists and Roman Catholics have entered into conversation with one another at numerous levels. Only in the past five years, however, have they undertaken a series of conversations at the international level. Jointly sponsored by the Commission on Baptist Doctrine and Interchurch Cooperation of the Baptist World Alliance and the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, these conversations have focused on a subject of concern to both bodies, namely, "Christian Witness in Today's World".

2. In this series of five conversations Baptist and Roman Catholic participants, composed of church leaders and scholars, discovered a remarkable amount of consensus on both general and specific issues. Agreement centered on God's saving revelation in Jesus Christ, the necessity of personal commitment to God in Christ, the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, and the missionary imperative that emerges from God's redemptive activity on behalf of humankind. There were, of course, some significant differences on both general and specific issues. We often noted that divergences appeared among representatives of the same communion as well as among those of the two communions.

3. The conversations, held annually in various locations, explored the following topics relative to common witness. The first, meeting in West Berlin, July 18-21, 1984 focused on "Evangelism/Evangelization: the Mission of the Church". The second, assembled in Los Angeles, June 24-30, 1985, addressed the issues of "Christology" and "Conversion/Discipleship", aspects of "Witness to Christ". The third, convened in New York City, June 2-7, 1986, explored ecclesiological issues under the title of "The Church as Koinonia of the Spirit". The fourth, held in Rome, July 13-18, 1987, directed itself to specific issues standing in the way of improving common Christian witness, that is, proselytism and restrictions on religious freedom. The fifth, located in Atlanta, Georgia, July 18-23, 1988, sought to gather the fruit of the entire series.

### **II. Common Statement**

4. This statement does not offer a summary of the individual sessions. It attempts, rather, to synthesize the discussions over five years and to articulate our shared response to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as this has been given to us in the Bible and in the faith and practice of our respective communities.

#### *A) Our witness to Christ*

5. Our common witness rests on shared faith in the centrality of Jesus Christ as the revelation of God and the sole mediator between God and humankind (*1 Tim 2:5*). We come to know Jesus Christ through the Scriptures, especially of the New Testament, which we share in common as the source and sustainer of our faith. That knowledge is experientially confirmed by the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, is handed down by the community of believers, and is certified by the authoritative witness of the church throughout the ages. We are also aware that God set forth in Christ "the mystery of his will" (*Eph 1:9*). All human language is inadequate to express the mystery of God's grace and love manifested in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We strive, with Paul as our guide, to gain "insight into the mystery of Christ" (*Eph 3:4*).

6. The distinction between the person and the work of Christ, while helpful to later theology, does not capture the riches of the biblical testimony to Jesus Christ. The christological statements in the New Testament express the faith of individuals and groups. In their earliest forms such as we find in Paul's resurrection *paradosis* (*1 Cor. 15:1-11*) and in the "kerygmatic" speeches of Acts (e.g. *2:22-24; 3:14-16; 4:10-12; 10:40-43*) Jesus is proclaimed as the one who God raised up (or made Lord and Messiah) for our sins or in whose name we are saved. The doctrine of the person of Christ cannot be separated from the message of the saving work which God accomplished in and through Christ.

7. The New Testament speaks of Jesus in different ways. The Synoptic Gospels present Jesus as the one who proclaims the advent of God's reign and enacts it in his ministry (*Mk 1:14-15*). He calls sinners to repentance (*Lk 5:32*) and conquers the power of evil (*Lk 11:19f.*). He takes the side of the sick and the marginal in his society (*Lk 4:16-19*). He gathers disciples who were to be with him and to be sent by him (*Mk 3:13-15*).

He possesses a unique familiarity with God and teaches those who follow him to pray to God as Father (*Mt* 6:7-15) and to walk in loving trust in God's power and presence (*Mt* 6:25-33). He summons those who would follow him to love God and neighbor with whole heart, mind and soul (*Mk* 12:28-34) and gives his life as a ransom that others may be free (*Mk* 10:45).

8. The Gospel of John is a rich source for understanding Christ and its language and perspective gave shape to the christological formulation of the councils. It was written in order that people might believe that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing they might have life in his name (*Jn* 20:31). Jesus is presented as the Word who was with God from the beginning and through whom all things were made (*Jn* 1:1-3). This Word became flesh and dwelt among us so that his glory could be seen. He was full of grace and truth (*Jn* 1:14). Eternal life was to know the one true God and Jesus Christ whom God had sent (*Jn* 17:3). Access to this eternal life was by way of faith. The Christian was summoned to confess with Martha, "Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world" (*Jn* 11:27). Through the death and resurrection of Jesus the Holy Spirit was given for the remission of sin (*Jn* 20:22-23). Through the witness of the Paraclete the disciples were made witnesses to Christ (*Jn* 15:26-27). Jesus in dying prayed for them that the Father keep them in his name and make them one (*Jn* 17:11).

9. Jesus is proclaimed as the one who descended from David according to the flesh and is designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead (*Rom* 1:4). He is also the suffering servant and the Son of Man who came not to be served but to serve (*Mk* 10:45). He is the Savior born for us in the city of David (*Lk* 2:11) and the one who, though equal to God, emptied himself, taking on the form of a servant, being born in human likeness (*Phil* 2:7).

10. The work of Christ is presented under a variety of metaphors such as justification (*Gal* 2:16; *Rom* 3:26-28; 5:18), salvation (*2 Cor* 7:10; *Rom* 1:16; 10:10; 13:11), expiation and redemption (*Rom* 3:24-25; 8:32) and reconciliation (*2 Cor* 5:18-20; *Rom* 5:10-11). These expressions point to the ontological, objective event wherein God has begun the restoration of a fallen humanity to relationship with himself and has inaugurated a renewal of creation through Christ's death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. The offer of salvation from God in Christ is received in faith which is a gift of God "who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (*1 Tim* 2:4).

11. Discussion of our witness to Christ has revealed that our two communions are one in their confession of Jesus Christ as Son of God, Lord and Savior. The faith in Christ proclaimed in the New Testament and expressed in the first four ecumenical councils is shared by both of our churches. Our discussion uncovered no significant differences with regard to the doctrine of the person and work of Christ, although some did appear with regard to the appropriation of Christ's saving work. We believe that this communion of faith in Christ should be stressed and rejoiced in as a basis for our discussions of other areas of church doctrine and life, where serious differences may remain.

12. While affirming that the Scriptures are our primary source for the revelation of God in Jesus, we give different weight to creeds and confessional statements. Roman Catholics affirm that Sacred Scripture and sacred tradition "flow from the same divine wellspring" and that "the church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the Holy Scriptures alone" (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, 9). The faith of the church expressed in its creeds through the ages is normative for Catholics. Baptists, while affirming the creeds of the first four ecumenical councils and producing confessional statements in their history, do not hold them as normative for the individual believer or for subsequent periods of church life. For Baptists, Scriptures alone are normative.

#### B) *The call to conversion*

13. Jesus inaugurated his public ministry by announcing the advent of God's reign and by summoning people to be converted and to believe in the Gospel (*Mk* 1:14-15). He immediately summoned disciples to follow him (*Mk* 1:16-20). Saul, the persecutor of the early Christians, through a revelation of the gospel of Jesus becomes Paul the apostle to the Gentiles (*Gal* 2:1-10). The mystery of who Jesus is and what he did for us can ultimately be grasped only in faith and in the practice of Christian discipleship through hope and love (*1 Th* 1:3).

14. After his resurrection Jesus announced to his disciples that “repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations” (*Lk 24:47*). Before he departed from his disciples Jesus commissioned them to make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that he commanded them (*Mt 28:16-20*). After Pentecost the disciples began to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations (*Acts 2:5-13*). Under the guidance of the same Spirit that was given to the disciples at Pentecost, in its preaching and witness the Church strives to fulfill the mandate of Jesus and through the ages renews this proclamation of conversion and forgiveness.

15. Conversion is turning away from all that is opposed to God, contrary to Christ’s teaching, and turning to God, to Christ, the Son, through the work of the Holy Spirit. It entails a turning from the self-centeredness of sin to faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. Conversion is a passing from one way of life to another new one, marked with the newness of Christ. It is a continuing process so that the whole life of a Christian should be a passage from death to life, from error to truth, from sin to grace. Our life in Christ demands continual growth in God’s grace. Conversion is personal but not private. Individuals respond in faith to God’s call, but faith comes from hearing the proclamation of the word of God and is to be expressed in the life together in Christ that is the church.

16. Conversion and discipleship are related to one another as birth to life. Conversion is manifested in a life of discipleship. In the Gospels Jesus summoned disciples to be with him and to share his ministry of proclaiming the advent of God’s reign and bringing the healing power of this reign into human life. He also summoned them to be like him in taking up their crosses and in living in loving service to others. After Easter and Pentecost the early community continued to announce and spread the good news, and to witness to the saving power of God. Like Jesus, the disciples were persecuted, but through the gift of the Spirit they remained faithful and continued to proclaim the Gospel.

17. Throughout history God continues to summon people to follow Jesus, and by the gift of the Spirit and the power of faith the risen Lord continues his ministry. Discipleship consists in personal attachment to Jesus and in commitment to proclamation of the Gospel and to those actions which bring the healing and saving power of Jesus to men and women today. The disciple is nurtured by Scriptures, worship, prayer in all its forms, works of mercy towards others, proclamation, instruction and the witness of daily life. The church, which can be called a community of disciples, is gathered in the name and presence of the risen Christ. This community is summoned to share the gift it has received. The gift is thus a mandate for a tireless effort to call all people to repentance and faith. A community of disciples of Jesus is always a community in mission.

18. As Baptists and Catholics we both strive to “be converted and believe in the Good News” (*Mk1:14*). Yet, conversion and discipleship are expressed differently in our ecclesial communions. Baptists stress the importance of an initial experience of personal conversion wherein the believer accepts the gift of God’s saving and assuring grace. Baptism and entry into the church are testimony to this gift which is expressed in a life of faithful discipleship. For Catholics baptism is the sacrament by which a person is incorporated into Christ and is reborn so as to share in the divine life. It is always consequent upon faith; in the case of an infant, this faith is considered to be supplied by the community. Catholics speak of the need for a life of continual conversion expressed in the sacrament of reconciliation (penance) which in the early church was sometimes called a “second baptism”. In both of our communions changes in church practice challenge us to consider more deeply our theology of conversion and baptism. In the recently instituted “Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults”, Roman Catholics affirm that the baptism of adults is the paradigm for a full understanding of baptism. In some areas of the world Baptists receive baptism at a very early age.

### C) *Our witness in the Church*

19. “*Koinonia* of the Spirit” (*Phil 2:1*, cf. *2 Cor 13:14*) is a helpful description of our common understanding of the church. *Koinonia* suggests more than is implied by English terms used to translate it, such as “fellowship” or “community”. Based on the root idea of “sharing in one reality held in common”, it was used in a variety of ways by early Christians. According to *1 Cor 1:9*, Christians are “called into the fellowship of the Son”, which means the same as being “in Christ” or being a member of the Body of Christ (*1 Cor 12:12ff.*). As we participate in Christ, we participate in the gospel (*1 Cor 9:23*; *Phil 1:5*) or in faith (*Philem 6*) or in the Lord’s Supper (*1 Cor 10:16ff.*). To share in the Supper is to share in Christ’s body and blood (v. 21). Fellowship with Christ entails participation in his life (*Rom 6:8*; *2 Cor 7:3*), sufferings (*Rom-i 8:17*; *2 Cor 7:3*; *Gal 2:19-20*), resurrection (*Col 2:12*; *3:1*; *Eph 2:6*), and eternal reign (*Rom 8:17*; *2 Tim 2:12*). For Paul *koinonia* with the risen

Christ is the same as *koinonia* with the Spirit (2 Cor 13:14) and with other Christians. This is more than a bond of friendship. All share together in the spiritual blessings of the Spirit and are thus obligated to help one another (Rom 12:13) in their afflictions (Phil 4:14) as well as in their blessings. In 1 John to be a Christian means to have *koinonia* with God — Father and Son (1:3, 6) — and with other believers (1:3, 7). The accent is placed on active participation — “walking” and “doing” — as an expression of this fellowship.

20. Discussion of the passages cited above led to the following conclusions: (1) that in and through Christ God has laid down the foundation of the church, (2) that *koinonia* both between God and human beings and within the church is a divine gift, and (3) that the Spirit effects the continuity between the church and Jesus. The uniting of a diverse humanity — Jews and Greeks, males and females, slaves and masters (Gal 3:28) — in one body could not have occurred on human initiative. It depended, rather, on God’s action through Jesus Christ — dead, buried, and risen. We are now called into communion with God and with one another in the Risen One. God actually binds us together in an intimate fellowship through the Holy Spirit. God offers the Spirit as a gift to the whole community of faith to guide it and nurture it and bring it to maturity.

21. *Koinonia*, whether between God and humanity or among human beings, must be regarded as a gift of God. Though made “in the image of God”, both male and female (Gen 1:27), to dwell in community, Adam, humanity, has ruptured the relationship with God and with one another that would make such community possible. God’s longsuffering love alone sufficed to salvage a broken humanity, through Israel and, above all, through God’s Son, Jesus Christ, the new Adam. In the Son God did for us what we could not do for ourselves. The free gift of God in Christ surpassed by far the effects of Adam’s transgression (Rom 5:15-17).

22. The Spirit continues in the church the redemptive work God began in the Son. In baptism the Spirit unites the diverse members — Jew and Gentile, slaves and freeborn, male and female, and we could add, black and white, rich and poor, etc. — into a single body (1 Cor 12:12-13; Gal 3:28). The Spirit is the ground of every dimension of the church’s life — worship, interior growth, witness to an unbelieving world, and proclamation of the gospel (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37). The Spirit apportions different “gifts” with which the members may build up the Body of Christ and carry out the mission of the church (1 Cor 12:4-11, 27-30; Rom 12:4-8).

23. *Koinonia*, which is at the heart of the church, is the result of the manifold activity of the Spirit. In the church there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, and varieties of service, but the same Lord, and varieties of working, but the same God, and, though composed of many members, the church is the one body of Christ (1 Cor 12:4, Rom 12:5). When Baptists speak of church they refer primarily to the local congregation gathered by the Spirit in obedience and service to God’s word. Catholics by church refer to the community of faith, hope and charity as a visible structure established and sustained on earth by Christ (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 8). While both Baptists and Catholics admit the presence of Christ in the church (Mt 18:20; 28:20), they understand this in different ways. Catholics believe that the Church is a “society furnished with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ [which] are not be considered two realities,... Rather, they form one interlocked reality which is comprised of a divine and a human element” (ibid.). Baptists affirm that the church is divine as to its origin, mission and scope; human as to its historical existence and structure.

#### D) *Our witness in the world*

24. The gift of faith we have received is a gift to be shared with others. Jesus was sent by God to proclaim the good news of God (Mk 1:14; cf. Lk 4:18; 7:22). He sent the Twelve (Mt 10:5ff.) and the Seventy (Lk 10:1ff.) to carry the same message. After the resurrection he directed his followers to go into all the world and make disciples (Mt 28:16-20) and commissioned them to be witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). The church has engaged in this task throughout its history.

25. Both Baptists and Roman Catholics respond to this summons through a ministry of evangelism or evangelization. Baptists typically emphasize free personal response of individuals to the gospel, often to the neglect of corporate responsibility. In more recent years, however, some Baptist groups have focused less on the individual and more on the corporate and social implications of evangelism/evangelization.

26. Roman Catholics apply the term “evangelization” to the “first proclamation” of the gospel to non-believers (*Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization*, 21) and also in the wider sense of the renewal of humanity, witness, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, and apostolic initiative. These elements are complementary and mutually enriching (ibid., 24). Christ is the center and end of missionary effort. Catholic

emphasis upon incarnation, however, encourages a greater concern for “inculturation” than does Baptist emphasis upon redemption of fallen humanity from sin. It also opens the way for assigning sacraments a more prominent place in the evangelization task.

27. Recent ecumenical developments have led to increased appreciation by Roman Catholics and Baptists for each other and for other Christian bodies and may open the way to common witness. Documents of the Second Vatican Council and after speak of many factors uniting Catholics and Protestants: faith, baptism, sharing in the life of grace, union in the Holy Spirit, the Christian life, and discipleship. While Vatican II maintained that the church of Christ “constituted and organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church” (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, 8), it also acknowledged that “some, even very many, of the most significant elements or endowments which together go to build up and give life to the Church herself can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church” (*Decree on Ecumenism*, 3).

28. Baptists and Roman Catholics differ among themselves about salvation within non-Christian religions. The Second Vatican Council brought to an end the negative attitude toward them that had prevailed in the Church and made it possible to enter into dialogue with them about some of the common problems of the present which need global attention. The Council expressed its high regard for the manner of life, precept, and doctrines of these religions which “often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men” (*Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, 2). At the same time the Council made it clear that the Church “proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is ‘the way, the truth and the life’ (Jn 14:6), in whom men find the fullness of religious life and in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor 5:18-19)” (*ibid.*). Baptists have issued no major statements on salvation through other religions, but must construe the biblical pronouncement, “for there is no other name under heaven given among humankind by which we must be saved” (*Acts 4:12*), in a rather strict fashion. They frequently cite also: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me” (*Jn 14:6*), and apply it in the narrow sense. Some Baptists, nevertheless, have engaged in dialogue or conversations with representatives of the other major world religions. Similarly, they discern the need for cooperation among world religions to solve urgent human problems.

#### E) *Challenges to common witness*

29. We respond to the summons to be heralds of the good news by proclaiming the name of Jesus to humankind in such a manner that people will be led to believe in Jesus Christ and to live as true Christians. As we strive to make our lives a witness of the faith that sustains us, certain issues emerge which are of common concern.

30. An important area of common concern is the language we use in speaking of our common witness. “Common witness” means that Christians, even though not yet in full communion with one another, bear witness together to many vital aspects of Christian truth and Christian life. We affirm that it embraces the whole of life: divine worship, responsible service, proclamation of the Good News with a view to leading men and women, under the power of the Holy Spirit, to salvation and gathering them into the Body of Christ.

31. Realizing that “for freedom Christ has set us free” (*Gal 5:1*), we seek ways that people may respond to the gospel in freedom and love. We also confess that competition and bitterness among Christian missionaries have often been a stumbling block for those to whom we seek to proclaim the Gospel. Often Christian missionaries are accused of “proselytism” which in both secular and religious circles has taken on the pejorative connotation of the use of methods which compromise rather than enhance the freedom of the believer and of the Gospel.

32. A historical overview shows that the understanding of “proselytism” has changed considerably. In the Bible it was devoid of negative connotations. A “proselyte” was someone who, by belief in Yahweh and acceptance of the law, became a member of the Jewish community. Christianity took over this meaning to describe a person who converted from paganism. Mission work and proselytism were considered equivalent concepts until recent times.

33. More recently the term “proselytism” in its pejorative sense has come to be applied by some to the attempts of various Christian confessions to win members from *each other*. This raises the delicate question regarding the difference between evangelism/evangelization and proselytism.

34. As Baptists and Catholics we agree that evangelization is a primary task of the church and that every Christian has the right and obligation to share and spread the faith. We also agree that faith is the free response by which people, empowered by the grace of God, commit themselves to the Gospel of Christ. It is contrary to the message of Christ, to the ways of God's grace, and to the personal character of faith that any means be used which would reduce or impede the freedom of a person to make a basic Christian commitment.

35. We believe that there are certain marks which should characterize the witness we bear in the world. We affirm:

- that witness must be given in a spirit of love and humility,
- that it leaves the addressee full freedom to make a personal decision,
- that it does not prevent either individuals or communities from bearing witness to their own convictions, including religious ones.

36. We also admit that there are negative aspects of witness which should be avoided and we acknowledge in a spirit of repentance that both of us have been guilty of proselytism in its negative sense. We affirm that the following things should be avoided:

- every kind of physical violence, moral compulsion and psychological pressure (For example, we noted the use of certain advertising techniques in mass media which might bring undue pressure on readers/viewers);
- explicit or implicit offers of temporal or material advantages such as prizes for changing one's religious allegiance;
- improper use of situations of distress, weakness or lack of education to bring about conversion;
- using political, social and economic pressure as a means of obtaining conversion or hindering others, especially minorities, in the exercise of their religious freedom;
- casting unjust and uncharitable suspicion on other denominations;
- comparing the strengths and ideals of one community with the weaknesses and practices of another community.

37. On the basis of this understanding of proselytism just given, we agree that the freedom of the Gospel and the individual must be respected in any process of evangelism/evangelization. We are aware, however, that often the charge of "proselytism" in a negative sense can be made when one communion comes in contact with the evangelization/evangelism of the other. Every effort must be made to increase mutual knowledge and understanding and to respect the integrity and rights of other individuals and communities to live and proclaim the Gospel according to their own traditions and convictions. In an increasingly secularized world, division and religious strife between Christian bodies can be such a scandal that non-believers may not be attracted to the Gospel.

38. From the time of Constantine until the modern period, the Christian church has experienced a wide variety of relationships to secular authority where, by custom, law and concordat, civil authority and church have been intertwined in many areas of life. Unfortunately, these interrelationships have sometimes led to intolerance and consequent suffering. In some traditionally Roman Catholic countries, Baptists were sometimes deprived of their full civil and religious rights and freedom. On the other hand, in areas where Baptists were a numerical majority or enjoyed greater economic or social power, Roman Catholics, although supposedly enjoying all civil rights, sometimes suffered discrimination, injustice and intolerance.

39. Baptists were among the first to advocate the separation of church and state. Having taken shape in an age of religious strife and persecution, Baptists have historically advocated freedom of conscience and practice in religious matters, not simply for Baptists but for all persons.

40. Historically Roman Catholics and Baptists have differed over the relation of the church to civil authority and on the question of religious liberty. With the “Declaration on Religious Liberty” of the [Second Vatican Council](#), Roman Catholicism affirmed strongly that “the human person has the right to religious freedom” (2) and that this freedom means that all men and women “are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that in matters religious no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his or her own beliefs” (ibid.). The Council states that this freedom is “based on the very dignity of the human person as known through the revealed Word of God and by reason itself” (2). Since religious liberty is a right which flows from the dignity of the person, civil authorities have an obligation to respect and protect this right.

41. Both Baptists and Catholics agree that religious freedom is rooted in the New Testament. Jesus proclaimed God’s reign and summoned people to a deep personal conversion (*Mk* 1:14-15) which demands that a person be able to respond freely to God’s offer of grace. The apostle Paul resisted all those who attempted to coerce the churches into practices or beliefs which he felt contrary to the freedom won by the death and resurrection of Christ.

42. In the area of religious freedom Roman Catholics and Baptists can fruitfully explore different forms of common witness. Both groups struggle to exist in situations where religious freedom is not respected. Both are concerned about those who suffer persecution because of their faith.

43. In certain traditionally Roman Catholic countries civil constitutions and laws enacted prior to the Second Vatican Council have not been changed to reflect the teaching of the Council. In some settings with a dominant Baptist majority the traditional Baptist stress on separation of church and state as a means to assure religious freedom has been weakened. Both groups need to exercise greater vigilance to ensure respect for religious liberty.

44. Christians have a right and a duty to bring their religious insights and values to the public debate about the structure and direction of a society. This may also include the effort to embody their values in civil law. As they do so, however, they should always be sensitive to and considerate of the rights of individual conscience and of minorities and the welfare of the society as a whole. They should measure their efforts against Jesus’ command to love one’s neighbor as oneself, his proclamation that both the just and the unjust have the same loving Father, and his own concern for marginal groups in his society.

### **III. Areas Needing Continued Exploration**

#### *A) Theological Authority and Method*

45. These conversations between Baptists and Roman Catholics have frequently surfaced different views and uses of theological authority and method. The theoretical reason for that is clear: Baptists rely on Scriptures alone, as interpreted under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Reformation principle. Roman Catholics receive God’s revelation from the Scriptures interpreted in the light of the tradition under the leadership of the magisterium, in a communal process guided by the Holy Spirit.

46. In fact, however, the differences are not as sharp as this formulation would suggest. At the Second Vatican Council the Roman Catholic Church dealt carefully and in detail with the relationship between scripture and tradition (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, 2). It endeavored to reach and express an understanding of the relationship between Scripture, tradition and the teaching office of the church (magisterium). Each of these has its own place in the presentation of the truth of Jesus Christ. The place of one is not identical with that of the other, yet in the Roman Catholic view these three combine together to present divine revelation. On the other hand, Baptists invoke the Baptist heritage as decisively as Roman Catholics cite tradition, usually disclaiming that it bears the same authority as scripture but holding on to it vigorously nonetheless.

47. Theory and fact need to be brought together in such a way as to alleviate some anxiety on both sides. Roman Catholics often ask how Baptists regard crucial theological statements which the church has issued in its walk through history, e.g., the great christological statements of Nicea and Constantinople. In brief, do they subscribe to orthodoxy of any kind? Baptists, looking at certain dogmas which they regard as grounded in tradition rather than in scripture, e.g., the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary, ask whether Roman Catholics

set any limits to what can be defined. Can the church simply approve anything it wants as official doctrine? The key issue needing discussion here is that of development of doctrine.

#### B) *The shape of Koinonia*

48. Another issue which distinguishes our communions is the different ways in which the *koinonia* of the Spirit is made concrete. Baptists and Catholics obviously conceive of the Spirit working through different structures. For Baptists, *koinonia* is expressed principally in local congregations gathered voluntarily under the lordship of Jesus Christ for worship, fellowship, instruction, evangelism and mission. In accordance with their heritage they recognize the Spirit's direction through the interdependency of associations, conventions, alliances and other bodies designed to proclaim the good news and to carry out the world mission of Christ. However, they have sought to avoid development of structures which would threaten the freedom of individuals and the autonomy of local congregations. For Roman Catholics, the *koinonia* which the Spirit effects in the local congregation is simultaneously a *koinonia* with the other local congregations in the one universal church. Correspondingly, they recognize the Spirit's activity in the spiritual and institutional bonds which unite congregations into dioceses presided over by bishops and which unite dioceses into the whole church, presided over by the Bishop of Rome. Vital to future ecumenical progress would be further discussion of the relationship between the Spirit and structures.

#### C) *Relationship between Faith, Baptism, and Christian witness*

49. The conversations revealed growing common concern among Baptists and Roman Catholics about authenticity of faith, baptism, and Christian witness. There are, however, obvious divergences. Baptists, viewing faith primarily as the response of the individual to God's free gift of grace, insist that the faith response precede baptism. Baptist congregations, however, vary in the way they receive persons baptized as infants in other congregations. Practices range from rebaptism of all persons who have not received baptism at the hands of a Baptist minister to acceptance of all persons baptized by any mode, whether as infants or as adults. Roman Catholics regard the sacraments, such as baptism, in a context of faith, as an exercise of the power of the risen Christ, comparable to that exercised by Jesus when he cured the sick and freed the possessed. Emphasizing the corporate as well as the individual nature of faith, they baptize infants and catechize them through a process culminating in full participation in the church.

50. Both approaches present some difficulties. Baptists are not at one on how children relate to the church prior to baptism. Some churches now have "child dedication" rites, but most have not dealt with the issue at all. Baptist "rebaptisms (viewed by them as a first baptism) can offend Christians of other communions because they suggest the others are not really Christian and because they seem to violate the scriptural call for "one baptism". Roman Catholics and others who practice infant baptism, on the other hand, confront the problem that there is little clear evidence in the Scriptures for this practice. The baptizing of infants thus seems to be sustained principally by tradition and a more corporate understanding of faith.

51. The heart of the problem to be addressed here seems to be the nature of faith and the nature of the sacraments (called "ordinances" by most Baptists) which raise a number of questions Baptists and Catholics must deal with together. Is faith solely an individual's response to God's gift? Can the faith of the community supply for the personal faith of an infant? May one speak of a "community of faith", that is, of the body of Christ as itself a subject of a common faith in which individual believers participate? Are the sacraments outward signs of a preceding inner commitment? Are they the means through which Christ himself effects his healing and saving work? What does it mean to say that baptism is "the sacrament of faith"? The issues between us are unlikely to be resolved without addressing these questions.

#### D) *Clarification of key terms*

52. We are aware that religious tension between communities can arise from different understanding and use of similar terms. A fundamental concept in both our communions is that of "mission". In its most extensive sense Baptists speak of the mission of the church to glorify God by making him known through faith in Jesus Christ. Roman Catholics also speak of "mission" in its broadest sense as everything that the church does in service of the kingdom of God. Baptists understand missions (plural, in the sense of the outward movement of the church) as one of the means by which the church accomplishes its mission in the world.

53. Baptists almost never use the term “evangelization” but prefer the term “evangelism” to describe how believers, individually or collectively, take the gospel of Christ to the world, “going everywhere preaching the word” (*Acts* 8:4). “Evangelization” until recent years was not frequently used within Roman Catholicism. The best working definition can be found in the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI, “On Evangelization in the Modern World” (1975): “... if it had to be expressed in one sentence the best way of stating it would be to say that the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the Divine Power of the Message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs” (18). Evangelization is, therefore, a broad concept comprising three major activities: (a) *evangelism*, understood as the proclamation of the gospel to the unchurched within one’s own society or culture; (b) *missionary activity*, which involves cross-cultural proclamation of the Gospel; and (c) *pastoral activity* — nourishing and deepening the Gospel among those already committed to it.

54. Even with a growing convergence in terminology, evangelism/evangelization assumes different forms within our two communions. The Baptist stress on conversion as an act of personal faith and acceptance of Jesus as Lord and Savior gives precedence to leading people to an explicit confession of faith through proclamation of the Gospel. Roman Catholics stress that by baptism a person is made new in Christ in the church and stress the establishment of a Christian community through proclamation of the word and through a ministry of presence and service.

55. Within these different emphases, however, there are strong similarities. Both communions stress the need for unbelievers and the unchurched to hear and live the message of salvation expressed in the Scriptures, and both strive to fulfill Jesus’ command to love the neighbor by engaging in works of mercy and charity both at home and in “mission” countries.

#### B) *The place of Mary in faith and practice*

56. Devotion to Mary has traditionally been an area of great difference between Roman Catholics and Baptists. It also emerged in our discussions as a challenge to common witness. Baptists in general have two major problems with Marian devotion: (1) It seems to compromise the sole mediatorship of Jesus as Lord and Savior, and (2) Marian doctrines such as the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption which are proclaimed by Catholics as infallible and hence to be believed in faith seem to have little explicit grounding in the Bible. According to Roman Catholics, devotion to Mary does not compromise the unique role of Christ, is rooted in her intimate relationship to Jesus, reflects her continuing role in salvation history and has a solid basis in the New Testament.

57. Because of the long history of misunderstanding and the theological difficulties and subtleties inherent in Marian doctrines, we do not expect consensus in the foreseeable future. In an area such as devotion to Mary, which evokes both strong emotions and strong convictions from both communions, the quest for mutual understanding and respect is put to the test. Roman Catholics must attempt to understand and sympathize with the serious problems Baptists have with Marian devotion and doctrine. Baptists must try to understand not only the biblical and the theological grounds of Marian doctrine and devotion, but its significance in popular piety and religious practice.

#### F) *Concrete ways to offer a common witness to the Gospel*

58. Conversations between Baptists and Roman Catholics will not lead in the near future to full communion between our two bodies. This fact, however, should not prevent the framing of concrete ways to witness together at the present time. It will be helpful to think of several different levels international, national, regional, and local — in which Catholics and Baptists could speak or act in concert. Such cooperation is already taking place in a variety of ways: translation of the Scriptures into indigenous languages, theological education, common concern and shared help in confronting famine and other natural disasters, health care for the underprivileged, advocacy of human rights and religious liberty, working for peace and justice, and strengthening of the family. Baptists and Catholics could enhance their common witness by speaking and acting together more in these and other areas. A whole row of issues vital to the survival of humankind lies before us. The prayer of Jesus, ‘that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, are in me and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me’ (*Jn* 17:2 1), has given a sense of urgency to our conversations. We testify that in all sessions during the past five years there has been a spirit of mutual respect and growing understanding. We have sought the guidance of the Lord of the church and give honor and glory to him for the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. We pray that God, who has begun this good work in us, may bring it to completion (cf. *Phil* 1:6).

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