

14.

Study Guide

This book has been written to provide resources for better understanding between Baptists and Catholics. You may want to use these resources in an ecumenical event in your congregation or among several congregations; suggestions about how to conduct ecumenical events will be found in Chapter Thirteen.

The book may also be studied by individuals or in small study groups. This Study Guide has been prepared to assist you in individual or small group study. It provides a series of questions and some brief comments concerning the first ten chapters of the book, organized in a chapter-by-chapter sequence.

The questions about each chapter are in two parts. First come questions which you may answer by reading and reflecting on the chapter itself; these are followed by questions for reflection on one or two passages of Scripture which are related to the topic of the chapter.

There is no need to begin at the beginning. Begin wherever your interest takes you. For example, you may want to begin with Chapter Ten which is a summary of agreements and differences between Catholics and Baptists.

Chapter 1: A CATHOLIC TESTIMONY ABOUT SOUTHERN BAPTISTS

Have you had the experience of being a religious minority? What did it feel like? What temptations did it present? What temptations does a religious majority face?

Do you think that better knowledge leads to better understanding? Why? How have you experienced it?

Could Baptists and Catholics study the Bible together? What problems would they face? What good could come of it?

Could you pray, as Bishop Niedergeses does, that Baptists and Catholics “shall continue to work together and to seek God’s grace in our search for the perfect unity for which Jesus of Nazareth prayed”? Why or why not?

Read John 21:20–23. How do you think our Lord Jesus feels about the theological, racial, economic, and denominational divisions which characterize God’s people today? What kind of Christian unity have you experienced: Christian-to-Christian? Local congregation-to-local congregation? Denomination-to-denomination? What kind of unity do you pray for: unity in ideas? in organizations? in service? in love?

Chapter 2: I AM A DEBTOR

Do you feel indebted to the scholars who, before the invention of printing by movable type, laboriously copied the Bible so that it was preserved for later generations? Did you know that most of those scholars in the Western world were Roman Catholics? How does that make you feel?

Here is a list of Christian beliefs. We believe in one personal, transcendent God, who is the creator of all things. In some mysterious way this one God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father sent the Son into the world to become a human being, whom we know as Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus lived a perfect life, gave matchless teachings, died for the sins of the world, and rose again. He and his Father poured their Spirit into the hearts of Jesus’ followers, forming them into the church and sending them on a worldwide mission. In the future God will complete the work which he has begun, and all of God’s children will be gathered together with their God, “lost in wonder, love, and praise.”

Are these Catholic beliefs? Are they Baptist beliefs? Do you think Baptists and Catholics have a substantial number of beliefs in common?

Do you believe that God has a preferential option for the poor? Why? What are the implications of your belief on this matter?

Read Ephesians 4:2–6. Do you see the seven unities listed? Explain what each one means to you.

Chapter 3: A PRIMER ON RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY

What is the ultimate religious authority for Baptists? For Catholics?

What is the primary source of our knowledge of God?

Have you experienced God's self-revelation in a way that is "dialogic and personal"? What is it like?

When you are asked, "What church do you belong to?," how do you answer? Do you naturally think of "the church" as a local congregation of Christians, or as a worldwide organization?

Read Psalm 119:105. Have you found God's Word to be a good guide in life? What do you expect to learn from reading the Bible? Do you learn how to fix a flat tire? Do you learn what will happen in the future? Do you learn about things God did in the past? Do you learn about God's purpose? About God's character? Do you learn about yourself? Do you learn how to live your life? Do you learn about love? About faith? About hope? About New York? What light have you recently received from reading the Bible?

Chapter 4: GOD'S GIFT OF SALVATION

When you hear the word "salvation," what time period comes to your mind? Is it long ago—when God saved Israel at the Exodus? Is it long ago—when Jesus died and rose again to provide salvation? Is it a more recent time—when you first felt, or realized, that you personally were saved? Is it now—do you believe that God is now at work in your life giving you a daily experience of salvation? Is it in the future—that you hope, or are confident, that you will be saved and live in heaven with God and all God's family?

Whom do you think will finally be saved? Everyone? All who believe in Christ? All who believe in Christ and also are trans-

formed into good Christians? Only some who are in the church?

Do you think it is a little self-centered to worry too much about your salvation? Would it be better to think more about sharing the gospel with others and less about whether or not you're going to be finally saved?

Read I Corinthians 15:1–7. What precisely is the gospel? Is it God's love in general? Is it faith in Christ? Is it that Christ died for our sins and rose again? Are the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday as important to your faith as the church says they ought to be?

Chapter 5: BEING A CHRISTIAN DISCIPLE

Do you think of Jesus as your mentor? In what area of your life? Does Jesus offer his disciples a practical way of life, or is he too idealistic? What have you learned from Jesus about how life ought to be lived?

What motivates you best as a Christian? Is it fear that God will punish you if you do wrong? Is it simple loyalty to the church? Is it habit? Is it the challenge to be all you can be as a Christian? Is it the example of others? Is it a sense of moral responsibility? Is it gratitude for God's blessings in your life? Is it personal love for Jesus?

Read Mark 1:14–20. Verse 15 is probably a summary of all of Jesus' preaching; what image does Jesus use? What do you think God's kingdom is?

Do you think Jesus calls people today to follow him, as he called Simon and Andrew? Whom does Jesus call today? Has Jesus called you? Are you following him? What does it mean to be Jesus' disciple today?

Chapter 6: UNDERSTANDING THE CHURCH

Catholics and Baptists both think of the church as the people of God, don't they? Do you think of yourself as one of the people of God? What makes you think you are (or are not) one of God's people? How does it make you feel to be (or not be) one of God's people?

What do you think God's people ought to do? How important is worship to you? How important is Christian fellowship? How important is Bible study? How important is prayer? How important is it to be a Christian witness? How important is it to help those who are hurting?

How do you feel about the clergy? Do you think that God has called them to do special work? Would you like to be of help to them? How can you do this? Would you like to be a clergy person? Do you know any women who are clergy? What do you think about women being clergy? What do you think about clergy being married?

Read Romans 12:3–8. What is the body of Christ? What is a member of Christ's body? What is a gift? What are some of the spiritual gifts? Do you think all Christians have a gift? Do they all have the same gift? Are all Christians supposed to be exactly alike?

How many bodies do you suppose Christ has?

Chapter 7: THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

What do you think is the mission of the church? How do you participate in the church's mission? Are all Christians called to do mission? Is the church's mission in the modern world different from what it was centuries ago, or is it the same?

Do you think of Christianity as being in competition with other world religions such as Islam? Do you think that, in nations which do not have Christian majorities, all Christian groups should work cooperatively?

Do you think Christians should listen to non-Christians, or just talk to them, or neither?

Read Matthew 28:19–20. Do you understand why Christians think that, as they are doing mission work, they are being obedient to Christ? What are the four activities which the disciples are to carry out? What do you think it means to go? To make disciples? To baptize? To teach? Which of these four activities have you done? Have you helped others to do some of them that you have not done? Can you explain why many Christians refer to this passage as "The Great Commission?"

Chapter 8: HOW WE WORSHIP

What do you think worship is? Is it something that happens rarely or is it something that happens frequently? Is worship natural to you, or do you have to discipline yourself to do it?

What helps you to worship? Does music? Being in your church building? Visiting an old church or cathedral? Reading the Bible? Looking at a picture or statue of Christ? Do you feel more worshipful in a simple setting, or in an ornate one? Do you feel more worshipful when you are outside—say, on a lake—or in a building?

What is your personal creed? Do the creeds of the church help you to worship? Do you find it easier to worship alone, or with others? On Sunday, or everyday? Is the Eucharist, or Lord's Supper, a special time of worship for you?

How does it make you feel to think about worshipping together with Christians who belong to a different denomination? Nervous? Happy? Uninterested?

Read Acts 2:40–42 and Ephesians 5:18–20. Both of these passages of Scripture seem to be speaking about the worship services of early Christians. The passage in Acts describes some elements in a worship service, and the one in Ephesians prescribes some elements for worship services.

What is the teaching of the Apostles? Should we continue in it today? How?

What is fellowship? Do we have it today? How are fellowship and worship related?

What is the breaking of bread? Do we do it today? As part of worship?

What is prayer? Is it part of worship today?

Do you see a reference to the Trinity in the passage in Ephesians? Do you find it helps your worship to think of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

Do you find music helps you to worship?

Is giving thanks to God part of worship? Should Christians thank God for everything that happens, or only for the good things in life?

Chapter 9: INTERMARRIAGE

Are you presently acquainted with a married couple, one of whom is a Baptist and the other a Catholic? Have you discussed marriage with them? What problems do Baptist-Catholic couples face? What opportunities?

What do you feel such couples should do about church attendance? About their children? About issues on which the two denominations differ, such as the use of artificial contraceptives?

Do you think Baptist-Catholic marriages are easier if the two persons are very strong in their faith and practice, or very weak in them, or if one person is strong and the other weak? Why?

Do you think that God is involved in all marriages, or only in those of Christians, or only in those of persons of one church? What does God want marriages to be like? Can God help a marriage to be more fulfilling?

Read Genesis 1:27–28 and 2:18–24. The word “genesis” means “beginning,” and in these passages the writer is talking about the beginnings of human sexuality and of marriage.

Who created sex, God or the devil? In light of this, is sex good or evil? Are you sure? Do most people you know agree with you about this?

Whose idea was marriage, God’s or the devil’s? Do you think that the impulse in people to get married was created by God or the devil? Should we expect marriage to be a happy experience, or a miserable one? Is marriage a form of imprisonment, or of freedom? Why?

What do you feel are the important benefits of marriage? Would you include sex? Having children? Companionship? Having someone to love? Having someone to support you? Having someone to keep house for you? Can a husband and wife be best friends? How (or, why not)?

Chapter 10: HOW WE AGREE/HOW WE DIFFER

All of the issues dealt with in this chapter are dealt with separately in earlier chapters, except for the last issue, eschatol-

ogy. So the questions for discussion will deal only with eschatology.

Do you think very much about death? What do you think happens when a person dies?

Who do you think will be the judge in the end—God? Christ? The devil? Do you think God's judgment will be merciful? Or severe? Or both?

Do you think God wants to forgive sins? Of all people, or just some? All sins, or just little ones?

Do you think very much about the end of the world? Do you think the world will ever end? Do you think it could be soon? What do you think it will be like? Do you think people have anything to do with when and how the world will end?

Read Revelation 21:9–22:5. This is a vivid picture of the New Jerusalem. Do you think it could be about the church today? Could it be about what God's people will experience after they die? Will it be interesting or boring? Will it be a good experience or a bad one? Will it be light or darkness? Poverty or riches? Famine or plenty? Does God lock the gate of the new city to keep people out, or leave the gates open to allow people in? Will people there know each other? Will they be good or evil? Will they worship God? Do people see God now—or just hear God's Word? Will people see God in the New Jerusalem? What does that mean to you?

Chapter 12: SYMBOLS THAT SPEAK

What terms used by Southern Baptists do you find confusing? What terms used by Roman Catholics?

Are there ways of speaking about religion that make you angry? Sad? Afraid? Hopeful? Consoled? Peaceful? Try to specify the phrases or the images that affect you in these ways.

Do you have any works of religious art in your home? Describe it or them. Are there particular times when you like to look at them? Are they in any way connected with your prayer life?

Are there religious symbols that arouse negative feelings in you? What are they? Can you help another understand why they affect you this way?

Which of the examples given in the article spoke to you personally, if any? Why?

Have you ever been to a funeral in the other's church? What was it like? How did you feel?

Instead of reading scripture text, this time find a church or a synagogue where a biblical text is depicted in glass, stone, oil, or some other medium. Look at it long and hard. What new dimension of faith do you see? What questions do you have? Is your own image of Christianity challenged by it in some way?

15.

For Further Reading

SOUTHERN BAPTIST

SURVEYS

C. Brownlow Hastings, *Introducing Southern Baptists: Their Faith and Their Life*. Paulist Press, 1981. A comprehensive introduction to Southern Baptist faith and life written specifically for the Catholic lay reader.

Brooks Hays and John Steely, *The Baptist Way of Life*. Revised Edition. Mercer University Press, 1981. A comprehensive introduction to Southern Baptist faith and life.

Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, Broadman Press, 1987. The largest history of Baptists.

Leon McBeth, *Women in Baptist Life*. Nashville: Broadman, 1979. A brief well-written historical account of the position of women in Baptist churches.

Albert McClellan, *Meet Southern Baptists*. Broadman, 1978. A beautifully illustrated introduction to Southern Baptists: their origins, history, distinctive beliefs, organizations and mission. McClellan gives less emphasis to theology and more to practical matters.

Walter Shurden, *Not a Silent People*. Broadman Press, 1972. An interpretation of six controversies which have shaped Southern Baptists.

DOCTRINE

Morris Ashcraft, *Christian Faith and Beliefs*. Broadman Press, 1987. A well-written exposition of Christian doctrine from a Baptist point of view.

Herschel H. Hobbs and Edgar Young Mullins, *The Axioms of Religion*. Revised Edition. Broadman Press, 1978. The six axioms taken together with the fundamental general principle out of which they spring—the competency of the soul in religion under God—are the platform of human rights in religion.

BAPTIST CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message*. Broadman, 1971. Presentation and discussion of the statement adopted by the messengers to the 1963 Southern Baptist Convention. Dr. Hobbs was President of the SBC in 1963, and also chairman of the committee which wrote the statement.

W. L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*. Revised Edition. Judson Press, 1969. The authoritative collection of Baptist confessional statements.

William H. Brackney, editor, *Baptist Life and Thought 1600–1980: A Source Book*. Judson Press, 1983.

MISSION

H. Cornell Goerner, *All Nation's in God's Purpose*. Broadman, 1979. A restatement of the traditional Southern Baptist way of understanding the mission mandate.

E. Luther Copeland, *World Mission and World Survival*. Broadman Press, 1985. A former missionary begins with his own experience and then looks at the Christian mission in today's world. He includes a discussion of theological perspectives.

Winston Crawley, *Global Mission*. Broadman Press, 1985. An interpretation of Southern Baptist foreign missions from a senior member of the Foreign Mission Board Staff.

