

*Growing in Under-
standing*
ADQ 6259

GROWING

IN

UNDERSTANDING

**A PROGRESS REPORT ON
AMERICAN BAPTIST—
ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIALOGUE**

The American Baptist—Roman Catholic Dialogue at the national level is sponsored by the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C.) and the Commission on Christian Unity of the American Baptist Convention (Valley Forge, Pa., 19481)



GROWING IN UNDERSTANDING

A Progress Report on American Baptist— Roman Catholic Dialogue

We Christians who participated in the dialogue of our respective traditions wish to share with you the experience we have had together over a period of four years. It was an experience that came from the discovery that the same Christ in whom we believe is the Savior to whom others have also committed themselves; and that in Him we share far more than our deeply felt differences would suggest.

This witness to our discovery through dialogue is co-sponsored by the American Baptist Convention's Commission on Christian Unity and the Catholic Bishop's Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, of which we were the chosen representatives. Our full complement was fourteen members whose names appear at the end of this statement for which we alone assume full responsibility.

In order to do some justice to an immense subject, it seemed wise to cover what we consider the five principal phases of our dialogue: its original purpose and summary history, its emerging areas of common understanding and of need for further study, and its effect on us personally and collectively as Christians who are dedicated Baptists and Roman Catholics.

Original Purpose

At the outset it was agreed that our dialogue should enable us to give a more effective witness to

Jesus Christ through the removal of misunderstandings and through increased understanding, mutual enrichment and goodwill. Our intention was to share with one another how we understand the Christian faith, its doctrines and certain specific issues from the point of view of our respective traditions. It has not been to press either for consensus or agreement.

A second purpose, but by no means secondary, was to provide substantive material for our fellow-Christians, to use in local dialogues throughout the country.

Our goal, therefore, was to engage in spiritual and theological conversation with a view to eliminating misconceptions due to a lack of knowledge. It was also to develop fruitful areas of exploration that in the years to come might lead to fuller mutual appreciation and fellowship in the interests of the People of God.

Summary History

Preliminary plans for the dialogue began in 1966 between Dr. Robert G. Torbet, Executive Director of the Division of Cooperative Christianity in the American Baptist Convention and the Most Rev. Joseph Green, then Auxiliary Bishop of Lansing, Michigan, and now the Bishop of Reno, Nevada.

The first meeting was held on April 3-4, 1967, at the Franciscan Retreat House, DeWitt, Michigan. Central to the meeting were two papers, by a Baptist and a Catholic spokesman respectively, each stressing what the two traditions had in common. From the Catholic viewpoint, it was explained that the name "Baptist" is profoundly theological; it expresses the cardinal principle of the Baptist ethos, which is "spiritual liberty" of the person under the leading of the Spirit. Roman Catholicism respects this position. On the Baptist side, note was taken of the shared concern of Baptist ministers and Catholic priests regarding salvation by grace through faith; a marked interest of the Roman Catholic laity in the Baptist stress on the priesthood of all believers; and a growing agreement on the nature of religious freedom.

At our second meeting on April 29-30, 1968, at the American Baptist Assembly, Green Lake, Wisconsin, three topics were explored: a) the relation between believer's baptism and the sacrament of confirmation, b) the nature of Christian freedom in

its bearing on ecclesiastical authority, and c) the role of the congregation in the total life of the Church. In each subject, the focus was on the implied dialectic between two different approaches to Christianity, the Baptist and the Catholic understanding of: the initiatory rites for Church entrance and acceptance of responsibility, the exercise and sacrifice of personal liberty, and the biblically or traditionally revealed Christian community.

In the third meeting, at the Holiday Inn, Schiller Park, Illinois, on April 28-29, 1969, we addressed ourselves mainly to a single subject, "The Nature and Communication of Grace." Two papers, one from each perspective, were read and discussed. The Catholic stress was on grace as an objective principle of new life in the soul, communicated through the Church and the sacraments. In the Baptist presentation, grace was described as the spontaneous manifestation of God's mercy, emphasizing the mediation of grace in the word rather than through the sacraments.

In our fourth meeting, April 17-18, 1970, at St. Benedict's Abbey, Atchison, Kansas, two of the lay members of the dialogue presented their side of the ecumenical story. Their papers made clear how devoted are many lay people to the Church, but how minimally their talents and resources have been utilized. The Baptist statement reflected an inter-faith approach and pointed to the current tension between two competing roles of the Church, as sanctuary for the word of God and as activist collaborator in society. The Catholic speaker told what the faithful are looking for: to have priests and religious leaders who are up to date in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, yet primarily responsive to the people's spiritual needs; and to give the laity far more opportunity to serve the Church in every possible capacity.

Emerging Areas of Common Understanding

There were far more areas on which we found either substantial agreement or the prospect of a wider harmony than we had ever expected. It seems more accurate to speak of areas than of specific doctrines because in many cases it became apparent that our different backgrounds made it next to impossible to express agreement in the same terms. What we often lacked, therefore, was a common vocabulary, even though we sensed that the inner faith was sometimes closer than the words at our disposal could articulate.

Thus we found the source of authority in the Triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who communicated Himself in a unique way to the Church in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The Baptists are coming to see that there has been a mutual influence over the centuries between the Scriptures and Christian experience. Both of these elements, in turn, have affected our understanding of God's message to His people; they have also been affected by the continual teaching of the Holy Spirit in the community of faith. Catholics, on their part, are realizing better than they had previously understood how fundamental to Christian revelation is the Bible as the inspired *word* of God, where not only the content but also the expression are believed to have been shaped under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

We also discovered common ground in recognizing that there is no salvation except by grace through faith that comes as a gift from God. From a Baptist viewpoint, those who possess the faith are believers and in that sense they are also sharers in the priesthood of Christ. This universal priesthood of the faithful gives the laity a dignity that is becoming more respected in Catholic circles, without threatening the status of the ordained priests and bishops in the Roman Catholic Church.

Moreover, we came to see that having the faith is one thing, but the desire and will to share it is something else. There was a mutual concern with the concept of the Church as mission, as a community of faithful who respond to Christ's sending them into the world to share His riches with others.

In spite of our vastly different histories, we learned that Catholics as well as Baptists have been extraordinarily convinced of Christ's words that we are to give Caesar only what belongs to Caesar, but to God what belongs to God. Religious freedom, which in practice generally means spiritual liberty from political encroachment, is part of both our ancestries. We have both been deeply concerned over the Gospel teaching that the rights of God take precedence over the dictates of man; that Christians "must obey God rather than man." And in both our traditions have been those who have suffered much because of our convictions.

Although we might define grace differently, yet we agreed on the biblical affirmation that grace is a divine favor, somehow far beyond our human claims and undeserving to us as sinners. On the

delicate question of how grace is communicated, we came to admit that—along with grave differences on such issues as sacramental efficacy—God uses the community of faith to channel His favor to mankind. Whether the object of this favor is a baptized infant or a baptized believer, the grace each receives is given to nurture and sustain his relationship with God and foster solidarity through charity with his fellow men.

Both communions appear to be seeking a fuller realization of the meaning of the Church. Many Baptists are endeavoring to develop a more corporate, ecclesiastical emphasis; Catholics are striving to develop a larger measure of parochial and personal liberty within the existing church structure. The latter were pleasantly surprised to hear that "the complete independence of a local congregation was foreign to early Baptists," that "in the associations which they formed, they gave expression to their belief in the reality of the church universal to which all true Christians belong, and they confessed their need of the wider fellowship for purposes of mutual assistance, counsel and fulfillment of the Great Commission." The Baptists, on their part, were surprised at the broad understanding of the word "Christian" voiced by the Second Vatican Council. "All those justified by faith," says the Decree on Ecumenism, "through baptism are incorporated into Christ. They therefore have a right to be honored by the title of Christian and are properly regarded as brothers in the Lord by the sons of the Catholic Church."

Areas That Require Further Study

There is a marked difference between us on the meaning of the sacraments. Roman Catholics profess seven sacraments, all believed to have been instituted by Christ, whereas Baptists accept only two, which they prefer to call ordinances. Also, our very understanding of what the sacraments are, and of their role in the economy of salvation differs greatly. In the Catholic tradition, the sacraments are mysteriously effective of the grace which they ritually signify, and in which the faithful have a personal encounter with Christ who confers on them His saving grace. In the Baptist view, the ordinance of baptism is a dramatic emblem to the one baptized of his fellowship in Christ's death and resurrection, and the Lord's Supper is a holy symbol in which bread and wine are used to commemorate together Christ's dying love for mankind. The ordinances do

not, however, actually effect or confer the grace which they symbolize.

We correspondingly differ in our approach to the question of how Christ's authority is made explicit in the community of faith. Roman Catholicism sees Christ during His stay on earth as having founded a Church in which He chose twelve apostles, with Peter at their head, and giving these apostles and their successors under the pope the right to "bind and loose" in His name. Baptists, on the other hand, do not so conceive the Church. They do not hold that God delegated to any person or persons in the Church the right to teach infallibly in His name, nor to bind the human conscience in moral matters. Even when they recognize that, "for the Christian, authority in matters of faith and practice has *de facto* always been located in some form of the Church," they do not identify within the Church any hierarchical order which has the divine right to teach and guide the faithful authoritatively in Christ's name.

We also approach the subject of Church membership and incorporation into its body differently. Catholics view membership more as the result of baptism, which explains their practice of baptizing infants. Baptists regard a person's profession of trustful faith and repentance as fundamental to Church affiliation. In the expression "believers' baptism," their stress is on *believers*, since for them the Church is a gathered community of those who believe in Jesus Christ; it is through confident belief in the Savior that a person enters the Church's fellowship.

A further difference between us concerns the Catholic sacrament of confirmation, absent in the Baptist tradition. Baptists find it difficult to distinguish adequately between where baptism of the infant ends and confirmation begins. They wonder whether it would not be possible to restore the ancient catechumenate and the re-linking of baptism with confirmation.

Characteristic of Baptist theology is the view of many scholars who favor a "declared" or imputed righteousness, which comes to those who are justified while they still remain sinners. It was asked whether this concept should not be set alongside of the incarnational view of the Church which sees Christians, once baptized, as a "pilgrim people" in a process of sanctification. Those who favor this

view trace its origins to the *devotio moderna* of pre-reformation times.

Touching on the same issue, but in the practical order, Baptists and Catholics face a common problem regarding baptism and dedication to the Church. For Baptists, the problem is the status of the child before baptism. Is the child in the Church or not and, more crucially, what is the Church's responsibility toward those born into Christian families who are not yet baptized? On the Catholic side, there is a crisis affecting those who had, indeed, been baptized in infancy but never perhaps made a personal decision for Christ and commitment to the Church. Might not the two communions seek together a form of baptism (or a ritual of initiation) which would make more meaningful the rite of Christian incorporation into Christ?

An uncharted field for united action between Catholics and Baptists lies open in areas of social concern. Family instability and racism, alcoholism and drug addiction, an escalating crime rate and pornography, abortion and artificial contraception, pacifism and militarism, affluence and poverty, are typical issues. Such issues have deep theoretical presuppositions. How can ecumenical conversations about the theology of these premises strengthen us to cooperate in responsible action to help solve the problems which beset our country?

Personal Reflections of the Participants

In many ways the most valuable benefits of our dialogue were the reflections evoked from us. These were so tangible that they are the main reason for putting our experience into print, in the hope of stimulating similar results in others.

What has been said so far could be verbalized in rather objective terms. It might also have been achieved under somewhat different circumstances, quite apart from the context of prayer in which we tried to meet. Our desire was to hold these serious academic conversations in a context of honest and open faithfulness and quite literally to engage in a trilogy with Christ our Lord as the unseen but ever present partner.

The best way to communicate this is to allow the participants to speak for themselves. All those who put their reflections on paper are represented in the excerpts which follow. Some are more intimate than others, as might be expected among men who differed so widely in temperament and

professional background. Some chose to answer directly to the question, "How I discovered Christ in our dialogue." Others preferred to comment on a particular phase of what unites or still divides us in the following of Christ. Others again chose to be quoted from the papers they presented at the meetings, where the focus was on a definite aspect of faith or religious practice.

No attempt was made either to identify the authors of each statement, nor even to indicate whether it was a Baptist or Catholic, although both elements can in most cases be ascertained easily enough from what is said.

This part of the brochure especially is aimed beyond our own limited experience and directed to the wider audience of those who belong to our respective communions. Hopefully it will become the basis for grass-roots dialogue among our clergy and laity, on the local level, where the real fruits of ecumenism are finally to be achieved.

Each statement, of varying length, is given a title by the editors, who were also participants. But the reflections are verbatim from each contributor personally, and re-checked by him to insure perfect fidelity to his own sentiments on the subject.

Increased Knowledge of the Unsearchable Riches of Christ. The dialogues with the representatives of American Roman Catholicism have not only given me a greater understanding of American Roman Catholicism, but have helped me better to understand aspects of my own evangelical, free-church tradition. For I have come to know more about the "unsearchable riches of Christ," not only in the formal discussions but also the informal fellowship and friendships that have accompanied them.

The deeper understanding of both traditions has served to make me see that older views of these traditions as largely antithetical are simply wrong. There is a vast amount of common history, theology, and churchmanship between us. This does not mean, of course, that there are not some major differences between the traditions, in such particulars as sacramental theology, doctrines of the Church, and church government. But I see these differences increasingly as occasions for creative tension and continuing discussion, in which we can all grow through frankly understanding how others see us and hear us and why.

One's commitment to Christ is helped by many things: by the gospel, by the work of the Spirit, by the family, by early associations, by the influence of friends and teachers, and by observation. Many forces work together to transmit to a believer knowledge of Jesus Christ and awareness of his continuing presence; some of these forces also carry the stamp of the transient and distort our understandings. Before participating in these dialogues, though I knew intellectually that the same Christ I call Lord was known through liturgical, high-church, centralized Christian traditions, I had trouble "feeling" this convincingly. The experience of dialogue has shown me the variety of ways Christ "finds" men in both Baptist and Catholic traditions. I have come to see more clearly how Christ deals with men in their own particularity. At a number of times in the course of our formal discussions and informal sharings, I felt in fresh ways the presence of the One Lord making himself known in quite different patterns of theology, worship, and style of Christian life. Ways of thinking and feeling hitherto somewhat alien to me became occasions for recognizing aspects of my own tradition which I had not sufficiently appreciated and which now have deepened my own commitment to Christ. For example, I have gratefully come to feel more strongly the spiritual presence of Christ in services of baptism and the Lord's supper.

Trust in the Holy Spirit. Participation in these officially sponsored conversations, aside from the social enjoyment and intellectual satisfaction that it has brought me, has richly benefited my religious life. My faith in Christ our Lord and my attachment to the Catholic Church have been strengthened by this contact with the members of the American Baptist committee, who have lucidly demonstrated their own belief in the revealed word of God and their adherence to their hallowed traditions. At the same time, I have become more aware of the tragedy of our separation and more convinced that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we can find ways to narrow the gap dividing us. My concern has been to communicate these attitudes to those who have not had the same personal experience.

Although our conversations have produced no practical results, in some respects they may be considered models of ecumenical dialogue. We have striven to be true representatives of our respective communions, not advocates of a particular course of action. We have tried not to point out precon-

ceived directions in which our churches should move but rather to explain the present positions in which they stand. We have not sought to make concessions or compromises in order to arrive at specious agreements, but we have endeavored to make clear to each other our sacred duty to preserve our peculiar witness to the Gospel. We have openly discussed questions of doctrine and policy of common interest, but we have not taken up moral teachings that transcend denominational boundaries among Protestants. The procedure that we have followed implies full trust in the Holy Spirit, for we have performed our immediate tasks without impatience or anxiety about ultimate goals.

Two Levels of Authority in the Church. In Judaeo-Christianity there has never been any hesitancy about accepting some form of authority. In the Old Testament, under the supreme authority of God, prophets, priests and books are all recognized as authorities in matters of religion and morals. The New Testament also follows a similar pattern, with appropriate differences and the major qualification that now Jesus Christ in both his historical and his transcendent form assumes a peculiar authoritative status. Among the varieties of the church since New Testament times, there has never been a group which has not at least tacitly acknowledged the legitimacy in Christian life and fellowship of some controlling authority.

The principle of authority, therefore, conceived in the broadest terms, need cause us no concern. The problems arise when we are called upon to be specific. Authority we must have. But when that has been accepted, two crucial matters remain to be decided. What kind of authority are we talking about, and where is it to be located? In the Old and New Testaments and throughout the history of the church these two questions have been a constant source of dissension. Not a little of the trouble has been the result of a failure to pay sufficient attention to the need for an adequate definition.

We must begin with a crucial distinction. In all three of the sources to which I have referred (Old and New Testaments and Christian history), with respect to the question of authority there is always implicit a duality of levels. Ultimately all authority is from God. He is the supreme or transcendent authority. To deny his right to authority would amount to blasphemy. To refuse to submit to his authority would be culpable rebellion. Exactly

the same situation prevails in the church when this transcendent authority is particularized in the second and third persons of the Trinity. The authority of Jesus Christ or of the Holy Spirit is by definition never capable of being challenged. Thus far all Christians are agreed.

The difficulty is, however, that this ultimate or transcendent authority is never known or exercised immediately. In addition to the ultimate level of authority, therefore, there is always a second, mediating level. And this second level is inevitably involved in the human. Unfortunately, controversy among Christians about the problem of authority has more often than not, largely, if not completely, overlooked the reality of this division of levels, and has proceeded on the assumption that the identification and character of the second level was directly evident from the acknowledgement of the first. The mistake has also often been made of taking for granted that the ultimacy of the first level could be transferred simply and without modification to the second level, as though the second level could somehow shed its human essence and become divine.

The shift from the affirmation of the supreme Lordship of Jesus Christ to the declaration of the supreme authority of the Bible of which we have been so fond is not by any means as elementary a move as has generally been assumed. The Roman communion may also have to face a similar challenge with respect to the authority of the Church.



Evangelization in the Modern World. A primary task of the Christian Church is to follow the precept of Jesus Christ laid down in His "great commission": "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." This is the evangelistic role of the church, and it is as imperative today as it was in Jesus' time. Of all the institutions within our society, this is the peculiar role of the church.

In winning men to Christ, the church has a world-wide role, sometimes referred to as the missionary task of the church. In our day, there is a tendency to use the term "mission" to refer to any and all aspects of the church's role, but the more specific concern of making disciples remains one of primary importance and obligation—in fact, it is the *sine qua non* of the life and continued exis-

tence of the church. While this evangelistic imperative remains the basic task of the church, it must be stressed that the church must continue to minister both to the souls of men and to their social needs, and that the two forms of ministry are not incompatible but are inextricably intertwined.

Communicating the Gospel of Grace. One of the truly distinctive words of Christian theology is "grace." Like the word "gospel," it is expressive of the source of man's hope for salvation. The apostle Paul took the Greek word *charis*, with its meaning of favor or kindness and gave it a particular use to describe the undeserved love of God towards mankind. For him, grace was a gift bestowed by God through Jesus Christ: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (II Corinthians 8:9). This inexpressible gift is not of man, lest he should boast, but of God. It is brought to sharp focus in Christ's death upon the cross (Romans 5:9). Through him it becomes an active and effective power from God, bringing forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration to man whose life was alienated from his Creator by pride and self will. This gift of God, which is operative in the human heart, produces a gracious quality of character which is expressed in generosity towards one's fellows (II Corinthians 8:6-7). Indeed, for Paul grace was, like righteousness and love, not only a gift of God, but quality, action and gift (I Timothy 1:12-17).

In our strange new world, it is difficult to communicate this gospel of grace, for we live in a non-biblical age. Canon Wedel has rightly warned that "a gigantic task awaits the educational ministry of the churches in confronting the reigning humanist concept of our predicament with the thought world of the Bible," Grace has lost its basic meaning of divine forgiveness. Indeed, "sin" is no longer associated with God. "Religion" is associated with institutionalism which for many is an anachronism. And "prayer" reflects the current lean understanding of God, if not complete indifference to his existence.

Yet there is not entire agreement, even within the church, as to the nature and communication of grace. Indeed, differences over this matter have existed between Roman Catholics and Protestants since the Reformation in the sixteenth century. And even before that, there were variant understandings

of this important doctrine developed by earlier Fathers of the church in both the East and the West.

If there is hope that Christians will effectively communicate the grace of God to our present age, it behooves us to find a common understanding of its meaning among ourselves as representatives of the Roman Catholic and evangelical Protestant traditions.

Prophetic and Priestly Aspects of Christianity. Ritual simplicity has characterized Baptist churches from the beginning. No doubt this was partly explained by the "spiritualizing" accent in their tradition, which de-emphasized sacraments and what some have called "cultic mediation."

At the other extreme, Catholicism has always been liturgical in the deepest theological sense of the term. Its seven sacraments and sacrifice of the Mass are central to the Catholic religion, and the current liturgical renewal only brings out in stronger relief the importance attached to lay participation in the ritual worship of God.

There is no easy way of telling what liturgical developments are occurring among Protestants in the free church tradition, but all evidence seems to point in that direction. I have in mind several recent publications under Baptist auspices that recommend a re-assessment of the centuries-old attitude to the contrary.

Two dimensions of Christianity are here involved, the prophetic and the priestly. One stresses the sermons of Christ and the preaching of St. Paul, with insistence on change of heart, on faith, hope, and the service of God. The other concentrates on the Savior's dialogue with Nicodemus, who was told that the Kingdom cannot be entered except by baptism of water and the Holy Spirit; and recalls the practice described in the Acts of the Apostles, that on the first day of the week the early Christians would meet for the breaking of bread and the Eucharistic liturgy.

Where the free churches have been solicitous about the prophetic, they are (I believe) coming more and more to admit also something of the priestly. And the Catholic Church, while sacerdotal in the whole orientation of its thinking, neither forgets nor ignores the prior need of fidelity to the interior movements of the Spirit. John Smyth or Roger Williams might have written the caution: "The sacred liturgy does not exhaust the entire

activity of the Church. Before men can come to the liturgy, they must be called to faith and to conversion." Yet the warning was made by the Second Vatican Council, in its *Constitution on the Liturgy*. (I:9).

The Church as Moral Guide to the Faithful. The laymen finds himself living in an age of rapid change with all of life's relationships becoming increasingly more complex. The rapidity of change scarcely gives him opportunity to evaluate its moral implications, much less control them. The complexity of life subjects him ever more to new pressures, tensions, and conflicts. They beset, not only him as an individual, but as he readily perceives, our whole society. He is impelled to do something about them. But what? Many of them involve his very nature, his duties and obligations to his fellow man. Thus is created his need for moral guidance in a world which he seeks to improve. He turns to the church for that guidance.

The leadership which is sought is mainly spiritual and moral. He does not want to be dictated to, nor does he want his socio-economic thinking to be done for him. What he needs is help to orient his thinking and judgment into channels consistent with the Christian order. He may even need, and will certainly welcome, the inspiration and encouragement to stand up and be counted in putting Christ back into the secular affairs of life in spite of the counter pressures on every side.

The need for the laity to carry out this mandate becomes daily more obvious. Evidence is given in the many problems that beset this complex and fast-moving world: the increasing incidence of juvenile crime, the growing addiction to drugs, rampant alcoholism, the abrogation of parental discipline, the tide of family disintegration, the discounting of the worth of human life, the inhumanity to minorities, the wasting and unjust distribution of resources, the greed of commercial exploitation, the violence of nations.

The laity will be involved in these matters with or without the guidance and leadership of the Church. Even if no other motivation exists, a sense of civic responsibility will bring about their involvement. But they earnestly wish their involvement to be in harmony with the establishment of the Christian way of life. They are mindful of Christ's admonition, "I am the Way, and the Life," but they earnestly need the help of their bishops and priests

to chart that way through the obvious paths of rampant confusion and pagan darkness.

We Differ with Ourselves, not with Jesus Christ. The dialogue has been revealing and releasing.

It has been revealing in many ways. First of all, respecting the differing religious convictions of each other, it was quickly apparent that there is a deep concern about Christian disunity, and this disunity's hampering our power to witness the Christian message to the world. Also the Catholic participants came to realize more vividly the present consequences of the error of past generations to remain aloof from ecumenical discussion and activity. A lot of catching up has to be done on our part now. Moreover, I have come to see more clearly, and have been deeply impressed by the fact, that there is a firm and sincere dedication to Christ personally and to the church on the part of Baptists as well as Catholics. Christ truly plays the dominant role in the lives and thoughts of those sincerely committed to Him. Finally, the discussions revealed that it is not so difficult to discuss different theological, religious, moral and ethical positions as one often-times hears. And the discussions themselves revealed that in many instances, our beliefs were not as contrary or contradictory as we had imagined prior to the dialogue. All of this drew us closer to Christ through each other, and made us see that it is not Jesus Christ with whom we differ, it is with ourselves.

The dialogue was also releasing in many ways. It released the build-up tensions, anxieties and even fears that we had about even talking to each other. These were mutual to the participants on both sides. They were quickly dissipated when we saw each other as Christian men sincerely trying to discern God's will, for ourselves personally and for His Church. In the same way, much misunderstanding and pure ignorance of each other's beliefs, history, and traditions were removed by the dialogue. We were surprised to discover that actually we had much more in common than we had thought. But best of all, our living, sharing and praying together gave us a profound awareness of what it means to live in a Christian community, with the presence of Christ among us. True Christian love bound us together because we were united with Christ. If this

can be done for a few, why not for many? Out of this awareness grew the desire to share the experience with others.

Sympathetic Understanding and Acceptance. Our experience together was accompanied by a compassionate understanding that befitted Christian men. The phenomenon in religious meetings today seems to be that Catholic groups often produce a feeling of conceptual and attitudinal diversity in theological positions and pastoral styles of action. Ecumenical encounters, which presuppose conflict, so often issue in rewarding moods of united and open concerns. Exaggeration would be damaging here, but our group has grown in genuine Christian fellowship. Trust is not perhaps expressive enough. Facing our historically sensitive questions accomplished the opposite of solidifying our divisions. Again the dread of sentimentality makes one cautious, but the awareness of our being gathered in Christ's name was a quiet factor in our meetings. For my part, the personal appreciation of each participant's relationship to Jesus Christ was noticeable and exemplary.

There was from the start an open speaking and sympathetic acceptance of common ecclesiastical problems. In a sort of unwitting confession we revealed the difficulty of practicing our respective tenets. We can baptize infants without cultivating their commitment. We can profess freedom and speak of the church as "freedom's house," yet give mediocre attention to the delicate nurture of freedom. At the same time, others can hold out against infant baptism, yet pragmatically move the age for baptism down to twelve years and younger. Or they can believe that no authority exists in the ministerial order beyond what resides in the local congregation, and then face issues whose solution so gravely depends on the corresponding belief in a charismatic role for the minister of the Gospel.

Epilogue

By actual count, the excerpts just quoted are less than five percent of the total presentation in formal papers during the four years of dialogue; and only a fraction again of all that we said and heard expressed in many hours of lively conversation. But even this sampling of what can be put into words gives some idea of the spirit of faith and candor which animated the experience.

Our plans for the next two years are to address ourselves to issues that came to the surface repeatedly and that focus more sharply on questions of common concern. We intend to examine three topics: (1) "The Theology of the Local Church," with obvious implications for both traditions as they wrestle with the dialectic of freedom and authority in today's society; (2) "Clergy-Lay Issues and Relations in Theological Perspective," which touch on another dialectic, the relationship of the secular and the sacred in Christianity; and (3) "The Meaning of Separation of Church and State in the United States Today," that promises to be the testing ground for religious survival in America, especially for churches like the Baptist and Catholic whose histories reflect centuries of struggle to maintain spiritual freedom against overwhelming odds.

As Catholics and Protestants enter more easily into dialogue on the local level they will learn, as we have learned, the blessings of grace that the Spirit of Christ confers on those who are gathered together in His name. We ask those engaged in such colloquies to share your experiences with us, as we have with you. Address communications to the nearest ecumenical center or agency of your church or to one of the following: American Baptist Convention—Division of Cooperative Christianity, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania 19481; or Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, 1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

Members of the Roman Catholic Sub-Committee of the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs

The Most Reverend Joseph Green, Bishop of the Diocese of Reno, P.O. Box 1211, Reno, Nevada 89504 (Chairman)

Mr. Emmet A. Blaes, Lawyer, 500 F. & B. Life Bldg., Wichita, Kansas 67202.

Rev. Msgr. John S. Cummins, Executive Director, California Catholic Conference, 926 J Street, Sacramento, California 95814.

Rev. John A. Hardon, S.J., Bellarmine School of Theology, Chicago, Ill. 60615.

Rev. John F. Hotchkin, Director, Executive Secretary of the Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, 1312 Massachusetts Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

Dr. James R. Oliver, Dean of the Graduate School, University of Southwestern Louisiana, P.O. Box 131, USL Station, Lafayette, Louisiana 70501.

Rev. Robert Trisco, Associate Professor of Church History, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C. 20017.

Rev. Bruce Vawter, C.M., Professor of Sacred Scripture, DePaul University, 2233 North Kenmore Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60614.

Members of the American Baptist Sub-Committee of the Commission on Christian Unity of the American Baptist Convention.

Rev. Robert T. Handy, Professor of Church History, Union Theological Seminary, 3041 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10027. (Chairman)

Rev. L. Doward McBain, Minister of First Baptist Church, 7000 No. Central Ave., Phoenix, Arizona 85021.

Rev. Robert G. Middleton, Minister of Hyde Park Union Church, 5600 Woodlawn Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60637.

Dean George W. Peck, (New Testament) Andover Newton Theological School, New Centre, Mass. 02159.

Dr. Lloyd M. Short, Political Scientist, University of Minnesota, 604 Desnoyer Ave., St. Paul, Minn. 55104.

Rev. Robert G. Torbet, Ecumenical Officer of American Baptist Convention, Valley Forge, Pa. 19481.

A List of Papers Published in Foundations, A Baptist Journal of History and Theology, 1106 So. Goodman St., Rochester, N.Y. 14620.

April-June, 1967 Issue

"Towards an American Baptist-Roman Catholic Dialogue" by John A. Hardon, S.J.

"Areas of Theological Agreement from a Baptist Point of View" by Robert T. Handy

July-September, 1968 Issue

"Christian Freedom and Ecclesiastical Authority" by George Peck

"Christian Freedom and Ecclesiastical Authority" by Robert Trisco

July-September, 1969 Issue

"The Nature and Communication of Grace: The Baptist Perspective" by Robert G. Torbet

"The Nature and Communication of Grace: The Roman Catholic Perspective" by John S. CUMMINS

October-December, 1970 Issue

"The Role of the Church: The Catholic Laity's View" by Emmet A. Blaes

"The Role of the Church: A Baptist Layman's View" by Lloyd M. Short

1972

Publications Office

UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

1312 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20005