

# 9.

## Intermarriage

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Nowhere is the breach between Baptists and Roman Catholics felt more keenly than in intermarriage. Scholars may dialogue at length and come away with both new respect for the other's faith and deepened commitment to their own. Pastors are trained in human relations that enable them to deal constructively with people holding clashing opinions. Denominational leaders may submerge deep-seated differences for a time to promote ecumenical programs of justice and charity in society. On the other hand, two young people who contemplate intermarriage are vulnerable to forces they may barely recognize. They have inherited many centuries of bitter conflict without realizing the heavy cultural baggage each brings to their proposed union. They know that their churches warn of the pitfalls of intermarriage. They feel the pain of parental discouragement. In their idealism, however, they insist on following love and not logic. Unfortunately, they must live with differences not of their own choosing.

Every true marital union is a uniting of more than two human beings into one flesh. It is a merging of two extended families, and this sometimes results in a blending of diverse cultural and traditional heritages. In spite of all the progress that has been made in ecumenical relationships in the past two decades, it is here that the inadequacies are revealed. For at the grassroots our peoples have barely been touched by the pronouncements of councils and dialogues. The young people themselves may be fully committed to the ecumenical ideal only to find that parents

and grandparents continue to express age-old prejudices and oppositions.

Strictly speaking, we should use "interfaith marriage" only for those unions of members of the major world faiths: Christian, Jewish, Moslem, and so on. Pope Paul VI, in his apostolic letter of 1970, called marriages within various Christian traditions "*Matrimonia Mixta*." An orientation booklet published in 1987 by the National Association of Ecumenical Officers (NADEO), a Roman Catholic organization, speaks of "Ecumenical Marriage," following the lead of The Association of Interchurch Families (AIF) in England. For Catholic-Protestant marriages, many still use the term "interfaith marriage"; this is done, for example, in a widely distributed pamphlet by the Interfaith Witness Department of the Home Mission Board and by the Diocese of Cleveland in 1985.

In this paper we do not attempt to be exhaustive, for the material is quite extensive (see the bibliography in Dean R. Hoge and Kathleen M. Ferry, "Empirical Research on Interfaith Marriage in America," Publications Office, United States Catholic Conference, Washington, D.C., 1981). We will reflect chiefly upon issues that were raised in the discussions of the Baptist-Catholic scholars dialogues. Robert Dalton, at the meeting of the Dialogue in Burlingame, California, October, 1987, presented "Some Aspects of Marriage from a Catholic Perspective." It was followed by lively discussion of issues that will be noted below. On another occasion the group agreed that the nature of our dialogue, made up largely of theologians, caused us to focus on theological issues and leave pastoral problems to those who work primarily with the laity. We will try to set the context and indicate something of the concerns for ministering to young people and their families in intermarriage.

Hard statistics are difficult to come by, but trends are easy to establish. The Institute of Pastoral and Social Ministry of Notre Dame University issued a "Study of Catholic Parish Life (1981-88)." With reference to intermarriage of Catholics it found that 17% of Roman Catholics in the nation are married to other Christians. Of those 50 years of age and over the percentage was 14%.

It increased steadily until doubling (28%) for those in their twenties. In addition to this documentation, Hoge and Ferry estimate that fully one-third of all such mixed marriages do not appear on parish records (p. 4).

It is easy to understand that intermarriage for Catholics increases greatly in areas where the Catholic Church is in the minority of population. There has been a decline of Catholic youth enrolled in parochial education to less than one-third of the total Catholic youth today. This figure is even less for students in secondary schools. This greatly increases the opportunities for interfaith relations in public (and other private) schools.

Increasing cross-culturation in the United States as a result of a more mobile society contributes to the growing incidence of intermarriage. Since Vatican II the Catholic Church in America has taken a more open stance toward other Christians, who also have been influenced by the ecumenical pronouncements of their churches. Added to this have been the various forms of youth movements since the sixties with much evidence of reaction against authority, both of the church and the home.

The Jewish sociologist, Albert I. Gordon, seeks to classify youth who enter into mixed marriages into four types:

1. The emancipated, those whose religious and cultural ties are weak and who are attracted by their mutual pursuit of freedom of choice and of a new humanism.
2. The rebellious, those who are expressing their independence of parental control and their reaction to a strict and often legalistic religious rearing.
3. The reluctant, those with real ties to their religion and culture and many misgivings about their prospects, who nevertheless are drawn by a love for each other they cannot reason away. They simply hope for the best and fear the worst. They often compromise by choosing a third religion they can both accept.
4. The nuclear, those with complete commitment to their respective faiths. These may go either way. Their long-range intention may be to proselytize. Some, more purely motivated, may work out a way of life that respects and supports the faith of the other. Either way, the religious education of the children is

more critical here than in any of the first three (Albert I. Gordon, *Intermarriage*, (Boston, Beacon Press, 1964), pp. 66–67).

Hoge and Ferry, as a result of their studies, make the following observations among others: for every marriage that remains mixed one other will have a spouse that converts to the religion of the other. Where formerly most converts were from the Protestant spouse, the trend now has about evened out. Usually the religious life of the wife is the stronger influence, but the strength of devoutness of the spouse is largely determinative. The researchers point to “lack of companionship and disagreement over children’s religious upbringing” as the main, continuing problems in intermarriage (pp. 1–2).

## ISSUES IN INTERFAITH MARRIAGE

1. Marriage as a sacrament or as a civil contract with religious blessing. There is basic agreement between Catholics and Baptists with regard to the biblical teaching of the sacredness of marriage. Both would agree with the statement by the Interfaith Commission on Marriage and Family Life in 1966:

We believe and unite in affirming that God the Creator of the Universe and the Father of all mankind did create us male and female and did establish families as part of His divine plan. Because of our understanding of this plan, we believe and unite in affirming that our sexuality is a wondrous gift from God to be accepted with thanksgiving and used within marriage with reverence and joy.

We believe and unite in affirming that our understanding of God’s plan for marriage ideally calls for life-long commitment in fidelity to a continuing supportive relationship in which each partner helps the other to develop to fullest capacity. We are united in our belief that God is an active partner in sustaining and enriching the husband-wife relationship in marriage. (Quoted in James T. McHugh, *Mixed Marriages: New Directions*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Catholic Conference, 1971, pp. 11–12).

Roman Catholic teaching holds that matrimony is one of the seven sacraments established by Jesus Christ for the permanent use of the church. As such, it is an external sign which confers grace upon the recipients. It is precisely because marriage is considered a sacrament of the church that the church insists upon a religious ritual for the marriage. As a sacrament of the church, marriage is celebrated within a liturgical setting, often including a eucharistic celebration. Normally the marriage ceremony of Catholics is to take place in the presence of a priest or deacon and two official witnesses, although permission can be obtained to celebrate the wedding in a different setting.

Marriage is the only sacrament which is not administered ordinarily by a priest or bishop. Each partner, when he or she makes the marriage vow, administers the sacrament to the other. The priest is there as a witness of the church.

There are factors in the Roman Catholic concept of marriage beyond that of its sacramentality. In recent years there has been a renewed recognition of the universal call of the laity to a life of service and holiness. This wider renewal movement within Catholicism has brought a fresh awareness of marriage as a vocation, or call from God, to a unique form of holiness. Marriage is no longer considered secondary to the vocation to celibate commitment in religious life. Marriage is a call to the couple to be channels of Christ's redeeming love to one another. Increasingly, marriage is seen as an equally demanding call to holiness involving a spiritual life of sacrificial, faith-filled and fruitful love.

There has been a shift in recent years from seeing marriage in the legal terms of a contract to the more biblical concept of a covenant. The bond of marriage is permanent and indissoluble precisely because the bond between Christ and the church is a permanent and indissoluble covenant of love (see Ephesians 5). This shift from contract to covenant terminology signals a new point of departure for Catholic discussion of marriage. The language now is not predominately canonical and legalistic, but is more biblical and theological and is responsive to human experience.

Every marriage between baptized persons, even those who are not Catholic, is considered a valid marriage, since the Catholic

Church holds that the natural and civil contracts are inseparable from the sacrament,

so that two baptized persons cannot marry each other validly without receiving the sacrament of marriage. It makes no difference whether those persons are Catholics or non-Catholics, whether or not they realize that Matrimony is a sacrament—in any case, a valid marriage between them is a sacramental marriage . . . in reality the Church teaches that every marriage of two baptized non-Catholics free from matrimonial impediments is just as truly a sacrament as the marriage of two Catholics celebrated before a priest (*Mixed Marriages*, p. 175).

On the other hand, Baptists do not regard marriage as a sacrament. They do not accept the classic definition of a sacrament as “an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace.” They hold that grace is primarily that character of God which prompts him to deal mercifully and in forgiveness with undeserving people. Therefore, it is not something that can be bestowed by any ritual act.

Since God instituted marriage from the beginning of the human race, Baptists hold that it belongs to the order of natural law rather than to ecclesial control. As the basic institution of society, the state rightfully exercises some control over marriage. Civil marriage is the basic contract, but religious ceremonies are to be encouraged. The act of pledging themselves to each other in a religious ceremony dignifies and deepens the couple’s act of sanctifying themselves to each other. The minister, however, acts as an agent of the state and not the church when he performs the ceremony. Ordinarily a Baptist pastor has no church or denominational rules he or she must follow in making decisions about weddings or in performing them.

More and more, Baptists are holding that marriage is a sacred covenant, a moment of grace, but not a means of grace. They would agree with Catholic teaching that marriage is for procreation, for human fulfillment, and for safeguard of moral life, but they would not make procreation primary. The notion of the

family as the "domestic church" would seem to have the same practical implications in both Catholic and Baptist Christian life.

2. The issue of premarital pledges. Since 1970 in America pledges have not been required of the non-Catholic spouse. He or she must be informed of the pledge of the Catholic party made orally or in writing in the presence of a priest or deacon. The usual form is: "I reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ and with God's help, intend to do all in my power to share the faith I have received with our children by having them baptized and reared as Catholics." In addition the non-Catholic is asked to give evidence of his Christian baptism.

3. This involves the further problem of the religious education of the children. Baptists believe that both marriage partners should be on an equal basis in this regard and that children in an interchurch marriage should be free to choose their own religion. The Baptist ideal is to give primary emphasis to the child's personal discipleship to Jesus as Savior and Lord and only secondarily to his denominational affiliation. The Baptist Covenant is commonly used by churches in defining the mutual obligations of members to each other. This pledges them among other things "to religiously educate our children." This is thought to be fulfilled when the children are educated in discipleship to Jesus and urged to make their own personal commitment.

This is an area that calls for much more pastoral ministry to the couple, both during the premarital period and at the time of the birth of the child. Neither Catholics nor Baptists would approve of neglecting the religious education of children, and few would be strong enough to choose the so-called democratic way of participating equally in the education provided by both churches.

4. Certain moral decisions. The official teaching of the Catholic Church condemns all forms of artificial birth control. Although it is commonly known that many Catholic couples choose to disregard this teaching, it does not lessen the responsibility of working through this difficult problem to a decision of conscience which each individual is able to accept. There is no official Baptist position on birth control. Most Baptists prefer to

trust the enlightened conscience of the couple. They generally find that the papal arguments against artificial birth control are unconvincing.

Both Baptists and Catholics decry the increase in divorce, especially among Christian couples. The practice of annulment, however, is a problem; most Baptists do not comprehend the moral and spiritual reasonings by which a Catholic tribunal declares a marriage annulled. They would agree that every marriage ought to be entered into with the highest of ideals, intentions, and commitments, but they would not trust the judgment of others, even of an ecclesial body, to determine its validity. They would generally agree with the civil courts' definition of annulment, based upon cohabitation and sexual consummation.

There is increasing evidence of agreement among both Baptists and Catholics of the dangers of abortion, euthanasia, and genetic control. On abortion, Southern Baptist resolutions in recent annual conventions have tended more to the absolutist position of the Roman Catholic Church.

5. The issue of proselytism and witness. It was significant that in the same Burlingame dialogue in which Robert Dalton's paper was given, the next paper was entitled "Evangelization vs. Proselytism," led by Tom Stransky. For a long time Baptists who were coerced into accepting the marriage pledge felt that they were being proselytized in an unfair manner. On the other hand, Catholics have felt that the prejudice of Baptists that all Catholics are lost makes them fair game for witnessing. It is true that most sociological studies indicate that the majority of mixed marriages do involve the conversion of one spouse to the religion of the other.

Here is another moment in the marriage when great pastoral care needs to be exercised. The converting spouse needs to have honest and open counseling by both minister and priest to insure that, as far as humanly possible, the decision is well informed and authentic. There also the pastors can render a valuable ministry to the parents of both spouses. In any successful interfaith marriage, the wholehearted support and understanding of the families is essential.

## SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

There are no easy answers for either the couple or the ministers who are counseling them. Here are a few suggestions that successful couples have found helpful:

1. Each partner should remain active in his or her own church, while building a base of solid respect for the decisions of conscience of the other.
2. Classes and dialogue sessions together can provide learning opportunities about the other's faith. This builds respect for the other, and respect is better than mere toleration.
3. Practical Christian service in community affairs without regard to denominational sponsorship can strengthen bonds of unity.
4. Praying together, using classical traditional prayers from both denominations as well as spontaneous prayers, should be encouraged.
5. Let love and patience rule in relationships with in-laws.
6. Worship together whenever common worship is possible.

Obviously these suggestions cannot resolve all of the difficulties that arise from differences in the religious convictions of persons in interfaith marriages. Fortunately, faith in God is often effective where human efforts seem doomed. The "Decree on Ecumenism" has a statement which can be wholly affirmed by Baptists as well as Catholics:

[We] must joyfully acknowledge and esteem the truly Christian endowments from our common heritage . . . nor should we forget that whatever is wrought by the grace of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of [each of us] can contribute to our own edification. Whatever is truly Christian never conflicts with the genuine interest of the faith; indeed, it can always result in more ample realization of the very mystery of Christ and the Church ("Decree on Ecumenism," 4).

# 10.

## How We Agree/How We Differ

### THE SCHOLARS' DIALOGUE

#### INTRODUCTION

In our discussions over the past decade, we have come to realize that despite the different vocabularies we use in presenting and explaining our beliefs and despite very real differences which remain, we do share a basic understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ by the grace of God. We do not claim to speak either for all Southern Baptists or for all Roman Catholics, nor do we attempt to cover all aspects of our respective beliefs. We recognize that considerable diversity of thought exists within both communions. We reflect the discussions held over the past decade on issues which we felt are important for Christian witness today. We have seen how the gift of faith and the experience of God's grace have shaped our personal lives and the lives of people in our churches. Though we list below primarily doctrinal points of agreement and divergence, the most profound experience of unity occurred in those times when we told the stories of our journeys in faith and when we gathered to hear the word proclaimed and to offer our prayers to a loving God. We not only confessed but experienced "One Lord, one faith, and one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). Our hopes and prayers are that the gifts of mutual understanding and respect, along with love and friendship, which we received in a decade of dialogue may be shared by other Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics.

## ON SCRIPTURE

We Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists agree that the ultimate authority and object of faith is the triune God and that the primary source of our knowledge of God is in the revelation of God in Scripture. We concur that the self-disclosure of God in Scripture is to effect a redemptive relationship between God and creation (both humanity and nature). We both affirm that the Bible is the inspired Word of God authoritative for faith and practice, and that the Bible is to be at the center of public worship and of the spiritual life of individual believers.

We also value tradition and heritage as an interpretative and shaping source for understanding Scripture. Southern Baptists, while recognizing the implicit authority of tradition, affirm that all tradition must be tested against the explicit authority of Scripture, and hold to the right of individual interpretation of Scripture. Roman Catholics affirm the necessity of individual appropriation of Scripture but affirm that any interpretation of Scripture must be measured against the manner in which Scripture has been proclaimed and lived by the whole church in its tradition and teaching.

## ON SALVATION

Both Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics agree that salvation is God's free gift of grace, unmerited by any human works or righteousness, and that this salvation was accomplished for all through the life, teaching, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We also agree that the proclamation of the offer of salvation to all peoples is the prime mission of the church. Southern Baptists stress the experience of salvation when, in faith, a person accepts Jesus as his or her personal Savior. Catholics tend to emphasize the work of Christ and the way in which the effect of the redemption by Christ is made available to the faithful through faith and the sacraments in the church.

## ON SPIRITUALITY

The gift of salvation is expressed in Christian life. Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists describe this in different ways:

“spirituality,” “discipleship,” “spiritual growth,” “growth in holiness,” “sanctification,” “devotional life,” and “Christian witness.” We both set the highest priority on seeking a conscious relationship with God in this life and on striving for the ultimate goal of living in glory with God in heaven, and we affirm that our love for God is best achieved in a close relationship with Jesus, coupled with a Christ-like love of neighbor.

Catholic practice places great emphasis on communal participation in and celebration of the sacraments. While Southern Baptists stress the complete sufficiency of a direct and personal but non-sacramental relationship to God, their spirituality is also church-related with a stress on face-to-face fellowship in the local church.

The Bible has always been at the center of Southern Baptist life. Since the Second Vatican Council, Catholic spirituality has also become strongly biblical. The proclamation and exposition of the Scriptures are central to the Sunday liturgies, and the celebration of every sacrament is to be accompanied by reading from the Bible. Reading, prayer, and study of the Bible are central to both Roman Catholic and Southern Baptist practice.

Over the centuries devotion to Mary and the saints has been a source of division and misunderstanding between Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists. While Roman Catholics affirm with Baptists the sole mediatorship of Christ, they also honor the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God and affirm with the Second Vatican Council that she is “inseparably linked with her Son’s saving work” (“Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy,” 103, in *The Documents of Vatican II*). They invoke or pray to Mary and to the canonized saints as an aspect of their belief in the communion of the saints (heavenly, earthly, and in purgatory). Southern Baptists honor Mary as the mother of Jesus Christ and emphasize the communion of saints as primarily a present reality among Christians, but they do not address prayer to Mary or to deceased Christians lest such infringe the sole mediatorship of Jesus Christ.

Since Vatican II, devotion to Mary has undergone significant changes among Roman Catholics. Mary is described in more biblical terms as the model disciple whose life is one of devotion to Jesus and who stands at his cross. Mary is seen also as an

advocate of the poor and oppressed when she rejoices in a God who exalts the lowly and puts down the mighty from their thrones (Luke 1:46–55). Devotion to Mary and the saints is an area where significant differences between Baptists and Catholics remain, but where great progress has been made in mutual understanding and respect. Catholics have come to appreciate the sincere problems Southern Baptists have with Marian devotion, and Southern Baptists have come to feel the depth of devotion and affection for Mary among Roman Catholics.

Because of theological, historical, and cultural factors, Catholic and Southern Baptist experiences of communal worship differ significantly in tone and style. Catholic worship centers on the Sunday Eucharist and the liturgical seasons. Various devotional practices also play a part. The texture of Catholic experience is shaped as well by the use of statuary, art, and other religious symbols such as incense, holy water, oil, and liturgical vestments. Southern Baptist Sunday worship centers on preaching, choral singing, communal prayer, and the study of Scripture. Church architecture is usually characterized by simplicity; use of religious symbols is restrained. Both Southern Baptists and Catholics share a strong commitment to communal worship and to the importance of deep religious experience within the context of public worship.

Although our two communions differ significantly in their approaches to worship, there are significant convergences in fundamental attitudes. Both groups have a strong sense both of human sinfulness and of God's love even amid our sins and failings; both stress strong family life and sexual morality; both stress active engagement in church life.

## ON CHURCH AND MINISTRY

We both affirm that the church is at the heart of the New Testament and of Christian life. In the New Testament the church is a community of people bound to Jesus Christ and to one another with the bonds of faith and love, acceptance and commitment. One major image found there is that of the church as the people of God (Hebrews 4:9; 11:25; 1 Peter 2:10) which describes

an understanding of church in both our communities. As Jesus called disciples to follow him, so people today are divinely called to the church. We both affirm that the church must be obedient to the Word of God in Scripture and proclaim and witness to it in its daily life.

Most distinctive of Southern Baptist theology is the stress that “the visible church” is “a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel” (from The Philadelphia Confession of 1742). Both Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics affirm with the New Testament that the church is the body of Christ and includes the redeemed of all the ages. For Southern Baptists the primary meaning of church is the local congregation. Southern Baptists stress fellowship in this congregation as a manifestation of that faith which leads to baptism and joining the church.

Roman Catholic theology describes the church in several different ways, for example, as “people of God,” “the mystical body of Christ,” “the household of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19–22; see also the “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” 6, in *The Documents of Vatican II*), and a visible society or institution. Most fundamentally the church is a mystery comprising the union of God with men and women in community effected by the saving work of Christ, and the union of the members among themselves through baptism. Catholics affirm that just as Christ is at work in the celebration of the sacraments, he is also at work in the church, which is often called the fundamental sacrament of the divine-human encounter. For Catholics the local congregation, called a parish, is one community which, with others, makes up a diocese. Catholics use the phrase “local church” to refer to a diocese headed by a bishop in communion with all other bishops under the leadership of the Bishop of Rome.

Both Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics recognize the multiplicity of ministries that characterized the church of the New Testament. On the basis of the New Testament, both communions also recognize a clear distinction between ordained and non-ordained persons. In practice, the ministry of a Baptist pastor and a Roman Catholic pastor exhibit many similarities, al-

though they are not identical. For Roman Catholics, the primary functions of the priest/pastor, often assisted by permanent deacons, are preaching the Word of God, presiding at the celebration of the Eucharist and administering the other sacraments of the church, and pastoral care and administration. For Southern Baptists the preaching task of the pastor is central, especially the role of evangelist. No less important, however, is the day-by-day pastoral care of the congregation and the administration of the church as an organization.

While Southern Baptists recognize an important difference between ordained and non-ordained persons, they also emphasize the ministry of the laity. There is an increasing emphasis on the ministry of the laity in the Catholic Church, where there are emerging ministries of lay people acting as campus ministers and chaplains (in hospitals and other institutional settings such as prisons) and pastoral associates (assistants officially appointed for the direction of a parish). One becomes a pastor in a Southern Baptist church by virtue of an invitation or call by the congregation. Tenure is at the pleasure of the congregation. In Catholicism, a priest is ordained by a bishop and receives his assignment to a parish or other ministry from a bishop or other church authorities.

### ON GRACE

We Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists agree upon the normative role of the Holy Scriptures in coming to an understanding of grace. Even so, in both our traditions we acknowledge post-biblical influences affecting our language and doctrine respecting grace.

Among Roman Catholics there is a tendency to connect the grace of God with the goodness of creation as well as with salvation-history, whereas among Southern Baptists there is a tendency to understand grace primarily in relation to human salvation from and divine forgiveness of sin.

We stand in the heritage of the grace/favor of God which was manifest to the people of Israel, and we affirm together that the supreme manifestation of God's grace occurred in the birth, life,

teaching, healing, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

We agree on the universality of sin and on God's gracious provision through the atoning sacrifice of his Son for the remission/forgiveness of human sins. Whereas Southern Baptists tend to emphasize the individual and personal aspect of sin and grace and Roman Catholics tend to stress the ecclesial and social dimension, both groups struggle to maintain a balance between the two. Roman Catholics, unlike Southern Baptists, teach that the Virgin Mary was without sin through the grace of her son Jesus Christ.

For Roman Catholics the grace of God in Jesus Christ is normally mediated to human beings through the church and the sacraments. For Southern Baptists the grace of God in Jesus Christ is normally mediated through the experience of repentance, faith, regeneration, justification, forgiveness, and so on. Roman Catholics do not deny the personal reception of grace, and Southern Baptists do not deny that grace is normally received through Scripture, church, preaching, and witness.

Both Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists agree that the Christian baptism of believing persons testifies to the grace of God and that it is God's grace that leads one to faith and baptism. Roman Catholics believe that baptism, which is to be performed only once, is a sacrament and means of grace which unites the believer to the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. It may be administered in different ways (immersion, affusion, aspersion) to infants as well as to adult converts. The present "Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults" notes that the initiation of adult converts into the faith provides the norm for a Catholic understanding of baptism. Southern Baptists baptize only professed believers, by immersion only, and believe that baptism is a symbol of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection and also a testimony that God's grace has been received by the baptized.

Both Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists agree that the Eucharist or Lord's Supper is a memorial of Jesus' passion and death and an anticipation of his return for the gathering of the faithful into glory. Roman Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the sacrament wherein, by the words of institution and the power

of the Holy Spirit, the body and blood of Jesus Christ become really present under the form of bread and wine. Thus Jesus is uniquely present to the recipients and invites them to offer themselves in union with him. Southern Baptists believe that the Lord's Supper was ordained by Jesus as both obedient testimony to and proclamation of his death and an occasion of communion, following self-examination, with him and with fellow Christians.

Both Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists agree upon the obligation and significance of discipleship in the life of grace. With variant patterns of Christian obedience and of spirituality, they nevertheless can together emphasize the personal commitment essential to discipleship and explore the greater usefulness of the term "community of disciples" as an ecclesiological theme.

Both Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists believe in God's graciousness and base their hope for salvation upon it. Southern Baptists believe that once a sinner has received the grace of God through repentance and faith, there is normally certain assurance of this gift, and, therefore, they express their confidence in "being saved." They also believe that through the promises, faithfulness, and keeping power of God, and despite the doubts, temptations, and backslidings of genuine believers, the latter will certainly attain final salvation. Roman Catholics, while trusting in God's grace to help them to persevere, believe that it is still possible to fall from grace through serious sin and that only when God moves the sinner to repent is it possible for grace to be restored. They therefore tend to speak with less assurance about "being saved."

## ON MISSION AND MISSIONS

Both Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists speak of the mission of the church in the sense of the vocation of the church to witness to the saving love of God and to proclaim God's redemption in Jesus Christ in order that men and women may experience grace and salvation. We also use "mission" and "missions" in the sense of the fulfilling the command of Jesus

“to preach the gospel to all peoples” (Mark 13:10) and to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19).

Roman Catholics use the term “evangelization” for that dimension and activity of the church’s mission of proclamation which presses to offer every person the valid opportunity to be directly challenged by the explicit gospel of faith in Jesus Christ. Southern Baptists prefer the term “evangelism” for proclaiming the gospel and leading people to a decision of faith in Jesus. Among Christian denominations Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists have been notable especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for missionary activity among peoples who have not yet heard the gospel. Both Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics have combined explicit proclamation of the gospel with other works of charity such as health care and education.

Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists agree upon the ecclesial and Christian mandate to proclaim the gospel of God’s grace to all peoples and all nations, but Roman Catholics tend to be more confident than Southern Baptists in affirming that God’s saving grace may be efficacious apart from specific confession of the name of the incarnate, crucified, and risen Jesus. Catholics also speak of the “evangelization of culture” or of a “mission to social structures” and in some areas practice Christian presence rather than explicit proclamation.

In practice Southern Baptists have stressed the importance of doing missions through and under the direction of the denomination rather than through outside or parachurch missionary organizations. The intent of the missionary activity has been to establish independent indigenous churches in mission areas. Roman Catholics also stress the responsibility of the local diocese for both home and foreign mission, but they understand that no local church is completely independent but is always in communion with all other local churches, which have similar missionary responsibilities. For Roman Catholics, the whole church is in mission through all the local churches in mission.

Both Roman Catholics and Southern Baptists reject a distorted witness or proselytism which involves improper attitudes and behavior in the practice of Christian witness and does not respect the right of the human person, Christian or non-Christian, to be

free from external coercion in religious matters. We also recognize the tensions in attempting to be faithful witnesses of the gospel and in proclaiming the gospel to others. In predominantly Roman Catholic countries Southern Baptist missionaries and local Baptists have sometimes suffered legal and social discrimination. At times, Southern Baptist missionaries have labored among Roman Catholics without respecting their faith and beliefs. When competition and conflict emerge in missionary activity, our efforts to share the gospel which we proclaim and which sustains our lives can become a stumbling block to those who have not heard the gospel.

### ON ESCHATOLOGY

In Roman Catholic theology the term "eschatology" has traditionally referred to teaching about "the four last things," namely, death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Under the impact of recent biblical studies it has taken on the richer meaning of teaching about the destiny of human history and its relation to the kingdom proclaimed and enacted by Jesus.

Roman Catholics affirm that those individuals who die in a state of friendship and union with God (the state of grace) will be happy with God for all eternity. Catholic theology strongly affirms the existence of hell and that an individual who freely rejects God's offer of love and grace and chooses to live in conscious enmity to God and hatred of the neighbor can lose eternal salvation. While Catholics await the second coming of Jesus and the general judgment, they affirm the judgment of the individual soul after death. Purgatory, or the stage of purification from the effects of earthly sinfulness prior to the fullness of happiness with God, is a firm part of Catholic teaching and remains a point on which Catholics and Southern Baptists disagree. In attempting to speak of the end of one's own life and of history as a whole, one stands before the mystery of God and the mysterious relation of time and eternity, so all language is inadequate.

Southern Baptists emphasize the leading themes of Reformation eschatology, that is, death, resurrection, second coming,

last judgment, hell, and heaven. Such teaching normally implies a conscious intermediate state, distinct from soul sleeping and from purgatory, and carefully avoids both the belief that all persons will be saved (universalism) and the belief that unbelievers will be annihilated. In the nineteenth century Southern Baptists began to be influenced by pronounced differences regarding the timing and sequence of end time events (especially concerning the thousand-year reign of Christ) and the meaning of the kingdom of God. In the late twentieth century such differences have contributed to denominational tensions.

Roman Catholic doctrine and practice have in general not been open to different forms of millennialism. However, more and more ordinary Catholics are being caught up in contemporary popular apocalyptic movements.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter is a summary of what we at the Roman Catholic/Southern Baptist Scholars' Dialogue concluded about how we agree and differ. More detailed information about our agreements and differences may be found in other chapters of this book. But this common statement, reviewed and amended in plenary session, gives testimony in a special way, we think, to the fact that Baptists and Christians share many fundamental convictions, including our Christian faith in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.