

6.

Understanding the Church

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A ROMAN CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

As is the case with all the doctrines of our Christian faith, both Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics look to the inspired Word of God in the Bible to find the foundation for our understanding of the church. Each of us does this, however, fully realizing that we read the biblical record of divine revelation as members of different ecclesial traditions which often interpret our common scriptural source in diverse ways, especially regarding our ecclesiologies or theologies of the church. At the same time, starting with the Sacred Scriptures does emphasize the basic convictions about the church of Christ that we do share as well as those that still divide us into two separate ecclesial communions. Only after we have searched the Scriptures prayerfully and carefully together are we able to enter into further dialogue about those aspects of our understanding of the church on which our communions must reach consensus before we can belong to the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church of Christ the Savior of us all.

The New Testament uses many diverse images to describe the various aspects of the mystery of the church. These include the people of God, land to be cultivated, the field of God, the flock, edifice, the house of God, the family of God, the church of Jesus Christ, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit, and so forth. We will reflect upon three of these biblical images, “the people of God,” “the body of Christ,” and “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (see *The Church's Confession of*

Faith, pp. 211–254). Each one has something distinctive to contribute to our theological understanding of the church as we interpret the Bible from a Roman Catholic perspective.

The Church as the People of God—The biblical image of the church as the people of God is central to the teaching of Vatican II on the mystery of the church (see chapter 2 of “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church” in *The Documents of Vatican II*). It has been particularly helpful in reforming Roman Catholics from an understanding of the church that was highly individualistic and excessively institutional. This biblical image emphasizes the fact that salvation is not intended for the individual in isolation but for a community in which each member participates and is co-responsible for the good of all. Like any people or family, the church is given to her individual members from the beginning, and the community is not the result of a coalition of believers who come together to form a community that had not already been given to us by God in the Pentecostal Spirit of our risen Lord. The people of God embrace everyone from the Pope to the newly baptized, thus underlining the truth that the church’s hierarchical structure and its various offices exist not for their own sake but as a means to beget and nourish the community of faith. The church’s institutional aspect, therefore, while essential and important, is not that which is most significant about her mysterious nature as God’s new creation in Christ.

The people of God is not an ordinary people, linked by common ancestry and so on, but the people chosen by God from all the peoples and with whom he has struck a covenant. According to this biblical image, whether it refers to the church coming to be under the Old Covenant, or already established in the New Covenant, she is one universal people derived from all peoples, races, and classes. A person is not born into the church but reborn and incorporated into her through faith and the sacrament of baptism. The church is not a civil-political assembly convened to consult and determine common concerns, but called together by God to hear what God has decided, has spoken, and has accomplished, in order to praise him for his saving desires and deeds on behalf of his people.

God's fundamental promise to his people in the Old Testament is: "I will be your God and you will be my people." This promise connects the church of Christ with Israel. Without this connection in which the church is prepared and prefigured (see "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," 9), it is not possible to understand the church. At the same time, there is a radically new reality about God's people of the New Covenant, who also include the Gentiles who were not originally the people of God. In the church of Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:11–22), God's promise to Abraham that all peoples would be blessed in him has reached fulfillment (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; Gal. 3:8).

Because the church is not tied down to one particular form of culture or system, because she embraces the whole of humanity, she can be the sign and efficacious instrument of bringing about the true unity of every people ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," 1). Of her very nature, she is a pilgrim people of God, on the march towards her heavenly home where she will no longer be needed as the means of salvation. Until the second coming of Christ, although she witnesses to much that is permanent and definitive, the church is not the goal but the God-given means to reach the heavenly church.

The Church as the Body of Christ—St. Paul was inspired to take up a popular comparison of antiquity between the human organism and the human community and apply it to the church. The church is one body with many distinct members who all need one another and who must cooperate together for the good of the whole (Rom 12:4–9). They all suffer and rejoice together (I Cor. 12:26), but the poor, the weak, and the persecuted members stand in special need of the church's solidarity ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," 8). St. Paul, however, did correct this familiar image by comparing not only the body and the church, but also the body and Christ (I Cor. 12:12). The church does not arise from the cooperation of her members, but entirely from Jesus Christ, who alone can make us members of his body the church (Eph. 1:22–23; 4:15–16; Col. 1:18; 2:19).

The church, therefore, is not only compared with a body, but is even identified with Jesus Christ in his body. This, of course, does not mean that Jesus Christ and the church are identical but

that they belong inseparably together and that the church's participation in Christ is threefold: she is called to build up Christ's body (herself) by sharing in his prophetic office through the proclamation of the word of God, by sharing in his high-priestly office by celebrating the sacraments (especially baptism and Eucharist), and by sharing in his kingly office through her pastoral ministries. Vatican II compares the mystery of the church with that of the Incarnation: "the Church is compared, not without significance, to the mystery of the incarnate Word. As the assumed nature, inseparably linked to him, serves the divine Word as a living organ of salvation, so, in a somewhat similar way, does the social structure of the Church serve the Spirit of Christ who vivifies it, in the building up of the body" ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," 8). The church then is the place filled with Christ and his Pentecostal Spirit, and through her he will fill all (Eph. 1:23).

The Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit—According to this biblical image, the church is not primarily a building of lifeless stones, but a "spiritual building of living stones," the cornerstone of which is Jesus Christ (I Pet. 2:4–5). "Temple" in the scriptures signifies the effective presence of God or Jesus Christ in the midst of his people (Mt. 18:20), and this presence comes about through the Holy Spirit (Jer. 31:31–33; Ezek. 11:19–20; 36:26–27), and also the one Spirit creates the church as the one body in Christ (I Cor. 12:13–14; 3:16–17; cf. II Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21).

This particular biblical image of the church seems to bring together the two aspects of the mystery of the church that the Roman Catholic tradition has always considered essential: her external visible structure (temple), and her interior invisible reality (the Holy Spirit and his gifts). Therefore the Holy Spirit may be likened to the "soul" in the mystical body of Christ or the principle of the life of grace within the church ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," 7). Both elements are indispensable to the pilgrim church; the church could not be a "sign" for human beings if she were not externally visible in the world, nor an "instrument" of effecting true unity in Christ if she were she not animated by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit preserves the church

in the truth (John 14:26; 16:13–14; “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation,” 7–9, in *The Documents of Vatican II*), inspires her to carry out missions (“Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity,” 4, in *The Documents of Vatican II*), and makes her holy in her members (“Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” 39–40). The Holy Spirit is especially the principle of church unity amidst her rich diversity of spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12:4–31a; Eph. 4:3; “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” 12; “Decree on Ecumenism,” 2, in *The Documents of Vatican II*). So she must pray to the Holy Spirit over and over that he will bestow upon her these gifts. It is especially important that such gifts are seen to be communicated both through charisms and offices in the church so that there might be avoided the undue conflicts between the established official structures of the church and the charismatic claims of groups and individuals such as erupted in Corinth (see I Cor. 12). When such conflicts do arise, however, are there any marks manifesting the true character of the church of Christ?

Unity, Holiness, Catholicity, and Apostolicity of the Church—The Nicene Creed confesses faith in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. These have been traditionally called the marks of the church of Christ. We will examine each one briefly in order to understand more clearly and in greater depth the developments that have taken place in the tradition of the Roman Catholic understanding of the church.

In Christ’s priestly prayer for unity (John 17:21–23) and in the Letter to the Ephesians (4:2–6), we find the New Testament foundation for our faith that the unity of the church is already a gift in Christ as a fruit of the Holy Spirit. In accord with the will of the triune God, there is one single church (uniqueness) and she is one in herself (unity). Vatican II teaches that there is a three-fold bond of unity: 1) of the confession of faith; 2) of the sacraments; and, 3) of church leadership and community (“Dogmatic Constitution on the the Church,” 14). This threefold unity does not mean uniformity; instead, it embraces a rich diversity of formulations of the single faith, of liturgical celebrations, and of ecclesiastical polities; the one church exists where the essential truths of revelation, the necessary means of salvation, and the

indispensable ministries are preserved. While this unity of the church is truly a grace, a gift of the Holy Spirit, it is also a task, especially for those of us who are participants in the ecumenical movement prayerfully seeking through dialogue to come together into the one church willed by Christ.

The holiness of the church, according to the Sacred Scriptures, consists first of the objective holiness of being singled out from the secular order and belonging in a special consecrated way to God (John 17:11, 14–15; Matt. 16:18; Matt. 28:20). From this a subjective holiness, an ethical perfection, must follow (Rom. 6:6–14, 8:2–17). All Christians, lay as well as clerical and religious, are called to this holiness. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit and not the product or achievement of our merely human efforts. At the same time, it does demand our free acceptance of the divine gifts and our continual cooperation with grace, especially in our fulfillment of the great commandment to love God above all and to love our neighbor as ourself (Mark 12:30–31; John 13:34; 15:12; I Cor. 13). Unlike her head, Jesus Christ, however, the church upon earth is not a sinless body. She is called to follow constantly the path of penance, reform, and renewal; she is always in need of further purification among her members, but is also always endowed by her head with the means of sanctification.

The word “catholic” does not appear in the New Testament; St. Ignatius used it for the first time in reference to the church about 110 A.D. (*Letter to the Smyrnians*, 8, 2). Applied to the church, catholicity means that the whole, worldwide, universal church will announce the faith in its integrity truly and authentically. Every truth of revelation and every means of salvation may be found in her. Concretely the church embodies her catholicity in three ways: 1) by preaching the gospel to all creatures (Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:15–20; “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” 13); 2) by being a local church in a particular historical place as well as a worldwide, universal church; and, 3) by providing in every local church as well as in the universal church the fullness of the means of salvation. By her mark of catholicity the church is shown to be not a static monolith but a dynamic organism of rich diversity with a profound unity of faith, worship, and ministry. As is the case with unity and holiness, this quality

is a task as well as a gift, especially the ecumenical task of giving the one church of Christ a fully realized catholicity as well as the missionary task of evangelization.

The fourth and final mark of the church, apostolicity, touches upon thorny problems in the ecumenical dialogue, particularly between Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics. The Roman Catholic belief is that the church must preserve her identity with the foundation laid by Jesus Christ on the apostles, precisely on the witness of the twelve and of St. Paul. But how can their testimony be present in the church until the second coming of Christ? The New Testament clearly records that even in their lifetime the apostles commissioned men to complete and carry on their mission after their deaths (see Acts 2:18–32 for St. Paul's farewell address in Miletus before the presbyters of the congregation of Ephesus). The Pastoral Letters (I and II Timothy and Titus) describe this handing on of the apostolic mission. Timothy and Titus were to lay hands upon men and so place them in the apostolic ministry (I Tim. 4:14; II Tim. 1:6, 2:2; Titus 1:5). The transition from the apostolic to the post-apostolic period of the church is already apparent, therefore, in the New Testament record itself.

With Clement of Rome (about 95 A.D.) and Ignatius of Antioch (about 110 A.D.), the understanding of an apostolic succession is already alive in the tradition to be further developed by Irenaeus of Lyons (about 180 A.D.) and Tertullian (about 200 A.D.). Vatican II summarizes the teaching of Scripture and tradition: "the bishops have by divine institution taken the place of the apostles as pastors of the Church" ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," 20). Of course, this does not mean that the bishops of the church are new apostles in the same sense as Paul and the twelve. The office and witness of the apostles themselves are unique in salvation history; but some particular apostolic functions must continue in the church, and the bishops are primarily responsible for preserving in the tradition the apostolic faith that has entered into Sacred Scripture.

Ministries and Offices of the Church—All of the baptized share in the one priesthood of Jesus Christ. This common or universal priesthood of all the faithful bestows upon each Chris-

tian not only a participation in the priestly office and mission of Christ, but also in his prophetic and kingly offices so that all are called to contribute to the church's growth in holiness ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," 30–38; "Decree of the Apostolate on the Laity," 1–8, in *The Documents of Vatican II*). Vatican II particularly stressed the importance of the role of the laity or non-ordained in the church of Christ during our time, especially through their Christian witness in the world or secular sphere ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," 31; "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," 43) as well as their co-responsibility within the church's hierarchical structure such as serving on parish councils, and so on.

Traditionally there has been a threefold ordained ministry in the church—that of bishops, of priests or presbyters, and of deacons ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," 28). As we have discussed regarding the church's mark of apostolicity, it is the ministry of bishops to succeed the apostles as pastors of the church ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," 20). Priests or presbyters share in the episcopal ministry and office by preaching the word and administering the sacraments, especially in celebrating the Eucharistic liturgy and other forms of pastoral ministry ("Document on the Ministry and Life of Priests," 4–6, in *The Documents of Vatican II*). The deacons serve by preaching, assisting at the liturgy, and charitable activity ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," 29). Although there is a distinction in kind and not only in degree between the common priesthood of all the faithful and the ordained or ministerial priesthood ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," 10), priesthood is designed to relate the laity and clergy more harmoniously in their respective roles in the one mission of the whole church.

In the church there is a collegiality of office so that every priest has his office within the presbyterate of a diocese under the leadership of a bishop ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," 28); and each individual bishop has his office within the college of bishops in communion with and under the Roman Pontiff, the successor of St. Peter ("Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," 22–23). Institutionally this common responsibility and fraternal collaboration is exercised in the priests' senate of a diocese, in

the bishops' national and regional conferences, and in the synods of bishops that have been convened by the Bishop of Rome regularly since Vatican II.

Certainly a distinctive characteristic of the Roman Catholic understanding of the church is the Petrine office as a ministry of preserving and fostering ecclesial unity. The phrase, "Petrine office" recalls the biblical basis of the primacy and the infallibility of the papacy as a particularly important service of keeping the whole church faithful to Christ and the unique witness of the apostles. The writers of the gospels report that Peter was the first called and sent by Christ (Mark 1:16–20, and parallels). Peter is placed first in the listing of the apostles (Mark 3:16, and parallels). He was obviously a representative of and spokesman for the other disciples of the Lord, and he was commissioned to strengthen his brethren (Luke 22:32). He was the first witness of the resurrection (I Cor. 15:5; Luke 24:34). According to the first twelve chapters of Acts, he had the principal authority in the apostolic church and also at the apostolic council held in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1–35). The thrice-confirmed granting of pastoral office to Peter by the risen Lord (John 21:12–17) as well as the two letters of the New Testament under his name, show that the authority of Peter still had force after his death. The most significant of the Petrine passages is Peter's confession of faith in Christ at Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:18–19). While there are still some difficulties about the proper interpretation of this passage, yet it does clearly teach that Peter himself is the foundation of the church, and that he was given the authority to administer the church and to make binding doctrinal and disciplinary decisions for protecting the church's unity. Roman Catholic interpreters recognize that there have been considerable developments in the outward shape of the papal office and ministry over the centuries. But its essentials of serving the faithful by assuring them of what must be believed and done for salvation seems solidly grounded in the biblical references to the "Petrine office."

The Church as the Communion of Saints—The Roman Catholic understanding of church would not be complete if the pilgrim church were not described in dynamic relationship to the

heavenly church of the saints in glory and to the expectant church of those in purgatory. Briefly, the latter are understood as our brothers and sisters who, having died in the state of God's grace, are not yet ready to look God in the face (the beatific vision) because of slight sins or the temporal punishment due to forgiven sins. In his infinite mercy, God allows them to become completely purified in his holiness. Roman Catholic doctrine does not try to define purgatory in terms of a "torture chamber," but as the state of the pain of having to wait with deep desire and longing for the fullness of life with the triune God, the risen Lord, and all the saints in heaven. The communion of saints, long found in our Christian creeds, can mean both the sharing of holy things by Christians here on earth, and our union with the saints in heaven and with those in purgatory. Either meaning refers to our Roman Catholic belief that we benefit by the prayers of the members of the heavenly church whom we invoke for their intercession and whose example inspires us to follow Christ more faithfully. It truly is a communion in which the bond of love unites all three states of the one church of Christ, the heavenly, the pilgrim, and the expectant.

The Church as a Particular Church and a Worldwide Church— There is no doubt that Jesus Christ came to proclaim the good news of salvation for all and to establish the kingdom of God to which everyone is called to belong. Although the pilgrim church of Christ is not yet fully the kingdom of God, her witness, offices, and ministries must manifest the universality of this calling. And that is why it appears to be especially significant that the Southern Baptist/Roman Catholic dialogue on the true understanding of the church of Christ continue to strive prayerfully to resolve the dialectical tensions in the mystery of the church of Christ as a local church—one located in a particular historical place—and the worldwide, universal church which embraces every local church, including even those of the past in her living tradition as well as of the future in her preparation for the Parousia and her veneration of the saints in the heavenly church. The church of Christ, therefore, is indeed a communion of communions and each local church is not merely a quantitative part of the whole, but one which is coextensive with it and tries to

express, especially in the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy, the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit to the whole church.

**JAMES LEO GARRETT, JR.:
A SOUTHERN BAPTIST PERSPECTIVE**

When Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists hear and speak the word “church,” they tend to hear and speak differently. For Roman Catholics the term immediately connotes a worldwide institution expressive of the intention of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and encompassing peoples of various ethnic origins, languages, cultures, all of whom recognize the supreme pastoral and teaching authority of the Bishop of Rome. For Southern Baptists the term immediately connotes a local and particular congregation of baptized believers which is in fellowship with Jesus as Lord and which worships, teaches, ministers, and evangelizes in its own environs and elsewhere.

Neither Roman Catholics nor Southern Baptists, however, are limited to their own primary meaning of “church.” Roman Catholics speak of “local churches”—a term most often employed for “national churches,” or the total body of Roman Catholics within a given nation. But dioceses and parishes also possess ecclesial reality, and since Vatican II the Roman Catholic Church has recognized “the separated brethren” as an ecclesial reality in some sense. Southern Baptists, when they have been freed from their nineteenth-century Landmark heritage, have affirmed the reality of the universal church in the sense of the total company of the redeemed people of God in all ages (see “The Baptist Faith and Message,” 6). Their first writing theologian, John L. Dagg, taught in 1858 that the universal church was visible through the lives of its members but was not capable of being organized (*A Treatise on Church Order*, ch. 3). Southern Baptists have been reluctant, however, to attribute specific ecclesial reality to their associations, state conventions, and national conventions, or to the Baptist World Alliance. Southern Baptists who understand their heritage still wince when a newspaper reporter or television commentator refers to the “Southern Baptist Church” instead of the “Southern Baptist Convention.” One reason Baptists prefer

to reserve the word “church” for local congregations rather than larger bodies is that in the New Testament the Greek word for church, *ekklesia*, usually refers to a local congregation; H. E. Dana, in *A Manual of Ecclesiology*, p. 32, said that at least 85 out of the 114 occurrences of *ekklesia* in the New Testament refer to a particular congregation or group of congregations. Another reason for the Baptist reluctance to attribute ecclesial reality to any bodies other than local congregations, is the fear that the general bodies—associations and conventions, which were brought into being by local churches—will usurp the rightful prerogatives of the local or particular churches. Nevertheless, the growth of the Baptist movement, so that it now has adherents in more than one hundred nations, and the intensive commitment of Southern Baptists to “foreign missions,” have created a new sense of “catholicity” or universality among Baptists.

The Roman Catholic commitment to catholicity and the Southern Baptist commitment to particularity during the latter twentieth century are the result of centuries of reflection upon and practice of “church.” Roman Catholics think in terms of twenty centuries of Christian history, of continuity with the past, of twenty-one ecumenical councils from Nicaea I to Vatican II, and of succession in the papacy. The doctrine of the church has been built upon the writings of the church fathers and of the medieval schoolmen and upon council documents, papal encyclicals, and the reflections of Catholic theologians. Since Vatican II greater emphasis has been placed upon biblical teachings concerning the church. From the patristic age to the modern, the marks of the true church (unity, holiness, catholicity, apostolicity) have had a significant place in the Catholic understanding of the church. The long tradition of the centuries weighs heavily upon Catholic attitudes toward contemporary issues related to the nature, ministry, and worship of the church, whether it be the possibility of women in the priesthood or to changes in the liturgy (note Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre’s recent schism). Even so, a fair and equitable assessment of the effects of Vatican II demands recognition that renewal and change have also characterized the Roman Catholic Church in our time.

Southern Baptists trace no specific Baptist presence prior to the opening decade of the seventeenth century. Baptists are heirs of the Protestant Reformation in its English phase, and their scholars still are debating to what extent the Continental Anabaptists as well as Luther and Calvin may have shaped the earliest English Baptists. Baptist roots were in English Separatism, itself an offshoot of English Puritanism. Baptist distinctiveness is a church-related issue, namely, the validity of believer's baptism and its impact upon the constituting of churches. The earliest Baptists were "come-outers" who at the same time affirmed a spiritual unity of all believers in Jesus Christ. They sounded a call to universal religious freedom and then drew alongside other bodies of English Nonconformists in a common quest for actual religious liberty. Somewhat later, Baptists in colonial America struggled for religious freedom. The impact of the First and Second Great Awakenings caused Baptists in this country to strive for a converted as well as baptized membership. As in England, Baptists in America formed general bodies for fellowship and mutual help and later for the conduct and support of missionary work. Southern Baptists have today the most elaborate denominational structure of any convention or union of Baptists throughout the world, but even so there is a strong attachment to and emphasis upon the local congregation (or local church), and major efforts are being made by Southern Baptists to plant new congregations in the United States as well as in other nations. For Southern Baptists reform, renewal, and revival have normally weighed more heavily than the continuity of Christian tradition.

But if Roman Catholic-Southern Baptist differences in thinking about the church have resulted from centuries-long developments of different kinds, one may ask whether there may be greater agreement on how they interpret New Testament teachings concerning the church. An answer to that question would seem to be a qualified "yes." Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists are much closer to each other when interpreting the New Testament materials about the church than in dealing with post-biblical concepts and patterns of church order (polity). But even so, there are continuing differences. In relating the ministry of

Jesus to the origin of the church there is much agreement. Southern Baptists understand that Jesus gathered or called forth what R. Newton Flew, a Methodist, called “a new religious community” with an “unparalleled consciousness of inheriting the divine promises made to Israel of old” (*Jesus and His Church*, pp. 18–19). Few Southern Baptists would question the “three stages in the formation of the Church” (public ministry, death of Jesus, Day of Pentecost) set forth by the Benedictine theologian, Aelred Graham (George D. Smith, ed., *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, p. 694), but perhaps they would ask whether more has to be said by Roman Catholics about Caesarea Philippi. Neither Catholics nor Baptists are prone to play down or deny that the church flows from the intention of Jesus. Both are aware that the word *ekklesia* appears only three times in the Gospels (Matthew 16:18; 18:17 twice) and that Jesus did refer to “little flock” (Luke 12:32) and to “one flock” (John 10:16).

Although in the past there probably have been significant differences concerning the relation of the Holy Spirit to the church (or churches), today Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics find increasing agreement in this area, especially when dealing with biblical materials. Hendrikus Berkhof, a Reformed theologian in the Netherlands, wrote in 1964:

In Roman Catholic theology, the Spirit is mainly the soul and sustainer of the church. In Protestant theology he is mainly the awakener of individual spiritual life in justification and sanctification. So the Spirit is either institutionalized or individualized. . . . The Spirit in this way is the builder of the church and the edifier of the faithful, but not the great mover and driving power on the way from the One to the many, from Christ to the world (*The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, p. 33).

Today Southern Baptists are emphasizing more the agency of the Spirit in the mission of the church, and Roman Catholics, partly at least under the impact of the charismatic movement among their own members, are emphasizing more the role of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit among members of the church. It is noteworthy that whereas Roman Catholic authors of books on

spiritual gifts which were written just prior to Vatican Council II built upon the treatment by Thomas Aquinas, the authors of books on spiritual gifts that have been written since that council take New Testament texts as their beginning point. Both Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics can see in the phrase “fellowship (or communion) of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1) that *koinonia* which the Holy Spirit has brought into existence. This means, of course, a Trinitarian base for the doctrine of the church.

The major images or metaphors for the church in the New Testament constitute another area of near agreement between Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists. The well-known Catholic theologian, Hans Kung, treated three images as major images; they are the people of God, the creation of the Spirit, and the body of Christ (*The Church*, pp. 107–260). Dale Moody, a Southern Baptist theologian, treated six images as major; they are the people of God, the temple of God, the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, the fellowship of the Spirit, and the ministry of the Spirit (*The Word of Truth*, pp. 442–48). One must search assiduously to find any substantive differences between these treatments of the New Testament terms. Nor does one find any notable variation in the interpretation of such images as salt of the earth (Matt. 5:13), light of the world (Matt. 5:14), branches of the vine (John 15:1–7), disciples, or friends (John 15:15). But it should be clearly acknowledged that the Roman Catholic tradition has normally placed a greater stress on the image of the church as the “body of Christ” than upon most other images and than have Baptists (see E. Mersch, *The Theology of the Mystical Body*).

Among the so-called models of the church, which recent theologians have discussed and for which they have claimed biblical bases, one again finds a high level of agreement. Avery Dulles, a Jesuit theologian, identified five models; they are the church as institution, as mystical communion, as sacrament, as herald, as servant (*Models of the Church*, chs. 2–6). Harold S. Songer, a Southern Baptist New Testament scholar, delineated four models; they are institution, redeemed community or fellowship, gospel herald, and suffering servant (“The Doctrine of the Church and

Support of Missions” in Morris Ashcraft, ed., *Mission Unlimited*, pp. 299–304). Only on the model of the church as sacrament does there appear to be a genuine difference.

Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists recognize the same basic functions of the church: worship, teaching, fellowship, service, and evangelization. Admittedly Roman Catholics tend to make worship more central than evangelization, and Southern Baptists tend to make proclamation or evangelization more central than worship.

What, then, are the essential, basic differences that persist when Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists ponder and utilize the same New Testament materials for their understanding of the church? One is the Petrine office, the Roman Catholic dogma that Jesus established Peter as the authoritative head of the apostolic band and caused him to transfer his headship to his successor as Bishop of Rome so that the Popes retain this Petrine headship over other bishops, a headship which enables them to exercise the supreme pastoral and teaching authority in the church. Roman Catholic exegetes and theologians find this teaching in Matthew 16:13–20, especially verse 18, and interpret the rock as Simon Peter himself. On the other hand, Southern Baptists deny that any Petrine headship or primacy was taught by Jesus or practiced in the apostolic age. The “rock” of Matthew 16:18 they believe to be either the faith of Peter in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God or the Petrine kind of faith. James’s leadership role in the church at Jerusalem and Paul’s leadership of the mission to the Gentiles seem to Baptists to contradict Petrine primacy.

Another continuing difference in understanding the church lies in the relation of the baptism of believers to the valid constituting of Christian congregations. Southern Baptists, and almost all other Baptists, hold that essential to the rightful constituting of particular congregations is the reception of all members via their immersion, past or present, as repentant and professing believers in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Baptists find especially in the Acts of the Apostles the sequence of the preaching of the gospel, the hearing of the gospel, the profession of faith in Jesus, and the baptism of those who profess. The Baptist doctrine re-

jects the recognition of infant baptism as valid Christian baptism and also the possibility of infants having faith. The mode of immersion is said to be essential for the depiction of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, and also essential for the believer's identification with Jesus. Baptists recognize as valid the Christian faith of those who have believed upon Jesus after having received baptism as infants, but they deny the validity of infant baptism and its appropriateness in a properly constituted church. On the other hand, Roman Catholics deny the Baptist claim that the immersion of professing believers is the only valid baptism. Catholics teach that both infant baptism and the baptism of post-puberty persons are valid and that modes of baptism other than immersion are permissible. Episcopal succession from the apostles and the primacy of Peter and of his successors are constitutive of the true church, and baptism does not serve that same purpose.

Differences concerning the church? Yes. But there are significant and increasing agreements.