

Catholics do NOT Understand Baptists and Other Independents

by Douglas R. Johnson
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The Roman Catholic Church has been having ecumenical talks with various Protestant denominations for now more than thirty (30) years. They have made headway with Methodists, Lutheran, and Episcopal denominations but have recently been turned off by the Southern Baptist Convention. I believe the reason for this failure with the Baptists is due to a lack of understanding by the Catholic Church.

Zenit.org published a press release March 23, 2001 which actually gives the clue to the problem. According to that document as quoted in full as attachment 1; Reverend R. Philip Roberts, president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, stated that "many Southern Baptists became suspicious of these discussions."

The "fact" that the Catholics do not understand is how literal the concepts of "the priesthood of all believers" and "Scripture only" are to independent evangelical Protestants. Having been one myself for more than fifty (50) years, I can speak to the subject with as much authority (according to these two concepts) as Rev. Roberts even though I have had absolutely no formal religious education.

It is my opinion that the leaders of the Reformation had no idea where their two concepts would lead. They thought they could use those principals to justify their replacing the authority of Rome with their own authority.

Prior to the Reformation, there were various smaller breaks with the Roman Catholic Church. (I consider the East West schism to be a "special case" that is not relevant to this analysis.) What the leaders of each of these breaks believed is one thing, but each follower clearly knew that they were breaking with the official Church established by our Lord Jesus Christ.

What the Reformation did was to totally demonize the Roman Catholic Church by branding the papacy as the Antichrist. This teaching was promoted extensively by each Reformation leader as the justification for that group's break with what they then considered as an "apostate" church.

I now see that much of the unifying power of the Roman Catholic Church is in the Sacraments of the Church. When you

take the "Real Presence" out of the Lord's table, you remove belief in is supernatural power that is clearly taught in Scripture where St. Paul says "many are weak and sickly" [I Cor. 11:30]. When an individual considers leaving the Roman Catholic Church he thus separates himself from the "Real Presence". In order to overcome that perception, the Reformation leaders also denied the "Real Presence" even though it was clearly evidenced in the writings of the Church Fathers in those first few centuries.

When you take away the Sacrament of Holy Orders you let any lay person assume the role of not only priest but also of an Apostle. In fact, a number of Independent groups freely use the title of "Apostle" for their leader(s). I personally witnesses an ordination where the "laying on of hands" included not only the denomination leadership but also the local "un-ordained" lay leadership. Scripture clearly teaches the appointment of church leader rather than the "majority vote" of local congregations even though the people may make recommendations as evidenced in Acts 6:3. In order for the Reformation leaders to assume leadership over the break-a-way Roman Catholics, they had to show their "ordination" to be valid. They did this by denying the Sacrament of Holy Orders. What they concealed in doing this was their denial of the Apostles' authority clearly given by Jesus and practiced thought the book of Acts especially in Acts 6:6 and Acts 8:18.

To get back on track here, the net result is that breaking with Protestant authority is no longer hindered in any way. In fact, the understanding of these basic Reformation concepts actually encourages fragmentation.

Scripture teaches that ministries vary. St. Paul devotes the full twelfth chapter of I Corinthians to that fact. When he lists the various offices of the church in verse 28, he is obviously talking of the whole church and not each individual local church.

When each local church is an independent entity having its own individual authority, then each church will differ in the ministries available to it. Differences foster evaluations and comparisons. Decisions of individuals as where to associate are based on the individual's comfort level with a particular local church. The individual may associate with one denomination in one location and then when moving to a new location might freely associate with another denomination in that new locality.

The Southern Baptist Convention has always (at least since

1925) taught, according to the "Report of the Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee to the Southern Baptist Convention", adopted June 14th, 2000, and reproduced as Attachment 2:

"(3) That any group of Baptists, large or small, have the inherent right to draw up for themselves and publish to the world a confession of their faith whenever they may think it advisable to do so."

The Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church has no such provision. It is my opinion that this is so because the Church for the fifteen hundred years before the Reformation considered such a statement as pure heresy. I dare say that every Reformation leader would also consider such a statement as heresy as each considered their break with the Roman Catholic Church as a "one time special case".

I dare say that these very leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention both in 1925 when they drew up this statement and now in 2000 when they again affirmed it, would consider it heresy that any one individual, as a "small" group of one, has this same "inherent right to draw up for himself and publish to the world a confession of his faith whenever he may think it advisable to do so."

Thus these concepts of "priesthood of all believers" and "Scripture alone", not only in theory but also in practice, promote the continuous fragmentation of the Protestant movement started with the Reformation.

But let us not stop here on this negative note but use the understanding presented above to chart a new strategy to bring such independent loyal disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ back into full fellowship with the entire body of Christ as per the intention of St Paul in First Corinthians chapter twelve.

I believe that the strategy is very simple but entirely different from what has been attempted for the last thirty plus years:

Individual independents should be allowed to enter full fellowship (communion) with the Roman Catholic Church without the need to break with their present independent church affiliations.

What has been the purpose of the Roman Catholic Church with these ecumenical talks for these past thirty years? Was it that each denomination disband and have each member be received

separately into the Roman Catholic Church through a year long RCIA training program?

Should the Roman Catholic Church adopt the above proposed new strategy, I can see for sometime in the future a motion being made at some future Southern Baptist Convention that:

"I move that in your capacity as Southern Baptist Convention chairman, you appoint a blue ribbon committee to review the Baptist Faith and Message statement with the responsibility to report and bring any recommendations to this meeting next June in Orlando."

And that the resulting report recommends the accepting of the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church as the new Statement of Faith of the Souther Baptist Convention and then be officially adopted. Before that can happen, many individuals will first need to come by themselves and later with their entire local congregations.

While this plan may be considered heresy by some, according to the official position of the Souther Baptist Convention as described above, it is a perfectly valid approach. I personally have accepted the Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church as my own "confession of my faith". I see no conflict with my participation and continuing in full fellowship with any and all of the various evangelical Protestant churches I have previously been and still am in fellowship.

Baptists Halt Ecumenical Talks With Catholics

NEW YORK, MAR. 23, 2001 (Zenit.org).- The Southern Baptist Convention is stopping 30 years of official doctrinal talks with the Catholic Church in the United States, the Associated Press reported.

"We're not ecumenists; we're evangelicals committed to sharing the Gospel," explained the Reverend R. Philip Roberts, president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, who formerly handled interfaith relations with the North American Mission Board.

Though the denomination's 1994 meeting endorsed talks with the Catholics, Roberts said "many Southern Baptists became suspicious of these discussions."

When the talks began in 1971, both sides saw them as an opportunity to understand agreements and differences, though there was never any prospect of organizational union. Catholics and Baptists have 78 million members between them in the United States.

Baptist officials notified Bishop J. Kendrick Williams of Lexington, Kentucky, Catholic co-chair of the dialogue, of the decision in a Feb. 7 letter but no public announcement was made. Brother Jeffrey Gros, the bishops' liaison to the Southern Baptist dialogue, said the Catholic side would have no comment.

The Southern Baptist-Catholic dialogue is one of eight official conversations with U.S. Christian branches that the Catholic bishops have established, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council's decree on ecumenism.

The Catholic bishops' ecumenical secretariat is at (<http://www.nccbuscc.org/seia/index.htm>).

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**Report of the Baptist Faith and Message Study Committee
to the Southern Baptist Convention
Adopted, June 14th, 2000**

The 1999 session of the Southern Baptist Convention, meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, adopted the following motion addressed to the President of the Convention:

"I move that in your capacity as Southern Baptist Convention chairman, you appoint a blue ribbon committee to review the Baptist Faith and Message statement with the responsibility to report and bring any recommendations to this meeting next June in Orlando."

President Paige Patterson appointed the committee as follows: Max Barnett (OK), Steve Gaines (AL), Susie Hawkins (TX), Rudy A. Hernandez (TX), Charles S. Kelley, Jr. (LA), Heather King (IN), Richard D. Land (TN), Fred Luter (LA), R. Albert Mohler, Jr. (KY), T. C. Pinckney (VA), Nelson Price (GA), Adrian Rogers (TN), Roger Spradlin (CA), Simon Tsoi (AZ), Jerry Vines (FL). Adrian Rogers (TN) was appointed chairman.

Your committee thus constituted begs leave to present its report as follows: Baptists are a people of deep beliefs and cherished doctrines. Throughout our history we have been a confessional people, adopting statements of faith as a witness to our beliefs and a pledge of our faithfulness to the doctrines revealed in Holy Scripture.

Our confessions of faith are rooted in historical precedent, as the church in every age has been called upon to define and defend its beliefs. Each generation of Christians bears the responsibility of guarding the treasury of truth that has been entrusted to us [2 Timothy 1:14]. Facing a new century, Southern Baptists must meet the demands and duties of the present hour.

New challenges to faith appear in every age. A pervasive anti-supernaturalism in the culture was answered by Southern Baptists in 1925, when the Baptist Faith and Message was first adopted by this Convention. In 1963, Southern Baptists responded to assaults upon the authority and truthfulness of the Bible by adopting revisions to the Baptist Faith and Message. The Convention added an article on "The Family" in 1998, thus answering cultural confusion with the clear teachings of Scripture. Now, faced with a culture hostile to the very notion of truth, this generation of Baptists must claim anew the eternal

truths of the Christian faith.

Your committee respects and celebrates the heritage of the Baptist Faith and Message, and affirms the decision of the Convention in 1925 to adopt the New Hampshire Confession of Faith, "revised at certain points and with some additional articles growing out of certain needs" We also respect the important contributions of the 1925 and 1963 editions of the Baptist Faith and Message.

With the 1963 committee, we have been guided in our work by the 1925 "statement of the historic Baptist conception of the nature and function of confessions of faith in our religious and denominational life" It is, therefore, quoted in full as a part of this report to the Convention:

(1) That they constitute a consensus of opinion of some Baptist body, large or small, for the general instruction and guidance of our own people and others concerning those articles of the Christian faith which are most surely held among us. They are not intended to add anything to the simple conditions of salvation revealed in the New Testament, viz., repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

(2) That we do not regard them as complete statements of our faith, having any quality of finality or infallibility. As in the past so in the future, Baptists should hold themselves free to revise their statements of faith as may seem to them wise and expedient at any time.

(3) That any group of Baptists, large or small, have the inherent right to draw up for themselves and publish to the world a confession of their faith whenever they may think it advisable to do so.

(4) That the sole authority for faith and practice among Baptists is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. Confessions are only guides in interpretation, having no authority over the conscience.

(5) That they are statements of religious convictions, drawn from the Scriptures, and are not to be used to hamper freedom of thought or investigation in other realms of life.

Baptists cherish and defend religious liberty, and deny the right of any secular or religious authority to impose a confession of faith upon a church or body of churches. We honor

the principles of soul competency and the priesthood of believers, affirming together both our liberty in Christ and our accountability to each other under the Word of God.

Baptist churches, associations, and general bodies have adopted confessions of faith as a witness to the world, and as instruments of doctrinal accountability. We are not embarrassed to state before the world that these are doctrines we hold precious and as essential to the Baptist tradition of faith and practice.

As a committee, we have been charged to address the "certain needs" of our own generation. In an age increasingly hostile to Christian truth, our challenge is to express the truth as revealed in Scripture, and to bear witness to Jesus Christ, who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

The 1963 committee rightly sought to identify and affirm "certain definite doctrines that Baptists believe, cherish, and with which they have been and are now closely identified." Our living faith is established upon eternal truths. "Thus this generation of Southern Baptists is in historic succession of intent and purpose as it endeavors to state for its time and theological climate those articles of the Christian faith which are most surely held among us."

It is the purpose of this statement of faith and message to set forth certain teachings which we believe.

Respectfully Submitted,
Adrian Rogers, Chairman
Max Barnett
Steve Gaines
Susie Hawkins
Rudy A. Hernandez
Charles S. Kelley, Jr.
Heather King
Richard D. Land
Fred Luter
R. Albert Mohler, Jr.
T. C. Pinckney
Nelson Price
Roger Spradlin
Simon Tsoi
Jerry Vines

(Note: the text of the actual statement of faith is omitted here in this attachment.)