



# NEWS

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## **SOUTHERN BAPTISTS AND CATHOLIC BISHOPS DISCUSS USE OF THE BIBLE**

WASHINGTON--The use and understanding of the Bible in the respective churches was the theme of the second meeting of the newly constituted Conversation between the Southern Baptist Convention and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB).

The Conversation was held at the Washington Retreat House here, September 12-14, under the chairmanship of Roman Catholic Bishop J. Kendrick Williams of Lexington, Kentucky.

The *Baptist Faith and Message*, a confessional text approved by the Southern Baptist Convention and used for guidance in seminaries and agencies, and the Second Vatican Council's *Decree on Revelation* were the focus of discussion. Background documents, including the Pontifical Biblical Commission's *Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* and the *Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* produced by an evangelical group in Chicago, were used. A report will be published next year.

Father Joseph Fitzmyer, SJ, of Catholic University presented a Roman Catholic analysis of the Southern Baptist texts and Dr. Mark Coppenger, President of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, surveyed the Roman Catholic position. The Conversation identified areas where the communities are in agreement, such as the importance of recognizing the inspired character of the entire Bible, the necessity of ascertaining the intention of the author, the role of the Holy Spirit in directing the authors in their writing, the miraculous character of biblical events so characterized, and the necessity of interpreting the Scriptures in the light of Christ and of the

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whole of the sacred text. Differences of definition and language were also clarified. Both Baptists and Catholics use words like revelation, inerrancy and historicity, but in different ways.

Both use critical approaches in the analysis of the text, but to a different extent and with different emphases. Finally, the group identified important areas of disagreement, for example, as to whether scientific and historical assertion in the text are to be taken literally, how literary genre are to be determined, and the symbolic use of language.

The Southern Baptist presentation was particularly concerned about the formulations in "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church" concerning "Fundamentalism." While Southern Baptists as a community do not define themselves as fundamentalists, there are those who use this term, including members of the Conversation. A principle was enunciated that language, like *fundamentalist* or *sect*, should only be used for groups which describe themselves that way.

There was also a presentation of two Bible studies to demonstrate how a biblical text is used in the two traditions. Dr. Roger Nichole of Reformed Seminary in Orlando and Father Thomas Rausch, SJ, of Loyola-Marymount gave an explication of John II, the raising of Lazarus. The exercise demonstrated both agreement and even parallel liturgical use between the two traditions but also differing preferences as to how such a text is used in evangelism and nurture of the faithful.

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