

## SOME TRENDS IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH TODAY

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### Introduction

The recent changes within the Roman Catholic church have elicited mixed responses from evangelical Protestants. Some are very suspicious of these developments. They dismiss them as public relations techniques which do not reflect genuine internal changes. On the other side of the spectrum are those who welcome the changes believing them to be an unmistakable work of the Holy Spirit leading the Catholic church towards an evangelical awakening. Most of those who have studied the recent situation carefully, however, would be more cautious in their judgment. They know enough to be convinced that Rome is really changing (despite her claim to changelessness), but they are not so naive as to believe that all the changes are in the right direction. That the Holy Spirit is at work within the Roman Catholic church today is unquestioned; but the extent to which he is the Author of a particular trend is still open to question.

The Second Vatican Council (1963-65) gave impetus to many encouraging trends in Roman Catholicism. The documents of that council are considered by many Catholics to be the most up-to-date official position of their church. It is remarkable, therefore, to find, within these documents, statements such as the following:

"Christ summons the Church, as she goes on her pilgrim way, to that continual *reformation* of which she always has need, insofar as she is an institution of men here on earth. Therefore, if the influence of events or of the times has led to deficiencies in conduct, in Church discipline, or *even in the formulation of doctrine* ...these should be appropriately rectified at the proper moment."

For the church that claims it never changes to officially talk about a "continual reformation" and to extend this reformation even to the "formulation of doctrine" seems to reflect a desire for real change. The ambiguities and tensions within the Roman Catholic church today, however, make it difficult to gauge the impact of this and similar encouraging statements. The documents of Vatican II contain some mutually exclusive views of conservative and progressive Catholic theologians. In a recent comment on the current state of the church, John Stott said, "The Roman monolith, which for centuries has appeared inviolable, has at last cracked open. Conservatives and progressives, traditionalists and radicals, are engaged in a fierce power struggle. Because the issues were still open during Vatican II, *the Council endorsed opinions which oppose, contradict and exclude each other*. To many observers the whole church seems to be in unprecedented disarray. Moreover, it is by

no means clear whether the final outcome will be the triumph of biblical truth or a disastrous lapse into some kind of existential subjectivism. All Christian people should be praying for those who are caught willy-nilly in this transitional agony."

In view of this complex and ambiguous situation, it becomes impossible to adequately study trends in modern Catholicism within the scope of such a brief paper. The limited purpose of this paper, therefore is to outline and analyze four significant *trends* within the Roman Catholic church today.

Many important areas of change (such as teachings about the Virgin Mary) have not even been mentioned. It has also been impossible, due to limited space, to document every statement which the perceptive reader might question.

The four trends which are presented have been developing for some time. Many observers believe that these trends will continue and eventually radically transform the Catholic church. The writer has not shared all his reservations or criticisms of these trends, rather an attempt has been made to give the reader an insight into what progressive Catholic theologians think is happening to their church. The same situation could be looked at differently by someone else! Thus it is hoped that the reader, rather than being worried that the paper is not critical enough of Rome, would instead investigate the changes seriously.

As evangelical Protestants attempt to understand and evaluate these four trends in the Catholic church, they need to determine how they are to react to them. The last part of the paper presents some challenges to evangelical Protestants arising out of these changes in Rome.

The brief time in which this paper had to be researched and written did not allow the writer to do as much personal verification as he would have liked. Any errors of fact or documentation will, therefore, be gratefully received!

In this paper, references to "church," "Catholic" or "theologian" always refer to the *Roman Catholic context unless otherwise stated*.

### PART ONE: TRENDS

#### 1. *Reinterpretation of dogma*

While most traditional Catholic teaching and dogma remains unchanged, the meaning of these dogmas for today is undergoing radical change. This reinterpretation of dogma is justified by progressive theologians on the basis that it is the *intent* of a particular doctrine which is infallible and unchangeable, rather than its formulation in a particular historical context. This process of reinterpretation allows the modern theologian to emphasize aspects of a doctrine which previously received little or no attention in Catholic teaching.

Thus, for example, the dogma of the "real presence" of Christ in the Eucharist is reaffirmed, but the medieval emphasis upon transubstantiation is dismissed as a scholastic attempt to explain this particular doctrine. Having rejected the philosophical framework of scholasticism, modern theologians are able to place a different emphasis on the church's view of the Eucharist and to present this in language and con-

cepts suited to contemporary thought. This may not make the doctrine more palatable to Protestants. The change of emphasis, however, is often reflected in the worship of modern Catholics. David Wells brings out this fact in his recent book, *Revolution in Rome*:

"Indeed, the Mass is often seen as the occasion when they sacrifice themselves to God rather than, as before, when Christ is resacrificed to God. The new concern is no longer with the automatic transformation of the elements into the actual body and blood of Christ...but with the subjective disposition of the participants in the celebration...*The old teaching is not denied; it has merely been pushed into the background.*

This search for the *intent* of doctrinal formulations is especially fruitful when applied to doctrines which were developed in polemic situations. The emphasis required to defend one facet of a doctrine may have been later misunderstood as a denial of other aspects of the doctrine. For example, the fact that the Council of Trent (1545) condemned what *it* understood as the Reformer's teaching on justification by faith, need not prevent the Catholic church today from viewing the matter differently. Removed from the historical context, and stripped of polemic language, some progressive Catholic positions sound surprisingly similar to that of the Reformers!

While there still are many reactionary and conservative Catholic thinkers, they are becoming a definite minority. A serious study of progressive Catholic writers demonstrates the freedom with which many of them are reinterpreting dogma. To use proof-texts from official Catholic documents in an attempt to affirm that the church has not changed betrays little understanding of what is actually happening. People who do not understand this trend of reinterpretation will continue to challenge Roman Catholics on doctrinal emphases which have lost much of their historical significance.

The question which can be legitimately asked, however, is whether this desire to return to the intent of dogmatic formulations is radical enough! What if the "intent" is still contrary to the progressive theologian's own views? To what extent does doctrine have to be based on Scripture? This crucial question leads into the next trend in modern Catholicism; the new emphasis on Scripture.

## 2. New emphasis on Scripture

Many have vivid memories of the time, not so long ago, when the Roman Catholic church seemed to be a major opponent of the distribution of the Bible in the free world. Today there is a radical change! The new interest in reading, studying and distributing of Scripture among Roman Catholics the world over has been a significant religious phenomenon during the past decade. It is no longer unusual to hear of official Roman Catholic projects designed to promote greater interest in the Bible. Whereas previously Catholics were often discouraged from reading the Bible, now they are not only encouraged to do so, but are also allowed to use many translations made by Protestant or ecumenical groups. In many parts of the world, Bible study groups are becoming a regular feature of Roman Catholic life.

Official support for this new interest in Scripture can be found in the documents of Vatican II. "Easy access to the Sacred Scriptures should be provided for all the Christian faithful." A Catholic commentator's note following this statement says, "This is perhaps the most novel section of the Constitution. Not since the early centuries of the church has an official document urged the availability of the Scriptures for all." This new emphasis on Scripture was reflected in the discussion and the texts of Vatican II. An attempt was made to use Scripture to support or illustrate much of what was said during the council. An interesting effect of this new emphasis can be noted in article 4 of the *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests*. This document affirms that the *primary* responsibility of priests is not the administration of the sacraments but rather the preaching of the Word, "For through the saving Word the spark of faith is struck in the hearts of unbelievers, and fed in the hearts of the faithful."

This new emphasis on Scripture raises the age-long question of the relationship between Scripture and tradition. This question was the occasion of a dramatic debate during the first session of Vatican II. The preliminary draft submitted to the council presented Scripture and tradition as two separate sources of revelation. This draft received such severe criticism that Pope John XXIII personally intervened and set up a new commission to study the matter further. The final document, which was unanimously approved during the fourth session of the council, reflects the thinking of many progressive theologians that tradition is the *authoritative interpreter* of Scripture rather than a *separate source* of revelation. Thus the Revelation of God to man is found in Scripture *as interpreted by tradition*.

*The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* made provision, however, for doctrines such as the assumption of Mary, for which biblical support cannot be found. Article 9 states that "...it is not from sacred Scripture alone that the church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed." The source of revelation is Scripture, the "certain" interpreter is tradition. A footnote to this text reads, "It does not exclude the opinion that all revelation is in some way, though perhaps obscurely, contained in Scripture. But this may not suffice for certitude, and in fact the church always understands and interprets Scripture in the light of her continuous tradition." Thus tradition can rule that a certain doctrine is "implicit" in Scripture even if this is not obvious from biblical exegesis.

While this loophole obviously limits the authority of Scripture within the church, the change which is taking place must not be minimized. In concluding his evaluation of this new interest in Scripture within the Roman Catholic church John Stott has said:

"Meanwhile, we may and must be thankful for those tentative concessions to the primacy of Scripture, which emerge from the Constitution like the first snowdrops heralding the end of the freeze and the beginning of spring. They at least make it possible for us, in debate with Roman Catholics, to appeal from tradition to Scripture. We can now challenge them to demonstrate that their tradition is in fact a legitimate elucidation of Scripture, and neither an accretion which may be dispensed with nor a contradiction which must be rejected."

Another question raised by the church's new emphasis on Scripture is in regard to its position on the inspiration and reliability of the biblical text.

Article 11 of the Constitution on Revelation states,

"...since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching firmly, faithfully, and without error that truth which God wanted put into the sacred writings for the sake of our salvation..."

Some have taken this statement as a clear affirmation of the inerrancy of Scripture. The wording, however, is subject to different interpretations. Most progressive theologians interpret this text as meaning that it is only the truths "related to our salvation" which are without error! This allows them a wide range of liberty in handling the text. They are free to subscribe to many radical and liberal theories about the Bible without jeopardizing their relationship with the church. There seems to be a shift away from viewing Scripture as a source of propositional truth. For them, it is the *encounter* with the Christ of Scripture which is considered infallible, and not the Scriptures themselves. This emphasis on experience in modern Catholic thinking provides a theological background and support for the new awakening of religious experience within the church.

### 3. Awakening of religious experience

There was a time when Catholics left the sterility and formality of their church in search of a more personal and meaningful religious experience. For many Catholics today this seems no longer necessary. Father Edward O'Connor's moving description of those involved in the Catholic Charismatic movement shatters textbook caricatures of Roman Catholics, "These people know God as a person; they have a personal relationship with him. One senses a personal familiarity in the way they speak of him. He is not just an entity about whom they have learned some lessons; nor the ground of being to which they subscribe. In attempting to say what the Spirit has done to them, many have used such expressions as, 'For the first time in my life, I really know God. Previously, I had known about him, but that's not the same as knowing him.'"

The Liturgical Renewal, coupled with the Charismatic movement, has revolutionized the nature of religious experience available to Roman Catholics today. They may now participate in worship services conducted in the vernacular, praise God in contemporary folk music, pray in small groups without using a prayer book, experience the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and look for daily help and nourishment from the Scriptures.

From a small beginning at Duquesne University (Pittsburgh) in 1967, the Catholic Charismatic movement has swept through the church at a phenomenal pace! Observers have delineated the following positive effects of the movement on its members:

- intimate knowledge of God
- deepened prayer life
- new love for Scriptures

- deliverance from bad habits and addictions
- physical healing
- experience of peace and joy
- renewed loyalty to the church

The elusive nature of this movement has allowed it to carry the winds of renewal sparked by Vatican II into the most unlikely quarters of the church. It has even at times been able to bridge the gap between progressive and conservative Catholics. The movement's emphasis on *experience* rather than doctrine is in keeping with much of progressive theology. On the other hand, its loyalty to the conservative hierarchy pleases the once-threatened bishops. It must, therefore, be understood as a truly Roman Catholic movement, and not simply an infiltration of Protestant Pentecostalism into the church.

A personal (subjective) relationship with God needs to be balanced by a biblical (objective) knowledge of God. As in all religious awakenings, the danger facing the Catholic Charismatic movement is an over-emphasis on experience. Unless the movement becomes grounded in Scripture, it will increasingly be blown about by every new wind of theological opinion.

Will the church be able to contain this movement? Will the Charismatics revolutionize the old structures and lead the church into a personal and intimate knowledge of God? Or will the hierarchy absorb the Charismatic movement to the point of rendering it ineffective? These questions raise one of the most pressing problems facing the church today; the definition of its nature. Is the church a hierarchical organization or is it the people of God?

### 4. Decentralization of authority

In 1870 the First Vatican Council declared the Pope to be infallible. The next day it was forced to adjourn due to the outbreak of war. In its proclamation of the primacy of the Roman pontiff, the council officially rejected the then-current idea that the papacy should be under the authority of church councils. Because it was so suddenly interrupted, however, the council left undefined the role and authority of the bishops. This factor has since then contributed towards an unbalanced emphasis on the centralized authority of the pope.

The original draft of the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, prepared for the Second Vatican Council, resembled standard Catholic attitudes on this matter. During the course of the council, however, the document was revised and completely re-written. The final draft reflects the tensions in the council surrounding the issue of papal authority.

A superficial reading of texts such as the following gives the impression that the Pope's position of complete supremacy has not changed: "For in virtue of his office, that is, as Vicar of Christ and pastor of the whole church, the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme, and universal power over the church. And he can always exercise his power freely."

In various ways, however, progressive theologians at Vatican II attempted to neutralize this seemingly unlimited authority of the pope. David Wells outlines four of these: (i) The Constitution of the church

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was organized and written in a way which emphasized the importance of the people and de-emphasized the centrality of the pope. Only one out of every eight chapters even mentions the pope!

(ii) The declaration that the pope has "full, supreme, and universal powers over the church" was qualified by the sentence immediately following which states that "...he can always exercise his power freely." At first glance this seems to enhance the pope's powers! A closer look at the original Latin text reveals, however, that the words are carefully chosen so as to put in question the validity of a free exercise of power by the pope. The point that this subtle qualification raises is that whereas the pope *can* exercise his powers freely (without consultation with the bishops), such an action is not necessarily *valid*!

(iii) While the progressives could not deny the infallibility of the pope, they tried to neutralize it by the inclusion in the Constitution of two other forms of infallibility: (1) All Catholics can have an infallible perception of the truth through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, (2) the bishops have an infallibility which derives from their apostolic office. Theoretically, these three infallibilities of the pope, the bishops, and the people should be in harmony! This sharing of "infallibility" undermines the uniqueness of the pope's authority.

(iv) The concept of "collegiality" was another attempt at preventing unilateral action by the pope. The progressives argued that Jesus first gave authority to *all* the apostles, before singling out Peter as their spokesman. Peter was simply the chairman of the committee. As such, his task was to speak on behalf of the apostles and not to make pronouncements with which they disagreed. By applying this New Testament model to the current situation, progressive theologians insisted that the pope's authority was valid only when he spoke after consultation with the college of bishops!

This attempt by progressive theologians to limit the authority of the pope proved to be a threat to Pope Paul VI. After the council had approved the Constitution of the church, the pope had an "explanatory note" added to it. (Since the council had already adjourned it was not given the opportunity to comment on this note.) In opposition to the whole thrust of the principle of collegiality, the note denied that there was "any equality between the head and the members of the College." It went on to say, "The Roman Pontiff proceeds according to his own discretion and in view of the welfare of the church in structuring, promoting, and endorsing any exercise of collegiality." What this note says, in effect, is that the principle of collegiality is only valid when the position of the college of bishops happens to coincide with that of the pope!

These mutually exclusive understandings of the papacy were brought to the fore in the birth control debate. When Pope Paul made an official pronouncement against birth control, many bishops took him to task. They claimed that he should have consulted them before taking a public stand on the matter. Many of them felt that since he did not consult them his action was not valid. They, therefore, do not feel obligated to abide by his judgment in this case. This feeling is quite widely spread within the Catholic church. Recent surveys have indicated that a large majority of Roman Catholics and their leaders are not abiding by the pope's ruling concerning birth control.

This trend towards the decentralization of authority from the pope to the bishops (and eventually to the people) again raises the troublesome question, "Who speaks for Rome?" It is clear that the pope is still the head of the church. It appears, however, that he no longer always speaks for the majority of Catholics!

With the ambiguities in the church's position on tradition, Scripture, and papal authority, the young parish priests of today have lost many of their traditional moorings. With the new surge of religious experience within the church and with the breaking down of the ancient barriers towards outsiders, everything seems open to question. In this situation of uncertainty and rapid change it is not surprising, therefore, that many Catholic clergy and laymen are turning to the writings of progressive Catholic theologians in search for a sense of direction. These men are looked up to as the new prophets in the church. Even though they often disagree with one another, they still speak with a sense of authority and confidence. It is the views of men like Rahner, Schillebeeckx, Congar, Küng, and others which seem to provide the real authority in the church today. What these men believe about theology, tradition, and the Scriptures is what is being passed on to the Catholic layman by his spiritual leaders.

This dependence on the new Catholic theology makes it imperative for the church to develop a theology which is not only relevant to contemporary culture but also faithful to the historic Christian faith. Will the church let secular society determine and mold its theology? Or will it turn back to the Scriptures in search for the eternal truths of God, and then seek to apply these truths to the needs of modern man?

The future of the Roman Catholic church seems to lie in the hands of its progressive theologians. They are presently molding its theology. Are they also determining its destiny?

## PART TWO: CHALLENGES

### 1. Challenges to action

a. *Encouragement of in-depth study of the Bible among Roman Catholics.* The new interest in the Scriptures among Catholics has made them open to those who are willing to expound the Word to them. Catholic groups are increasingly inviting Protestant lecturers to speak to them on biblical themes. Small group Bible studies, led by laymen, often look to Protestant participants for help.

Evangelical Protestants are especially known for their love for the Scriptures and their ability to study the Bible in depth. They now have a unique opportunity to introduce Catholics to the many excellent Bible study tools and methods which they have developed over the years. Roman Catholics who are interested in studying the Bible need to be helped to "dig" into the text, rather than merely using it as a springboard for religious discussion and meditation.

b. *Dialogue with Roman Catholic theologians.* The influence of liberal Protestant theology on Catholic thinking has, no doubt, been partly due to the ecumenical spirit of liberal theologians who were willing to dialogue with their Catholic counterparts. The present revival in evangelical Protestant scholarship could have an equally powerful impact on Catholic thought!

Protestant evangelical theologians should seek to share their biblical and theological insights with Catholics through all available channels. They need to be especially encouraged to participate in scholarly societies and organizations with Catholic theologians. Because of his many efforts in this direction, Oscar Cullmann's books are now being used in several Catholic seminaries. His strong stand against the Bultmannites must certainly be having its influence on Catholic seminarians and their teachers. There is no reason why such involvement could not be duplicated by many evangelical Protestant theologians!

The present direction of Catholic theology seems to be away from the historical Christian faith. The likelihood of there ever being a solidly evangelical and biblical counter-current within the church depends, in some part, on the extent to which modern Catholic theologians are exposed to evangelical Protestant theology!

c. *Fellowship with believing Roman Catholics* As well as participating with Roman Catholics in small Bible study groups, evangelical Protestants need to be willing to spend time in prayer and meditation with believing Catholics. Fellowship (as distinct from cooperation) should be based upon mutual life in Christ rather than on doctrinal agreement. To refuse to pray with a Roman Catholic because of disagreement with his church may be a rejection of someone whom Christ has accepted.

Fellowship in prayer, Bible study, and personal sharing with true believers within the Catholic church should be encouraged. It should neither be construed as an endorsement of Catholic doctrine, nor should it be confused with organizational cooperation.

d. *Participation of Catholic believers in inter-denominational outreaches* The three above-mentioned challenges of in-depth Bible study, theological dialogue, and fellowship are already being partly accomplished by inter-denominational organizations which involve Roman Catholic believers. These evangelistic organizations invite Catholic believers to participate on the same basis as others. The recent changes in the Catholic church have made many Catholic believers able to honestly subscribe to the doctrinal position of some evangelical inter-denominational groups. As long as they can do this, the organizations are willing to appoint them as helpers, counselors, or even staff members.

In defence of their position, these organizations argue that they do not exclude Presbyterians because of their denomination's views on baptism, or Lutherans because of their peculiar understanding of the Eucharist, or members of the Salvation Army because they do not practice these two ordinances; even Anglicans are not excluded in spite of their emphasis on the episcopacy! On what basis, they ask, should they exclude Catholics who evidence the fruits of the Spirit and are willing to submit to the authority of the organization?

The traditional exclusion of Roman Catholics from such participation needs to be examined in the light of Scripture and the recent changes in the Catholic church. Historical circumstances are not enough to justify such a stance.

## 2. Challenges to self-examination

a. *Discourage the perpetuation of prejudiced and antiquated caricatures of Roman Catholics* The strong emphasis in the Bible on truth and justice requires evangelical Protestants to be scrupulously honest in their descriptions of Roman Catholics. Personal prejudices and historical antagonism are no excuse for misrepresenting Catholics.

In spite of the rapid change in the Catholic church, some evangelical textbooks still portray Roman Catholics as medieval sacramentalists with all that this caricature entails! This approach makes it very difficult for many evangelical Protestants to grasp the significance of the changes in modern Catholicism.

There is a fear that if it is admitted that Rome has changed there will no longer be the same motivation to evangelize Catholics. Surely this should not be the case! The motive which impels Christians to evangelize unconverted Roman Catholics should be the same as that which impels them to evangelize unconverted Protestants. An accurate and sympathetic understanding of modern Catholicism should not dampen evangelistic zeal towards unbelievers within the Catholic church.

b. *Continuous subjection of Protestant traditions to the scrutiny of Scripture* Since evangelical Protestants accept the Bible as their final authority, they should always be willing to subject all their traditions to its scrutiny. In dialogue with Roman Catholics, the evangelical Protestant must make sure that he is not holding on more firmly to his traditions than to the Word of God.

Many Protestant theological systems were formulated in polemic situations. An aspect of the truth was threatened and it was necessary to defend it. The teaching of the Reformers on justification by faith, for example, was formulated in opposition to the Catholic church's emphasis on justification by works. Some evangelical Protestants misunderstood the Reformers' teaching thinking that their intent was to discourage Christian social action (the futility of "good works"! ). The rediscovery of the evangelical social conscience during the past two decades has been an uphill battle against this particular tradition. A return to the Bible clearly demonstrates the important balance between faith and works. Great care should be taken, therefore, to make sure that historical formulations of doctrine are continuously submitted to the scrutiny of Scripture.

In the light of the above, evangelical Protestants should ask themselves whether it is ever legitimate to incorporate a particular theological tradition (be it evangelical or not) in a heavily annotated Bible or a loose biblical paraphrase. The increasing dependence of evangelical Protestants on such "authorized" Bibles should be brought into question. Can these Bibles judge the very traditions which are incorporated in them? If not, then can they be honestly described as "The Scriptures"?

c. *Empathy for evangelical Protestant missionaries in Catholic lands* In their present relationships with Roman Catholics, many Protestant missionaries and pastors are facing an acute dilemma. On the one hand, they are enjoying a new and exciting ministry among Catholics through Bible teaching, discussion, prayer and evangelistic activity. On the other hand, this involvement with Catholics is sometimes strongly questioned by the



Christian workers' churches or mission boards. The latter are afraid that such activity by their missionaries may be a compromise of biblical principles.

Many Christian workers, caught in this dilemma, find it very hard to know what to do. Often, even when they are convinced that their activities do not involve any compromise of biblical principles, they feel forced to either cover up what they do or completely abandon their involvement with Catholics. If they do not do this many of them face the prospect of losing financial and organizational support from their church or mission.

This delicate situation is increasingly becoming the experience of many evangelical Protestants ministering in predominantly Roman Catholic countries. It requires serious, patient, and prayerful consideration by all involved. There should be a real feeling of Christian empathy and understanding for those grappling with these issues. Love must be demonstrated, but not at the expense of truth. Truth must be grappled with, but not to the neglect of love!

d. *Development of a consistent view of Christian experience.* Many believing Catholics are puzzled by the evangelical Protestants' over-emphasis on the *experience* of conversion, and their under-emphasis on the *fruits* of conversion. Some Protestants may need to examine their own view of Christian experience as they increasingly meet Catholic believers who have not had dramatic conversion experiences and yet evidently manifest the fruits of the Spirit.

Evangelical Protestants who are critical of the emphasis on experience in the Catholic Charismatic movement, should consider being also critical of their own emphasis on experience in conversion. The biblical criteria for assessing the spiritual life of a person do not seem to depend on *the way in which* a person was either converted or sanctified, but rather on the results of that "experience."

"By their fruits ye shall know them" is a test which can be equally applied to evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics. When all is said and done, what the world looks for in Christians is a practical and demonstrable evidence of the inner knowledge of God which they claim to have.

It was a Catholic, Cardinal Suhard, who said that to be a witness is not to engage in propaganda or always to try to convince others that our way is the right one, but rather "to live in such a way, that our lives would not make sense if God did not exist!" AMEN.

## EVANGELIZATION AMONG NOMINAL OR SACRAMENTALIST CHRISTIANS REPORT

The subject brought response from a widely divergent group of people. There were those associated with missions primarily among nominal or sacramentalist churches; those whose ministry was entirely within nominal or sacramentalist churches; and those who, by means of a new experience of the Holy Spirit, found fellowship in Christ broke all barriers down.

The group's concern was not primarily with the subject of the paper but was stimulated by the paper in its broader implications.

There was great heaviness of heart expressed for the many people who are culturally bound to churches but not spiritually alive in Christ. Should these people be abandoned to the mercy of God while our whole effort should go to those who have never heard the Gospel? Some members of the group testified to the Lord honoring their work of imposing sacramental disciplines among nominal Christians. Others were encouraged by the simple and honest preaching of the Word in a nominalist situation, and others were greatly encouraged by the apparent work of the Holy Spirit transcending the doctrinal, denominational and cultural differences to bring a new awareness of Christ.

The work among Roman Catholics aroused strong feelings. Those involved in and with Roman Catholic people were suspect. There remains evidence of a Protestant evangelical backlash whenever Roman Catholics are not invited to come out of the Roman church as part of their conversion experience. The group was not able to find one mind on this. Some were prepared to work with people who remained in the Roman church, some insisted on their coming out, some wanted them to come out but would never say so directly, and some were prepared to encourage born-again believers to stay in the Roman church.

In direct response to the paper, a deep sense of thankfulness was expressed for the new openness of the Roman church. The group did, however, *doubt* the proposition that the leadership of the church was in the hands of the progressives. Some felt that the changes were more apparent than real and that the historic mistrust of the Roman church was still justified.

There was *unconditional* approval of meeting with Roman Catholics for Bible study, sharing Christian experience, and praying together.

There was apparent in the group the turmoil that evangelism often creates between those who work in the nominal and sacramental churches, and those whose work is a mission to the nominal and sacramentalist Christians. The group after three days of discussion reached a healthy level of mutual understanding between these two positions.

Nominal Christians were taken to be those whose affiliation to the Christian Church seemed to lack any sense of sharing in the resurrected life of Christ. The state churches of Europe suffer from nominalism, the large free churches of America suffer from nominalism. The problem of evangelism of nominal Christians in a non-Christian culture was stressed.