

# The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology

## Reflections on the Evangelical-Catholic Dialogue

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# Editorial: A Unity Based on Truth

Thomas R. Schreiner

**Thomas R. Schreiner** is a professor of New Testament at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has also taught New Testament at Azusa Pacific University and Bethel Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Romans* in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament and co-author of *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance*. His most recent book is *Paul, the Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*. In addition, he is serving as the preaching pastor of Clifton Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky.

I grew up in a Roman Catholic home and attended parochial schools for nine years. When I was young, I attended church regularly. I was baptized in infancy as a Roman Catholic, received my first communion at six years of age, and was confirmed at the age of twelve. During those years I was convinced that Protestants were wrong, though I never gave Protestantism much thought. I do think that one can be a genuine believer in Christ as a Roman Catholic, but I was not in that company. In my teenage years I slowly drifted from the church, for religion meant very little to my everyday life. Almost all of my Catholic friends had the same experience. When I was seventeen years of age, I was converted through the influence of the person who later became my wife. She gave me a Bible to read. As I read it, I realized that we are justified by faith alone and not by our works. This teaching of the Apostle Paul was wonderfully liberating and refreshing. I understood that Mary was not a mediator between God and man, but our one and only mediator was Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:5). It dawned upon me when reading Hebrews that the only priest I needed was Jesus Christ, the great high priest whose blood was shed so that I could enter into God's presence with confidence. The theology of the mass contradicted the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ on Calvary. Nowhere did the scriptures teach that a pope should rule the church.

I had these experiences some thirty years ago. Since then I have met genuine Roman Catholic believers, especially charismatic Catholics. I have also met some

evangelical converts from Roman Catholicism who had very negative experiences with Catholicism in their early years. Such converts have occasionally responded with words about Roman Catholicism that are overly harsh and vituperative. For myself, I do not look back on my years as a Roman Catholic as years of repression. I grew up in a wonderful home and have many fond memories of my early years. I am thankful that I learned from Roman Catholics that God is a holy God. He is to be revered and feared as the holy one. Some Protestants seem to think of God as their buddy. By God's grace I learned a different view of God, a more biblical one, as a Roman Catholic. I am also grateful for the biblical teachings that I learned in my early days as a Roman Catholic. I believed in the Trinity, the deity of Christ, Christ's resurrection, and the inspiration of the scriptures. I believed that all of us were born in Adam as sinners, and that heaven and hell were real.

The issue in the current journal in which we examine the relationship between Roman Catholicism and evangelicalism is not merely academic, for many evangelicals have Roman Catholic roots. In recent years evangelicals and conservative Roman Catholics have joined hands in contemporary culture wars, repudiating the secularism of our age and contending for moral values in the public square. More controversial have been theological discussions and statements jointly prepared by evangelicals and Catholics. The articles in this journal seek to give our readers an overview of some of the important issues and implications

involved in the recent evangelical and Catholic dialogue. For readers unfamiliar with the topic, the articles will serve as an introduction and orientation to the debate. Don Sweeting sets the historical landscape for us admirably. Both Ben Mitchell and Kevin Offner note that progress has been made in the various discussions and encourage us to seek unity, where possible, with Roman Catholics.

The call to unity is salutary, for we all need to heed Christ's call for unity that resounds throughout John 17. Nor should we surrender hope, for we believe that God can work in new ways and break down old walls. Still, R. Albert Mohler, Jr. reminds us that unity must be based on the truth of the gospel. And Russell Moore rightly observes that contemporary Roman Catholics believe that final unity means submission to the pontiff in Rome. Unity at the expense of truth, particularly unity that compromises the gospel, is not true unity. The essay by Mark Seifrid on justification by faith and judgment according to works reminds us that justification *sola fide* is the touchstone of the gospel.

We must not compromise on *sola scriptura*, or *sola fide*, or *sola gratia*. Though God can do all things, it is hard to imagine how we can be united with Roman Catholics: They would have to surrender their teaching on Mary, on the sacraments, on the primacy of the Pope, on the role of tradition, and revise their official teaching on justification. It is clear that the official Roman Catholic teaching on all these matters is not taught in the scriptures. Perhaps I lack even a mustard seed of faith regarding the prospect for unity. It is difficult to conceive of Roman Catholics changing their teaching on such central matters, especially since tradition is venerated by Roman Catholics.

On the other hand, we as Protestants must be vigilant to stay true to the "faith that was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3) in the scriptures. I fear that Protestants longing for unity may compromise theologically. Anyone who attended the Evangelical Theological Society Meeting in Colorado Springs this fall had to be astonished at the theological vacuity that now exists among evangelicals. Too many cannot see what would have been obvious to all evangelicals even fifty years ago, viz., that open theism is heretical. Given such a state of affairs, will the center hold, or will evangelicals try to find some security and stability by compromising with Roman Catholics? May the Lord grant us his grace so that we do not ever abandon the beauty and simplicity of the gospel. May we seek unity, but never at the expense of truth.

# Standing Together, Standing Apart: Cultural Co-Belligerence Without Theological Compromise<sup>1</sup>

*R. Albert Mohler, Jr.*

**R. Albert Mohler, Jr.** is President and Professor of Christian Theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of numerous scholarly articles and has edited and contributed to important volumes on theology and culture. Dr. Mohler's writing is regularly featured in *World* magazine and Religious News Service.

An ominous sense of urgency surrounds any gathering of those who claim the name of Christ and would dare to speak of eternal things. Darkening shadows and a sense of cultural decline are now settled on the Western Christian conscience with a heaviness of spirit and a tragic sense of loss.

We must not claim that Christianity is the property of Western civilization, but we do acknowledge that Western civilization, such as it is or was, is the product of Christianity and of Christians. Darkness has always loomed in the background, if not in the forefront of Western culture. The critical turning points in Western history were moments when darkness was defeated or dispatched, often just in the nick of time.

Augustine died in 430 as the Vandals were sacking his beloved Hippo. The earthly city would fall, he had warned, but the City of God would remain and stand eternally. Keeping the two cities distinct and clear in the Christian mind has never been easy, but Augustine knew that this distinction is crucial to Christian clear-headedness, and the distinction is irreducibly theological:

One of them, the earthly city, has created for herself such false Gods as she wanted, from any source she chose—even creating them out of men—in order to worship them with sacrifices. The other city, the Heavenly City on pilgrimage in this world, does not create false gods.

She herself is the creation of the true God, and she herself is to be his true sacrifice. Nevertheless, both cities alike enjoy the good things, or are afflicted with the adversities of this temporal state, but with a different faith, a different expectation, a different love, until they are separated by a final judgment, and each received her own end, of which there is no end.<sup>2</sup>

Western civilization now faces a new invasion of the Vandals, and Christians are again confused about the meaning of our current struggle. Theological vandals seek to undermine the Church; political vandals have debased our civic discourse; legal vandals have turned the law into a playground of invented rights; moral vandals entice with a promise of polymorphous perversity; psychological vandals have made every self a victim; and the academic vandals have transformed the university into a circus of irrationality.

We are in danger of forgetting and thus forfeiting the very foundations of our civilization—perhaps even of civilization itself. As T. S. Eliot expressed through the voice of Thomas Beckett,

You shall forget these things, toiling  
in the household,  
You shall remember them, droning  
by the fire,  
When age and forgetfulness sweeten  
memory  
Only like a dream that has often  
been told  
And often been changed in the telling.  
They will seem unreal.

Human kind cannot bear very much reality.<sup>3</sup>

Eliot's Beckett is profoundly right; human kind cannot bear much reality. Christians are, on the other hand, those who claim to be stewards of ultimate reality—a reality more real than anything the earthly city claims as reality. We have no choice but to be the glad bearers and stewards of reality in the midst of a world gone mad. And, as G. K. Chesterton warned almost a century ago, "the most characteristic current philosophies have not only a touch of mania, but a touch of suicidal mania."<sup>4</sup>

This suicidal mania is evident in what Pope John Paul II has identified as the "Culture of Death" and a "conspiracy against life." In his words, "This culture is actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents which encourage an idea of society excessively concerned with efficiency."<sup>5</sup> Further, "This conspiracy involves not only individuals in their personal, family or group relationships, but goes far beyond, to the point of damaging and distorting, at the international level, relations between peoples and states."<sup>6</sup>

The Culture of Death has come hand in hand with the Death of Culture. Debris and ruins surround us as we survey the cultural landscape. Art has been debased, and what is celebrated in the salons is a self-conscious revolt against reason and objective standards. Literature has been thoroughly deconstructed, and the academy is reduced to what Lionel Trilling once called the "bloody crossroads" where politics and literature meet.

Hollywood and the electronic media bombard us with noxious programming labeled as "entertainment." Given the coarseness of our popular culture, we owe

the barbarians of old an apology. Some analysts advise that explicit pornography may be the seventh largest industry in America. Whatever its rank, the line between pornography and mainstream entertainment is so indistinct that it is nearly meaningless.

William Bennett recently quipped that America has become "the kind of nation civilized nations sent missionaries to." Indeed, missionaries are coming, and not all are Christian missionaries. This strange historical moment presents the Christian conscience with an unavoidable challenge.

### **Great Tradition Christians: A New Ecumenism?**

In light of this challenge, one of the most interesting and promising developments has been a realignment of what have been traditionally identified as the three main traditions or movements within organized Christianity, the (Eastern) Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and evangelicals. Proponents and architects of this realignment celebrate the fact that believers from these communions are working in closer relation, and often in active solidarity, with each other—a development that would have been unthinkable just a few decades ago.

Observers explain that this realignment is the product of two related developments or trends. The first is the displacement of all serious believers in any Christian worldview from the mainstream culture. These believers are united in their verdict that the culture is now pervasively opposed to the convictions and values central to Christianity—and to Western civilization.

The second trend, it is claimed, is a rediscovery of common Christian con-

victions that had been hidden during centuries of theological and ecclesiastical warfare. Some argue that the convictional lines separating Roman Catholics, evangelicals, and the Orthodox from each other have been transcended by history, reduced to matters of inconsequence if not irrelevance. Others argue that the various parties to historic theological controversies were victims of limited knowledge and misunderstandings. The first can be corrected by further study, the second cleared by explanation. Still others argue that organized Christianity simply cannot afford to present a disunited front against the new cultural reality. They sound like Benjamin Franklin in his challenge to fellow patriots during the American revolution, "We must all hang together, or, assuredly, we shall all hang separately."

Another version of this proposed realignment is based on the argument that the historic schisms of institutional Christianity have been overcome by history and theological development. This argument is found among those who claim, for example, that the Reformation has been accomplished in purpose—that the Roman Catholic Church has been reformed in theology and practice since the sixteenth-century, and the purposes of the Reformers are thus accomplished.<sup>7</sup>

Behind all this is the failed project of liberal ecumenism. The modern ecumenical movement was born in the optimism of modernity as it emerged in the early decades of the twentieth century. The architects and planners of the ecumenical movement saw a vision of Christendom reunited visibly, institutionally, and gloriously in order to present a common Christian front in the modern world.

Regrettably, this ecumenical movement was not only an artifact of modernity and

its optimism, but of theological modernism and its reductionism. The major players in the ecumenical movement came from the Protestant left, and the movement based itself on a lowest-common-denominator foundation of doctrine. Even when traditional and orthodox theological language was used, it was undercut by the aberrant and sub-orthodox teachings of the ecumenical leadership. Conservatives in all Christian communions looked askance at the declarations and directives of the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches in the United States.

The old ecumenism produced a vast bureaucracy, promoted a leftist political agenda, and is effectively owned and operated by those committed to theological liberalism, revisionism, and cultural accommodationism. With the decline and rejection of the historic ecumenical movement as backdrop, some now declare a "new ecumenism" formed around a coalition of traditionalist or conservative elements in the three traditions, but most especially between conservative evangelicals and traditional Roman Catholics. Thomas Oden recently argued that the "new ecumenism" emerged out of the wreckage of the older ecumenism, which he charges was hijacked by the left in the 1960s:

Meanwhile the new ecumenism has been quietly rediscovering ancient Christian ecumenism, without press notice, without fanfare. It has silently reclaimed the courage of the martyrs, and the faith of the confessors, the resolve of the early Councils, and the wisdom of the Fathers. It is being rediscovered by the truth once for all revealed in Jesus Christ. That truth is constantly being renewed by the work of the Holy Spirit in engendering proximate unity of the community of baptized

believers world wide.<sup>8</sup>

Some champion this “new ecumenism” as the salvation of organized Christianity from its cultural isolation and displacement. Conservatives from the three historic traditions should present a united front as cultural co-belligerents—what Timothy George has described as “an ecumenism of the trenches.” Given the reality of the culture war, the description is immediately appealing. But is this really *ecumenism*? For some, the ecumenical claims simply go too far. Coalitions are built on identifiable foundations of common concern and common action, but not necessarily on a comprehensive agreement concerning issues across the worldview.

The older ecumenism aimed for the institutional ingathering of all Christians into one visible body—polity, confession, and structure to be worked out later. Thomas Oden suggests that the new ecumenism has yet to make its institutional ambitions clear. “It may decide not to seek any structure at all at this time, but allow the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit to shape whatever structures are required. This debate is only beginning.”<sup>9</sup> He points to journals such as *First Things*, *Pro Ecclesia*, and *Touchstone* as influential voices. Interestingly, all three are published by what are essentially parachurch organizations.

The new ecumenism has been championed, defined, and described by figures such as Richard John Neuhaus, who has given personal leadership and an articulate public voice to the movement. The defining symbol of the new ecumenism is the 1994 statement, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium.”<sup>10</sup>

The statement quickly gathered signatories from various branches of evangelicalism as well as an impressive roster of Roman Catholic theologians and churchmen. As intended, the statement also received a good deal of attention in the religious media. So far as liberal Catholics and Protestants were concerned, the statement was nothing more than theological window dressing for the Religious Right—a manifesto for a coalescence of conservative Catholics and evangelicals into a massive movement against the moral tide.

The response from many Catholic leaders was lukewarm at best, and this came as no surprise to the organizers, who were well aware of the liberal bent of many of the nation’s Catholic bishops. From the Catholic traditionalists came a mixture of celebration and concern. The evangelicals responded with a divided mind and a divided voice—no surprise, given the increasingly pluralistic character of the evangelical movement, in so far as it remains a movement at all.

The most vocal opposition to the very idea of a new ecumenism came from the evangelical wing most closely associated with the movement in its founding, and those most concerned with theological clarity—those most committed to the historic Protestant confessions that were championed and cherished by the Reformers and their spiritual children. Among these, the response was swift and clear. Those evangelicals who signed the ECT statement had forfeited their claim to evangelical legitimacy—had sold out the faith and the faithful. Others were more charitable in language, but shared the essential verdict.

Meetings were quickly organized and at least one new organization, the Alliance

of Confessing Evangelicals, was formed (indirectly, at least) out of the controversy, and as evidence of the fact that ECT had aroused evangelical outrage as well as evangelical appreciation. J. I. Packer, one of evangelicalism's most respected theologians, felt the necessity of explaining his signing of ECT in a lengthy article published in *Christianity Today*.<sup>11</sup> Packer explained that he signed it,

Because it affirms positions and expresses attitudes that have been mine for half a lifetime, and that I think myself called to commend to others every way I can. Granted, for the same half lifetime I have publicly advocated the Reformed theology that was first shaped (by Calvin) in opposition to Roman teaching about salvation and the church and that stands opposed to it still—which, I suppose, is why some people have concluded that I have gone theologically soft, and others think I must be ignorant of Roman Catholic beliefs, and others guessed that I signed ECT without reading it.<sup>12</sup>

The article simultaneously clarified and confused the issues. Packer said that he could not become a Roman Catholic “because of certain basic tenets to which the Roman system, as such, is committed.”<sup>13</sup> Yet, he seemed to acknowledge that the statement implied more agreement than was actually achieved, and he stated that “historic disagreements at the theory level urgently now need review.”<sup>14</sup>

The entire ECT project is open to various interpretations, and no consensus on its precise meaning may even be shared among the signatories—indeed this lack of consensus is apparent. This confusion must be set over against the clarity of the confessions and statements of historic importance that stipulate the issues of doctrinal *disagreement* between the traditions.

In this light, George Lindbeck correctly identifies the issue of concern to many evangelicals. How can Catholics and evangelicals, or Orthodox and Catholics, claim simultaneously to hold their historic and conflicting doctrines without alteration, and to find themselves now in basic agreement? The very structure of the claim raises suspicions, at the very least. Official dialogues between some Lutheran bodies and the Roman Catholic Church have produced statements claiming that, in essence, everyone party to the historic Reformation debates was right in his own way, if understood on his own terms, as now interpreted by his confessional great-grandchildren.

As Lindbeck notes, many find these reported agreements difficult to understand and inherently self-contradictory:

They are inclined to think that the very notion of doctrinal reconciliation without doctrinal change is self-contradictory, and they suspect that the dialogue partners are self-deceived victims of their desire to combine ecumenical harmony with denominational loyalty. The dialogue members . . . usually protest. They say they have been compelled by the evidence, sometimes against their earlier inclinations, to conclude that positions that were once really opposed are now really reconcilable, even though these positions remain in a significant sense identical to what they were before.<sup>15</sup>

When the ECT project was first announced, I was very hopeful. My understanding was that the project was essentially and specifically focused on cultural co-belligerence. Given the cultural disaster we face, and what is at stake, it simply makes sense for men and women who share basic worldview concerns to gather strength from each other, join hands and hearts, and enter the cultural



fray. On this point, all but the most extreme separatists among us would agree.

But when the ECT statement was released, it was something very different than I expected. The statement went into rather substantial detail on issues of doctrine and theology, claiming basic agreement, and promising even the possibility of common witness. I did not sign the statement. I could not in good conscience sign the statement. At the most basic level, I am in full agreement with the critics of the statement who have registered serious theological concerns about the document and its interpretation.

Those on either side of the ECT project who express surprise at this verdict should take note to distinguish those who reject the statement for both its call for co-belligerence and its theological content beyond a foundation for co-belligerence, and those who reject the statement for the latter, while joining in the former, at least in spirit. Most of the evangelical critics of ECT support the call for co-belligerence, even as we protest what we believe to be inherently dangerous theological claims within the statement.

A certain logic reveals itself within the ECT statement, and this is the most foundational criticism among evangelicals. The central objection is found in this partial paragraph:

All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ. Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ. We have not chosen one another, just as we have not chosen Christ. He has chosen us, and he has chosen us to be his together (John 15). However imperfect our communion with one another, however deep our disagreements with one another, we recognize that there is but one church of

Christ.<sup>16</sup>

For the confessional evangelical, the problem is evident in the logic joining the first and second sentences, and then following through the remainder of the section. Certainly, all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ. No responsible Roman Catholic, evangelical, or Orthodox theologian would deny that fundamental reality. But this begs the most important question: What does it mean to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?

Here we are face to face with the theological debates of the Reformation era, and the mutual anathemizations that ensued. The next sentence of the statement claims that ‘Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ.’ At this point, the basic logic behind the Catholic and evangelical understandings diverges. It is completely within the logic of the documents of Vatican II for Roman Catholics to accept baptism in evangelical churches as a valid baptism, and thus sacramentally salvific. The reverse simply does not apply. In so far as evangelicals remain *evangelical* we must reject any claim that the sacraments in themselves are saving acts—whether the baptism is received within a Catholic or an evangelical church.

I am using the concept of theological *logic* here in order to demonstrate that the problem is not limited to any individual doctrine, or even to a set of doctrines, but is tied to the entire envisioning of theology, salvation, authority, and ecclesiology. Though I am seldom in agreement with Andrew Greeley, I am pointing to something similar in spirit to what he identifies as the distinction between the Protestant and Catholic *imaginings*.<sup>17</sup> Given

this fundamental difference in theological logic, evangelicals and Roman Catholics will respond to the same document in different ways. The danger comes in claiming agreement where no real agreement exists.

### **How *Mere* is *Mere* Christianity?**

The idea of something like “mere Christianity” may be directly traced to Richard Baxter, among the most influential of the English Puritans. Nevertheless, the concept is rightly associated most directly with C. S. Lewis, whose book of that title emerged from radio addresses delivered during World War II. In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis contended for a conception of Christianity that was irreducible and central to all authentic Christian expression. Pointing to the use of the word “Christian” as first used to identify believers in Antioch (Acts 11:26), Lewis suggested that Christians are “those who accepted the teaching of the Apostles.”<sup>18</sup>

Of course, an older conception of “mere Christianity” was offered by Vincent of Lerins in the fifth century as “*Quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*” (“that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by everyone”). Here again we face a difficult quandary. *Some* doctrines must surely have been believed by all true Christians everywhere and at all times. But do we really agree on *what* those doctrines are?

We face the twin dangers of minimalism and maximalism at this point. We should be thankful for a body of doctrine that unites Roman Catholic, evangelical, and the Orthodox believers when each is faithful to his tradition. Such shared doctrines include belief in the Trinity, in the Bible as the inerrant and infallible deposit of divine revelation, in the unique hypo-

static union of full deity and humanity in Jesus Christ, in the sinfulness of humanity and the necessity of salvation, and in the fact that salvation is found in the gospel of Christ as preached by the Apostles. Lewis referred to such doctrinal agreement as “an immensely formidable unity.”<sup>19</sup>

A minimalist approach would either deny this common ground or deny the importance of this convergence. But the more pressing danger is a maximalism that claims basic doctrinal agreement beyond this commonly accepted body of doctrine. Central to the Christian message is the *kerygma*—the most basic declaration of how sinners are saved by the atonement achieved by Christ and applied to the believer through faith. Here, the three great traditions are separated by not only logic, but by explicit doctrinal claims as formalized in historic confessional statements, declarations, and formulae.

This separation increases to a gulf of distance once the logic of the system moves to the nature and identity of the Church as the Body of Christ, and to issues of revelation, authority, sanctification, ministry, sacraments, and the remainder of the body of doctrine. From these roots come the historic divisions over the contested claims related to the papacy, justification by faith, the relative authority of Scripture and tradition, the veneration of Mary, purgatory, doctrinal mystery, and many other theological issues of inherently kerygmatic importance. *These are basic claims that caused the divisions, gave birth to the traditions, and remain still in force.*

As faithful believers from these three traditions, we should give thanks for the agreement among us without fear, and give voice to our conflicting claims with-

out compromise. Compromise would be evident when truth claims are withheld, or when truth claims are surrendered or modified against conscience.

Lewis believed that “mere Christianity” would be clearest at the center of the faith. “It is at her center, where her truest children dwell, that each communion is really closest to every other in spirit, if not in doctrine. And this suggests that at the center of each there is something, or a Someone, who against all divergences of belief, all differences of temperament, all memories of mutual persecution, speaks with the same voice.”<sup>20</sup> There is a poetic quality of hopefulness to this claim, but the more I reflect upon it, the less I believe it to be true—at least as will be popularly believed. At the center of all three traditions is a claim to basic faith and trust in Christ as Savior. This is expressed in the historic creeds and confessions of the Church and is irreducible. But behind this hope and trust is a basic understanding of *how* the saving work of Christ accomplishes our salvation, and how this is applied to believers (or to others). Evangelicals, Catholics, and the Orthodox do not share a common understanding of *how* the work of Christ accomplishes our salvation—and this is the heart of the gospel.

An evangelical Christian is pulled in two directions here. We believe in justification by faith *alone*, and we believe that this doctrine is indeed the *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* (“the article by which the church stands or falls”).<sup>21</sup> Thus, while we hold without compromise that theology matters, we do not believe that we are saved by theological formulae. But we really do believe that theology matters, and that a sinner must believe that Christ is Savior, and that salvation comes

through Christ’s work and merits alone. We do not claim to be able to read the human heart—that power is God’s alone. We must, on the other hand, evaluate all doctrinal claims—ours and those of others—by a biblical standard of judgment. Evangelicals came to our understanding of justification by faith alone the hard way, and we defend it as central and essential to Christianity itself. This is the doctrine of salvation, the *kerygma*, as preached by the true church.

Without this doctrine, no church is a true gospel church. Many evangelicals, myself included, remain unconvinced that any consensus on salvation now exists between those who hold to the teachings of the Reformers and those who hold to the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. As a matter of fact, the embrace of an inclusivist model of salvation by the Catholic church at Vatican II (and expanded thereafter) has served to increase the distance between the evangelical affirmation of salvation through faith *alone* by grace *alone* through Christ *alone* and the official teaching of the Catholic church. Central to the evangelical doctrine of justification by faith is faith *in Christ*—and this faith is a gift received consciously by the believer through the means of the proclamation of the gospel.

In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis acknowledged his reluctance to define who is and who is not an authentic Christian. “Now, if once we allow people to start spiritualizing and refining, or as they might say ‘deepening,’ the sense of the word *Christian*, it too speedily will become a useless word.”<sup>22</sup> Yet, this “deepening” of verbal specificity is precisely what we as theologians are called to do—whatever our tradition. Here, I must respond as a free-church evangelical that *no visible commun-*

*ion is coterminous with the Body of Christ*— even my own. Given our cherished Baptist principle of regenerate church membership (and the doctrine of believers' baptism), we attempt to identify the church by conscious confession of Christ and in congregations made visible by their allegiance to Christ through personal declaration of faith and the ordinance of baptism, reserved for believers. Even so, no thoughtful Baptist would claim that all members of Baptist churches are true Christians, for such will be seen only on the Day of Judgment. Beyond this, it is impossible for a true Baptist to recognize the claims of any denomination or church as authentic, lacking this principle of regenerate church membership, the rightful preaching of the gospel, and the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper reserved for believers.

Evangelicals must measure the claims of any church or individual by the simplicity of the gospel. If the true gospel is not preached, it is no true church. Again, any thoughtful evangelical would acknowledge that there are certainly true Christians within the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. But these true believers must in some sense come to the simplicity of faith through means other than the official teaching of these churches.

An entire system of interconnected doctrines and beliefs, all driven by a theological logic, separates Roman Catholics, evangelicals, and Orthodox believers from each other. As those who hold to our traditions, claim them as biblical, and teach them as normative, we must be sufficiently honest to concede that our doctrinal disagreements are not incidental, but urgently important and carry significance for eternity, in that we teach what

we claim to be the gospel of salvation.

At the end of the day, the traditional Roman Catholic, the confessing evangelical, and the Orthodox believer may be the last three men (or women) on earth who can have an honest disagreement. In our contemporary context of postmodern irrationality and cultural superficiality, this is in itself a significant achievement. We all believe in the existence of truth, in the unity of truth, and in our accountability to Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. This sets us apart from the larger culture, distinct in our honest agreements and in our honest disagreements. This is no small matter.

### **Our Changed Situation: Traditional Believers in a Culture of Unbelief**

Our theological conversation among honest believers representing three historic traditions is now taking place in a changed cultural context. Christendom is gone, and a new post-Christian reality now dominates the cultural space in which we work, worship, and witness. The radical displacement of theistic belief and historic Christian forms is the product of the modernist hermeneutics of suspicion and the postmodern embrace of irrationality. Nihilism looms as the only alternative to Christian theism, and yet theism is increasingly abandoned by those who claim to be Christian.

A form of Christianity unhooked and unhinged from any historic tradition and antithetical to them all has been loosed in the world and now masquerades as a form of updated Christianity. Liberal, revisionist, and radical forms of Christian theology come packaged today in two basic forms. The first is old-style anti-supernaturalism as perfected by the framers of the naturalistic worldview now firmly

entrenched within the academy, especially in the sciences, including the social sciences.<sup>23</sup> The clearest example of this form of anti-supernaturalism is the so-called “Jesus Seminar,” a self-appointed cadre of self-described “scholars” who seek to debunk the historical basis of Jesus’ words and deeds. True to form, they present a vision of a demythologized Jesus who sounds remarkably like a leftist, laconic, academic pundit, ready to demand tenure but misunderstood by the powers that be, who fear the well-intended rabble-rouser. This form of unbelief has been thoroughly ensconced in liberal Protestant and Catholic seminaries and divinity schools. This worldview is fundamental to the current structure of academic guilds and university culture.

The other form of anti-traditional pseudo-Christianity is the esoteric, New Age, structure-free “spirituality” that drives so much of the popular culture. The do-it-yourself spirituality of American consumerism is directed at nothing more transcendent or authoritative than the self. These “hard” and “soft” versions of pseudo-Christianity have infected all three historic traditions, but have been especially damaging to Catholicism and evangelicalism, the traditions most closely identified with Western culture.

We face the reality that our situation is drastically changed from what it was a century ago—and this is true in light of the secularization of the culture and the secularization of the church. As J. I. Packer reflects,

Time was when Western Christendom’s deepest division was between relatively homogeneous Protestant churches and a relatively homogeneous Church of Rome. Today, however, the deepest and most hurtful division is between

theological conservatives (or “conservationists” as I prefer to call them), who honor the Christ of the Bible and of the historic creeds and confessions, and theological liberals and radicals who for whatever reason do not; and this division splits the older Protestant bodies and the Roman communion internally.<sup>24</sup>

J. Gresham Machen recognized this reality eight decades earlier, when he identified the liberal theology then (and now) infecting the mainline Protestant denominations as a religion distinct from authentic Christianity, and never to be confused with it. Machen, a confessional Presbyterian, recognized the divisions within evangelical Protestantism, but looked to the larger conflict.

Far more serious still is the division between the Church of Rome and evangelical Protestantism in all its forms. Yet how great is the common heritage which unites the Roman Catholic Church, with its maintenance of the authority of Holy Scripture and with its acceptance of the great early creeds, to devout Protestants today! We would not indeed obscure the difference which divides us from Rome. The gulf is indeed profound. But profound as it is, it seems almost trifling compared to the abyss which stands between us and many ministers of our own Church. The Church of Rome may represent a perversion of the Christian religion; but naturalistic liberalism is not Christianity at all.<sup>25</sup>

Note Machen’s distinction between the “gulf” that separates evangelical and Roman Catholics, and the “abyss” that separates Christianity from liberal unbelief. Ever the careful scholar, Machen describes this gulf with honesty and clarity. He never denies the importance of the issues at stake, nor does he minimize the distance between Catholic and evangelical convictions. But over against this gulf

is the abyss of anti-supernaturalistic liberalism—another religion altogether, presenting itself as updated Christianity for modern times.

There is something deeper here, for Machen wrote this paragraph with the lingering hope that the gulf between evangelicalism and Catholicism could be bridged—not by theological compromise, but by theological correction. So long as the Bible is recognized as the authoritative revelation of the one true and living God, there is hope for this bridge by the corrective ministry of the Holy Spirit. To the extent that either tradition compromises this principle (as in the Roman Catholic understanding of Scripture as interpreted by tradition or in the popular evangelical heresy of interpreting Scripture by personal experience), the hope is denied. For this reason, the evangelical principle of *sola Scriptura* is non-negotiable.

These same principles apply to the engagement of evangelicals with the Orthodox churches. We have less experience in this engagement than is the case with Roman Catholics; but, in a changed world situation and missiological context, we are learning about each other.

With all this in mind, and with the cultural challenges now before us, evangelicals, Roman Catholics, and the Orthodox should stand without embarrassment as co-belligerents in the culture war. The last persons on earth to have an honest disagreement may also be the last on earth to recognize transcendent truth and moral principles—even the sanctity of human life itself.

### **Standing Together: Cultural Co-Belligerence**

Our agenda for cultural co-belligerence

must include three dimensions covering philosophical, theological, and cultural challenges. The first two are necessary foundations for the third.

At the philosophical level, we must contend together for the *transcendent reality of truth*, over against the postmodern despisers of all truth claims. In this regard we must be advocates for what Francis Schaeffer called “true truth,” or what philosopher William Alston calls “alethic realism.”

Pope John Paul II addressed this crisis in his 1993 encyclical letter, *Veritatis Splendor*, warning that a “crisis of truth” threatened civilization by elevating personal freedom over truth, even bending the very notion of truth to an absolute confidence in human autonomy.<sup>26</sup> Without a recovery of confidence in truth—a truth external to ourselves and to which we are accountable—no progress on theological or cultural fronts is possible.

With this recovery of truth must be a recommitment to the *unity of truth* and a denial of the relativistic worldview that is so attractive to postmodern Americans. Without this, rational discourse and civic conversation is impossible.

We must also move to recover the *dignity of language* and the *objectivity of texts*. The march of postmodern deconstructionism through the English and literature departments of America’s leading universities has now filtered down to popular culture, where Everyman and Everywoman seem ready to declare the author of every text to be dead, and meaning to be up to every reader. Needless to say, this hermeneutic is also evident in America’s law schools and courts, even the United States Supreme Court, where some justices seem completely unconcerned with and unlimited by the inten-

tion of the author or even the words of the text. To acknowledge that original intent is not always easily established is to be contrasted with the contemporary disregard and disrespect for this responsibility.

The philosophical dimension also requires that we redignify the reality of truth by acknowledging the *inseparability of the transcendentals*. The good, the beautiful, and the true cannot be separated from each other, for all are established in the being and glory of God. The crisis in the arts is inescapably tied to the human effort to call the false good, the true ugly, and the evil beautiful. The cultural crisis in the arts cannot be corrected merely by adopting consensual patterns of taste. Something far deeper is at stake.

At the theological level, we must contend together for the *ontological Trinity* as more than a metaphor, for *Nicean/Chalcedonian Christology*, for the *historical veracity of the Holy Bible*, and for a model of *theological realism* which, like the alethic realism described above, understands doctrinal statements to make propositional claims about ultimate reality, and not merely to express the religious sentiments of the speaker or author.

A very important issue of co-belligerence relates to the *claims of tradition*. Here, the first reality to note is the important distinctions between the way evangelicals, Catholics, and the Orthodox value and understand the role of tradition. Evangelicals must reject any notion that the Bible is to be interpreted in light of an authoritative tradition, much less by an official magisterium, or that tradition is in any way a second source of revelation. The Bible is the *norma normans non normata*—it norms and cannot be normed.

At the same time, evangelicals are

growing in our understanding that we are, as fallible and frail humans, traditioned people. We are not the first to read the sacred text of Scripture, nor the first to confront crucial theological challenges. In conscious and unconscious ways, tradition informs and shapes us. As Timothy George, my own church history professor at Southern Seminary began his introductory lecture, “My job is to inform you that there were Christians between your grandmother and Jesus—and that it matters.” *How* it matters is an issue of conflict between the traditions, but *that* it matters is increasingly a conviction common to all three. We need to resist the anti-historical temptation of postmodern culture and argue with each other about what the tradition(s) mean, and how Scripture alone can correct us all. This humility of spirit is indicative of what Chesterton called “the extension of the franchise.” He continued, “Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about.”<sup>27</sup>

In the cultural arena, we must be vigilant together in defending the *sanctity of human life* at all stages of development, from conception to natural death. The massive assaults on human dignity seen in the twentieth century stand as evidence of the devaluation of human life and human dignity produced in the wake of the Enlightenment. Human life has been cut down to size, man is just another of the animals, and human life is not inherently more valuable than any other form of life, or at least any other form of conscious life.

The Culture of Death has invaded the womb and the laboratory. Millions upon

millions of preborn children have been aborted, hundreds of thousands of frozen human embryos lie in a state of suspended life, awaiting their disposal as parents have no need or desire for them. Embryos are created for destruction through stem-cell research and scientists announce their intention to clone human beings, even against the near unanimous outrage of the medical establishment. But the medical establishment has shown itself to be anything but a bulwark of moral defense. Medical school graduates recite the Oath of Hippocrates at their commencement ceremonies, only to embark on careers antithetical to that ancient pledge.

Governments, too, have been found to be inadequate defenders of human life. The democracies of the supposedly civilized West have legalized abortion and increasingly accommodate themselves to the logic, if not yet the universal practice, of euthanasia. Totalitarian governments have murdered millions in what Zbigniew Brzezinski has called “the century of Mega-Death.” Political scientist R. J. Rummel surveyed the twentieth century and found that most persons murdered during that murderous century were killed by totalitarian regimes, a crime Rummel called “death by government.”<sup>28</sup>

We must contend for *objective moral principles* when most Americans believe that morality is either an outdated philosophical concept or a constructed reality designed to protect established and entrenched powers. Actually, most Americans are merely amateur moral relativists, mostly related to matters of sex. The recovery of *authentic sexual morality* will certainly not be achieved easily. The moral relativists control the dominant centers of cultural production, and the cultural elite embodies the very sexual anarchy we seek

to correct. The homosexualization of America continues apace, and the *institution of marriage* is increasingly undermined by a culture of expressive divorce and calls for homosexual “unions” on par with marriage. Sexual intercourse outside of marriage is now taken for granted, and sexual antinomianism reigns.

We must contend even for the *reality of gender*, and the creation of human beings as male and female as a part of the goodness of God’s creation. We are the first generation required to contend for gender as a fixed, meaningful, and unexchangeable reality, but contend we must.

Against the culture of death we must fight the *hostility to children* that pervades some sectors, and an anti-natalist philosophy that treats children as unintended and accidental by-products of sexual recreation—needy little creatures that take up critical resources, demand attention, interrupt careers, and need nurture.

We must recover a *vision of education* that is distinctively Christian and cognitively distinctive. A confidence in transcendent revealed truth will necessarily produce a model of educational structure and practice that humbles itself, and its learners, before the truth. This stands in stark contrast to the educational nihilism of the leading universities and academic centers. We must also contend for our educational institutions to be accountable to our churches, and not surrendered to the vandals of the secular academy. As James Tunstead Burtchaell traced in *The Dying of the Light*, the predominating pattern of academic life in America is “the disengagement of colleges and universities from their Christian churches.”<sup>29</sup>

The list is incomplete, and necessarily so. We must rebuild an entire civilization. Love of neighbor demands that we give



ourselves to this task. We must rebuild this culture brick by brick, stone upon stone, truth upon truth, until we see a recovery or until this task is removed from us by divine intervention.

### **Standing Apart: No Theological Compromise**

This is the harder task, and far less welcome, but standing apart is also a part of our witness to ourselves and to the larger secular world. If we authentically honor truth, we dare not compromise that which we believe to be true. With this in mind, I offer some humble principles for theological truth-telling among the three traditions here in question.

First, we must be absolutely honest with each other, both in our agreements and our disagreements. Second, we must strive for genuine understanding, and not settle for caricatures of the other's convictions. Third, we must seek to understand the parts in light of the whole. That is, no truth is understood in isolation from other truths. We must aim for the larger understanding. Fourth, we must hope for the best from each other, and never celebrate the discovery or affirmation of aberrant doctrine in the other. Fifth, we must be careful with words and specific in clarity. Confusion harms all concerned, and clarity is never to be feared. We must be ready to admit disagreement and agreement where each is appropriate. Sixth, we must not personalize the issues at stake or the doctrines in question. We cannot afford to speak to each other with a false concern for personal feelings or what the secular world considers the politically-correct etiquette. When convictions collide, we may both be wrong, but we cannot both be right. Seventh, we must be ready to stand together in cultural co-belligerence, rooted

in a common core of philosophical and theological principles, without demanding confessional agreement or pretending that this has been achieved. We must contend for the right of Christian moral witness in secular society. We indeed need to be as wise as serpents and as innocent as doves to know how to contend for Christian truth in what Robert P. George rightly identifies as *The Clash of Orthodoxies*—secular and Christian.<sup>30</sup>

### **Standing Together, Standing Apart: Cultural Co-Belligerence without Theological Compromise: A Concluding Word**

My ambition and hope as expressed in this project is to present a consistently evangelical understanding of the issues at stake in a meeting of those identified as "Great Tradition Christians." I hope that my approach has been both humble and honest. The great danger comes when one is severed from the other.

We claim the name of Christ. We claim a purchase on the Great Tradition of authentic Christianity. Each of our traditions claims to be normative Christianity. These claims are incommensurate and necessarily involve conflict. These claims do not necessarily prevent cooperation in the cultural arena.

In the sovereign providence of God, we face a great cultural challenge. We must be unembarrassed co-belligerents in this battle. Human rights, human dignity, and human happiness hang in the balance. Standing together, we work *with* each other. Standing apart, we witness *to* each other. Nothing less will do.

### **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup>This article was originally given as an address to the Conference, *Christian*

*Unity and the Divisions We Must Sustain: A Gathering of Traditional Christians II*, at the University of St. Mary of the Lake, Mundelein, Illinois, November 10, 2001.

<sup>2</sup>St. Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin Books, 1972) 842.

<sup>3</sup>T. S. Eliot, "Murder in the Cathedral," in *The Complete Poems and Plays 1909-1950* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1950) 209.

<sup>4</sup>G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (Wheaton: Shaw Publishers, 1994) 35.

<sup>5</sup>Pope John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life {Evangelium Vitae}* (New York: Times Books, 1995) 22.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Interestingly, this argument often turns on how one interprets the Second Vatican Council. Here, the interpretation of the Council by traditionalist Roman Catholics seems on a collision course with the hopefulness invested in the Council by some evangelicals.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas C. Oden, "The New Ecumenism and Christian Witness to Society," an address given on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, October 1, 2001. The address may be found on the web at <http://ird-renew.org/News/News.cfm?ID=214&c=4>.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Hereafter referred to as "ECT." The document may be found in Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, eds., *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission* (Dallas: Word, 1995) xv-xxxv.

<sup>11</sup>J. I. Packer, "Why I Signed It," *Chris-*

*tianity Today*, 12 December 1994, 34-37.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>15</sup>George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984) 15.

<sup>16</sup>ECT statement, in Colson and Neuhaus, xviii.

<sup>17</sup>Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000). Greeley points to a critical distinction at a level deeper than doctrines. "These philosophical and theological differences are the bases (or perhaps only the justifications and rationalizations) for the two different ways of

approaching the divine reality that arose out of the Reformation. Put more simply, the Catholic imagination loves metaphors; Catholicism is a verdant rainforest of metaphors. The Protestant imagination distrusts metaphors; it tends to be a desert of metaphors. Catholicism stresses the 'like' of any comparison (human passion is like divine passion), while Protestantism, when it is willing to use metaphors (and it must if it is to talk about God at all), stresses the unlike" (p. 9).

<sup>18</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1945; reprint, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1980) 11.

<sup>19</sup>C. S. Lewis, "Introduction," *St. Athanasius on the Incarnation*, trans. and ed. by a Religious of C.S.M.V. (1944; reprint, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1989) 7.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>21</sup>I acknowledge the point made by

Richard John Neuhaus that the first recorded use of this formulation is found in Valentius Loescher, who in 1718 used it to correct the Pietists. I reject his further claim that this formulation indicts contemporary evangelicals *qua* evangelicals. It certainly does indict those who claim to be evangelicals, but who preach a gospel of health, wealth, prosperity, consumerism, self-esteem, or good works.

<sup>22</sup>Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 10.

<sup>23</sup>Interestingly, a revival of Christian thought has emerged among the philosophers. Some now claim that as many as a third of all those teaching philosophy at the graduate level hold to some model of Christian belief.

<sup>24</sup>Packer, 35-36.

<sup>25</sup>J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 52.

<sup>26</sup>Pope John Paul II, *The Splendor of Truth: Regarding Certain Fundamental Questions of the Church's Moral Teaching* (Washington: Office for Publishing and Promotion Services, United States Catholic Conference, 1993).

<sup>27</sup>Chesterton, 47-48.

<sup>28</sup>R. J. Rummel, *Death by Government*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 2000).

<sup>29</sup>James Tunstead Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from their Christian Churches* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>30</sup>Robert P. George, *The Clash of Orthodoxies* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2001).



# Changing American Evangelical Attitudes towards Roman Catholics: 1960-2000

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## Introduction

In 1960, Presidential campaign historian Theodore H. White observed that “the largest and most important division in American society was that between Protestants and Catholics.”<sup>1</sup> As a vital part of American Protestant life, evangelicalism reflected the strains of this conflict.<sup>2</sup> Anti-Catholicism, according to church historian George Marsden, “was simply an unquestioned part of the fundamentalist-evangelicalism of the day.”<sup>3</sup>

This posture of outright public hostility was evidenced in many ways. It could be seen in the opposition of many evangelical leaders to the presidential candidacy of John F. Kennedy in 1960. It could be read in the missions textbooks used at seminaries such as Fuller, which saw Catholicism, along with communism and modernism, as one of the three massive world forces threatening Christianity.<sup>4</sup> It could be heard in the founding documents and speeches of the National Association of Evangelicals.<sup>5</sup> And it could be sensed in the opposition to appointing American ambassadors to the Vatican. Yet nearly forty years later, due to various cultural, political and theological shifts, there has been a significant change in the way many evangelicals perceive Roman Catholics.<sup>6</sup>

As early as 1985, Joseph Bayly, writing in *Eternity* magazine noticed that things were changing. Writing on what the evangelical leaders of his generation were passing on to a new generation of leaders, and

summing up forty years of evangelicalism since 1945, Bayly said, “We inherited a Berlin Wall between evangelical Christians and Roman Catholics; we bequeath a spirit of love and rapprochement on the basis of the Bible rather than fear and hatred.”<sup>7</sup>

By the mid 1990s, it was clear that attitudes were changing. On a local level, evangelicals and Catholics were meeting to discuss issues from poverty and welfare reform to abortion. On the national level changes were also apparent. Evangelical publishing houses were printing books by Catholic authors. Some evangelical parachurch ministries began placing Roman Catholics on their boards. Catholic masses were being conducted at an evangelical university. Evangelical scholars held some key teaching posts at Notre Dame University. For the first time a Roman Catholic was invited to give a seminar at InterVarsity’s Urbana Missions conference. Moreover, key evangelical leaders were having audiences with the pope.

In 1994, these changes dramatically came to public attention with the publishing of the *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (ECT) statement—a document providing a rationale for evangelical and Catholic dialogue. Then in 1997, ECT was followed up with another proclamation called *The Gift of Salvation* (GOS), which announced that certain evangelicals and Catholics had come to a shared understanding of

salvation.<sup>8</sup>

Such changes and claims are extraordinary when we consider the tortured history between these two groups over the centuries, as well as the hostile climate that existed just four decades ago. There is a remarkable new openness between many Catholics and evangelicals. The ECT statement itself boasted of a new spirit of “historic cooperation.”

Clearly, significant changes were taking place. Attitudes were changing. Whereas once many evangelicals thought of Catholics as theological and cultural enemies, today, many evangelicals think of Catholics as theological and cultural allies.

Of course, the word “many” properly clarifies that not all evangelicals feel this way.

While some see these changes as a sign that evangelicalism is coming to maturity, others see them as indicating serious theological compromise. Still others see it as a mixed blessing. However one assesses these changes, nearly all admit that things have changed!

This article will briefly examine the roots of anti-Catholicism and the historical factors that led to this change in evangelical attitudes. It will not describe in any detail the differences of beliefs since many studies have already done this.<sup>9</sup> Rather, it will look at the shaping forces that have been at work—those events, movements, and influences that have brought us to where we are at the beginning of a new century.

### **A Brief Consideration of the Roots of the Conflict**

The roots of evangelical anti-Catholicism run very deep. They extend to the Protestant Reformation. At its core, the

Reformers believed that Rome abandoned the pure gospel of grace. The Reformers responded with a call to *sola fide*—the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and *sola scriptura*—the supreme authority of Scripture. There were also protests against all the extra-biblical traditions of Rome that obscured the gospel.

Early American colonialists from New England Puritans to Virginia Anglicans feared Rome’s claim to political and spiritual supremacy. These fears were present in American culture right up to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, anti-Catholicism was not an exclusively evangelical stance. Secularists, like John Dewey, and mainline Protestants as represented by the *Christian Century*, held similar sentiments.

American anti-Catholicism is complex and has taken various forms. Sometimes anti-Catholicism took a nativist form. Nativist anti-Catholicism feared the power-threatening influx of immigrants to the United States. It reached its zenith in the 1920s and seemed to die out by the 1960s. Sometimes anti-Catholicism took patriotic forms. Patriotic anti-Catholicism feared the universal claims of the pope. It suspected Rome for its antipathy to democracy and American liberty and its claims of ultimate authority in both the spiritual and temporal realms (*Unam sanctum*, 1302). Anti-Catholicism also took a theological form. Theological anti-Catholicism focused on doctrinal objections to what Rome does and who Rome is.

### **Ten Shaping Forces that Have Altered the Landscape**

Given the fact that the roots of this conflict are nearly 500 years old, what explains this shift in American evangelical attitudes? What shaping forces have been at work to bring about a change in

attitude? There are at least ten that I would like to identify. Looking at them will help us better understand ourselves and the context in which we do ministry in the first decade of a new century.

### *The 1960 election of John F. Kennedy*

In 1960, anti-Catholicism was not merely an evangelical phenomenon. It was an American phenomenon. Both secularists and Christians, both evangelicals and non-evangelical Protestants, worried about the universal claims of Rome. The prospect of having a Roman Catholic president frightened many. For this reason John F. Kennedy's candidacy in the 1960 presidential election caused a major controversy.

Evangelicals and non-evangelicals alike shared the belief that the Roman Catholic Church could never change. It would not embrace religious freedom, and it would not renounce its universal claims over civil governments, let alone its attitude towards non-Catholics. On the Protestant spectrum, voices ranging from Norman Vincent Peale to Harold John Ockenga to Carl McIntire expressed fear that electing Kennedy would be a terrible thing for our nation. Opposition to Kennedy's election also came from *Christianity Today* and the Southern Baptist Convention. Donald Grey Barnhouse argued that his election would be "perilous."

The issue is simple. The Roman Catholic Church will not allow Kennedy the right to carry out his own desires. They have made it unmistakably clear that Senator Kennedy must be a Roman Catholic first and a United States president second, where the interests of the Church are concerned.<sup>10</sup>

The debate over religion seemed to take central place in the campaign. Our coun-

try had never elected a Catholic president. The last time one ran for office (Al Smith, 1928), he was decisively rejected. Kennedy himself brought things to a defining moment when he spoke to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association. It was an event heavily covered by the media. In his speech Kennedy said that he believed in an America "where the separation of church and state is absolute—where no Catholic prelate would tell the President how to act and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners how to vote."<sup>11</sup> He said religion should be a private affair. He promised to uphold the First Amendment's guarantees of religious liberty. In addition, he expressed his opposition to the appointment of an ambassador to the Vatican and to the granting of aid to parochial schools.

The speech persuaded many. It emerged as the turning point of the election that led to Kennedy's victory. A Catholic was in the White House, but he turned out to be a strong advocate of the separation of church and state. Some wondered how seriously committed Kennedy was to Catholicism. Others joked that he seemed to "out Protestant the Protestants!" Still others mused that he was, by his stance, really the first Southern Baptist president of the United States!

Kennedy's election is significant because it signaled the full acceptance of Catholics into American life. While nativism was not dead in America, nativist anti-Catholicism was on the ropes. Four years later, when Republican candidate Barry Goldwater chose a Roman Catholic as his vice presidential running mate, it was clear that anti-Catholicism was no longer an issue in American politics.

## ***Vatican II***

If the first nail in the coffin of political anti-Catholicism was the 1960 Kennedy election, the second nail was Vatican II (1962-1965). The Vatican council was convened under Pope John XXIII for the purpose of *aggiornamento* or “up dating” the church so it would be more relevant to the present age. Whereas the last two Catholic Councils, Trent (1545-63) and Vatican I (1869-1870), took a defensive and antagonistic stance toward Protestantism, Vatican II had a different spirit. Among other things, the council called for a revised liturgy, allowed the vernacular language in the Mass, defined a new view of calling for the laity, opened up the church to inter-faith dialogue, revised its view of non-Catholic Christians (they were identified as “separated brethren”), encouraged Bible based preaching, Catholic Biblical scholarship, and Bible translation in common languages.

The most controversial ruling of the council was its *Declaration of Religious Freedom* where it affirmed religious liberty as a fundamental human right. This marked a radical break from the former views, say, of the 1864 *Syllabus of Errors*, in which the church restated its right to be a temporal power and use force, and argued against both religious freedom and the separation of church and state. Vatican II, in contrast, affirmed limited government and religious freedom as the first human right.

This Vatican Synod declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that in matters religious no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps most striking was its admission that “the American experience of religious freedom is not only an advance in Church history: it is also an important breakthrough in government.”<sup>13</sup>

This unambiguous affirmation of religious liberty not only calmed many fears, but also silenced critics such as Paul Blanshard and others who said that the Catholic church was anti-freedom and believed in a policy of coercion.<sup>14</sup> Even *Christianity Today* admitted that “no one can safely predict the possible extent of reform and renewal within the Roman Church.”<sup>15</sup>

Vatican II revealed several things about the Catholic church. It showed that it was not a monolith. The ambiguity of some of its rulings showed that a measure of dissent was tolerated within the church. It also showed that the church was capable of change. Those who said it could not change, now modified their criticism to say that it might be able to change in some areas, but not its essential theological position. Vatican II offered a glimpse into how the Catholic church changed, not by renouncing previous papal statements, but simply by adding new pronouncements. Finally, the council made it clear that many theological barriers still remained between evangelicals and Catholics. While nativistic and patriotic anti-Catholicism were effectively silenced, theological anti-Catholicism was not.

## ***The Cooperative Evangelism of Billy Graham***

In the 1940s and 1950s the ministry of Billy Graham gained a high profile in the United States. Graham’s ministry, which included reaching out to Catholics, has greatly influenced the evangelical movement. He has been called the evangelical

“pope,” not only because he has preached the gospel to more people than anyone else in history, but also because, more than anyone else, he has been a spokesman for the evangelical movement.

Part of Graham’s appeal, and we could say part of the strength of the entire evangelical movement, has been the simple proclamation of the gospel. To his credit, Graham has been committed to reaching people from all kinds of backgrounds—Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Orthodox, and unchurched. In so doing, Graham, as well as the evangelical movement, has not only appealed to Catholics, but brought many crossovers from Catholicism into evangelical churches.

Graham has often admitted that early in his life he spoke against and did not cooperate with Roman Catholics. Coming out of a Fundamentalist background that took him from Bob Jones University to the Florida Bible Institute to ordination in the Southern Baptist Convention to Wheaton College, he was not shy about speaking out against Modernism, Romanism and Communism. Not only did Graham take a negative view of Catholics, they also took a negative view of him!

By the late 1940’s Graham began to moderate his tone. He began to seek a broader sponsorship for his meetings. He adopted a policy of not criticizing other religious groups. All this took place while his associates were denying that any changes were taking place. Jerry Beven, Graham’s executive secretary wrote to Fundamentalist critics saying:

You asked if Billy Graham had invited Roman Catholics and Jews to cooperate in the evangelistic meetings. Such a thought, even if the reporter did suggest it as having come from Mr. Graham, seems ridiculous to me. Surely you must

know that it is not true. . . further, that you should give any credence to the idea that Mr. Graham would ever turn over any decision card to the Roman Catholic Church seems inconceivable.<sup>16</sup>

Over time, the inconceivable took place. While he did not modify his basic message, he did modify his strategy. Kennedy’s election prompted him not to speak critically of Catholics. Cooperation seemed to be a matter of evangelistic necessity when he visited Latin American nations where there was a small Protestant base. He was ready to work with whomever was willing. The same could be said of his ministry in Communist nations.

Billy Graham’s Catholic strategy evolved over time. Early on he called the Catholic bishop in an area to acquaint him with his ministry and invite him to the meetings. In his 1964 New England Crusade, he received an unprecedented endorsement by Cardinal Cushing. Then came invitations to sit on the platform. In 1977 at his University of Notre Dame Crusade he made an effort to tailor the invitation to his audience. Catholics were invited to make “commitments to Christ” or to “reconfirm their confirmation” as opposed to his more typical appeal to make a “decision for Christ.”<sup>17</sup> In 1978 he had the opportunity to preach a full evangelistic sermon in a Roman Catholic church in Poland. In 1981 he met with the newly elected pope, John Paul II. Early in the Reagan administration he recommended the President appoint a full U.S. ambassador to the Vatican (a move that deeply disappointed his fellow Baptists). By the 1980s, Graham had adopted a position of close and careful cooperation with Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. Graham’s cooperative evange-



lism and ecumenical outreach attempted to exploit the common ground of “mere Christianity” with all denominational groups. When Crusades were set up in American cities, an entire strategy to win Catholic cooperation was set in motion. He believed that blessing and sponsorship by an archdiocese meant wide Catholic participation. After a crusade, the archdiocese was provided with names and addresses of Catholics who responded. By the late 1980s, Roman Catholics made up the largest single religious group attending his citywide crusades.

In pursuing “an ecumenism of the gospel” Graham had many critics. Some, like Bob Jones, Sr., said he was “selling our crowd down the river.” Other less strident voices, like those of Martin Lloyd-Jones in Britain, and Carl F. H. Henry in the United States, thought that Graham won Catholic endorsement at too great a price. Graham and his defenders, who referred to the Catholic question as “the great controversy,” pointed to the fact that his basic message had not changed. Besides, they said, his cooperative evangelism followed in the steps of Paul, Whitefield, Wesley, Finney, and Moody.

This pattern of cooperative evangelism that Graham modeled was soon adopted by other evangelical groups such as Campus Crusade for Christ and Promise Keepers. As Bill Bright’s ministry went international, he invited Catholic participation and cooperation. Promise Keepers, which was founded by a born again Catholic, set out the aim of full participation with Catholics right from the start. They even amended their statement of faith so that it would be less offensive to Catholics.

### *The Charismatic Movement*

Long before anyone was talking about evangelicals and Catholics coming together (ECT), there was talk about Pentecostals and Catholics coming together. Pentecostalism and what is sometimes called “neo-Pentecostalism” (the Charismatic Movement) experienced phenomenal worldwide growth from the 1960s on. The Charismatic Movement is often seen as a “second wave” of Pentecostalism. It brought aspects of Pentecostalism to the mainline churches and helped give birth to the Catholic Charismatic renewal movement. By the mid-1970s, contact between Catholics and Pentecostals increased. Focusing on a common experience of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, Charismatics, at least initially, managed to avoid the doctrinal controversies of the past. They met not just for mass evangelistic gatherings but for mass praise and worship rallies, local prayer fellowships, and formal dialogue.

Catholics were beginning to realize that the Pentecostal movement represented a large and growing segment of worldwide Christianity. They were also concerned about strained relations between Catholics and Pentecostals in Latin America. Inspired by Vatican II and a quest for renewal, the International Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue was officially initiated in 1972 and continued through the 1990s. Initial contacts for this dialogue began with David du Plessis, who had been an observer at Vatican II and who became an unofficial ambassador-at-large for the Pentecostal Movement.

In what set out to be a dialogue on spirituality, participants found they had many surprising areas of agreement. They discovered what has been called “an ecumenism of Jesus” or “an ecumenism

of the Holy Spirit”—a unity born out of experience. Some of the Catholic Charismatics even referred to themselves as “evangelical Catholics.” They spoke the language of evangelicals, saying that salvation cannot be earned but is a free gift, that there is only one mediator between God and man—Jesus Christ, that the Eucharist is not a repetition of Calvary since Jesus died once for all. Some Catholic Charismatics were even boasting of their ability to affirm all the tenets of the evangelical Lausanne Covenant of 1974.<sup>18</sup>

Of course, not all Catholic Charismatics were this evangelical. In fact, Catholic evangelicals remain a small minority. Many Catholic Charismatics continue to adhere to Catholic doctrine, sacramental theology, and devotion to Mary. Ongoing talks in the International Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue have also pointed out these disagreements (e.g., disagreements about the Bible, baptism, the Holy Spirit, the church, and Mary).

### ***Political Ecumenism of the 1980s and 1990s***

Yet another factor that contributed to the changing of American evangelical attitudes was their re-entry into the political arena. One consequence of the neo-evangelical call to forsake Fundamentalist isolationism and to “penetrate the world for Christ” was the contact evangelicals have with others in the political arena—including Catholics. The practicalities of local political involvement brought evangelicals on the Right and the Left to discover “an ecumenism of the trenches.”

On the Right, the discovery was prompted by the Supreme Court’s 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, which liberalized abortion laws. When the court made its ruling, evangelicals were divided. The

strongest condemnation came from the Catholic church. The Southern Baptist Convention, for example, passed a resolution in 1971, affirming a woman’s right to have an abortion if giving birth posed any physical or emotional dangers.<sup>19</sup> *Christianity Today*, on the other hand, came out immediately and condemned the *Roe v. Wade* decision. The majority of evangelicals were not ready to act on this issue. Through the efforts of the Christian Action Council and especially the influence of Francis Schaeffer, things began to change.

Schaeffer’s books and films highlighted the issue and argued for an evangelical co-belligerency. Co-belligerency for the cause of social justice is good. Schaeffer made a distinction between a co-belligerent and an ally. Co-belligerency is temporary and focused at specific points. Schaeffer warned against allying with groups that have a non-Christian base. But he encouraged co-belligerency and criticized evangelicals for leaving the battle for human life to the Catholics.<sup>20</sup> Schaeffer’s influence on evangelical and Fundamentalist leaders was immense. He had a major role in Jerry Falwell’s political awakening, which in turn prepared Falwell for his 1979 encounter with Catholic activist Paul Weyrich. That meeting laid the foundations for the Moral Majority. Schaeffer’s co-belligerency arguments also influenced the leaders of Operation Rescue. Moreover, religious freedom battles brought together Catholic and evangelical activists. In the mid-1970s the IRS and other government agencies had a series of run-ins with the Christian School movement. Catholics and evangelicals joined together to fight them. Then came a similar collaboration on religious freedom in broadcasting in 1979.

Just as socially conservative Catholics and evangelicals were getting together, their socially liberal counterparts were drawing strength from each other as well. From its inception, *Sojourners*, a prominent voice of the evangelical Left, was drawing inspiration from Catholics such as Dorothy Day, Daniel Berrigan, and Gary Wills. In its early years, *Sojourners* magazine often expressed surprise at discovering Catholic Christians in the midst of a social protest who were committed to “orthodox Christianity.” Jim Wallis, the editor of *Sojourners*, called it an “ecumenism of the soup kitchens and homeless shelters.” In recent years, the Call to Renewal movement led by Wallis and others, has sought an even broader alliance for biblical faith and spiritual politics that includes evangelicals, Catholics, and Mainline Protestants.

The net effect was that as the evangelical Right and Left rediscovered the social implications of Christianity, both gained a new-found appreciation for the depth of Catholic thinking and social teaching on public issues. This appreciation and common cause in the trenches forged a wide-ranging political ecumenism.

### *Evangelical Dialogue with Catholics*

ECT is often mistaken as the beginning of evangelical and Catholic dialogue. We have already spoken of the Pentecostal dialogues. Before 1994, other dialogues were taking place, such as the discussions between the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity from 1988 to 1997. An even more significant discussion was the Evangelical Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission 1977-1984 (ERCDOM). Granted, this was an international dialogue, but it

did include several American evangelicals along with British evangelicals, such as John Stott and David Wells, who have had extended ministries in the United States.

The unique focus of ERCDOM was missions. The talks were undertaken to reduce misunderstanding, bring to light areas in which major disagreements still exist, and highlight common doctrinal ground especially in light of their shared concern for missions. While the dialogues confirmed consensus on areas such as a Chalcedon based Christology, there was no flinching from the trouble spots. Even though there was agreement on the necessity of revelation, the objectivity of God’s truth, and the divine inspiration of the Bible, there were disagreements as to the nature of biblical authority (i.e., Catholics echoed Vatican II’s assertion that sacred tradition and sacred Scripture form the Word of God, while evangelicals pointed to the normativity, the primacy, and the perspicuity of Scripture). Another flash point came in discussions on Mary. Salvation was yet another controversial topic. While both sides agreed that there is one savior and one gospel, and that we are saved by grace through Christ, they differed in their understanding of human nature and need. Catholics speak of a weakened free will and are more optimistic about humanity’s ability to respond to the grace of God. Whereas evangelicals place more emphasis on humanity’s inability to save itself and emphasize justification by grace in Christ through faith alone.

ERCDOM ended with a discussion of the possibility of common witness in light of the truths that unite us and the convictions that divide us. The talks agreed that there was much room for common witness in areas such as Bible translation,

publishing, media influence, community service, emergency relief, development, justice issues, marriage, and family. In the area of common worship, ERCDOM encouraged evangelicals and Catholics to join in common prayer and Bible study. But it admitted to the “major problems” that arise in sharing communion. It also raised caution about common witness in evangelism because “common evangelism necessarily presupposes a common commitment to the same gospel.” ERCDOM said that outstanding differences make common witness in evangelism premature because “each side regards the other’s view of the gospel as defective.”<sup>21</sup>

### *The Radicalizing of the Mainline Churches and American Culture*

Another influential force at work has been the radicalizing of liberalism and the decline of the mainline churches. As the old Protestant mainline churches became progressively more liberal, evangelicals and Catholics discovered that they had more in common than they had previously thought.

During the 1960s, American political liberalism took a radical turn. The classical or traditional liberalism of the 1940s and 1950s, which affirmed liberty within the context of law, morality, religion and God, was abandoned. In its place came a new relativistic liberalism that abandoned the old context. The twin thrusts of modern liberalism are radical individualism and radical egalitarianism. The influence of this new liberalism had a twofold effect. On the one hand, it led to a reversal of American values and a redefinition of deviancy. What was once considered moral was redefined as immoral and *vice versa*. On the other hand, it put tremen-

dous pressure on the culturally prominent mainline churches to accommodate to the spirit of the times. Consequently, many mainline churches changed their convictions about key doctrines and altered their institutional structure. They often stopped speaking of the uniqueness of Christ. Emphasis in missions switched from an interest in salvation to an exclusive interest in temporal liberation. As this was happening the mainline churches began losing members. Theological liberalism led to decreasing levels of commitment in the pew. Mainline churches constituted half of the Protestant churches in the 1950s but have dropped to just a third of that number today. Millions have left for other options.

While the mainline churches were redefining themselves, evangelicals and Catholics began to notice what they had in common. When Rome was starting to reform itself toward the Bible, mainline Protestantism was moving further away from Scripture even to the extent of demythologizing Jesus. We arrived at the strange situation where a conservative Baptist or conservative Presbyterian had more in common with an Orthodox or a Catholic Christian than with a liberal Baptist or a liberal Presbyterian! The ground beneath our feet was heaving.

### *The Broadening of Evangelicalism*

While the mainline was drifting Left, evangelicalism did not remain static. As the movement grew up and distanced itself from its Fundamentalist roots, it broadened. The broadening of evangelicalism made it more open to other movements and traditions. In some cases this openness is healthy and good. In other cases it has caused a serious fraying at the edges of what it means to be an evangeli-

cal. Commitment to previous theological positions has weakened, and thus created more tolerance for other theologies.

On the more positive side, this broadening is seen in the spiritual formation movement. Spiritual formation is now the rage in all the main evangelical institutions from Moody to Gordon Conwell. The formation movement draws heavily on ancient—including Catholic—sources. It usually contends that in breaking from the Catholic church, Protestants threw out a great deal of spiritual wisdom and insight. Many evangelicals want to move beyond a head centered faith, or an activist faith, or even a feeling centered faith to something deeper. So they explore the “inward journey” and study some of the early church fathers, desert mothers, ancient martyrs, scholastics, and responsible Christian mystics. In so doing they discover some of treasures of ancient Christian spirituality through such masters as Bernard of Clairvaux, Francis of Assisi, Teresa of Avila, Brother Lawrence, and others. They adopt spiritual directors and disciplines.

Another example of positive broadening is seen in the area of worship. There is a new interest in learning from other worship traditions that go beyond the contemporary. This “call to rediscover the past” was first announced by the Chicago Call of 1978 when a group of evangelical scholars worried about the shallowness of an evangelicalism that ignored its historical, creedal, and confessional roots. In some ways the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals focuses on this same concern. The movement towards “convergence worship” as articulated by Robert Webber appears to be gaining ground. Millennials hunger for a worship that highlights mystery, contemplation, and ancient roots.

In both of these examples, the broadening of evangelicalism is evidenced by an exploration of our Reformation or pre-Reformation past. This exploration often involves a positive encounter with some form of Catholic Christianity.

On the other hand, some of the broadening taking place among evangelicals has not been so positive. George Marsden has written about the broadening at Fuller Seminary over the issue of biblical inerrancy.<sup>22</sup> Richard Quebedeaux and James Davison Hunter have written of the liberalizing tendency among young evangelicals.<sup>23</sup> They have demonstrated that increased openness has led to embracing views previously associated with liberal movements. David Wells has written about both the increased theological illiteracy in evangelical churches and the declining passion for truth in evangelical seminaries. He thinks that the evangelical movement is losing its confessional dimensions.<sup>24</sup> One could also cite the movement of theologians calling themselves “post conservative evangelicals,” who seek to move away from classical Christian theism toward an “open view of God.”<sup>25</sup> In these latter examples it is easy to see how a significant broadening of the evangelical movement not only makes it difficult to say what an evangelical is, but also makes the contrasts with Roman Catholicism less clear.

### *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: ECT I and ECT II*

The *Evangelical and Catholics Together* statement, along with its follow-up statement *The Gift of Salvation*, are sometimes conveniently referred to as ECT I and ECT II. These statements simply could not have been written in the 1950s or 1960s. Together they serve both as an indicator

of our changing attitudes as well as an influencing factor themselves.

ECT I put a name on what was already happening. In many ways it was a continuation of an existing dialogue. ERCDOM said that “every possible opportunity for common witness should be taken except where conscience forbids.”<sup>26</sup> In this sense, ECT was simply taking up the mandate that ERCDOM handed them.

Both ECT documents seek to persuade evangelicals and Catholics to “contend together.” While ECT I includes some loaded theological statements that are left intentionally vague, its burden seems to be a call for a common Christian witness in the public square. It emphasizes the church’s responsibility to proclaim the gospel and to stand for righteousness and justice. Its main affirmation is that politics, law, and culture must be secured by moral truth. Moral truth is secured by religious truth. And evangelicals and Catholics must stand together to contend for this in our culture.

ECT I was published in 1994. It was not an official church document. But it did contain some amazing affirmations, which elicited an intense reaction. Some people welcomed ECT. Others flatly denounced it. And some, like Kenneth Kantzer, wisely gave it mixed reviews: “[the ECT statement] rightly calls our attention to the importance of working together for the good of our nation and all of society.” But then he adds that “unfortunately, it does not make . . . clear how important are the doctrinal differences that still divide Evangelicals and Roman Catholics.”<sup>27</sup>

As a cultural statement ECT had much to say. As a theological statement it was ambiguous at best and misleading at

worst. Justification is listed as a common agreement but in a way that reflects the traditional Catholic understanding and ignores the Reformation qualifier “alone.”

In 1997, further discussions among ECT participants issued in a new statement called *The Gift of Salvation*, or ECT II. Acknowledging the short-comings of the first statement, the second statement attempted to deal with justification head on. ECT II claimed that both the Catholics and evangelicals who met were in agreement “with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone (*sola fide*).”

This in itself was a remarkable claim. But once again it was not without ambiguity. Catholic participants added that the understanding of salvation affirmed in ECT II “is not the understanding condemned by the Catholic church in the sixteenth century.” In 1545, the Council of Trent said that justification is not an event but a process, that it takes place by an infusion of grace and not by imputation, that it was not forensic, but transformational, and that we can have no assurance that we are justified until we are in heaven.

ECT II participants, on the other hand, claimed to have agreed that justification was central to Scripture, that it was not earned by good works or merit of our own, that it is declaratory, that it is by faith alone, and that it brings to us an “an assured hope for the eternal life promised.” ECT II went on to list issues left undiscussed (questions such as baptismal regeneration, sacramental grace, questions of imputation, purgatory, and indulgences). Critics of ECT II rightly point out that the interconnectedness of these issues cannot be overlooked.

It must be remembered that ECT II was

not an official accord but rather a good faith effort between some Roman Catholics and some evangelicals. Like ECT I, it did not claim to be a complete agreement but a significant first step.

Did this step indicate that Rome was moving away from its historic understanding of justification? Some think so. They point to the renaissance in Catholic theology over the last three decades, which seems to be moving towards a Reformation understanding of certain issues. That is, there is a shift away from scholasticism and toward a more theocentric outlook. They also point to the increased recognition among Catholic Biblical scholars of the forensic character and centrality of justification.<sup>28</sup> They point out that some of the Catholic ECT II signers have been influenced by the Charismatic renewal and are more driven by Scripture than tradition. They also point to the 1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) between the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>29</sup> Since we cannot expect everything to change at once, ECT defenders tell us, we ought to be patient and encourage any movement we see.

Others, however, think that Catholic leaders who signed these statements may be influenced more by contemporary models of doctrinal development. John Henry Newman in the 19<sup>th</sup> century tried to merge Protestant and Catholic ideas on justification to include both imputation and infusion. Avery Dulles, a signer of both ECT I and ECT II, believes that a theological concept can be illustrated by the use of multiple models that are to be kept in tension with each other. Joseph Ratzinger developed the idea of a hermeneutics of unity which involves reading past dogma and historical statements in

the context of the entire tradition and with a deeper understanding of the Bible. Time will tell if the ECT discussions signal a Catholic shift or not. What ultimately matters is whether the official teaching voice of Rome will make the same remarkable affirmations.

Despite the shortcomings of ECT I and II, these meetings got Catholics and evangelicals talking about the very heart of the gospel. It was the first such dialogue of its kind between evangelicals and Catholics on American soil. This is a development that must be welcomed.

ECT also prompted a serious discussion among evangelicals themselves. For the truth is, many evangelical organizations had been downplaying the significance of justification by faith alone. ECT raised the profile of this very critical doctrine. Evangelicalism tends to be minimalistic in its doctrinal affirmation. Evangelicals have not been explicit enough about justification. While it may be an assumed belief, numerous evangelical parachurch organizations do not even mention justification in their statements of faith, fewer still mention justification by faith alone. And hardly anyone mentions imputation explicitly. Evangelical critics who blast ECT II signers for not being explicit enough have overlooked the fact that many of our key evangelical institutions, affirm no more and often much less than ECT I or II. If nothing else, ECT I and II revealed that evangelicals have done a poor job of articulating a doctrine so central as justification by faith alone.

*Americanization,  
American Pluralism, and  
the Postmodern Mood*

A final factor that may be shaping both

evangelical and Catholic attitudes is the influence of Americanization, which conditions us to adapt to plurality. American life can have a “homogenizing” effect on evangelicals and Catholics. The more distanced we are from old European contexts, the more Americans of all theological persuasions share in the values of our own common culture. This shapes us in many ways. It shapes us by its separation of religion and state. It shapes us through the media. It shapes us through suburbanization—a force that disperses the old urban Catholic village and the old Protestant rural village and places us side by side. It also shapes us through the general postmodern mood with its disinterest in truth. While it would be very difficult to measure such influences, they certainly have exercised an effect on both Catholics and evangelicals and may have contributed to a softening of doctrinal edges on each side.

### **Where This Leaves Us**

The point of detailing all these historical factors is not to suggest that it is inevitable that Catholics and evangelicals will come together anytime soon. Nor is it to minimize the presence of other shaping factors in our lives, such as the power of the gospel, the truth of God’s Word, and the on-going influence of the Reformation. Rather, it is to help us understand what has been quietly molding our own convictions.

Each of these historical factors have influenced the evangelical mind to some degree during the last forty years. Love them or hate them, they have all played a part in nudging us away from a hostile disposition and towards at least minimal cooperation. In the days ahead, there may in fact be other shaping forces that do this

as well.

As we enter the twenty-first century, it looks as if evangelicalism and Catholicism will be the two vital forces for Christianity in the United States and the world. Their primary religious contender will be Islam. We now find ourselves in a post ideological world of a new century where the West is terrorized by the forces of radical Islam, and most of Islam is fearful of the economically and militarily powerful secular West. We also find Islam expanding at such a rapid rate that it is the fastest growing religion in America. Amazingly, the age grows more religious, not less. Will the Islamic threat be another factor nudging evangelicals and Catholics together?

Meanwhile, at the beginning of a new century, evangelicals find that we are more open to Catholics than we were. The neo-evangelical engagement with culture had some very distinct and unexpected consequences. We were forced to look around at those next to us and find out what motivated them to serve by our side.

Evangelicals of the 1960s generation were wrong. The Roman Catholic Church has changed. But then so have we. The Catholic Church became less isolationist. It affirmed religious freedom. It started talking about evangelism. It opened the door to a new emphasis on the Bible. Evangelicals became less nativist. They began learning from other traditions. They welcomed co-belligerents in the fight for a God-honoring cause. Evangelicals discovered that we have more in common with Catholics than we realized. But we also learned that there are still significant disagreements that divide us. While we rejoice in the fellowship we can have with born again Catholics, we still long for the day when the teaching office of the Catho-



lic church unambiguously affirms the very heart of the gospel message, and bows before the supreme authority of the Scriptures.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President* (New York: Atheneum House, 1961) 271.

<sup>2</sup>Evangelicalism is a post-Fundamentalist renewal movement that includes but is not confined to denominations among Protestant churches. It attempted to avoid the weaknesses of both modernism and Fundamentalism. Theologically, evangelicalism has emphasized the good news of God's grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ, it holds to all of the most basic doctrines of the Bible as summarized in its historic confessions, and it recognizes the Bible as the final authoritative source for all doctrine. Yet in saying this, the wide diversity of the evangelical movement must be kept in mind (varieties include: Fundamentalist, Dispensational, Independent, Reformed, Anabaptist, Wesleyan, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Radical, African American, and Mainline evangelicals). Estimates for evangelicals in the United States range from 30-66 million.

<sup>3</sup>George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 84.

<sup>4</sup>Harold Lindsell, *A Christian Philosophy of Missions* (Wheaton: Van Kampen, 1949) 54, 77, 223.

<sup>5</sup>Joel Carpenter, ed., *A New Coalition: Early Documents of the National Association of Evangelicals* (New York: Garland, 1988) 38; *United We Stand*, May 3-6, 1943, "A Report of the Constitutional Convention of the National Association of Evan-

gelicals," 17, 38, 61. Also see "Evangelical Action: A Report of the Organization of the National Association of Evangelicals for United Action," 26.

<sup>6</sup>American Roman Catholicism is part of a worldwide religious body representing all churches in union with the Bishop of Rome. It asserts equal devotion to Scripture and tradition. There are some 60 million Roman Catholics in the United States, making it the largest religious denomination in the nation. While it is united by a clear structural unity, it is also a complex, diverse body. Its diversity is seen in the ethnic make up of Catholicism (Hispanic, Irish, Polish, Italian, etc.). It can also be seen in the various Catholic subcultures (traditional, liberal, charismatic, centrist, and evangelical Catholics). For a fuller description of these terms, as well as other details in this article, see Donald W. Sweeting, *From Conflict to Cooperation? Changing American Evangelical Attitudes Towards Roman Catholics: 1960-1998* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 1998).

<sup>7</sup>Joseph Bayly, "The End of an Era," *Eternity*, October 1985, 79.

<sup>8</sup>Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, eds., *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Towards a Common Mission* (Dallas: Word, 1995). *The Gift of Salvation* statement was released on 12 November 1997 by the Institute for Religion and Public Life. It was printed in *Christianity Today* on 8 December 1997. It also appeared in *First Things* in January 1998.

<sup>9</sup>See e.g., Norman Geisler and Ralph MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

<sup>10</sup>Donald Grey Barnhouse, "The Peril Over the Presidency," *Eternity*, October 1960, 8.

- <sup>11</sup>White, 437.
- <sup>12</sup>Walter M. Abbot, ed. *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild, 1966) 278, 279.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid., 699.
- <sup>14</sup>Paul Blanshard, *American Freedom and Catholic Power* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950) 3.
- <sup>15</sup>Klass Runia, "Evangelicals in the Church of Rome," *Christianity Today*, 18 March 1966, 22.
- <sup>16</sup>John Ashbrook, *New Neutralism II* (Painesville, OH: Here I Stand Books, 1992), 35. Also, original Graham Association-Ketcham correspondence was forwarded to me by the author.
- <sup>17</sup>William Martin, *A Prophet With Honor: The Billy Graham Story* (New York: William Morrow, 1991) 461.
- <sup>18</sup>What is an Evangelical Catholic? 1992 Dublin: Archdiocese of Dublin ([www.dublindiocese.ie](http://www.dublindiocese.ie); also see [www.evangelicalcatholic.com](http://www.evangelicalcatholic.com)). See also Keith A. Fournier, *Evangelical Catholics* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990).
- <sup>19</sup>It was not until 1980 that the SBC reversed its stance on the abortion issue.
- <sup>20</sup>Francis Schaeffer, *Christian Manifesto* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1981) 68.
- <sup>21</sup>Basil Meeking and John Stott, eds., *The Evangelical Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission 1977-1984* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 88, 89.
- <sup>22</sup>See George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).
- <sup>23</sup>Richard Quebedeaux, *The Young Evangelicals* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), and *The Worldly Evangelicals* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978). See also James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
- <sup>24</sup>David Wells, *No Place For Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) and *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).
- <sup>25</sup>Roger E. Olson, "Post-conservative evangelicals greet the postmodern age," *Christian Century*, 3 May 1995, 480, and Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Post-conservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).
- <sup>26</sup>Meeking and Stott, 91.
- <sup>27</sup>Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Should Roman Catholics and Evangelicals Join Ranks?," *Christianity Today*, 18 July 1994, 17.
- <sup>28</sup>Works cited include: Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (New York: Double Day, 1993) 117-118; W. H. van der Pol, *Karakteristiek van het reformatorische Christendom* (Roermond, 1952) 348; Hermann Volk, "Imputationsgerechtigkeit," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1960) 4:641-42; K. Kertelge, *Rechtfertigung bei Paulus. Studien zur Struktur und zum Bedeutungsgehalt des Paulinischen Rechtfertigungsbegriffs* (Munster: Aschendorf, 1971) 286, 295-306; Otto Hermann Pesch, *Gerechtfertigt aus Glauben: Luthers Frage an die Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder, 1982); and George Tavard, *Justification: An Ecumenical Study* (New York: Paulist, 1983).
- <sup>29</sup>The JDDJ is the result of decades of Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue. While some hail it as a "magnificent breakthrough," resolving the long-standing division between Lutherans and Catholics, other Lutherans view it as an ambiguous statement that carefully avoids precise definition and sacrifices truth on the altar of unity. See the website of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod ([www.lcms.org/president/statements](http://www.lcms.org/president/statements)).



# Of Sacraments and Sawdust: ECT, The Culture Wars, and The Quandary of Evangelical Identity

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In 1960, a Catholic presidential candidate traveled to Texas to reassure evangelical ministers there that he would not listen to the Pope on social and political matters. In the year 2000, an evangelical presidential candidate travels from Texas to Washington to reassure the American public that he will in fact listen quite closely to the Pope. With the recounting of this anecdote at a recent symposium on American evangelicalism, Roman Catholic commentator Richard John Neuhaus winsomely summarized the change in evangelical/Catholic relations in the past generation.<sup>1</sup> Neuhaus might just as easily have illustrated this point by pointing to his very presence at a forum designed to explain the fortunes of conservative American Protestantism.

The conference, “Pilgrims on the Sawdust Trail,” sponsored by Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School, explored the direction and prospects of American evangelicalism and fundamentalism. While representatives from various communions addressed the topic, perhaps the most provocative voice was that of Neuhaus, a former Lutheran pastor and 1960s civil rights activist turned Roman Catholic priest and editor of the neo-conservative monthly *First Things*. Exploring topics ranging from the notion of “Christian America” to the threat of militant Islam, Neuhaus and his respondents navigated much of the discussion toward the significance of the “Evan-

gelicals and Catholics Together” (ECT) discussions for conservative American Protestantism and the larger goal of Christian unity, a debate that has continued almost non-stop since Neuhaus spearheaded the ECT phenomenon with Southern Baptist Charles Colson in the mid-1990s.<sup>2</sup> Neuhaus’s intellectually rigorous attempt to forge a precise definition of the Christian unity sought by the “mere Christianity” of the ECT project is not incidental to the questions about the “sawdust trail” raised by the Beeson conference. Indeed, the ECT project and its accompanying efforts to forge a doctrinal consensus between the evangelical and Roman Catholic communions strikes at the very heart of evangelical theology’s ongoing quest for definition. As such, the ECT project is more than a series of documents. Instead, it represents both the best and worst impulses of contemporary parachurch evangelicalism. Therefore, the ECT dialogues carry with them some important implications for the future of evangelical theology.

## ECT and the Promise of Evangelical Theology

As Neuhaus’s wry observation about the place of Catholicism in the respective campaigns of John F. Kennedy and George W. Bush would suggest, the effort toward evangelical/Catholic unity has much to do with politics. Indeed, at first glance, the initial 1994 ECT document would seem

to be a “culture war” manifesto. Galvanized by a cultural ethos typified by *Roe v. Wade* in the American courtroom and *Heather Has Two Mommies* in the American classroom, Neuhaus and Colson, along with representatives of their respective constituencies, unveiled ECT in March 1994 as a united Christian front against the “culture of death,” with the document recognizing that the “pattern of convergence and cooperation between evangelicals and Catholics is, in large part, a result of common effort to protect human life, especially the lives of the most vulnerable among us.”<sup>3</sup> The document did not limit itself to addressing questions such as abortion and euthanasia, however, but instead went on to address questions of racial reconciliation, the exploitation of the pornography industry, vouchers for private school education, the protection of the family and other societal mediating structures, and the larger question of the preservation of Western culture.

Still, ECT and its successors did not stop at a call to a united front in the culture wars. Instead, they have sought to ground Catholic/evangelical co-belligerency not in a tactical political maneuver, but in a theological consensus that sets evangelical and Roman Catholic sociopolitical activism in the context of a shared commitment to Nicene Trinitarianism, Chalcedonian Christology, and even a common salvation received by grace through faith alone (*sola fide*).<sup>4</sup> Colson, among others, has argued forcefully that a common theological starting point is necessary for a united Christian front:

These are the reasons for “Evangelicals and Catholics Together.” Because, to bring God’s truth about the public good into the public square and to resist the abortionists and mercy-killers, the relativists and

the tyrants, Christians must stand together. The controversies that have divided believers for nearly five hundred years are real, to be sure, and none of them is to be minimized. However, the divisions between us are not the battle of the hour, when hosts of secularists and relativists threaten to sweep away the last trace of Christian truth, thought, and influence from our culture. Indeed, the controversies that divide us are far less significant than the common threat that confronts us.<sup>5</sup>

The need for such a theological consensus, Colson contends, was discovered by Catholics and evangelicals on the picket lines of the abortion debate: “There, evangelicals and Catholics have discovered that their presence is inspired by a distinctly Christian ethic that rests on a common foundation of Christian doctrine about God, human nature, the sanctity of life, and the Church’s mission to the world.”<sup>6</sup> Neuhaus agrees, arguing that genesis of the evangelical/Catholic search for a theological consensus was not the 1994 statement, but instead began when Reformed apologist Francis Schaeffer led evangelicals into the Roman Catholic terrain of anti-abortion activism following *Roe v. Wade*. “The evangelicals and Catholics who found one another in the pro-life cause knew that they were not simply co-belligerents in a political movement,” Neuhaus observes. “Behind the political agreement was the discovery of agreement about moral truth, expressed in terms of common grace or natural law. Undergirding it all was the discovery of a shared allegiance to the Author of truth and a shared faith in the One who is the way, the truth, and the life.”<sup>7</sup>

By recognizing that united action in the public square requires an underlying theological consensus, the ECT project rightly resonates with one of the primary

distinctives of the postwar evangelical movement led by theologians such as Carl F. H. Henry, Harold John Ockenga, and Edward John Carnell. It must be remembered, after all, that the origins of contemporary evangelical theology are most often pinpointed to 1947 with the publication of Carl Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*.<sup>8</sup>

Henry's *Uneasy Conscience* was a call for a new evangelical theology, which would define itself by leaving behind the cultural isolationism of its fundamentalist heritage.<sup>9</sup> As Henry and his colleagues understood it, however, this social and political engagement required theological agreement to remove the obstacles to cultural penetration and to provide a united evangelical front. Henry's manifesto called for evangelicals to transcend the bitter arguments between, for example, dispensational premillennialists and covenantal amillennialists.<sup>10</sup> Still, he maintained, this was not to be done by ignoring the crucial question of the nature of the kingdom of God. Instead, he argued, evangelicals must coalesce around a common understanding of the kingdom, one that would provide the basis for a comprehensive worldview of evangelical engagement in every facet of human life.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, in the early days of the postwar evangelical renaissance, evangelical leaders claimed that a renewed conservative evangelical theology could provide the basis for cultural engagement precisely because it was an alternative to the detailed public philosophy of Roman Catholicism. Henry, for example, asserted:

Formulation of an evangelical philosophy is not without its difficulties. For one thing, Protestantism has no official philosophy, whereas Roman Catholicism has its Thomism. But the more one wrestles with

Thomism and modern problems, the more he senses how much of an advantage this may prove to be. For the evangelical is free to go back to biblical theology—without any mediator but *the* Mediator; without any authority save the Scriptures themselves; without any imperative testimony save that of the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup>

The theologians of the postwar evangelical movement recognized that social and political concerns were, at their core, ultimately matters of theological reflection. This contention gains credence in light of the way in which *Roe v. Wade* caught evangelical Protestantism off-guard. As Francis Schaeffer saw it, evangelicals lagged behind Roman Catholics in condemning abortion rights for a precisely theological reason; namely, because of “the prison house of [evangelical] platonic spirituality,” which severed body from soul and thereby failed to recognize that the trampling of human life is not at the periphery of the Christian gospel.<sup>13</sup> Schaeffer's prophetic word was verified in the public scrambling of evangelicals in the wake of *Roe*, many of whom seemed to be asking, “What hath the revival tent to do with the abortion clinic?”<sup>14</sup>

The ECT project recognizes, with the founding generation of evangelical theologians, that social and political engagement is about more than political maneuvering, especially as the trend of cultural hostility to the Judeo-Christian roots of Western civilization has accelerated. As Neuhaus has repeatedly argued, “the crisis of the ‘Naked Public Square’ is not political or institutional or legal—as important as these dimensions undoubtedly are—but theological.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, Catholic apologist Peter Kreeft crystallizes the co-belligerents' concern for the doctrinal

roots and consequences of cultural upheaval when he writes:

When a man leaves a room, his image disappears from the mirror in that room. We are living in that split second between the disappearance of God and the disappearance of His image in the human mirror. The image is the life of our souls, our consciences. That is what our present "culture war" is about. It is not merely about getting our rights in the naked public square; it is about the salvation of the soul. It is very probably about the continued biological survival of our species and our civilization on this planet in the next millennium, for the death within will necessarily spill out into a visible death without, like oozing pus. It is certainly about eternal life or eternal death, for without repentance there can be no salvation, and without a real moral law there can be no repentance, and the culture war's Pearl Harbor is the attack on the moral law.<sup>16</sup>

Granted, Kreeft's assessment betrays a decidedly Roman Catholic vision of personal salvation, and perhaps a bit of literary hyperbole. Still, his point that cultural engagement cannot be isolated from "more important" matters such as personal piety echoes the arguments made by Henry and other early evangelical leaders against the fundamentalist charge that the church should concentrate on individual evangelism and personal morality.<sup>17</sup> Such a refusal to provide a theological response to the pressing cultural and political issues of the day, Henry maintained, would mean nothing less than a new evangelical monasticism, which would render irrelevant any attempt to evangelize the world.<sup>18</sup>

For postwar evangelical theology, therefore, cultural engagement could not be attempted with a doctrinally frayed coalition, nor could sociopolitical ques-

tions be addressed simply in a reactionary, *ad hoc* manner on the basis of political realities alone. The ECT project of recent years would seem to have learned this lesson better than the attempts of evangelicals and fundamentalists of the 1970s and 1980s to forge a united "New Christian Right" concerned with many of the same issues. Despite the perennial demonization of the evangelical Religious Right as seeking a theocratic takeover of society, such groups often actually boasted about the lack of any theological basis for united action. Thus, Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell claimed his was "a political organization and is not based on theological considerations" while Christian Coalition executive director Ralph Reed contended, "This is not a vision exclusively for those of us who are evangelical or Roman Catholic or Greek Orthodox or Jewish. This vision makes room for people of all faiths—and those with no faith at all."<sup>19</sup>

Without the theoretical tools to evaluate political goals *theologically*, many in the religious right were unable to articulate the priorities of their political agenda in terms of the overall scheme of an evangelical worldview. Without a comprehensive worldview theology undergirding its political action, the evangelical right sought to unify instead around public personalities, secular methodologies, or relatively shortsighted legislative goals.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the succeeding movements of evangelical conservative political engagement seemed at times to have as much internal cohesion as any other celebrity-driven political action committee. When the centrifugal personalities faded from the scene, often so did the unifying center of the movement. As the Christian Coalition's Reed laments: "In my view,

when the helicopter carrying Ronald Reagan left the Capitol grounds in 1989 following the inauguration of George Bush, we witnessed the departure of the first and last individual who could unite all religious conservatives from the national political stage."<sup>21</sup>

The ECT project seems determined not to make this mistake, and instead resonates with the neo-evangelical founding generation's call for doctrinal cohesion and comprehensive theological reflection. Unlike the pioneers of evangelical engagement, however, ECT leaders such as Neuhaus and Colson seek to broaden the "united action" beyond the parameters of the Reformation heritage. Thus, Colson argues, co-belligerence must be done on more than the basis of the Reformed doctrine of common grace since "while cooperation on the basis of common grace might suffice for merely political alliances among different religious communions, it cannot suffice in reestablishing Christian influence in our increasingly secular and even increasingly hostile culture."<sup>22</sup> Since the stakes are higher than political campaigns, Colson maintains, the task of evangelicals and Catholics "is nothing less than to articulate convincingly to a culture awash in nihilism and hedonism. Neither a Baptist worldview—and I am a Southern Baptist—nor a Lutheran worldview, nor a Catholic worldview is enough to present a comprehensive, universal worldview."<sup>23</sup> As such, Reformed theologian J. I. Packer joins Colson in wondering if the "united and transformative witness" of the ECT movement has not achieved the kind of comprehensive worldview theology called for by earlier generations of evangelicals, going so far as to wonder whether Pope John Paul II might be the successor to evangelical

worldview theologian James Orr in articulating the need for a coherent, all-embracing Christian vision.<sup>24</sup>

With such the case, the ECT project is right to note that dialogue on matters such as justification, Marian devotion, and baptismal regeneration are not peripheral to cultural co-belligerence. The claim to a common theological consensus, a common Christian worldview, necessitates that these theological issues must be confronted and engaged by both sides. The theological stakes are nowhere clearer than in Colson's summation of the ECT rationale for a common witness:

In sum, those who are committed to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, who have experienced the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, who affirm the authority of Holy Scripture—each and all, though they understand and in worship respond to these realities differently—share more than a political or cultural agenda. They share the "one faith, one baptism, one Lord" of the Christian gospel. And they share the assumptions that proceed from faith, assumptions that form the Christian view of the world—the Christian worldview—that they must defend together.<sup>25</sup>

### **ECT and the Failure of Evangelical Theology**

The consensus celebrated by the Catholic and evangelical co-belligerents, however, is not merely an expansion of the kind of doctrinal unity sought by postwar evangelical theology. Instead, as ECT critics have noted, the "consensus" achieved by ECT dialogue partners is more often grounded in carefully-worded statements than in genuine theological rapprochement.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, rather than building upon theological developments in both communions, the ECT statements seem to claim consensus largely on the basis of the



divisions and confusions of an evangelical theological project that has fallen on hard times in last half-century.

This is illustrated perhaps most obviously by the ECT statement's capitalization on the confused state of evangelical soteriology. Even before the "Gift of Salvation" statement used the term *sola fide* to describe justification, Neuhaus contended that evangelicalism has moved beyond its Reformation heritage of claiming justification through faith alone as the article of a standing or falling church. *Sola fide*, Neuhaus observes, is "hardly representative of evangelicalism."<sup>27</sup> Instead, he argues, evangelical theology has become less Lutheran or Reformed and more Wesleyan in its soteriology. Indeed, Neuhaus assumes that John Wesley himself would have signed enthusiastically the ECT statement. "Far from being an initiative that is abrupt and premature," Neuhaus proclaims, "ECT is simply catching up, two centuries later, with John Wesley and other defining figures of world evangelicalism."<sup>28</sup>

Neuhaus's contention of this shift toward Wesleyan soteriology in evangelical theology might be more persuasive if the leading evangelical figures involved in both ECT statements were not, almost to the man, leading proponents of a Reformation understanding of forensic justification on the basis of the imputed righteousness of Christ. J. I. Packer, for instance, along with two other Protestant ECT signers responded to controversy from ECT critics by signing a statement that outlined the Reformation understanding of justification as indeed "the article by which the Church stands or falls."<sup>29</sup>

Still, Neuhaus's point is not one that should be easily dismissed by evangeli-

cal theology. After all, both Roman Catholics and confessional Protestants are affirming the same language about justification, without touching the centuries-old anathemas each communion has placed on the other. The Catholic cobelligerents, it would seem, have not deemed the debate over justification to be a matter of indifference. Catholic activist Keith Fournier, who was prominent in the drafting of the 1994 statement, followed the statement with a popular book outlining the public policy implications for the principles laid out in ECT.<sup>30</sup> In the volume, published by a major evangelical publisher with a foreword by evangelical broadcaster Pat Robertson, Fournier provides a vigorous apologetic for a decidedly Tridentine formulation of justification as the infusion of grace, along with traditional Catholic defenses for the role of merit and baptismal regeneration in salvation. "God makes me just," explains Fournier of what he means by justification. "He doesn't just declare me so."<sup>31</sup>

By contrast, contemporary evangelical conviction on the issue seems almost hopelessly muddled. This is seen, for instance, in the presidential address at the 2000 meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, a speech that sought to distance the fastest growing wing of the global evangelical coalition from the Protestant understanding of justification. In the address, Pentecostal theologian Frank D. Macchia declared:

When I first read the Catholic response to the Reformation in the Council and Decrees of Trent, my heart was "strangely moved." I found there much that had been missing from the shallow well of the forensic model. Here was an attempt to view justification as something

that God not only declares but God does. God makes us right with the divine life by a justice that redeems and heals. The Italian Pentecostal Church of my youth which leveled so many anathemas against the Catholic Church would have been surprised to discover that in some ways their understanding of the New Testament texts that speak of justification was actually closer to Trent than to certain Reformers.<sup>32</sup>

Such sentiments are hardly relegated to Pentecostal/charismatic evangelicalism. In more recent years, a growing “reformist” wing of evangelicalism has pressed to abandon the evangelical commitment to a Reformation soteriology based on substitutionary atonement and forensic justification. Clark Pinnock and Robert Brow, for instance, argue that their “family room” model of salvation is closer to post-Vatican II Catholic soteriology than to the traditional Protestant “courtroom” model of a sinner declared righteous on the basis of the sacrificial death and imputed righteousness of Christ.<sup>33</sup> With such the case, evangelical theology would do well to consider Father Neuhaus’s alarming observation that it is evangelicalism that has moved closer to the Vatican on the doctrine of salvation; not the other way around.

The ECT documents add to the confusion here by continuing the American evangelical establishment’s failed attempt to create consensus through vaguely worded manifestoes, rather than through the difficult work of dialogue with a view toward genuine theological unity. Packer, for instance, argues that the first ECT document surmounted the thorny soteriological debate because “ECT lets go Protestant precision on the doctrine of justification and the correlation between conversion and new birth, just as it lets

go the Roman Catholic dogmas of baptismal regeneration and the sacramental structure.”<sup>34</sup> One might wonder how the doctrine of salvation could even begin to be addressed by a Roman Catholic without setting forth a doctrine of the sacraments since Catholic soteriology is, by definition, sacramental. Likewise, one might wonder how an evangelical can attempt to claim common cause on salvation without a common understanding of perhaps the most highly emphasized doctrine of a postwar evangelical movement steeped in the Billy Graham crusades—the new birth.

The shaky nature of this theological consensus is only further exemplified in the way in which both sides describe the “unity” they seek to find in the ECT project, even as both sides point to Jesus’ prayer “that they may be one” (John 17:11). But what, ultimately, would this unity look like? For evangelicals, it would seem that the unity is a theologically informed cooperation, along the same lines as the parachurch networks to which they have long ago grown accustomed. Evangelical ECT proponents resonate with the “ecumenism of the trenches” concept, at least in part, because evangelicalism itself was an “ecumenism of the trenches” against the hostile denominational bureaucracies of liberal mainline Protestantism.

Richard John Neuhaus, in his presentation at Beeson, however, projected a very different vision of what the ultimate “unity” of the ECT project should be, a vision informed by a full-orbed Catholic understanding of the church. “It all has to do with ecclesiology, finally, as to the problem addressed,” Neuhaus remarked. “And the problem addressed is the scandal of Christian division.”<sup>35</sup> In light of

Jesus' prayer, Neuhaus argued, the unity desired by the ECT project must be much more than networking, but must be a *visible* unity, "so that the world may see and believe that I am sent by you" (John 17:21). The question of Christian unity, for Neuhaus, therefore centers on a truth-claim about the nature of the church:

Did [Christ] intend to establish a Church? This is a very basic question. Did He intend, as the early Christian community had no doubt whatsoever that He intended, designate twelve pillars, apostolic pillars of that Church? Did He intend a continuing community that would be defined by its proclamation, by its prayer, by its life, but by its communion with the apostles? And did He intend that of the apostle Peter be given the commission to strengthen the brethren? And did He intend that this would continue through time, and that there would be successors to these apostles, and successors to Peter?<sup>36</sup>

And so Neuhaus defines what he means by the "visible, palpable" unity he seeks, and of which ECT is, he hopes, a beginning. Thus, Neuhaus posed the question to the participants at the Beeson conference as to the Catholic goal of ECT:

Crystal clear. It is full communion among all Christians. Full communion means that we would be together at the altar, at the source and summit of the church's life. It would require our agreement in the unity of faith, our agreement in the unity of the liturgical ritual enactment through the centuries in all of its diversity, of that faith as it is both prayed and believed. And it would require being in communion with Peter, the Bishop of Rome; the 264<sup>th</sup> exerciser of the Petrine ministry.<sup>37</sup>

Such is certainly understandable in light of Neuhaus's Catholic ecclesiology. He dismisses the evangelical talk of

"churches" by arguing, in continuity with historic Catholic teaching that Christ and the church are co-terminus. "Church has no plural, just as Christ has no plural," he told the Beeson gathering. "There is only one Christ, who is the Head, and therefore there can only be one Body, the church."<sup>38</sup> This understanding of the church therefore roots itself in Neuhaus's still robustly sacramental view of salvation. "For the Catholic, the act of faith in Jesus Christ and the act of faith in the church is one act of faith," he asserted.<sup>39</sup> Christian unity for the ECT-supportive evangelical might be evangelicals and Catholics "accepting one another as brothers and sisters in Christ." But, the question must be asked what, ultimately, is the goal of this unity. For Father Neuhaus, it would seem to be, among other things, evangelical submission to the Petrine authority of the Pope and submission to the Eucharist as the continuing sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Again, this doctrinal understanding of Christian unity should come as no surprise to anyone who has read the catechisms of the Roman Catholic Church. Nonetheless, this vision is sharply at odds with the most basic foundations of evangelical soteriology and ecclesiology. This claim to theological consensus therefore can only be described with the words Catholic theologians have used historically to deride the Protestant understanding of justification through faith alone in Christ alone. It is a "legal fiction."

And so, on these central issues, the evangelical and Catholic participants of the ECT project seem to be working from very different presuppositions and toward two very different goals. Perhaps not surprisingly, these central issues are the very matters that constituted the Ref-

ormation churches' break from Rome in the first place. Until both sides can transcend this problem, the ECT project will be saddled with one of the most unfortunate legacies of contemporary evangelical theology. After all, American parachurch evangelicalism has a long track-record of attempting to base theological consensus on *ad hoc*, doctrinally minimalist statements, ranging from "The Fundamentals" at the turn of the twentieth century to "An Evangelical Celebration" at the turn of the twenty-first, a document several participants at the Beeson conference dubbed "evangelicals and evangelicals together."<sup>40</sup> While evangelical refusal to divide over secondary matters such as eschatological timetables served the movement well, it might also be argued that this skittishness over doctrinal precision for the sake of cooperation is what has led to an evangelical movement so theologically anemic that the Evangelical Theological Society now finds itself in a perennial dispute over whether God knows the future.<sup>41</sup>

### **ECT and the Future of Evangelical Theology**

If indeed the ECT project shares characteristics of both the best and worst aspects of contemporary evangelical theology, what then are the implications for the future directions of conservative Protestant theological and cultural engagement? Positively, the ECT documents model for evangelical theology what at least some strands of Roman Catholicism has always seemed to know: that matters of social, cultural, and political engagement cannot be severed from the task of theological scrutiny. There are helpful signs of such a theologically rigorous evangelical engagement in, for

instance, the cultural activism of the Southern Baptist Convention. The SBC's nineteenth century legacy of an understanding of the "spirituality of the church," which sharply divided the "spiritual" matters of redemption and piety from "secular" matters of state and culture, proved costly to the spiritual health of the denomination as the churches largely refused to raise a prophetic voice against slavery, racial segregation, and other social evils. The current SBC leadership seems, however, to recognize that matters of human life, liberty, and dignity are indeed theological matters. Thus, the SBC (to no small criticism from its dissident left wing) has addressed matters such as racism, family deterioration, and the encroaching "culture of death" in its confessional statement, *The Baptist Faith and Message*. This is precisely the kind of "uneasy conscience" the postwar generation of evangelical theologians sought to awaken.

Similarly, the ECT project offers the possibility that evangelical theology might begin the process of constructing a distinctively evangelical public philosophy, a deficiency the ECT project underscores. It is not in error, after all, that Neuhaus spoke of President George W. Bush "listening carefully" to the Pope. In fact, it would seem that President Bush might more accurately be described as listening carefully to Father Neuhaus, a development for which conservative evangelicals should be grateful. Evangelical theology should not allow concerns over ECT to force them into an intellectual isolationism from our cultural allies in the Catholic communion. Still, it should be disconcerting for evangelicalism, a movement formed at least in part to engage the world politically and socially,

that the theoretical foundations of contemporary evangelical public engagement are not found in Reformation political thought or evangelical theology, but instead from a vibrant Catholic intellectual movement. As the *New Republic* magazine has noted of projects such as ECT, “evangelical reliance on Catholics isn’t simply a function of goodwill; it’s a function of need.”<sup>42</sup> This is because, the magazine perceives, Catholic neo-conservatives such as Neuhaus and Michael Novak, unlike many contemporary evangelical culture warriors, have seen “their project as theological as well as political.”<sup>43</sup>

The prospects for such an evangelical renaissance are called into question, however, by the evangelical theological ambiguities highlighted in the ECT process. Evangelical theology will never be able to dialogue with Roman Catholic thinkers on the question of religious liberty without a serious discussion of basic theological differences of ecclesiology and the biblical mandate of a separation of the church and the state. The evangelicals of 1960 were perhaps motivated by bigotry when they laid out doomsday scenarios of the Pope running the White House through John F. Kennedy. They were also, as Father Neuhaus points out, a bit naïve as to the depth of Kennedy’s Catholicism. Even so, there is within the Protestant historical memory of several bloody attempts at Constantinian church/state alliances, which were motivated far too often by basic Catholic theological understandings of the nature of the church.<sup>44</sup> Until evangelical theology overcomes its fear that ecclesiological distinctives might imperil the parachurch coalition, these theological discussions may never get off the ground.

Nonetheless, the most pressing need

for evangelical theology to continue its dialogue with Roman Catholicism is the shoring up of its own understanding of soteriology. It is difficult to see how evangelical theology can craft a coherent understanding of the justice of God in the public ordering of society if it cannot articulate a coherent understanding of the justice of God in the forgiveness of sins (Rom 3:26). Some argue that evangelicals simply need to overcome their populist legacy of the “sawdust trail” of crisis evangelism. S. M. Hutchens, for instance, contends that confessional Protestant opposition to ECT springs less from the sixteenth-century disputations than from the twentieth-century crusade tents: “When these appeal to justification by faith alone they are appealing to the revivalist soteriology of the evangelical masses, who associate the doctrine with their belief that once one has a punctiliar conversion experience, one’s soul is eternally secure.”<sup>45</sup> Still, whatever the inadequacies of some streams of evangelical revivalism, the essential message of sin, a finished atonement, and once-for-all justification is very much in continuity with the point of the Protestant Reformation and, more importantly, with the gospel proclaimed by the apostles and Jesus Himself.<sup>46</sup>

With such the case, the evangelical “uneasy conscience” cannot afford to ignore the mandate to join with Roman Catholics and others in the naked public square. At the same time, however, the evangelical conscience will grow uneasier yet if it is not honest about the convictions that make it evangelical in the first place. This means that, if evangelicals believe what they claim to affirm about the gospel, they must recognize the implications of their soteriology. If salvation means that

the sinner must abandon all hope of being found righteous through anything within himself, and must cling solely to an external righteousness accomplished by the one Mediator between God and humanity, then evangelicals must sadly conclude that the official teaching of the Catholic Church teaches another way of salvation. Father Neuhaus models this kind of candor to evangelicals when he announces his prayer that the “sawdust trail” will lead ultimately to Rome. Evangelical theology must respond that our prayer is to see our Roman Catholic co-belligerents join us, not only on the picket line, but in the baptistery as well. If evangelical theology loses this, then, whatever else is gained, there is not much of a “sawdust trail” left to discuss.

#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Richard John Neuhaus, “The Meaning of Christian America” (address given to the “Pilgrims on the Sawdust Trail: Evangelical Conversations” symposium, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, Birmingham, AL, 2 October 2001. Audiocassettes of the conference are available from Beeson Divinity School.
- <sup>2</sup>“Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium,” in *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*, ed. Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus (Dallas: Word, 1995) xv-xxxiii. This statement was followed in 1998 by another document, this one more narrowly focused on soteriology. “The Gift of Salvation,” *First Things*, January 1998, 20-23.
- <sup>3</sup>“Evangelicals and Catholics Together,” xxiv.
- <sup>4</sup>The first ECT statement notes: “We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ.” “Evangelicals and Catholics Together,” xviii. The second statement goes even further to assert: “We understand that what we here affirm is in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone (*sola fide*).” “The Gift of Salvation,” 21.
- <sup>5</sup>Charles W. Colson, “The Common Cultural Task: The Culture War in Protestant Perspective,” in *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, 38.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup>Richard John Neuhaus, “The Catholic Difference,” in *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, 178.
- <sup>8</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947). As the editor of the Billy Graham Association’s *Decision* magazine would put it: “The book dropped like a bomb into the peaceful summer Bible conference atmosphere of the postwar evangelical community.” Sherwood Eliot Wirt, *The Social Conscience of the Evangelical* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968) 47.
- <sup>9</sup>For an analysis of the mediating position of Henry’s *Uneasy Conscience* between the options of Protestant fundamentalism and Social Gospel liberalism, see Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 138-45.
- <sup>10</sup>Henry, *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 48-57.
- <sup>11</sup>For a fuller treatment of this, see Russell D. Moore, “Kingdom Theology and the American Evangelical Consensus: Emerging Implications for Sociopolitical Engagement” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, forthcoming). This study claims that the seem-

ingly insurmountable differences within the postwar evangelical coalition on matters of eschatology, soteriology, and ecclesiology have largely been resolved in recent years by a growing rapprochement within the dispensationalist and covenantalist wings of evangelicalism.

<sup>12</sup>Carl F. H. Henry, "The Vigor of the New Evangelicalism," *Christian Life*, March 1948, 38.

<sup>13</sup>Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982) 68-69.

<sup>14</sup>*Christianity Today*, for instance, noted the Supreme Court's seismic legalization of abortion by blankly reporting that the decision "brought, as expected, immediate response from the nation's Roman Catholic leaders." "Abortion Decision: A Death Blow?" *Christianity Today*, 16 February 1973, 48.

<sup>15</sup>Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) xii.

<sup>16</sup>Peter Kreeft, *Ecumenical Jihad: Ecumenism and the Culture War* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996) 20-21.

<sup>17</sup>One such voice was that of Henry's fellow neo-evangelical theologian Bernard Ramm who argued that the biblical injunction for evangelicals is simply "but to (1) evangelize, and (2) keep my spiritual life at the right level." Bernard Ramm, "Is Doctor Henry Right? No!" *United Evangelical Action*, 15 July 1947, 16.

<sup>18</sup>To those who wished to jettison political engagement for an exclusive emphasis on personal evangelism and piety, Henry said the following: "Perhaps, despite all that

I have said, somebody here is looking for a bomb shelter in which to propagate the evangelical faith. If so, let me propose a change on your reading list: retire your Bible to the Smithsonian Institute and get a copy of the Dead Sea Scrolls instead. The Essene caves are waiting for you. You won't have to worry about the world outside. You won't have to worry about neo-evangelicals. You won't have to worry about anything. And in A. D. 4000 some roving archaeologists from Mars may discover in those Judean hills that, during the great crisis of the twentieth century, Saint Kilroy slept here." Carl F. H. Henry, *The God Who Shows Himself* (Waco: Word, 1966) 50.

<sup>19</sup>Jerry Falwell, "An Agenda for the 1980s," in *Piety and Politics: Evangelicals and Fundamentalists Confront the World*, ed. Richard John Neuhaus and Michael Cromartie (Washington: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1987) 113; Ralph Reed, *After the Revolution: How the Christian Coalition is Impacting America* (Dallas: Word, 1996) 18.

<sup>20</sup>Thereby causing some evangelical theologians such as Henry to recoil in horror at the perception of evangelical political activists "hurriedly attaching Christian identity to specific legislative proposals such as a balanced-budget amendment or line-item veto." Carl F. H. Henry, *Has Democracy Had Its Day?* (Nashville: Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1996) 53.

<sup>21</sup>Ralph Reed, *Active Faith: How Christians Are Changing the Soul of Ameri-*

*can Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 1996) 112. Former Moral Majority organizer Cal Thomas likewise recounts his disaffection at the personality-driven politics of the 1980s, anchored first to disappointment with evangelical President Jimmy Carter, who turned out to be hostile to evangelical concerns, and then with Reagan, whose legislative achievements on cultural issues were not as far-reaching as evangelical political activists had hoped. Cal Thomas and Ed Dobson, *Blinded by Might: Can the Religious Right Save America?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999) 11, 22.

<sup>22</sup>Colson, "The Common Cultural Task," 38.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup>J. I. Packer, "On from Orr: Cultural Crisis, Rational Realism, and Incarnational Ontology," in *Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox in Dialogue*, ed. James S. Cutsinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997) 155-176.

<sup>25</sup>Colson, "The Common Cultural Task," 38.

<sup>26</sup>See, for instance, elsewhere in this same journal R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "Standing Together, Standing Apart: Cultural Co-belligerence Without Theological Compromise."

<sup>27</sup>Richard John Neuhaus, "The Catholic Difference," in *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, 210.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>29</sup>J. I. Packer, "Crosscurrents Among Evangelicals," in *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, 157-159.

<sup>30</sup>Keith Fournier, *A House United? Evangelicals and Catholics Together* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994).

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 213.

<sup>32</sup>Frank D. Macchia, "Justification and the Spirit: A Pentecostal Reflection on the Doctrine by which the Church Stands or Falls," *Pneuma* 22 (2000) 5.

<sup>33</sup>Clark H. Pinnock and Robert C. Brow, *Unbounded Love: A Good News Theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994) 28-30.

<sup>34</sup>Packer, "Crosscurrents Among Evangelicals," 167.

<sup>35</sup>Richard John Neuhaus, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together Forum" (address given to the "Pilgrims on the Sawdust Trail: Evangelical Conversations" symposium, Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, Birmingham, AL, 3 October 2001). Audiocassettes of the conference are available from Beeson Divinity School.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>The latter document, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration," was signed by a coalition of evangelicals ranging from Calvinist R. C. Sproul to Wesleyan Thomas Oden to church growth leader Bill Hybels. Still, even it did not avoid controversy within the evangelical movement. Biblical scholar Robert Gundry, for instance, points to the forensic justification language in the document as representative of Reformed theological hegemony within American evangelicalism. Robert H. Gundry, "Why I Didn't Endorse 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration,'" *Books*

*and Culture*, January/February 2001, 6-9. See also Thomas Oden's reply to Gundry, "A Calm Answer," *Books and Culture*, March/April 2001, 12-13. For expanded commentary on the "Celebration" statement, see John Akers, John Armstrong, and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *This We Believe: The Good News of Jesus Christ for the World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

<sup>41</sup>For the doctrinal foundations of the "open theism" debate and its relevance for evangelical authenticity, see Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000).

<sup>42</sup>Franklin Foer, "Spin Doctrine," *New Republic*, 5 June 2000, 20.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>44</sup>Nor should it be thought that Catholic social thought has decisively settled the issues of religious liberty and church/state separation. A recent, very provocative work by a brilliant Catholic legal theorist combines confessional Catholicism with the postmodernism of Stanley Fish to call into question the very concept of "religious liberty," arguing that the idea rests on the untenable presuppositions of Enlightenment liberalism and Baptist populism. Kenneth R. Craycraft, Jr., *The American Myth of Religious Freedom* (Dallas: Spence, 1999).

<sup>45</sup>S. M. Hutchens, "A (Somewhat) Protestant Response to Richard John Neuhaus," in *Reclaiming the Great Tradition*, 65.

<sup>46</sup>This debate did not materialize with the ECT discussions. The "Evangelical Affirmations" statement laments

the fact that "some have declared that several evangelical doctrines are theologically innovative and do not represent the central traditions of the Christian church." This statement, drafted by a broad coalition of evangelical leaders, sought to refute this claim, along with the similar suggestion that evangelicalism "suddenly" arose from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century revivals. Kenneth Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry, eds., *Evangelical Affirmations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).





# ECT and Beyond: A Plea for the Pursuit of Unity, Irenic Perspicuity, and Sphere Ecumenism

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*I pray that what you and your colleagues have done is pleasing to God. I cannot praise or condemn it. I expect that this may change forever what generations of Bible-believing Protestants have thought was their mission in relation to Roman Catholicism. I pray that you are right. I tremble to think that you may be wrong.*

—Anonymous evangelical theologian to Fr. Richard John Neuhaus

Evangelicals, especially Southern Baptists, have not taken seriously Jesus's high priestly petition that his disciples "... may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21 ESV). Evangelicals and other Christians have settled too easily for the fallen world of Christian division and dissimulation. In fact, in some quarters sectarianism is seen as virtue, unity as vice. The fragmentation of the body of Christ not only denies the power of the gospel of the risen Jesus, but also reveals a shameful immaturity among his disciples.

Furthermore, Jesus' prayer indicates that Christian unity has a clear missiological implication. Unity among Christians testifies to the unity in the Godhead. If God is one, why are God's people divided? Christian unity would be a powerful evangelistic witness. Yet those committed to a robust mission are sometimes equally committed to maintaining the fissures among Christians. This is not only inconsistent; it is, in a very real sense, self-defeating. In every generation until Jesus returns, those who call themselves "Christians," who wear the name of the

one who offered the petitions recorded in John 17, should lament these fractures and, rather than tolerating historical divisions, should commit themselves to resolving those divisions—not at the expense of truth, but in pursuit of truth.

## The Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) Controversy

Nearly a decade has lapsed since a group of evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics began a discussion that resulted in a convulsion that continues to the present. In September 1992, a group of well-known leaders on both sides of that historic Christian chasm began meeting to explore their "common convictions about Christian faith and mission." The first public consequence of that dialogue was the declaration, *Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* (ECT).<sup>1</sup> The declaration was drafted by Charles Colson, former Nixon White House aide, noted evangelical author, and founder of Prison Fellowship Ministries in Reston, Virginia, and by Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, former Lutheran minister, editor-in-chief of the journal *First Things*, and head of the Institute on Religion and Public Life in New

York City. Thirteen additional participants in the dialogue included evangelicals and Catholics from a variety of communions.<sup>2</sup> A host of individuals endorsed the document at the time of its publication.

According to those who signed the declaration, ECT was meant “to speak responsibly from our communities and to our communities,”<sup>3</sup> though it did not come with the official endorsement of their various communions, denominations, or organizations. In traditional coalitional language, signer’s organizations were shown for identification purposes only. The argument of the document begins with the simple affirmation, “As Christ is one, so the Christian mission is one” and with the confession that “We together, Evangelicals and Catholics, confess our sins against the unity that Christ intends for all his disciples.”<sup>4</sup>

A number of sections form the organizational rubric of the declaration. The signers “affirm[ed] together” that (1) “Jesus Christ is Lord”; (2) “we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ”; (3) “all who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ”; (4) “Christians are to teach and live in obedience to the divinely inspired Scriptures, which are the infallible Word of God”; (5) “Christ has promised to his church the gift of the Holy Spirit who will lead us into all truth in discerning and declaring the teaching of Scripture”; and (6) the Apostles Creed is “an accurate statement of scriptural truth.”<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, the signers “hope[d] together” that (1) “all people will come to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior”; (2) “the church lives by and for the Great Commission”; (3) “unity and love among Christians is an integral part of our missionary witness to the Lord whom we

serve”; (4) “as Evangelicals and Catholics, we pray that our unity in the love of Christ will become ever more evident as a sign to the world of God’s reconciling power”; (5) “whatever may be the future form of this relationship between our communities, we can, we must, and we will begin now the work required to remedy what we know to be wrong in that relationship”; and (6) “we do not deny but clearly assert that there are disagreements between us.”<sup>6</sup>

They “search[ed] together” for “a fuller and clearer understanding of God’s revelation in Christ and his will for his disciples,” acknowledging that they did not presume to suggest that they could “resolve the deep and long-standing differences between Evangelicals and Catholics”—differences that “may never be resolved short of the Kingdom Come.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the signers of ECT articulated what they believed to be some of the significant points of division between them, admitting that “Evangelicals hold that the Catholic Church has gone beyond Scripture, adding teachings and practices that detract from or compromise the Gospel of God’s saving grace in Christ. Catholics, in turn, hold that such teachings and practices are grounded in Scripture and belong to the fullness of God’s revelation. Their rejection, Catholics say, results in a truncated and reduced understanding of the Christian reality.”<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the signers “can and do affirm together that the entirety of Christian faith, life, and mission finds its source, center, and end in the crucified and risen Lord” and “can and do pledge that we will continue to search together—through study, discussion, and prayer—for a better understanding of one another’s convictions and a more adequate comprehension of the

truth of God in Christ.”<sup>9</sup>

Common cause was made in what the signers “contend[ed] together.” Those evangelicals and Catholics who framed the document not only joined together in affirming the necessity of spreading the gospel, they also understood the task of Christians to include “a responsibility for the right ordering of civil society” through neighbor love and in the exercise of public responsibilities.<sup>10</sup> Together they contended for “the truth that politics, law, and culture must be secured by moral truth”; that “only a virtuous people can be free and just, and that virtue is secured by religion”; that religious freedom must be protected as “the first freedom, the source and shield of all human freedoms”; and that separation of church and state is to be strongly affirmed over against the distortions of the doctrine in contemporary jurisprudence.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, the signers of ECT were clear in their understanding that the impetus behind this new quest for unity was a result of “common effort to protect human life, especially the lives of the most vulnerable among us.”<sup>12</sup> That is to say, abortion on demand and the encroachment of the assisted death movement in America led to a healthy conversation and energetic cooperation that opened the door for such a dialogue to begin. The evangelical and Catholic signers also converged around a virtue-based public educational system; parental choice in education; media reform, including anti-pornography legislation; the dismantling of religious, ethnic, sex, and class discrimination; economic freedom; and a renewed appreciation for Western culture. They called for an appropriate foreign policy that promotes democracy and for public policies that support the so-called medi-

ating institutions in society: the family, church, and voluntary associations.<sup>13</sup>

Lastly, the signers of ECT “witness[ed] together.” Common witness brings to the foreground some of the more controversial distinctions between evangelicals and Roman Catholics. While standing firmly “for urgency and clarity of Christian witness to the Gospel,” the signers worried about “proselytizing” or “sheep stealing”—“recruiting people from another community for the purposes of denominational or institutional aggrandizement.”<sup>14</sup> In the spirit of respect for religious liberty and freedom of conscience, they agreed that genuine gospel conversion was the goal of Christian witness and that proselytism should be repudiated. Their final resolve was that: “All authentic witness must be aimed at conversion to God in Christ by the power of the Spirit.”<sup>15</sup>

The May 16, 1994 issue of the evangelical magazine, *Christianity Today*, contained a brief commentary on ECT by historical theologian and dean of Beeson Divinity School, Timothy George, who was not a signer of the declaration. George hailed it as an expression of “an ecumenism born out of a common moral struggle to proclaim and embody the gospel of Jesus Christ to a culture in disarray.”<sup>35</sup> “For faithful evangelicals and believing Roman Catholics,” opined George, “this is a time to sew, not a time to rend. In expressing our common convictions about Christian faith and mission, we can do no better than to heed the words of John Calvin: ‘That we acknowledge no unity except in Christ; no charity of which he is not the bond, and that, therefore, the chief point in preserving charity is to maintain faith sacred and entire.’”<sup>17</sup>

While on the surface *Evangelicals and*

*Catholics Together* may seem to have been a benign statement of Christian collegiality, even if not an entirely fulsome *rapprochement*, it set off a firestorm of controversy. The beauty of the declaration was clearly in the eye of the proverbial beholder. One might have expected to hear church bells ringing, see parades in the streets, and find Larry King commenting about the reunion of two groups whose cleavage reached back nearly 500 years. There was shouting all right. While the signers of ECT were united in their common understandings, other members of their communities went to war against one another. R. C. Sproul, then professor at Reformed Theological Seminary, blasted J. I. Packer, professor at Regent College in Vancouver and the best-known evangelical theologian who signed ECT, even after Packer provided an articulate defense of why he attached his name to the document.<sup>18</sup> After discussing the *raison d'être* of what Packer calls the 8,000 word “programmatically statement,” he puts several questions to his readers. “First: do we recognize that good evangelical Protestants and good Roman Catholics—good, I mean, in terms of their own church’s stated ideal of spiritual life—are Christians together? We ought to recognize this, for it is true.”<sup>19</sup> Packer is willing to grant, contrary to some he labels “isolationists,” that Roman Catholics can be genuine Christians in the fullest sense of the term. Next he asks, “Second: do we recognize that the present needs of both church and community in North America (not to look further for the moment) cry out for an alliance of good evangelical Protestants with good Roman Catholics (and good Eastern Orthodox, too)? We ought to recognize this, for it, too, is true.”<sup>20</sup> Packer points out in this section

that in today’s culture wars, it is not evangelicals and Catholics against one another, but classical Christian belief against the “materialistic, hedonistic, and nihilistic” drift of contemporary North American culture. Propagation of the basic Christian faith remains crucial for both evangelicals and Catholics. “Third:” queries Packer, “do we recognize that in our time mission ventures that involve evangelicals and Catholics side by side, not only in social witness but in evangelism and nurture as well, have already emerged? We ought to recognize this, for it is a fact.”<sup>19</sup> Abortion, Billy Graham’s cooperative evangelism, and charismatic “get-togethers” are cited as examples.

Packer insists that even though the rhetorical style of the document might be questionable, “ECT’s tone and thrust are right, and anyone who has learned not to rip phrases out of their context will see well enough what is intended.”<sup>22</sup> ECT is not, says Packer, a “sell-out of Protestantism, but is in fact a well-judged, timely call to a mode of grassroots action that is significant for furthering the kingdom of God.”<sup>23</sup>

Among Southern Baptists, ECT more than raised eyebrows. The two Southern Baptists who participated in the ECT-resulting dialogues and who signed the document were Richard Land and Larry Lewis. At the time, Land led the Christian Life Commission (now the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission), the moral concerns, public policy, and religious liberty agency of the Southern Baptist Convention, and Lewis was president of the convention’s Home Mission Board (now the North American Mission Board).

On May 27, 1994, Lewis distributed a ten-page memorandum to the trustees of the North American Mission Board responding to critics who had petitioned

the board to discipline him by instructing him to “withdraw publicly his endorsement of the document.”<sup>22</sup> Lewis pummeled his board with a rhetorical barrage:

Why do you suppose this meeting in New York City and this document are being referenced by so many as “historic” or as the “most historic meeting of Evangelicals and Catholics since the Reformation”? Why do you suppose such evangelical leaders as Charles Colson and Pat Robertson would sign such a document and rejoice in doing so? Why would a man like Bill Bright, who probably has as great a heart for world evangelization as anyone alive today, endorse the document? Why would an outstanding conservative evangelical scholar like J. I. Packer endorse the document if, as some have claimed, it is fraught with theological problems? Why would William Bentley Ball, possibly the most outstanding constitutional lawyer and authority on church/state issues in the nation, endorse such a document? The list goes on: Keith Fournier of the American Center for Law and Justice; Dr. Richard Mouw from Fuller Theological Seminary; Dr. Mark Noll, distinguished historian and evangelical scholar from Wheaton College; Dr. Jesse Miranda, from the Assemblies of God churches; Dr. Kent Hill from Eastern Nazarene College; and Dr. John White, well-known evangelical leader and former president of the National Association of Evangelicals. Are these distinguished evangelical leaders so ignorant and naïve that they do not see the “terrible” consequences of endorsing such a document? Why are they calling it “historic” and of “monumental significance”?

The answer is both simple and complex. Simply put, the document is not about theology. Neither Catholics nor Evangelicals have yielded or compromised anything in the realm of doctrine or theology.<sup>25</sup>

After six pages of exegesis of ECT, Lewis exclaims: “I believe this document

represents the ultimate victory of the Reformation! . . . I believe the document purports a great new day for evangelism and missions in those nations and communities that are predominantly Catholic.”<sup>26</sup>

Lewis ends his memorandum by appealing to the majority of the trustee board who are pastors:

I do not think it is appropriate for the Executive Committee or the Board of Directors to “instruct Dr. Lewis” to “withdraw publicly his endorsement of the document.” You must allow your president to exercise prophetic leadership—freedom to preach what he believes he should preach, to speak what he believes should be said, to stand where he feels he should stand on significant issues. If you’re a pastor, I imagine you expect that from your church; and I expect that from you. I think history will record the issuance of this document as a definitive moment in the history of Christendom. I’m happy to have had a small part.<sup>27</sup>

In June 1994, the Southern Baptist Convention met in Orlando, Florida, and passed a “Resolution on Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics.”<sup>28</sup> The resolution begins by acknowledging ECT and both the things Southern Baptists hold in common with all true Christians and the things on which Southern Baptists differ with Roman Catholics. The resolution first affirms the benefit of conversation with other religious groups, the importance of examining differences, and the importance of maintaining “our Southern Baptist confession without compromise.”<sup>29</sup> The remainder of the resolution is equally important:

Be it further RESOLVED, That due to the degeneration of moral values and ethical norms, coupled with the loss of meaning in people’s lives and the relative status ascribed to historic

truth claims in our contemporary world, we call for endeavors to bring about cooperative efforts on the part of all Christian organizations to present united support for pressing social and moral concerns; and we call on all religious bodies to affirm the importance of religious liberty and all of its expressions including freedom to evangelize among all peoples everywhere; and

Be it further RESOLVED, That we confess the historic Baptist doctrine of justification, namely, that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone without any addition of good works or human efforts; and we affirm that justification by faith alone is an essential of the Christian message, and we deny any view of salvation that adds to or subtracts from the sole sufficiency of Jesus Christ as Redeemer and Lord; and

Be it further RESOLVED, That the Bible is the inspired and inerrant Word of God and is the infallible touchstone by which all other authorities, teachers, and traditions must be judged; and

Be it further RESOLVED, That the Southern Baptist Convention affirm [sic] its commitment to evangelism and missionary witness among populations and individuals not characterized by genuine faith in Christ alone, and we reject any suggestion that such witness be characterized as “sheep stealing” proselytizing or a wasteful use of resources; and

Be it finally RESOLVED, That Southern Baptists affirm their commitment to evangelism and global missions and renew their intent to share Christ with all people everywhere to the end that the unsaved may be converted and the unchurched may become a part of Bible-believing, Christ-honoring congregations.<sup>30</sup>

Interestingly, the resolution nowhere references Jesus’ prayer for the unity of his disciples or any biblical text that calls for reconciliation and unity within the body of Christ (e.g., Eph 4:1-16).

In April of 1995, following a year of

controversy, both Land and Lewis removed their names from ECT. Stressing their enduring affirmation of the principles expressed in ECT and citing what amounts to immaturity on the part of their critics, Land and Lewis released a statement signaling the removal of their names from the document, while making clear that they were “not personally rejecting the intent of the document, nor . . . agreeing with unjust criticism of it.”<sup>31</sup>

William G. Streich, a trustee of the Home Mission Board told the press,

While we believe that the criticism of the ECT document is justified and valid, we nevertheless are grateful for the removal of their signature. This says to the world that Southern Baptists actively uphold the narrow (biblical) way of salvation (that is, by grace alone through faith in Christ alone) and that grassroots Southern Baptists will always contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.<sup>32</sup>

Few grassroots Southern Baptists had a clue about what had been going on.

Criticisms of ECT revolved around a number of issues. Commenting on the aftermath of ECT, evangelical professor J. Daryl Charles observed that,

Evangelical opposition to ECT over the last year-and-a-half falls mainly within four categories: (1) those who failed to read the declaration at all yet responded to sundry “reports” and “warnings”; (2) those who missed the intended thrust of the declaration; (3) those who isolated particular statements in ECT from their intended context; and (4) those who were concerned that the doctrine of *sola fide* had either been jettisoned, softened or ignored in the interest of forging unity.<sup>33</sup>

This seems to be an accurate summary of the responses to the original declara-

tion, with one exception. Articles and books discussing ECT almost universally fail to take into account the possibility (in fact, the likelihood) that just as the evangelicals signed the document as individuals and not for their communities, so the Catholics had done the same. That is, most treatments of ECT and its *sequelae* pit evangelical dogma over against Catholic dogma whilst the signers of ECT admitted up front that they spoke *from* their communities, *to* their communities, but not *for* their communities. One way to read ECT is to view it as merely a wishful accord by ecclesiastical misfits within their own communities. This may be a more cynical way to read the document, but one suspects this is closer to the truth than the view that the signers thought for a moment that they were representing their various constituencies, even if informally.

Another cynical analysis of ECT was offered by Rob Boston in an article in *Church & State*. Boston cites approvingly Indiana State University historian Richard V. Pierard's assessment that "These people have sold everything for politics. They've just taken the faith and hooked it up to a political machine."<sup>34</sup> Pierard worried that the evangelical and Catholic signers of ECT were wed out of political convenience, not out of genuine theological dialogue. The argument seems to run thusly: because the signers shared a common concern about public policy matters (e.g., abortion, school choice, pornography, etc.), their *rapprochement* must be politically motivated rather than truly doctrinal and theological in origin. Subsequent versions of ECT would prove difficult to interpret in this fashion.

Catholics were largely untroubled by ECT. As Richard John Neuhaus

announced,

It has not escaped notice that ECT has generated very little controversy among Catholics. That is no doubt because Catholics are long accustomed to ecumenical initiatives, and have no difficulty in acknowledging that non-Catholic Christians are brothers and sisters in Christ who, by virtue of baptism and faith, are "truly but imperfectly in communion with the Catholic Church" (Vatican Council II).<sup>35</sup>

Among evangelicals, the substantive controversy focused on foundational doctrinal matters. The evangelical signers were viewed by some of their theological kin as being soft on three crucial evangelical doctrines: the infallibility of scripture, justification by faith alone, and the doctrine of the church. Michael Horton, a chief critic of ECT, framed his critique of evangelical-Catholic dialogue around the Reformation understanding of these doctrines.<sup>36</sup>

The formal principle of the Reformation—the infallibility and perspicuity of scripture—has been a major dividing line between evangelicals and Catholics. Evangelicals have been identified by their credo *sola scriptura*; i.e., that the Bible alone is the source of authoritative revelation from God and is the infallible rule of faith and practice. Moreover, this scriptural revelation is perspicuous; i.e., it is clear enough to be understood by believers without the aid of any infallible interpreter, such as a pope or priests.

By the Middle Ages, the Church of Rome had begun to teach that tradition could be an equally infallible means of revelation, "since God continued to speak to His church through the magisterium (teaching office), with the pope as its chief shepherd under Christ."<sup>37</sup> That this view



of revelation continues to shape Catholic teaching is evident from the Catholic Catechism. On the topic of “The Relationship between Tradition and Sacred Scripture” the Catechism says:

*Sacred Scripture* is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit.

And [Holy] *Tradition* transmits in its entirety the Word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound, and spread it abroad by their preaching.

As a result the Church, to whom the transmission and interpretation of Revelation is entrusted, “does not derive her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal sentiments of devotion and reverence.”<sup>38</sup>

Some evangelicals also claimed that the document expressed a sub-evangelical (if not sub-Christian) doctrine of justification by faith. The primary point of reference for this criticism was the sentence in the document, “We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith *because* of Christ.”<sup>36</sup> Another document would seek to clarify the operative phrase, “justified by grace through faith because of Christ.”

By January 1995, the controversy between evangelicals about the substance and implications of ECT had reached such a crescendo, that a historic meeting of evangelicals was held in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, at the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church, pastored by D. James Kennedy. According to a news account in *Christianity Today*, the meeting included Charles Colson, Bill Bright, J. I. Packer, along with critics of ECT, R. C. Sproul, John Anker-

berg, Michael Horton, and Kennedy. Moderating the meeting was Joe Stowell, president of Moody Bible Institute, and John Woodbridge, church historian at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.<sup>36</sup> The so-called Fort Lauderdale Agreement included the following declarations:

We understand the statement that “we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ,” in terms of the substitutionary atonement and imputed righteousness of Christ, leading to full assurance of eternal salvation; we seek to testify in all circumstances to this, the historic Protestant understanding of salvation by faith alone (*sola fide*).

While we view all who profess to be Christian—Protestant and Catholic and Orthodox—with charity and hope, our confidence that anyone is truly a brother or sister in Christ depends not only on the content of his or her confession but on our perceiving signs of regeneration in his or her life.

Though we reject proselytizing as ECT defines it (that is, “sheep-stealing” for denominational aggrandizement), we hold that evangelism and church planting are always legitimate, whatever forms of church life are present already.<sup>37</sup>

While everyone at the meeting signed the agreement, not everyone was satisfied that the matter had been settled. A Catholic signatory of ECT said that the agreement represented the “true spirit of ecumenism,” while John MacArthur, pastor of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, said: “I’m very glad for the second document. I’m glad [Colson, Packer, and Bright] had the opportunity to clarify what is clarified there. It still does not go as far as I would have hoped.”<sup>38</sup> In MacArthur’s view, Roman Catholicism is “another religion.”<sup>39</sup>

## The Gift of Salvation Document (TGS) Controversy

Before the dust settled on the first ECT document, Evangelicals and Catholics Together (now the official moniker of the *ad hoc* group convened by Colson and Neuhaus) produced another statement: "The Gift of Salvation." Both sides of the controversy refer to the document either affectionately or pejoratively as ECT II. "The Gift of Salvation" (TGS) was released in *Christianity Today* on December 8, 1997, nearly five years after ECT.<sup>40</sup> The document was prefaced by a brief commentary by Timothy George, not only a signer, but one of the architects of the statement. The signers of TGS were much more characteristically professional theologians than the signers of ECT.<sup>41</sup>

According to George's preface, the occasion of TGS was a meeting of Catholic and evangelical theologians on October 7, 1997. Like ECT, its purpose was "not the result of an officially sponsored dialogue, but the collaborative work of individuals who speak from and to, but not for, our several communities."<sup>42</sup> The title of the statement derives from the signers' belief that "True Christian unity . . . is not so much a goal to be achieved as a gift to be received."<sup>43</sup> Speaking for the group, George opined, "We reject the kind of ecumenical euphoria that assumes the way to peace in the church is to downplay doctrine and theology. We are committed to an ecumenism of conviction, not an ecumenism of accommodation."<sup>44</sup> George's characterization of TGS as an "ecumenism of conviction" seems stronger than his characterization of ECT as an "ecumenism of the trenches."

According to George, TGS represented a new day in ecumenical dialogue in that it was

. . . made possible by a major realignment in ecumenical discourse: the coalescence of believing Roman Catholics and faithful evangelicals who both affirm the substance of historic Christian orthodoxy against the ideology of theological pluralism that marks much of mainline Protestant thought as well as avant-garde Catholic theology. Thus for all our differences, Bible-believing evangelicals stand much closer to Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger than to Bishop John Spong!<sup>45</sup>

TGS aimed to address two of the perceived ambiguities in ECT, "the doctrine of justification by faith alone and the biblical mandate for world missions and world evangelization." How well the document does so is a matter of some dispute.

The inaugural words of TGS are most familiar to Roman Catholics and evangelicals alike, "For God so loved the world . . ." (John 3:16). What follows are two, double-column pages of theological exposition of the story of creation, fall, and redemption. The signers of TGS affirmed that "God created us to manifest his glory and to give us eternal life in fellowship with himself, but our disobedience intervened and brought us under condemnation."<sup>46</sup> Original sin, "compounded by our personal acts of sinfulness," is the cause of estrangement from God, rebelliousness of heart, and impotence to "restore the ruptured bonds of union with God."<sup>47</sup> Yet, the Creator is also the Redeemer. Moreover, the signers affirmed that,

The restoration of communion with God is absolutely dependent upon Jesus Christ, true God and true man, for he is "the one mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5), and "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father

but by me" (John 14:6). He is the holy and righteous one who was put to death for our sins, "the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).<sup>48</sup>

Acknowledging that "Justification is central to the scriptural account of salvation," and that "it's meaning has been much debated between Protestants and Catholics," the signers of TGS, Protestant and Catholic together, state straightforwardly:

We agree that justification is not earned by any good works or merits of our own; it is entirely God's gift, conferred through the Father's sheer graciousness, out of the love that he bears for us in his Son, who suffered on our behalf and rose from the dead for our justification. Jesus was "put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25). In justification, God, on the basis of Christ's righteousness alone, declares us to be no longer his rebellious enemies but his forgiven friends, and by virtue of his declaration it is so.

The New Testament makes it clear that the gift of justification is received through faith. "By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). By faith, which is also the gift of God, we repent of our sins and freely adhere to the gospel, the good news of God's saving work for us in Christ. By our response of faith to Christ, we enter into the blessings promised by the gospel. Faith is not merely intellectual assent but an act of the whole person, involving the mind, the will, and the affections, issuing in a changed life. We understand what we here affirm is in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone (*sola fide*).<sup>49</sup>

Any ambiguity in ECT on the doctrine of justification by faith alone appears to have been dissipated by this statement, or

so it would seem. Here one sees Roman Catholics affirming a doctrine that many believe had to be rediscovered by the Protestant Reformers because the Roman Papacy had obscured it. Trentian Catholics have been able to affirm that salvation is by grace alone and that sinners are justified by that grace. What is striking for evangelicals is the affirmation that justification is by means of faith alone. This is an affirmation of monumental import. So much so that Timothy George says in his preamble to TGS, "We rejoice that our Roman Catholic interlocutors have been able to agree with us that the doctrine of justification set forth in this document agrees with what the Reformers meant by justification by faith alone (*sola fide*). This, we believe, is a major step forward . . ."<sup>50</sup> He goes on, however, to douse any naïve ecumenical celebratory flame:

. . . but it still does not resolve all of the differences between our two traditions on this crucial matter. In connection with the Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration, new questions are being asked about the status of the mutual condemnations of the sixteenth century, including those concerning the doctrine of justification. For their part, evangelicals must not allow *sola fide* to become a pretext for "easy believism" or antinomianism, both distortions of Reformation soteriology. Thus among the items requiring further discussion, we have included this quotation from John Calvin: "We are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies is not alone."

Equally important is the normative status of justification by faith alone in relation to other doctrines and practices. For the Reformers, justification was the criterion by which they evaluated the piety and teaching of the medieval church. This led them to call into question purgatory, relics, indulgences, the excesses of Marian devotion, and invocation of the saints—issues that

still divide Catholics and evangelicals today. These and many other matters that are not even broached in this document, such as the role of the papacy and Scripture and tradition, are “necessarily interrelated” with what we have here affirmed together. The task of reforming the church on the basis of the Word of God still remains today: *ecclesia semper reformanda* (the church is always reforming).<sup>51</sup>

Fallout from the new statement was doubtlessly expected. By that time, nearly everyone could anticipate whose theological feathers would be ruffled. Some members of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, led by Michael Horton, argued that the statement was “theologically misleading and spiritually dangerous.”<sup>52</sup> Paige Patterson, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, proclaimed the statement “. . . a coup for evangelicals in which instead of winning they lose . . . On the one hand, it was an achievement to get the Catholic signers to affix their signatures to a statement this lucid on justification by faith. On the other hand, Baptist evangelicals don’t have any business signing any doctrinal consensus papers with Rome until Rome disassociates itself from the Council of Trent.”<sup>53</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr., president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, opined: “Regretfully, I must conclude that the Catholics and evangelicals really do not define faith the same.”<sup>54</sup> He went on to say, “Justification by faith alone, if genuinely affirmed by Catholics and evangelicals, would require repudiation of baptismal regeneration, purgatory, indulgences, and many other issues presently affirmed by Roman Catholic doctrine.”<sup>55</sup>

Reactions to TGS again showed signs of a fundamental misunderstanding about

the nature of the document. Both ECT and TGS begin with the caveat that the signers were not speaking officially and that the statements did not represent their respective communions. Rather, TGS was meant to speak “to” the respective communions as much as “from” the Catholics and evangelicals who framed the statement. Nevertheless, both Catholic and evangelical reactions to the document slapped the hands of the signers for overreaching. Jeff Gros of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, for instance, said of TGS, “I believe this document is quite consistent if you understand our definition of faith”; but went on to point out that the statement was “useful” and “a good contribution,” but not “official.”<sup>56</sup> Phil Roberts, then vice president of the North American Mission Board, observed that “No presiding bishop or member of the Ecumenical Secretariat nor representative of the National Council of Catholic Bishops signed the document. . . . It should therefore be taken with a grain of salt.”<sup>57</sup> Because the statement did not have official Papal endorsement, Paige Patterson even labeled the signatures of the Catholics “gratuitous.”<sup>58</sup> Even though TGS stated explicitly that the signers were committed to an ongoing dialogue about “diverse understandings of merit, reward, purgatory, and indulgences; Marian devotion and the assistance of the saints in the life of salvation; and the possibility of salvation for those who have not been evangelized,”<sup>59</sup> some critics insisted that the body that signed TGS had somehow reached beyond their legitimate purview. “In short, no ecumenical body should claim consensus among its constituents when it has glossed over the differences on which some have staked their lives. And no Protestant-Catholic dialogue

on the doctrine of justification should ignore important related issues such as indulgences, penance, and purgatory," remarked Doug Sweeney, a professor of church history at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.<sup>60</sup>

More strident opposition to TGS came from persons like Mike Gendron of the organization, Proclaiming the Gospel. Believing that ECT distorted "the biblical distinctions of the gospel and set the mission of the church back 500 years," Gendron said in *Christianity Today*, "If [ECT] is sustainable, then its endorsers must declare the Reformation was a terrible mistake and the martyrs who died defending the gospel died in vain."<sup>61</sup> On March 27, 1999, the annual conference of "ExCatholics for Christ," meeting at Countryside Bible Church in Southlake, Texas, issued a "public call to repentance" to the evangelical signers of ECT.<sup>62</sup> At the conference, chairman Tom McMahon, read the list of names of the evangelicals who signed ECT and TGS and asked conference members to stand who agreed with a public call to repentance. Most of those in attendance stood. Representing Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and its president Paige Patterson, professor David Nelson stood to address the conference toward its conclusion. Nelson affirmed that Patterson, then president of the Southern Baptist Convention, "disavowed in no uncertain terms the ECT documents but did not address the issue of calling anyone to account for involvement with ECT."<sup>63</sup> Continued Nelson, "We're not willing in any way to compromise any of the Reformation solas, and we hold to those solas simply because they are expressions of biblical truth, and there we stand."<sup>64</sup>

In an April 1999 statement addressing

the controversy, Patterson confessed that "until Rome disavows the conclusions and anathematizations of the Council of Trent (1545-1563), I cannot imagine how significant progress can be made in any reproachment other than to understand one another better and work together to eliminate the evils currently warping our social order."<sup>65</sup> "On the other hand," Patterson continues, "those who demand repentance on the part of the leaders who signed ECT are misguided . . . Repentance is the appropriate response to sin," but signing ECT was "in my judgement [sic], an error, but not a sin demanding repentance."<sup>66</sup>

Louisiana Southern Baptist pastor Jerry Moser, called on Richard Land, president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, to "defend his involvement in the ECT process" at a pre-conference point-counterpoint prior to the Texas conference. Land responded to the invitation in a letter stating: "For me to come to a public forum and defend the document would rekindle . . . confusion and would serve, in my opinion, no productive purpose. In fact, I believe that it would be a distraction from my primary calling of encouraging Southern Baptists to be salt and light for our Lord and Savior."<sup>67</sup>

Further, responding to Patterson's statement, Moser argued:

To hold Christian leaders accountable for their public actions is guided by the Word of God. It is God who demands repentance, and we are left to agree with him who says, 'Those [leaders] who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning. I charge you in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do so without favoritism' (1 Timothy 5:20).<sup>68</sup>

To date, no public statement of repentance has been offered.

The controversy over TGS did not go unnoticed among Roman Catholic proponents of the statement. In March 1998, Richard John Neuhaus took the opportunity to respond to the rhetoric over TGS in his "Public Square" section of the journal *First Things*. "Some Baptists," notes Neuhaus, "have taken the position that, while the statement is splendid on justification by faith, it is also self-contradictory because it mentions unresolved questions such as baptismal regeneration, it being assumed by these critics that baptismal regeneration is incompatible with justification by faith."<sup>69</sup> Neuhaus makes it clear that the Catholic participants believe justification by faith to be consistent with the remainder of Catholic teaching, noting that "This Baptist criticism would also include Lutherans, Calvinists, and others who affirm baptismal regeneration. . . ."<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, Neuhaus avers,

One prominent Southern Baptist declares, "Justification by faith alone, if genuinely affirmed by Catholics and Evangelicals, would require repudiation of baptismal regeneration, purgatory, indulgences, and many other issues presently affirmed by Roman Catholic doctrine." The implication would seem to be unavoidable that the Catholics who signed "The Gift of Salvation" are not genuine Catholics, are dishonest, or are just plain dumb.<sup>71</sup>

In a rather forthright paragraph, Neuhaus retorts:

Then there is another Southern Baptist official, also miffed at unofficial activities outside the orbit of hierarchical control (so much for the vaunted Baptist devotion to independence), who goes on to say that he had learned from official talks

with Catholics that "unless one of the ecumenical councils decreed it or unless the Pope decreed it to be official dogma, no other Catholic signatures make any difference and hence are gratuitous." So "The Gift of Salvation" simply doesn't matter. I don't know what Catholics he's been talking to, but by any measure, except for one infallible definition in 1950 and the Second Vatican Council, every Catholic book, episcopal statement, and papal document in this century is gratuitous and makes no difference. It seems all of us Catholics who are in any way involved in the theological project might as well pack up and take a permanent vacation.<sup>72</sup>

In August 1998, the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals (ACE), a coalition that exists to promote biblical and Reformational Christianity, issued its own statement, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together? An Appeal to Fellow Evangelicals."<sup>73</sup> The appeal begins by locating its occasion as the publication of ECT and TGS. They rightly understood the latter to be a clarification of the former, but still were "profoundly distressed by [TGS's] assertions and omissions, which leave it seriously flawed."<sup>74</sup>

Specifically, the signers of the appeal worry that even though TGS affirms justification by faith (*sola fide*), Catholics could not have meant what the evangelicals meant by that affirmation. "Historically Rome has always contended that the basis of justification is the righteousness of Christ, but it is a righteousness that is 'infused' into the believer rather than being 'imputed' to him. This means that the believer must cooperate with and assent to that gracious work of God, and only to the extent that Christ's righteousness 'inheres' in the believer will God declare the person justified."<sup>75</sup> Likewise, the appeal cites the problem of

ambiguity in both ECT and TGS when those who signed them talk about “agreement.” The appeal charges that even though signers of ECT and TGS say they agree, they understand the meaning of their affirmations differently. “When this occurs,” says the appeal, “we maintain that the ‘agreement’ is not really agreement and the declaration of unity is at best misleading and at worse fraudulent.”<sup>76</sup>

Lastly, the appeal maintains that TGS distorts the meaning of evangelism. The signers of TGS affirmed that “As believers we are sent into the world and commissioned to be bearers of the good news, to serve one another in love, and to do good to all, and to evangelize everyone everywhere.”<sup>77</sup> Further, the signers commit themselves “to evangelizing everyone. We must share the fullness of God’s saving truth with all, including members of our several communities,” evangelicals to Catholics and Catholics to evangelicals.<sup>78</sup> The signers of the ACE appeal claim that despite testimony to the contrary, “‘Evangelizing’ here does not mean preaching the gospel with a view to converting those who hear, because to preach the gospel to Roman Catholics would mean proclaiming it to those who are already within the church and therefore already in the process (in Roman Catholic theology there can be nothing else) of being saved.”<sup>79</sup>

**“The Gospel of Jesus Christ:  
An Evangelical Celebration”  
(Evangelical Celebration)  
Controversy**

If nothing else, the debates surrounding ECT motivated evangelicals to clarify their own understanding of the gospel and unity around that message of hope. A group over 200 evangelicals launched

their own declaration in the summer of 1999. “The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration” (Evangelical Celebration) was drafted by a committee representative of both proponents and opponents of the Evangelicals and Catholics Together projects.<sup>80</sup> Though not focused solely on ECT and its cousins, according to David Neff, editor of *Christianity Today*, the Evangelical Celebration was framed against the backdrop of a post-Christian world in which evangelicals

find [themselves] standing with Catholic and Orthodox believers on key social issues. Indeed, through collaboration with Catholic and Orthodox activists in the prolife movement, many evangelicals have discovered a genuine appreciation for and developed friendships with them. This deeper friendship has required that Protestants know their Protestantism (and that Catholics know their Catholicism and the Orthodox, their Orthodoxy).<sup>81</sup>

Following a lengthy preamble, the Evangelical Celebration defines the gospel in traditional terms of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Interestingly, it acknowledges that “divisions among Christians hinder our witness in the world, and we desire greater mutual understanding and truth-speaking in love.”<sup>82</sup> At the same time, the Celebrators took seriously the pursuit of truth. “We know too that as trustees of God’s revealed truth we cannot embrace any form of doctrinal indifferentism, or relativism, or pluralism by which God’s truth is sacrificed for a false peace.”<sup>83</sup> The major and more controversial section of the Evangelical Celebration is the “Affirmations and Denials” section. Of the eighteen affirmations and denials, several deal with the substantive points of con-

troversy in the ECT projects.

11. We affirm that the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone is essential to the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:14).

We deny that any person can believe the biblical Gospel and at the same time reject the apostolic teaching of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. We also deny that there is more than one true Gospel (Gal. 1:6-9).

12. We affirm that the doctrine of the imputation (reckoning or counting) both of our sins to Christ and of his righteousness to us, whereby our sins are fully forgiven and we are fully accepted, is essential to the biblical Gospel (2 Cor. 5:19-21).

We deny that we are justified by the righteousness of Christ infused into us or by any righteousness that is thought to inhere in us.

13. We affirm that the righteousness of Christ by which we are justified is properly his own, which he achieved apart from us, in and by his perfect obedience. The righteousness is counted, reckoned, or imputed to us by the forensic (that is, legal) declaration of God, as the sole ground of our justification.

We deny that any works we perform at any stage of our existence add to the merit of Christ or earn for us any merit that contributes in any way to the ground of our justification (Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).<sup>84</sup>

Readers of the Evangelical Celebration will recognize its classically Reformed understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith. Yet this formulation of such an essential doctrine as justification by faith was not without controversy among evangelicals themselves.

New Testament scholar Robert Gundry and theologian Thomas Oden partici-

pated in a lively exchange in *Books & Culture: A Christian Review*. Gundry charges that the Celebration has “a Reformed stamp that many evangelicals cannot knowingly endorse.”<sup>85</sup> In a post-script Gundry worries,

People who know of the recent dialogue between evangelicals and Roman Catholics and read “Celebration” without perusing the list of drafters and endorsers will probably think, as I originally did, that “Celebration” was designed to criticize the dialogue and those evangelicals who participated in it. People who by perusing the list discover names of such participants will probably think, as I now do, that “Celebration” is designed in part to counter any possible compromise with Roman Catholic soteriology, and that drafters and endorsers who participated in the dialogue are declaring themselves innocent of such compromise. I believe them. Yet the heavy-handed jabbing at traditional Roman Catholic soteriology is liable to discourage fruitful continuation of dialogue between evangelicals and Roman Catholics, especially if both sides were to give up their respective notions of imputation and infusion.<sup>86</sup>

In his response to Gundry, Thomas Oden, himself a Wesleyan, opines that the drafters of the Evangelical Celebration “sought to be as inclusive as possible of major evangelical voices, including those our critic thinks have been neglected . . .”<sup>87</sup> Against the accusation that Evangelical Celebration is anti-Catholic, Oden maintains that while it is not, it “does clearly distinguish differences between the infusion metaphor and the accounting metaphor in the reception of grace, which traditionally has stood as a difference between Protestants and Catholics.”<sup>88</sup>

Thus the debate goes on, both among evangelicals and Roman Catholics and among evangelicals themselves. The next



stage in the dialogue will be a collection of essays on the scripture versus tradition debate among evangelicals and Catholics to be published by William B. Eerdmans Publishers under the title, *Your Word is Truth*, in March 2002.<sup>89</sup> Whether these essays will advance the discussions or set them back is yet to be seen. One thing seems certain, they will be controversial.

## Conclusion

Christian unity is not easily won. Over 500 years of division is a daunting barrier to constructive dialogue. Some see the likelihood of substantive unity between evangelicals and Catholics to be not only elusive, but ultimately impossible. Their skepticism is not due to their mistrust of the good faith efforts of both communions, but by their belief that the two traditions represent incommensurable worldviews. That may or may not be the case. As I once heard an old evangelist say, "time and the Devil will tell."

It seems to me, however, that as Christians who are committed to fidelity to the word and way of the Lord Jesus, we have no choice but to make earnest efforts to achieve meaningful unity. We must not sacrifice truth in the process, but we must pursue the goal with enthusiasm until Jesus returns. At a recent conference sponsored by the editors *Touchstone: A Journal of Mere Christianity*, November 8-10, 2001, representatives from Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant communions engaged in a sincere, honest, and robust conversation about "Christian Unity & the Divisions We Must Sustain."<sup>90</sup> Though strategies are yet to be developed to chart the course ahead, every speaker at the conference addressed the importance of maintaining unswerving fidelity to truth while pursuing meaningful unity

unwaveringly.

In the meantime, we may celebrate and participate joyfully in what I like to call "sphere ecumenism." That is to say, there are a number of important social and cultural arenas in which evangelicals and Catholics share common cause. Pro-life causes, the preservation of traditional heterosexual marriage, biblical normative sexuality, and religious liberty are critical areas of cultural engagement upon which there is substantive agreement among both traditional Catholics and faithful evangelicals. In those areas, we are able to join arms as co-belligerents against the culture of death.

Co-belligerency is not enough, however. The old saw, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend," is sub-Christian. Even the enemies of unity can do that, as the slogan "Enemies of ecumenism, unite!" somewhat humorously shows. As long as we claim allegiance to the one, true and living God and his Son Jesus Christ, we can never be satisfied with sphere ecumenism. Sphere ecumenism is a painful recognition that we live in a tragically fallen world and that our fallenness has even negatively impacted we whose sins have been forgiven. To boast of our divisions, even when those divisions are rooted in truth, is an unseemly testimony before a watching world. Rather, we should lament our disunity while we work winsomely, collaboratively, and Christianly to build up the body of Christ, "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes"

(Eph 4:13-14). If that takes us the rest of our days, so be it.

In my own view, participants in the ECT projects are at least making earnest attempts to achieve this unity. We would all do well to pray for them and to imitate their example in our own communities. Nothing less than the integrity of the church for whom Christ died is at stake.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>See "Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*, May 1994, 15-22. Hereafter, ECT. ECT was released originally on March 29, 1994.

<sup>2</sup>Participants included: Mr. Charles Colson, Prison Fellowship; Fr. Juan Diaz-Villar, S.J., Catholic Hispanic Ministries; Fr. Avery Dulles, S.J., Fordham University; Bishop Francis George, OMI, Diocese of Yakima (Washington); Dr. Kent Hill, Eastern Nazaren College; Dr. Richard Land, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention; Dr. Larry Lewis, North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention; Dr. Jesse Miranda, Assemblies of God; Msgr. William Murphy, Chancellor of the Archdiocese of Boston; Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, Institute on Religion and Public Life; Mr. Brian O'Connell, World Evangelical Fellowship; Mr. Herbert Schlossberg, Fieldstead Foundation; Archbishop Francis Stafford, Archdiocese of Denver; Mr. George Weigel, Ethics & Public Policy Center; and Dr. John White, Geneva College and the National Association of Evangelicals.

<sup>3</sup>ECT, 15.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid. A helpful sociological analysis of the way coalitions work is Kevin W.

Hula's, *Lobbying Together: Interest Group Coalitions in Legislative Politics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 19-20.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>16</sup>Timothy George, "Catholics and Evangelicals in the Trenches," *Christianity Today*, 16 May 1994, 16-17.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>18</sup>J. I. Packer, "Why I Signed It," *Christianity Today*, 12 December 1994, 34-37.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 36.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>24</sup>Larry L. Lewis, Memorandum to the Board of Directors, Home Mission Board, May 27, 1994.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 2.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>28</sup>Resolution on Southern Baptist and Roman Catholics, Southern Baptist Convention, Orlando, Florida, June 14-16, 1994.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Richard D. Land and Larry L. Lewis "Statement Regarding Evangelicals and Catholics Together," April 6, 1995. Land and Lewis stated that their reason for removing their names was that "No matter how many times we explain that we

signed ECT as individuals, not on behalf of our agencies or Southern Baptists, many do not understand. Confusion resulting from this continuing misperception has the potential to impact negatively the mission and ministry of our agencies." Removing their names from the document should not, they claimed, be viewed as a repudiation of its value.

<sup>32</sup>Martin King, "Land and Lewis Remove Names from Controversial Document," Baptist Press, April 7, 1995.

<sup>33</sup>J. Daryl Charles, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: One Year Later," *Pro Ecclesia* V(1), 79.

<sup>34</sup>Rob Boston, "Marriage of Convenience," *Church & State*, 10 May 1994.

<sup>35</sup>Richard John Neuhaus, "The Public Square," *First Things*, August/September 1995, 67-68.

<sup>36</sup>Michael Horton, "What Still Keeps Us Apart?" in *Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants Analyze What Divides and Unites Us*, ed. John Armstrong (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994) 245-266.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>38</sup>*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994) Chapter 2, Article 1, Section 2.

<sup>36</sup>ECT, 16. Emphasis added.

<sup>36</sup>Joe Maxwell, "Evangelicals Clarify Accord with Catholics," *Christianity Today*, 6 March 1995, 52-53.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup>*The Gift of Salvation*, in "Evangelicals and Catholics Together: A New Ini-

tiative" *Christianity Today*, 8 December 1997, 34-38.

<sup>41</sup>Evangelical signers of "The Gift of Salvation" included Gerald Bray (Beeson Divinity School), Bill Bright (Campus Crusade for Christ), Harold O. J. Brown (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), Charles Colson (Prison Fellowship), Bishop William Frey (Episcopal Church), Timothy George (Beeson Divinity School), Os Guinness (The Trinity Forum), Kent Hill (Eastern Nazarene College), Max Lucado (Oak Hills Church of Christ), T. M. Moore (Chesapeake Theological Seminary), Richard Mouw (Fuller Theological Seminary), Mark A. Noll (Wheaton College), Brian F. O'Connell (Interdev), Thomas Oden (Drew University), J. I. Packer (Regent College, BC), Timothy Phillips (Wheaton College), John Rodger (Trinity Episcopal School for Ministry), and John Woodbridge (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School). Roman Catholic signers included, James Buckley (Loyola College, MD), J. A. Di Noia (Dominican House of Studies), Avery Dulles (Fordham University), Thomas Guarino (Seton Hall University), Peter Kreeft (Boston College), Eugene LaVerdiere (Emmanuel), Francis Martin (John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family), Ralph Martin (Renewal Ministries), Richard John Neuhaus (Religion and Public Life), Michael Novak (American Enterprise Institute), Edward Oakes (Regis University), Thomas Rausch (Loyola Marymount), George Weigel (Ethics and Public Policy Center), and Robert Louis Wilken

(University of Virginia). Also, Richard D. Land (Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention) signed the document but removed his name before it went to press.

<sup>42</sup>Timothy George, "An Evangelical Assessment of Evangelicals and Catholics Together: A New Initiative," *Christianity Today*, 8 December 1997, 34.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup>TGS, 35-36.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.* This last sentence seems almost an act of surprised confirmation. That anyone who calls himself or herself a Roman Catholic could affirm justification by faith alone would seem to some evangelicals to be impossible. Just so as to make the point unmistakably clear, TGS says, "We understand that what we here affirm is in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone (*sola fide*)." It is unclear to me whom this sentence is meant to convince, the signers themselves or the critics of their enterprise; but it leaves little room for misunderstanding.

<sup>50</sup>Timothy George, "An Evangelical Assessment," 35.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup>"Theological Disputes," *WORLD*, 27 December 1998.

<sup>53</sup>Martin King, "New Evangelical-Catholic Statement Called Inconsistent, Unofficial," Baptist Press November 24, 1997.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*

- <sup>55</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>56</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>57</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup>TGS, 38.
- <sup>60</sup>Douglas A. Sweeney, "Taming the Reformation: What the Lutheran-Catholic Justification Declaration Really Accomplished—and What it Did Not," *Christianity Today*, 10 January 2000, 63.
- <sup>61</sup>Jackie Alnor, "Groups Battle Over Catholic Outreach," *Christianity Today*, 2 March 1998, 70.
- <sup>62</sup>Dave Couric, "Signers of Evangelical-Catholic Accords Publicly Urged by Opponents to Repent," Baptist Press, March 29, 1999.
- <sup>63</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>64</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>65</sup>Art Toalston, "Paige Patterson Addresses Both Sides of Evangelical-Catholic Controversy," Baptist Press, April 8, 1999.
- <sup>66</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>67</sup>Dave Couric, "Signers of Evangelical-Catholic Accords Publicly Urged by Opponents to Repent," Baptist Press, March 29, 1999.
- <sup>68</sup>Art Toalston, "Paige Patterson Addresses Both Sides of Evangelical-Catholic Controversy," Baptist Press, April 8, 1999.
- <sup>69</sup>Richard John Neuhaus, "Ungenuine and Gratuitous," *First Things*, March 1998.
- <sup>70</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>71</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>72</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>73</sup>Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together? An Appeal to Fellow Evangelicals," at <http://www.alliancenet.org/month.98.08.appeal.html>; internet. Those who signed the appeal include: John H. Armstrong (Reformation and Revival Ministries), Alistair Begg (Parkside Church, Cleveland), James M. Boice (Tenth Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia), W. Robert Godfrey (Westminster Theological Seminary), John D. Hannah (Dallas Theological Seminary), Michael S. Horton (Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals), Rosemary Jensen (Bible Study Fellowship), J. A. O. Preus III (Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis), R. C. Sproul (Ligonier Ministries), and Gene E. Veith (Concordia University, Wisconsin).
- <sup>74</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>75</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>76</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>77</sup>TGS, 36.
- <sup>78</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>79</sup>Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together? An Appeal to Fellow Evangelicals."
- <sup>80</sup>"The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration," *Christianity Today*, 14 June 1999, 49. The Drafting Committee consisted of: John N. Akers, John Ankerberg, John Armstrong, D. A. Carson, Keith Davy, Maxie Dunham, Timothy George, Scott Hafemann, Erwin Lutzer, Harold Myra, David Neff, Thomas Oden, R. C. Sproul, and John Woodbridge.
- <sup>81</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>82</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>83</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>84</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>85</sup>Robert H. Gundry, "Why I Didn't Endorse It," *Books & Culture*, January/February 2001.
- <sup>86</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>87</sup>Thomas C. Oden, "A Calm Answer . . . to a critique of 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration,'" *Books & Culture*, March/April, 2001, 12.
- <sup>88</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>89</sup>Based on personal conversation with Timothy George, November 2001.
- <sup>90</sup>Persons interested in receiving tapes of the conference should see <http://www.touchstonemag.com> or contact Touchstone at P. O. Box 410788, Chicago, IL 60641 or by calling 773-481-1090.



# How Should Evangelicals Think About Roman Catholics Today?

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## Introduction

I want to begin this essay on an autobiographical note since I think there is a growing number of evangelicals whose thinking about Roman Catholics, thanks to some similar personal experiences, has taken a turn similar to mine. I grew up in east-central Illinois in a strong evangelical home. Both of my parents were (and are) committed disciples of Jesus Christ and we always attended Baptist and Bible churches. What did I think about Roman Catholics during the first twenty years of my life? I rarely thought about them at all. They were a distant faith, a different religion, and I simply did not know any Catholics personally. If you had asked me what Catholics were like and what they believed, I probably would have said something like, “Catholics worship Mary, believe God will save them only if they do more good things than bad things, and most of them are not saved (they do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ). They are a lot like Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

I met a few Catholics in my twenties (they seemed hung up about needing to go to Mass every day) but it was not until I was 29 that my perspective began to change. After attending Regent College in Vancouver, and spending a year doing missions in Kenya, I joined the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship staff at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. And there I met Vito, a freshman. Vito was an intelligent, Bible-loving, Christ-centered, deeply committed Chris-

tian—and he was also a Roman Catholic. He loved C. S. Lewis, was well versed in the Church Fathers and believed strongly in Christian unity. I was especially impressed with Vito’s compassion for, and action toward, the poor. He loved people better than most of the evangelical students did. In Bible study, I was humbled by the number of times Vito’s insights exposed certain blind spots and biases—“evangelical blinders,” if you will—that prevented me from seeing some Scriptural truths.

In 1990 I moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts and for the next five years I ministered among graduate students at Harvard and M.I.T with InterVarsity. At Harvard I met some Roman Catholic doctoral students who, again, did not fit the “typical” Catholic mold. They knew and loved the early creeds, they reasoned well from their Tradition and from the Scriptures, they had deep, quiet lives of prayer, and they were theologically and culturally conservative. And then one day a frightening thought crossed my mind: I seemed to have more in common, on one level, with my Roman Catholic friends than I did with my liberal-leaning, culture-embracing, evangelical friends! But how could this be?

Since moving to Washington, D. C. in 1996 I have come to know many Roman Catholics. Not all are solidly orthodox and committed followers of Christ, but many are. I can no longer think of Catholics as members of a cult or as lukewarm, work-your-way-to-heaven, legalists. Many of

them love Jesus Christ, read their Bibles, and even actively share their faith with others. Such Catholics can no longer be squeezed into my old cookie-cutter stereotype. I need a fresh, new paradigm.

My own experience dovetails with what seems to be happening nationally. Evangelicals and Roman Catholics are breaking down the walls of ignorance and hostility that used to safely seclude them from one another, and they are actually swimming in the same streams. In 1994 the document ECT (“Evangelicals and Catholics Together”) was drafted and over the last decade literally dozens of books were written (I own about thirty) about this new mutual awareness (and often appreciation) between Catholics and evangelicals. From ministries like Promise Keepers and CareNet, to magazines like *First Things* and *Touchstone*, to conferences like those held by the C. S. Lewis Institute in Oxford and the Rose Hill gathering in South Carolina, Roman Catholics and evangelicals are increasingly finding themselves in each other’s lives. So how should we regard these Roman Catholics?

### **The Current Scene: Deepening Appreciation Yet On-Going Frustration**

I am both encouraged and concerned about the growing rapport between Catholics and evangelicals. I confess to having little patience with those conservative evangelicals who resolutely refuse to see anything good about this newly forming ecumenism, and who refuse to entertain the thought that God might be doing a new thing. Yet I also confess to a similar frustration with doctrinally lax evangelicals who naively believe that simply being in one another’s presence erases the divisions of the Reformation—as if

unity can be forged outside of truth. A proper response, I think, must be somewhere in the middle.

### ***Deepening Appreciation Common Social Commitments and Partners in the Culture Wars***

Up until the 1890s, conservative Protestants were on the front line of social reform, whether it was fighting against slavery or fighting for the poor, women’s rights, and the national observance of the Sabbath. Caring for men’s souls and caring for men’s bodies went hand in hand. But from 1900 to 1930 in what historians have christened, “The Great Reversal,” conservative Protestants began focusing exclusively on the “spiritual,” the personal and the private. To a large degree, they were reacting to the “social gospel” of liberal Protestantism. In addition, premillennial eschatology taught that the world’s end was imminent, leading churches to emphasize saving souls rather than perfecting society.

From the 1930s to 1970s, a renewed concern for saving a “Christian America” brought conservative Protestants (many who changed their name from “Fundamentalist” to “Evangelical”) out of their separatistic hibernation, and social change was deemed important once again—but only *after* evangelism: personal conversion, which was hoped to lead to social transformation, remained front and center. It has only been since the 1970s that many evangelicals have embraced social action as part and parcel of what it means to be a Christian, and a worthy end in itself. Thanks to the influence of Francis Schaeffer, Ron Sider and others, evangelicals by the droves have re-entered the world of politics and contemporary culture, and have rolled up their sleeves to

care for the poor, fight abortion, lobby for support of the family, and push for the passing of just laws.

It is no secret that social action is second nature for most Roman Catholics. The dualistic body-soul split that has plagued evangelicals for decades is almost totally absent. But the typical rejoinder by evangelicals runs something like this: “Well, yes, Catholics eagerly care for physical needs, but they are motivated by guilt, thinking they will be rewarded by God for their good works.” Or, “Yes, but Catholics, like Protestant Liberals, focus on the physical to the exclusion of the spiritual—and social action apart from evangelism does no one any lasting, eternal good.”

We must leave it to God to judge Catholics’ (and our own) motives, and even if some actions towards physical needs fall short of holistic care, this should not prevent evangelicals from applauding and teaming with Catholics on the social front. It is true that evangelicals must always resist substituting social transformation *for* personal regeneration—but this is no excuse for rejecting social transformation. Happily Catholics and evangelicals *are* working side by side today in ways unparalleled in America’s history: Promise Keepers, Ethics and Public Policy, the Marriage Law Project, crisis pregnancy centers—the list of ministries that enjoy joint Catholic-evangelical support is long and growing.

The “culture wars” in America today are real indeed. It cannot be stated too strongly that more and more people today, consciously or unconsciously, are seeking to recreate America as a country whose mores, values and laws are relativistic, created by men and having nothing to do with God. Evangelicals can

and should increasingly team with Roman Catholics in insisting (as did the reformers!) that the first purpose of God’s Law is to restrain evil. It is good and right to strive with other God-fearers for a nation where murdering, stealing, and committing adultery are discouraged.

With ECT I we can join hands with Catholics to affirm the following balanced statement:

Christians individually and the church corporately... have a responsibility for the right ordering of civil society. We embrace this task soberly; knowing the consequences of human sinfulness, we resist the utopian conceit that it is within our powers to build the kingdom of God on earth. We embrace this task hopefully; knowing that God has called us to love our neighbor, we seek to secure for all a greater measure of civil righteousness and justice.... Together we contend for the truth that politics, law, and culture must be secured by moral truth.

#### *Importance of Reason*

One of the unfortunate consequences of evangelicals’ overreaction to Roman Catholicism has been that in our zeal to keep Holy Scripture central we have often downplayed, and at times rejected, the important role that our God-given reason plays in how we think about God’s world and our role in it. This anti-intellectual current is shifting among many evangelicals today, however. Thanks in part to new initiatives by the Pew Foundation’s Young Scholars Program, Mustard Seed’s Harvey and Bakke Fellowships, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship’s targeted ministry to doctoral students and faculty, and Campus Crusade for Christ’s Christian Leadership Ministries, evangelicals are being both encouraged and aided in bringing their



Christian minds to bear upon their academic disciplines in Higher Education. More articles and books are being written by Christians where the truths received from Scripture are combined with the insights gleaned from the social sciences, physical sciences, and humanities to craft a well-rounded mosaic of knowledge. All truth is indeed God's truth, whether it is obtained from God's special or general revelation.

There are at least three reasons for the hundred-plus year history of anti-intellectualism within large pockets of evangelicalism. First, we overreacted to Catholicism or, more particularly, to the Protestant Modernists of the 1900s. Second, we overemphasized the noetic effects of the fall. Our ability to reason accurately has been damaged by sin—but not obliterated. Third, we adopted an all-or-nothing mentality, which leads us either to speak the truth prophetically, with a large degree of certainty, or not to speak at all. We may not be able to say with the same degree of authority, "Light is both particles and waves," as we can, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," but this should not prevent us from asserting the former.

We evangelicals have perhaps been most naive in explaining the use of reason in the interpretation of Scripture. No evangelical Christian, regardless of how pious, ever bases his life solely on the Bible alone. For the Bible must be interpreted, organized into some coherent theology, and made applicable to contemporary situations—and all these activities demand *reason*.

Evangelicals have much to learn from Roman Catholics here, for Catholics have a rich heritage of thinking deeply about the nature of things, the inter-connection

of things, the consequences of things, and so on. They make good philosophers. Furthermore, the strong heritage of a natural law philosophy has enabled Catholics to draw out important implications from obviously stated biblical truths. For instance, I continue to turn to the papal encyclicals *Veritatis Splendor* and *Fides et Ratio* for some of the best thoughts on understanding the nature of truth, and the relationship of faith and reason.

Perhaps this is nowhere more obvious than in sexual ethics. We evangelicals know directly from Scripture that God commands sexual relations to occur only within marriage between a husband and wife. But what about birth control? What about in vitro fertilization? What about cloning? How should evangelicals respond to the current stem cell research debate? Evangelicals can say that homosexual relations are sinful—but can we also say, equally strongly, that they are unnatural? Many questions about sexuality simply cannot be answered by looking for proof texts from Scripture.

Or take gender issues. Conservative evangelicals may agree that the Bible teaches that men, not women, are to hold positions of leadership in the church, and that in marriage the man is to be the "head" of his wife. But what are the implications of this for dating and courtship, for masculinity and femininity, for the nature of gender? How strongly can evangelicals speak out on these issues without appealing *directly* to Scripture in their reasoning?

Or take social sin. Evangelicals will agree that all sin is personal and begins in the human heart. But are there also patterns of personal sin that show up in social institutions? Can we speak at all of "systemic evil"? Are there better and

worse ways of ordering society where certain sins are discouraged from developing and spreading?

Or take popular culture. How ought a biblically-saturated, Christ-centered mind think about notions of leisure, entertainment, the writing of good books, and the producing of good movies? How ought an evangelical think about America's growing dependence upon technology? Are there any standards for what makes art "good" or "bad"? What cultural ingredients are needed today to encourage a fertile and edifying Christian imagination? And why is it that, with few exceptions, the best twentieth century Christian fiction writers are Catholics?

We evangelicals rightly stop short of giving extra-biblical truth claims the same authority as Holy Scripture. For example, even evangelicals who largely agree with *Humanae Vitae* regarding the wrongness of birth control, distinguish the clearly taught biblical injunction against extra-marital sex from the humanly deduced prohibitions against birth control. Still, we should reason alongside and learn from Roman Catholics. More and more evangelicals today are reading and learning from papal encyclicals, attending conferences where both evangelicals and Catholics are the speakers, and subscribing to ecumenical orthodox magazines. These are steps in the right direction.

#### *Importance of Tradition*

A few years ago two Jehovah Witnesses knocked on my door and for a change I invited them in for a robust theological discussion. I decided to mince no words but go right for the jugular: who exactly is Jesus Christ? They chose the usual Scriptures to try and prove to me that Jesus was but a creature and not divine,

and I chose the usual Scriptures to try and show them that Jesus was (and is) divine. We argued back and forth for over an hour. Although I personally think that I won the debate, to be fair (these guys were really good), if a totally objective judge were present, he may very well have called it a draw. Finally, admittedly a bit exasperated, I blurted out, "But look here. Ever since the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 Christians everywhere have considered your Arian position to be heretical." Their immediate reply (a rather evangelical one!) got me thinking for days: "Well, but it doesn't matter what this or that church teaches. We must go back to the Bible itself for our doctrines." As I reflected later over this conversation I realized that I had been basing part of my argument for Christ's divinity on Tradition—and I somehow knew that it was legitimate to do so.

For the evangelicals among us who want to claim that we never need or use Tradition (Baptists especially often make this no-creed-but-the-Bible claim), I think we are not being fully honest. If I were to ask you why you believe that the Nicene Creed is true you would probably answer, "Because it's biblical." But then if I were to ask you in what way exactly, say, the phrase, "very God of very God" was biblical, you might answer, "Well, I've never looked up the Scriptures on that one ... but I will, and I'll get back to you." To this I might say, "You mean you recite a creed in church as affirming what you believe and yet you yourself have never personally checked out the biblical orthodoxy of each phrase?" And then you might respond, "Yes, because others whom I trust *have* done the research..." Exactly! You affirm the creeds because they are biblical, but you trust other Christians (the

Church?!) in making the decision as to what phrases are or are not biblical.

None of us reads the Bible in a perfectly neutral way. We are all influenced by traditions—good ones and bad ones—to help us “see” certain truths. No one verse in the Bible categorically states that God is three Persons and one God, yet all evangelicals will agree that the Bible does indeed teach this. Many evangelicals read the Bible within the Reformed Tradition and we find, if we are honest, the following circular reasoning: we affirm the Reformed Tradition because we think it is biblical, and we affirm certain interpretations of the biblical text because they in turn are in line with the Reformed Tradition. There is an interweaving among most of us, even if it is an unconscious one, between Bible and Tradition.

Why do I believe women should not hold positions of spiritual authority in the church and why do I believe wives should submit to their husbands? Without question my first and strongest answer would be, “Because this is what the Bible teaches”—and I would seek to persuade you accordingly by pointing you toward some key texts. But if you then responded by saying, “But look: ever since the 1960s, card-carrying evangelicals have come up with new interpretation that overthrow the traditional interpretations,” I then would reply, “Does it not strike you as curious that the majority of Christians over hundreds of years have agreed together on the ‘traditional’ interpretations, and it has only been since the feminist-fueled 1960s that these novel interpretations have been promulgated? I will trust the nearly two thousand years of biblical interpreters over those of the last forty years.”

Now, I remain a Protestant, so what I

must say (and do so without hesitation or embarrassment) is that it is theoretically possible that the interpretations of the 1960s are right and the Church has been wrong for nearly two thousand years. For I believe that Luther and Calvin actually did rediscover some central biblical truths in the sixteenth century that had become fuzzy and dormant for nearly a thousand years. It is theoretically possible that the Feminist Revolution of the 1960s is as radically earth-shattering as was the Reformation of the 1520s. But we should be very leery and hesitant of making such a claim, understanding how the full weight of history and tradition leans against us.

Evangelicals need to know and appreciate Tradition so that we will not quickly succumb to the strong temptation (very prevalent in contemporary culture) that the latest is always best. C. S. Lewis wisely urged his correspondents to try and read one older book for every contemporary book since we all have our blindspots.

We must not think that we are being unfaithful Protestants by standing on the shoulders of the great saints before us rather than feeling the need always to quote the Bible alone. Luther and Calvin quoted extensively from the Church Fathers, especially Augustine. And they did more than quote them—they referred to them as authorities. In making a point in the *Institutes*, Calvin assumed that his readers would regard a citation of Augustine as supporting orthodox doctrine. In his theological works Thomas Goodwin, the brilliant seventeenth century English Puritan divine, quotes Augustine 51 times, Aquinas (!) 23 times, the Western Church Father Tertullian and the Eastern Church Father Chrysostom 11 times each.

Evangelicals today are helping lay Catholics rediscover the Bible, and Catho-

lics are helping evangelicals learn about and appreciate tradition. Historical theology is a burgeoning field of study at many evangelical seminaries today, and more evangelicals are doing Ph.Ds in the study of Patristics (the Early Church Fathers) at top universities in America and England. Evangelicals will always stop short of giving divine status to any tradition (for while the Bible is inerrant, no tradition is) but, as with the case of Reason, this should not mean throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

### *Historical Orthodoxy*

We must never forget the number of important doctrines evangelicals share with Roman Catholics. In their helpful book, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Disagreements*, Norman Geisler and Ralph MacKenzie show that substantial agreement between Catholics and evangelicals exists over the following subjects: Revelation, God, Human Beings, Christ, Salvation, The Church, Ethics, and Last Things. (They also state eight areas where we disagree.)<sup>1</sup>

A few years ago I was sharing a pizza with two friends, one a liberal Methodist and the other a conservative Roman Catholic. We discussed the nature of man and what it means to be created in God's image, and I found my Catholic friend to be an ally. His comments were fully biblical and completely in line with Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin. As I minister at secular universities I have found Catholics to be kindred spirits when it comes to battling relativism. They expose the dangerous consequences of trying to build a worldview on the sandy foundation of relativism, and they do so in a way that any evangelical could embrace.

I have more confidence in the knowl-

edge of, and commitment to, historical Christian orthodoxy among my committed Roman Catholic friends than I do among many of my I-love-Jesus-and-I-think-the-Bible-rocks evangelical brethren. For to be a good Catholic *means*, implicitly if not explicitly, that one affirms the creeds, whereas a "good" evangelical usually means a commitment to the gospel and the Bible—but not necessarily an affirmation of the orthodox historical doctrines of Christianity! Though I will often disagree with my Catholic friends, I confess that I often trust their doctrinal instincts more than those of many evangelicals.

### *On-Going Frustration*

When my Catholic friends discover that I believe what is written above, they (metaphorically) rub their hands and lick their lips, certain that a Catholic convert is in the making. They seem convinced that all the major mechanisms have been set in place that will inevitably lead the consistent Christian into the Roman Catholic fold: how can one value social action, appreciate reason and tradition, and affirm an historical orthodoxy, and *not* become Catholic? Nevertheless, my reasons for not converting run deep.

I honestly think that all of my reasons for not becoming Roman Catholic can actually be summarized under two headings: *gospel* and *authority*. If evangelicals and Roman Catholics could ever see eye to eye in these two areas, I think Christian unity would not be far off. But both headings carry a major amount of baggage in their train. There are significant presuppositions that precede, and convictions that flow out of, these two subjects.

## *The Gospel*

It is next to impossible to stress strongly enough how important a right understanding of the gospel is to evangelicals. Everything else pales in comparison. If two people agree on the gospel but disagree on eschatology, evangelicals will say that eschatological differences are unfortunate but understandable since all Christians do not agree on everything. But if two people agree on eschatology but disagree, fundamentally, about the gospel, evangelicals will say it is a matter of heaven and hell—and you cannot get any more serious than this. As Saint Paul said, “If we or an angel from heaven should preach to you another gospel, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8).

Evangelicals’ negative attitudes toward Roman Catholics can be summarized as follows: “What difference does it make if we agree on all these doctrines—the nature of truth, God, man, ethics, the last things—if we disagree on the nature and significance of the gospel? What good is it if you cleanse the outside of the cup while the inside remains dirty? Who cares if you are doing good works, if your actions are not springing from a motivation of gratitude for and from the gospel? For let us be honest now: are Roman Catholics truly Christians?! Have they been saved?! Do they have a relationship with Jesus?!”

Before getting to the heart of this issue, two prior points need to be restated to clear away some unnecessary roadblocks. First, we must remember that no human being is able to see definitively into another person’s soul. No evangelical can authoritatively, with the voice of God, declare whether this or that person is or is not trusting Jesus Christ. We do not know Roman Catholics’ hearts, and we do

not even know other evangelicals’ hearts; the only heart we can dare to know with some certainty is our own. Our Lord does exhort us to take note of one another’s fruit—“By their fruit ye shall know them”—but even here we cannot know the eternal destiny of any soul but our own. This is an important point to make because many evangelicals quickly decide that some people are not Christians. When we get to heaven there will be some surprises: some we were sure should have been there, will not be, and vice versa. At the same time, we need to assume that certain truths must be believed in order to be a Christian. If someone says, “I believe Jesus is dead and gone and did not rise from the dead—and I am a Christian,” we are not to treat him as a brother in Christ but as an infidel. We must be sure that our grounds for excluding a particular Roman Catholic from fellowship are biblical. Second, evangelicals can and do disagree among ourselves concerning *various aspects* of the gospel yet still acknowledge one another as a brother or sister in Christ. For example, both Arminians and Calvinists think the other is badly mistaken regarding his understanding of the relationship between God’s grace and our wills, but few in either group believe those in the other camp are heading for hell. Billy Graham does not believe in a “limited atonement” but few evangelicals would say he is not a Christian. Pentecostals think non-Pentecostals are missing out on God’s intended Second Blessing, and non-Pentecostals think Pentecostals are confused about how the Holy Spirit works—but again, rarely does either group accuse the other of not being Christian. These are intra-familial squabbles.

So are our debates with Roman Catholics about the gospel intra-familial or

inter-faith? Are the majority of Catholics putting their trust in Jesus Christ, knowing and clinging to the gospel, born again, growing disciples of Christ? Putting it bluntly: are Roman Catholics “Christians”?

Many evangelicals will answer, if pushed, “No, most Roman Catholics are not Christians. They do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They have never been born again. They do not *believe the gospel*.” Why this answer? Because many evangelicals were themselves once Roman Catholics. They were baptized into the Church, confirmed, attended Mass daily, and faithfully jumped through all the right hoops, yet did not “know” God personally. They had no idea that Jesus Christ’s death on the cross set them free from the penalty and power of sin. They never personally experienced the reality of existentially knowing that their sins were forgiven. They did not know it was possible to read the Bible for themselves, to pray on their own from their hearts, to sense that God the Holy Spirit actually resided inside them and was daily changing them to become more like Christ. They had had no faith—only duty and rote obedience to external rules.

When these former Catholics become converted, something like scales fell from their eyes. They “saw,” spiritually and experientially for the first time, that *their* sins were forgiven, and their awareness of Christ’s personal presence was enlivened. Moreover, the reality of the Holy Spirit’s indwelling them, changing them, and giving them joy and peace was for the first time palpable. Such a convert is often angry with the Roman Catholic Church:

How could I attend Mass for so many years and never hear the gospel?! I feel betrayed. I have lost so many years. I never understood before why evangelicals sang so vibrantly those hymns about their chains falling off and their hearts becoming free—but now I understand! But the Catholic Church actually *kept* me from seeing the gospel because she stressed the fruits, not the root, of faith. They told me all the things I needed to *do* ... without showing me what I first needed to *believe* about the gospel. Consequently I was actually trying to *save myself* for those many years, and I was engulfed in guilt and fear.

Yes, true faith always will lead to obedience; but when obedience is stressed without the prior faith, one becomes hardened, proud, legalistic and a law-keeper. The focus is on Law, not Grace, in such a system.

The outcry by many evangelicals, then, over ECT II (“The Gift of Salvation”) was understandable because it seemed to make too many assumptions about Catholic and evangelical beliefs regarding the gospel. It claims that we evangelicals and Catholics “have been able to express a common faith in Christ and so to acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters in Christ,” when in fact the jury is out whether in fact we *are* brothers and sisters in Christ.

What *is* the gospel, then, that all must believe? The gospel is the Good News that God sent Jesus Christ to die for sinners. Our sin has created a gulf between God and us, and we are helpless to make things right. Our sin has left us in bondage and we are unable to break free. Our sin has led us into rebellion, a clinched fist toward God, and the words, “Not thy will but mine be done” is our life’s motto (we say this dozens of time each day through the ways we attempt to live out a life of

autonomy and independence from God). The person who sees Jesus Christ with eyes of faith sees his sin for what it is—and he repents. He knows that his only hope for being made right—right with God, right with others, right in his own person (coming under New Management where God, not himself, is the Master)—is through casting himself upon Jesus Christ for mercy. Jesus Christ alone can save us because He alone is fully God and fully man, the one and only Mediator between holy God and sinful man.

The gospel, in a word, is Jesus Christ. One believes the gospel when one believes Jesus is the Christ who takes away the sin of the world—specifically, one's own sin—through his death and resurrection.

Do Roman Catholics believe the gospel? The correct answer is: some do and some do not. The Roman Catholic who does good works out of a response of faith in Christ, knowing that trusting someone also means obeying him, believes the gospel; whereas the Roman Catholic who does good works out of fear and guilt, somehow hoping that God will love him because of those good works, does not believe the gospel. The Roman Catholic who cannot set a time and day when he "asked Jesus into his heart" but has humbly been seeking to trust and obey Christ as long as he can remember, believes the gospel; whereas the Roman Catholic who assumes that he is made right with God because of being born and baptized into the Church, and who has no desire to trust and obey Christ throughout his life, does not believe the gospel. Any person who in any way thinks he has put God in his debt ("God is so lucky to have me on His side!") demonstrates that he does not believe the gospel—whether Catholic or evangelical.

Good evangelicals insist that the gospel's effects are past-perfect: "I have been saved." They revel in the finished work of Christ on the cross and love to rejoice in the victory, past tense, that God has won on their behalf. Good Catholics understand the gospel's call to a present tense, ongoing, process salvation: "I am being saved." They understand the importance of obedience that involves sacrifice and service. The evangelical who understands the gospel as only referring to past sins that need forgiveness and who only understands the righteousness that he needs to be an imputed one, does not understand the gospel—for true saving faith will, *must*, lead to good works. The Catholic who understands the gospel only as process, as commands for us to obey rather than (or prior to) promises to trust, does not understand the gospel.

I believe evangelicals have erred by making too strong a distinction—sometimes even a separation—between justification and sanctification. And I believe Roman Catholics have erred in the opposite way by so melding justification and sanctification that salvation is never seen as secure, definite or finished (everything is always "process").

Evangelicals need to help Roman Catholics see that the gospel is not just one of dozens of things that Christians believe and live out but the very centerpiece, that one Relationship out of which everything else flows. Evangelicals must be careful not to push some sub-cultural brand of gospel-centered Christianity on Catholics (for example, the Bible nowhere equates faith with "asking Christ into your heart"; the Bible nowhere says the sign of true conversion is being able to set a date of when one "became a Christian"; the Bible nowhere says it is wrong for followers of

Jesus to want to do good works—in fact, quite the contrary), and we should not assume that all Catholics are not believing the gospel. Nevertheless, it is right and important for us never to tire of insisting on the gospel’s non-negotiable importance.

Evangelicals also must firmly point out to Roman Catholics the folly of a creeping universalism that is often heard among their leaders. We are right to react to Peter Kreeft’s “ecumenical jihad” where he draws Muslims within the ecumenical circle. We are right to react to Richard John Neuhaus when he implies that Jews can be saved outside of faith in Christ the Messiah. We are right to react to any and all mention of “theism” as the crucial factor in the culture wars, insisting instead that building a “theism” without Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone is a wobbly edifice. Saint Paul was “not ashamed of the gospel” and neither should we be; he reminds us that Jesus Christ is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks, and so He is; and he could boldly say, “For me to live is Christ”—and so should we!

### *Authority*

Imagine if somehow evangelicals and Catholics were able to agree that though we emphasize different elements and use different terminology, we are in general agreement as to the essence of just what the gospel is—that the majority of evangelicals could actually feel theologically comfortable with calling Roman Catholics, “Christians”. Even so, a huge divide would continue to separate us. For the key element that distinguishes us and that affects so many secondary issues is the issue of *authority*. All conservative Christians agree that God has authority

and that God has communicated His will authoritatively to us in Holy Scripture. The question is: what kind of authority has God given His Church—or churches—to interpret and teach these Scriptures, and perhaps go further than them? Before answering this question, two common misconceptions need to be addressed.

First, evangelicals are simply naive to think that by saying, “I submit to the Bible, not the Church,” all disputes have been settled. For the Bible must be interpreted. Imagine that a John Smith joined one of our evangelical churches. The word quickly got out that John was attempting to have sex with various women in the congregation. When confronted, John replied, “But the Bible doesn’t forbid this—in fact, it encourages it! I’ve read a new book that shows definitively that the Greek words for ‘fornication’ and ‘adultery’ really refer to one’s heart, not actions. And the way I read 1 Corinthians 13, the goal in all relationships is LOVE. Well, I truly love these women!” I have little doubt that most evangelicals would respond, “No, John, you’re wrong. That is in fact not what the Bible teaches.” But we would not leave it at that. We would expect, indeed encourage, our church leaders to discipline John. He would not be allowed to enjoy fellowship with the brethren unless he repented. We would not allow for any and all individualistic biblical interpretations to pass muster, and we would expect that our churches would deal swiftly with John’s sin—with authority.

Or take another example. Imagine you have attended an evangelical Church X for twenty years now and Pastor Jones has been your pastor all these years. You know Pastor Jones well. He led you to Christ, performed your marriage ceremony, and



counseled you over the years. You have deeply appreciated and grown spiritually from his weekly sermons. Then one day Pastor Jones said something in his sermon that sounded off base. It was not heretical but it did not sit right with you (he in fact told the congregation that the Lord had opened his eyes to see some things in Scripture that he had never quite seen before). You go home and you study the particular passage in question. It enters your mind that perhaps Pastor Jones has gone a bit off track here ... but then you remember his character, his great possession of biblical knowledge, and his consistency over the last twenty years as a solid preacher. And so you find yourself willing to trust his interpretation over yours. Though we evangelicals agree that our pastor can err and that we submit ultimately to the Bible and not to him and his human interpretations, nevertheless, *in practice*, the line is thin that divides his teaching and the Bible's teaching. Many evangelicals would be hard pressed to find anything they strongly disagreed with that is written by Theologian X (fill in the blank with your favorite biblical author). What is going on here? Answer: we are choosing to give a certain degree of authority to our pastor (or denomination). We do not sit with arms crossed in questioning suspicion every time our pastor speaks, but we listen humbly and expectantly to God's Word preached and expounded, largely trusting our pastor's interpretations. So we must be aware that we evangelicals, just like Roman Catholics, make subjective choices to accept and reject certain interpretations of Scripture.

The second point is this: It is not true that evangelicals have no notion or appreciation of *positional* authority. In reaction to "apostolic succession," the notion that

authoritative leadership has been passed down through the ages from bishop to bishop such that Pope John Paul II should be listened to and (when speaking *ex cathedra*) obeyed *due to his position* as the vicar of Christ on earth, evangelicals have often thought that they must run headlong in the opposite direction, insisting that one's authority is only valid to the degree that his authority is under Scripture. And yet Scripture does tell us to submit to elders as those who have been given Christ's charge to care for the sheep. There is a certain "positional" authority that a husband has in his marriage and that parents have over their children. If a mother tells her son to stay out of the cookie jar, and he retorts, "Show me a Bible verse that tells me that cookies are bad for me," most evangelicals would agree that he should obey his mother *because* she is his mother. So it is not true that evangelicals must object to Roman Catholics' notion of a positional authority per se.

But with these two caveats aside, for evangelicals the key point is that all human authorities, whether positional or earned, and all traditions and communions, whether Baptist, Presbyterian or Roman Catholic, must be in submission to Holy Scripture. The Roman Catholic Church, evangelicals would insist, does not have the authority from God to go beyond Scripture in declaring what is true and what must be believed and obeyed where the Bible is silent. This includes most of the Marian doctrines, indulgences, praying for or to the dead, penance, the Seven Sacraments, marriage annulments, purgatory, and so on. Was Mary bodily assumed up to heaven? It is possible, but we do not know: for God has not revealed it to us. Do saints in heaven hear us when we pray to them? It is pos-

sible, but we do not know: for nowhere in Holy Scripture has God spoken of this.

This does not mean that there is no truth outside of what has been revealed in Scripture, but it does mean that the truth revealed by God in Scripture sits in judgment and has priority over all perceived or humanly derived truths. For example, Scripture teaches that all sex outside of marriage is sinful, and many Christians derive from the biblical truths about sexuality that all birth control, even within marriage, is also sinful. Evangelicals will say that a Christian must believe the first truth and is free to debate the second one. One's conscience is to submit to God's Word and not to man's words. There inevitably must be development of doctrine, but it must be a development that clearly and consciously seeks to submit itself to Holy Scripture. Evangelicals can and should encourage Catholics to study and know the Bible and we must always be open to new (often "new" because historic and thus largely forgotten today) interpretations. Out of loyalty to our Lord, however, we must never give secondary sources the same weight that we give to God's Word itself.

Has God in fact given the Roman Catholic Church His authority to interpret and teach the Holy Scriptures in an infallible way? If so, many of the other concerns evangelicals have with Roman Catholicism would be dissolved. But evangelicals do not believe that Rome has been given this authority by God, which is a crucial disagreement.

Evangelicals are happily rediscovering the importance of the Church and acknowledging the wrong-headedness of individualism. We are rightly valuing community, tradition, and the important role that human authorities should have

in an ordered Church and in an ordered universe. We therefore have a growing range of shared convictions and practices with Roman Catholics. But until the Roman Catholic Church puts herself under Holy Scripture and holds more loosely areas where God has not authoritatively spoken, the chasm between evangelicals and Catholics will necessarily remain large.

### **The Way Forward**

Surely the first thing to say here is this: Evangelicals must *desire* unity with all Christians. We must long for it, pray for it, and grieve over the current lack of it. The Reformation was a tragic necessity—but woe to the evangelical who emphasizes "necessity" more than "tragic." Our Lord's longest, most passionate recorded prayer in the Bible is found in John 17, and here we find him crying out to God for unity among his people. Paul exhorts the Philippian Christians that "if there is any encouragement in Christ, incentive of love, participation in the Spirit, or affection and sympathy, they should strive after being of the same mind, having the same love and being in full accord" (Phil 2:1-2). Under the Old Covenant one of the worst curses on God's people Israel was to be scattered and divided. We must take no hidden, sadistic delight in friction with other Christians and we must strive to be peacemakers. When one part of the Body hurts, the whole Body hurts.

Second, grassroots efforts of ecumenism should occur in every city across our nation. Study groups, Bible studies, prayer meetings, social service projects, etc.—we must look for ways to be in the presence of Roman Catholics. Many stereotypes and caricatures dissipate when faced with a real flesh-and-blood person

from the other side of an argument (and of course some stereotypes will only be underlined since many of our differences are real).

I have personally found the common study of C. S. Lewis's writings to be a surprising, semi-unifying salve. Lewis helps different traditions see truths that have been hidden, and he exposes blindspots. When discussing our differences directly, I have found it helpfully disarming to begin a conversation with, "Please share one positive aspect of the other's perspective," and then ask, "What important truth in your own tradition are you wanting to preserve, and do you fear that the other tradition, if left unchecked, will weaken it?"

A third suggestion: Rome should call a Vatican III specifically to readdress the issues of the Reformation. (Perhaps this could occur in 2017, exactly five hundred years after Luther's 95 Theses!) The two themes of *gospel* and *authority* could be addressed, and leading evangelical theologians could be brought in to share concerns. The Lutheran-Catholic Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification is a good start here, showing that real dialogue and some convergence is actually possible. Were Rome to make significant changes here, evangelicals would be hard pressed to refrain from reuniting.

Fourth, evangelicals must rediscover our Protestant heritage. Much of what I wrote above under the heading, "Deepening Appreciation" is not so much a sign that Roman Catholicism is the solution but that evangelicals have strayed widely from their Reformation roots. Historic Protestantism has always valued the social ramifications of the gospel, reason, tradition, and historical orthodoxy. However, in going back to our roots we must

also seek the Holy Spirit's help to open our eyes to our own Protestant weaknesses and blindspots. Maybe the Lord will use some grassroots "going back to our roots" initiatives by both evangelicals and Catholics to help both groups see, with five hundred years of hindsight, ways in which we may be closer to one another doctrinally than we ever imagined. We must go back not to ossify the past, but to see afresh ways in which the past was and was not faithful to the Scriptures.

May evangelicals and Catholics move forward together where our consciences will allow, and where we disagree, may we seek to persuade one another of the truth with humility and teachable hearts. There are thousands of American Roman Catholics who have been baptized and who go to Mass daily but who are not believing the gospel; and there are thousands of American evangelicals who have "asked Jesus into their hearts" but who are not believing the gospel. There is much work to be done—and my conviction is that much of this work can be done together.

May God have mercy on us all.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Norman Geisler and Ralph MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Disagreements* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

# Justified by Faith and Judged by Works: A Biblical Paradox and Its Significance

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## The Challenge of Listening to the Whole of Scripture

Within the space of two short chapters in Romans, Paul declares, "It is not the hearers of the Law who are righteous before God, rather those who do the Law shall be justified" (Rom 2:13); and, "According to our evaluation, a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law" (Rom 3:28).

One can find no indication in the text that Paul was embarrassed by the seeming incongruity of these affirmations. Nor is it likely that he fell unawares into inconsistency, when we consider that the letter to Rome is carefully constructed and composed by the apostle in his maturity. We must assume that in some way these two widely different perspectives on the momentous matter of our standing before God cohere with one another. It is this point of cohesion that I would like to consider.

It is worth reminding ourselves at the outset that in seeking a biblical synthesis, we must take care to listen to all the biblical evidence and guard ourselves against diluting either one of the Pauline statements we have just cited. We should remember that it was the rediscovery of Paul's latter affirmation, that justification is a gift given to faith, which prompted the Protestant Reformation in a Church that had grown dull of hearing. The Reformers, whether Lutheran or Calvinist, came to understand that believers shall

stand at the final judgment by a righteousness given to faith alone as a gift. In other words, the righteousness that saves us is found outside us in Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified and risen. In taking this position, the Reformers were making a conscious break with traditional understandings of justification, according to which the initial gift of justification had to increase and grow internally in order for the believer to attain salvation. Their disagreement with their contemporaries was not over whether salvation was a divine gift. Everyone at that time was a follower of Augustine, or at least thought themselves to be. The distinctive of the Reformers was that they went beyond Augustine and back to the Scriptures. They preserved Augustine's insight that justification is the work of God alone in their rediscovery of the biblical and Pauline understanding of grace: "If [salvation] is by grace, it is no longer by works, otherwise grace is no longer grace" (Rom 11:5). The reformational insistence on "sola fide" was inseparable from its equally firm affirmation of "sola Scriptura." It is well beyond our scope here to explore the ways in which the Reformers appealed to Scripture to support their position. We may simply observe that although Paul was a primary Scriptural witness to this truth, he was by no means the only witness. Whether or not the Reformers' reading of Scripture is right on the matter of justification is

another issue of course. For various exegetical reasons that I cannot elaborate now, I think that they did get it right. My present purpose is to remind us that when we wrestle with the relationship between “justification by faith” and “judgment according to works,” we do not, in the first instance, seek to legitimate a Protestant tradition. Instead, we seek to understand the message of Scripture in its fulness.

Therefore, the following reflections represent an exercise in biblical theology. It is an attempt to find that central point from which these seemingly disparate affirmations of the text find their resolution. Although I shall restrict myself primarily to Paul’s letters, it will be readily apparent that the observations I shall offer have implications that encompass the whole of Scripture. Here and there, where appropriate, I shall attempt to draw some connections with other elements of the biblical witness.

### **Inadequate Solutions to the Problem**

First, it is necessary for us to consider some of the ways in which theologians, particularly Protestant theologians, have handled the question at hand. One of the most common attempts at resolving the difficulty has been to say that in the final judgment “works” shall serve as evidence of the justifying faith of believers. This claim finds obvious support in the words of the Jakobean interlocutor, “I shall show you my faith by my works” (Jas 2:18). This thesis, if properly qualified, is essentially correct. Nevertheless, it has obvious deficiencies. In context, James goes on to speak not of a justification by faith shown by works, but of a justification by works, as do various passages in the New Testament from the preaching of Jesus to the

Apocalypse of John (Jas 2:20-26).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, as Protestants generally have recognized, to speak simply in terms of “justification by faith” would be to overlook the various ways in which Scripture, and Paul in particular, locates justification in Christ and his saving work (e.g., “we have been justified by [Christ’s] blood,” Rom 5:9). For Paul justifying faith is inseparable from the saving work of Christ, and vice versa. It is in Christ crucified and risen that the biblical tension between faith and works finds its resolution.

Other solutions to the problem are less than satisfactory.<sup>2</sup> The argument that we must understand Paul’s expectation of judgment primarily in relation to the church as a corporate entity, fails to convince, since the texts that speak of judgment generally speak of the individual.<sup>3</sup> It also has been suggested that Paul’s references to judgment according to works represent a mere rhetorical device, drawn from Jewish tradition. Indeed, interpreters frequently read Romans 2:12-16 and its surrounding context as a hypothetical description of judgment, even if they do not apply this claim to Paul’s thought as a whole. Yet precisely in this passage the argument fails, for here, having declared that it is not the “hearers,” but the “doers of the Law” who shall be justified in the day of judgment, Paul solemnly affirms that “God shall judge the secrets of human beings according to my gospel, through Christ Jesus” (Rom 2:16). Paul explicitly includes a final justification according to works within his gospel of justification apart from works. We, therefore, cannot escape the inherent tension within his thought.

Yet another attempt to resolve this difficulty, one that is popular among evangelical Christians, is to draw a distinction

between final salvation and reward. The former has been secured by Christ for the believer once-for-all. The latter is dependent upon our obedience. The texts that speak of justification or salvation by faith (alone) thereby retain their full force. Those that speak of judgment according to works do so likewise, because they speak about another, secondary matter. Again in this case, logical coherence is obtained at the cost of the meaning of the biblical texts. We may freely grant that the judgment according to works that Paul expects entails eternal reward and, in a certain sense, degrees of it. Moreover, Paul's reference to the one saved "yet as through fire" in 1 Corinthians 3:10-17 shows us that he obviously knows of deficient service within the church, which will be exposed and consumed at the final judgment, ending in the bare salvation of the one who offered it. Even in this context, however, Paul goes on to warn that anyone who destroys the church will meet with destruction from God. A danger exists not only of empty labor, but also of final condemnation. Significantly, Paul leaves the line of demarcation between shoddy workmanship and destructive efforts undefined. Furthermore, other Pauline texts that speak of final judgment leave no room for a distinction between salvation and reward, since they presuppose an absolute "either-or," standing or falling, life or death, salvation or wrath.<sup>4</sup> Nor can we legitimately read 2 Corinthians 5:10 as dealing with the mere dispensation of rewards to believers: "For it is necessary for all of us to be manifest before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one might be recompensed for the things done through the body, whether good or evil." As the following verse makes clear, the topic at hand is the legiti-

macy of the apostle, which ultimately God alone will confirm. Although Paul formulates his description of final judgment in general terms, in the first instance, he has in view those who claim to have apostolic authority within the congregation. The passage deals with approbation and condemnation, life and death, not with the supposedly secondary matter of rewards. Occasionally, this "rewards" thesis is combined with the idea that the biblical language of "inheritance" refers to rewards and not salvation itself.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, in the New Testament and contemporaneous Jewish writings, the terminology of "inheritance" clearly signifies the age to come and life in it.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, to conceive of "reward" in this manner is to miss its intrinsic and paradoxical connection to salvation, a topic we cannot explore here.<sup>7</sup>

Yet another way of trying to reconcile Paul's expectation of a judgment according to works with his understanding of salvation has been to claim that he embraced a doctrine of Christian perfection. Although we can recognize how certain passages such as Romans 6 might give rise to this theory, it is entirely implausible and does violence to the very texts it uses as its starting point. Paul would hardly have needed to urge believers to continue to forgive one another, if he supposed they had or could attain perfection.<sup>8</sup> And it is quite obvious that when he calls the Corinthians "holy ones" it is on account of what God had accomplished for them in Christ, not on account of what they were in themselves. Throughout his letters, Paul deals realistically with the errors, weakness, and transgressions of his congregations, and leaves no room for perfectionism.

In the current literature, one more

frequently finds the contrary theory that God does not look for perfect obedience at the final judgment.<sup>9</sup> This idea is not new: it was implicit in the medieval conceptions of salvation against which the Reformers reacted and appeared again among some late seventeenth-century Anglican divines, who viewed Christ as having purchased a lowered condition for salvation. The argument is advanced that God has never demanded perfect obedience from his people. All that he has ever required is sincere allegiance, the devotion of the heart, “embrace of the Law,” “responsible covenant-behavior,” or the like. This unhappy attempt at synthesis reduces the biblical demand to a form of idealism. Obedience now becomes a distant goal, rather than an immediate and unconditioned requirement, from which the human being may not be excused. The message of Deuteronomy, the quintessential book of the Law, is that Israel’s love for God must express itself in unqualified obedience to *all* the commandments, or indeed, to the “entire commandment” of the Law, since the Law is to be understood as an indivisible whole: “Then the Lord commanded us to observe *all* these statutes, to fear the Lord our God, for our good, so as to keep us alive, as is now the case. If we diligently observe this *entire* commandment before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, we will be in the right” (Deut 6:24-25).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, when the apostle James indicates that to transgress one commandment is to become a transgressor of the whole of the Law, he merely echoes the antecedent biblical understanding (Jas 2:10-11). The same may be said for the author of Hebrews, who reminds his readers that “the word spoken through angels was confirmed, and every transgression and

disobedience received just recompense” (Heb 2:2; cf. Heb 10:28). Jesus, too, regarded obedience to all the commandments of the Law as necessary to entrance into the kingdom of heaven, as is evident in his response to the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-22 and parallels).<sup>11</sup> In the Lukan account of a lawyer’s question, the Law is summarized in the two greatest commandments of wholehearted love toward God and love for one’s neighbor as for oneself: “Do this” Jesus says, “and you shall live” (Luke 10:25-28).<sup>12</sup> Consequently, when Paul indicates on the basis of Deut 27:26 that a curse rests on everyone who does not do *all* that is written in the book of the Law, he merely reflects the theology of Deuteronomy in unison with the broader New Testament witness (Gal 3:10).

In this connection we cannot overlook the provision of forgiveness within the Levitical system of sacrifices, even if we cannot discuss it at length. It is worth observing that a tension appears within Leviticus itself concerning the efficacy of the sacrifices. On the one hand, they clearly serve as a means of atonement, in some sense putting aside Israel’s sin and maintaining her relationship with Yahweh. On the other hand, if Israel does not observe *all* the commandments of Yahweh and thus breaks covenant with him, he shall send them away into exile (Lev 26:1-39, esp. 26:14). The sacrifices operate only within the sphere of obedience. In other words, Leviticus and Deuteronomy speak with one voice concerning Yahweh’s demand for complete obedience, subordinating the sacrificial system and the forgiveness it offered to that demand.<sup>13</sup> We have here a paradox, indeed the anticipatory form of the very paradox with which we are dealing. Its

presence in the biblical text attests that as the recipient of divine revelation Israel accepted that tension without diluting it. The prophets' later rejection of the cult in the face of Israel's abuse of it may likewise be understood as a reassertion of the primacy which the Torah had already assigned to unqualified obedience.<sup>14</sup> From this perspective, even the bold and sweeping statements of the letter to the Hebrews do not appear to be at odds with Leviticus. The high priestly offering on the Day of Atonement removes only sins performed in ignorance (Heb 9:7). The Levitical sacrifices provide only an outward cleansing (Heb 9:13). They could never provide forgiveness, but serve only as reminders of sin (Heb 10:1-4). Like the prophets before it, the letter to the Hebrews decisively rejects the cult in favor of the demand for obedience, as articulated in Psalm 40, which the author cites. Now, however, something remarkable takes place: the original, paradoxical juxtaposition of forgiveness secured by sacrifice and the requirement for absolute obedience reappears. Biblical demand and biblical promise have been fulfilled in the incarnate Son, who by the will of God offered up his body as a sacrifice, once for all (Heb 10:5-10, esp. v. 10; cf. Ps 40:7-9).<sup>15</sup> In him, and in him alone, this tension within Scripture finds its unity.

### **Justification and Final Judgment**

By this circuitous route, then, we have returned to Jesus Christ and his saving work as the resolution of the biblical tension between justification by faith and judgment according to works. I would like now to elaborate and confirm this "center" of the biblical message that I have advocated by considering several aspects of justification, judgment, faith, and works

in Paul's letters.

Interpreters frequently have lost sight of the full dimensions of the biblical conception of the final judgment and of Paul's forensic language. The image of a modern courtroom, in which the judge functions merely as an administrator of justice fails to capture the whole of the biblical understanding. Particularly in Paul's letters and the Johannine writings another dimension of judgment drawn from the biblical prophets and psalms appears prominently. In judgment God does not act merely as a distributor of justice, he is a party to the dispute. This theme is particularly prominent in Romans and comes to expression in Paul's citation of Ps 51 (LXX 50) in Romans 3:4: "Let God be true, and every human being a liar, just as it is written, 'In order that you might be justified in your words and triumph when you judge.'"<sup>16</sup> God has a contention with us fallen human beings, who in word and deed have denied him as Creator and have turned aside to idolatry. According to Paul's expectation, the day of judgment is nothing other than the day of God's wrath against such unrighteousness.<sup>17</sup> Above all else, the final judgment shall bring the justification of God over against the fallen world, the revelation of his righteousness before the nations, and the effecting of his saving purposes. Paul understands that the gospel has its power to save precisely because this righteousness of God already has been revealed in it.<sup>18</sup> The day of judgment has been brought into the present in Jesus Christ crucified and risen. For us and our transgressions he was crucified. For us and our justification he was raised (Rom 4:25). For those who believe in Jesus, God has come to be the righteous one, vindicated in his charge against us. At the



same time he is the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom 3:26). *God's* righteousness is ours through Christ by faith (Rom 1:17; Rom 3:22). Consequently, there is no justification of the sinner that is not simultaneously the justification of God in his wrath against the sinner. Our justification contains our condemnation within it. Paul often speaks of Christ's cross in this way, as for example in Galatians 2:19b-20: "For I through the Law died to the Law. I have been crucified with Christ. I live, but it is no longer I, rather Christ lives in me. What I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me."<sup>19</sup> For Paul, mercy is not given apart from judgment. Life is granted only where God has put to death. On those who believe judgment already has been passed, even though it is yet to come.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, we who believe share not only in Christ's death but also in his life. Because Christ was raised "for us," we live in the certain hope of the resurrection from the dead. But that is not all. Christ's resurrection is projected into the present time in the "new obedience" of believers. Or, to put it the other way around, our obedience is nothing other than Christ's resurrection life projected into the present: "We have been buried with him through 'baptism into death' in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4). Bodily obedience here and now is the necessary anticipation of bodily resurrection.<sup>21</sup> Paul obviously does not suppose that the *eschaton* has wholly come, but he does understand that in Christ crucified and risen it has come as a whole. In this connection, we may limit ourselves to a single observation, even though there is much

more to be said: behind Christ's resurrection stands Christ's cross. Our obedience to God as believers presupposes that our old life has been judged and condemned.<sup>22</sup> According to the text it is because we have been "baptized into Christ's death" that we "walk in the newness" of life (Rom 6:4). Here as elsewhere, when Paul speaks of "newness" he has in view the entrance of the age to come into the world. And his very reference a *new* creation presupposes that the old has been done away with: "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old things have passed away, behold new things have come!" (2 Cor 5:17; Isa 43:18-19). The newness of life in which believers walk is a reality that comes from beyond the final judgment, from the life of the age to come. The works of believers cannot be reduced to a mere condition of obtaining entrance into the age to come. They are themselves the reality of the age to come as it has broken into the present in Jesus Christ. To put it as Luther did in his Heidelberg Disputation (Thesis 25): our works do not work our righteousness, our righteousness works our works.<sup>23</sup>

This observation helps us to understand another dimension of Paul's expectation of final judgment that is easily overlooked. Not only shall the saints be judged by God, they shall judge the world with God and share in his triumph over it. This expectation appears prominently in Romans 8, where Paul speaks of the present suffering of the children of God, which anticipates their glory. Those who believe have been thrust into the contention between God and the world. Echoing the language of Isaiah's Servant, Paul asks: "If God is for us, who is against us? . . . Who shall bring a charge against the elect of God? . . . Who is the one who con-

demns? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? (Rom 8:31-35). As in the book of Isaiah to which Paul alludes, God predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies his servants, and in so doing establishes his claim to be the true God (Rom 8:28-30). In this context Paul does not speak of our justification before God, but of our justification by God before the world. The resurrection of the body, the instatement as sons that we await, constitutes God's triumph over the world in judgment. Correspondingly, in admonishing the Corinthian church, Paul speaks of the future participation of believers in judgment as a matter fundamental to the gospel: "Do you not know that the saints shall judge the world? . . . Do you not know that we shall judge the angels?" (1 Cor 6:2-3). Paul presupposes the same at the conclusion of Romans 2, when he rhetorically suggests that the uncircumcised one who fulfills the Law shall judge the circumcised transgressor of it (Rom 2:28). Through God's justifying verdict, those who belong to Jesus Christ shall rule and reign with him. God shall not only be our judge, but our vindicator, who shall establish and defend his own saving work before the world and angels (Rom 8:31-39).

In the present time, the contention between God and the world runs through the very hearts of those who believe. The Spirit and the flesh constitute two "wholes" in Paul's thought, the old person and the new, who do battle until the resurrection from the dead.<sup>24</sup> Although it often does not seem so to us, the battle is entirely one-sided and has, in fact, been decided: "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh, with its passions and desires" (Gal 5:24). Paul's similar statement of the matter in

Romans 8 is significant. The sons of God who are led by the Spirit of God, "put to death the deeds of the body" (Rom 8:13). The Spirit again and again reenacts the cross and resurrection in us. We stand under the judgment of God, and therefore can be granted life and freedom only through the sentence of death that has been effected in Christ. The self-judgment of believers at the table of the Lord, i.e., "the judgment of the body" of which Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 11:29, shows how central it is to Paul's thought. The same may be said of the church's responsibility to exercise discipline when the repentance of transgression is absent in its members (1 Cor 5:1-13). Our self-judgment in Christ is necessary to our sharing in life in him. If we judge ourselves we shall not be judged (1 Cor 11:31).

### **Faith and Works**

We have not yet addressed the question as to why Paul can reject a justification by the "works of the Law" while expecting a final judgment according to works in which the Law itself shall serve as the standard. The answer is two-fold, having to do with Paul's conception of the final judgment and his understanding of the "works of the Law."

For Paul the final judgment is not a "weighing" or "counting" of works, but a manifestation of persons by their works. We may remind ourselves of 2 Corinthians 5:10: "It is necessary that we all become manifest before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one should be recompensed for the things done through the body, whether good or evil."<sup>25</sup> As we have seen, Paul describes the day of judgment in similar terms in Romans 2:16. The idea is likewise implicit to 1 Corinthians 3:13, where he announces the searing revela-

tion of our works on the last Day.<sup>26</sup> Correspondingly, Paul speaks of the judgment of a person's "work" (note carefully the singular form) as a comprehensive matter. In the final judgment the "work" of each life shall appear as a whole, either as perseverance in seeking "glory, honor, and immortality," or as obedience to unrighteousness (Rom 2:7-8).

This inseparability of "person" and "works" has two sides. On the one hand, taken as a whole our works reveal our persons. At the end of the day we are what we do, not what we suppose ourselves to be. Every act of sin, even the smallest sin, is an expression of our person, that is, an expression that each of us is a sinner. According to the apostle, the commandment of God serves to expose this truth about us, rendering sin "sinful beyond measure" (Rom 7:13). When we encounter the commandment "you shall not covet," we acknowledge that it is good and that it leads to life, but we act otherwise. The irrational cause of our disobedience lies in our desire to do away with God, who gives the commandment. As Luther rightly saw, in its essence sin is nothing other than the "*annihilatio Dei*," the attempt to annihilate God. Because sin is thus rooted in our persons, it is overcome only in the re-creation of our persons in Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, the unity that exists between "person" and "works" means that even those works which presently appear to be good cannot be judged apart from the person who performs them, that is, apart from the "heart," the motive and intent behind the works. Paul therefore refuses to allow the Corinthians to pass judgment on him, and does not do so himself. We cannot rightly see the depths of our own hearts. As Paul later

writes to Timothy, "the sins of some are obvious, going before them to judgment, for others they follow afterward" (1 Tim 5:24).

Although the meaning of the expression "works of the Law" is debated, it seems clear that it signifies those outward, visible deeds that the human being is capable of performing in obedience to the Law. These "works of the Law" served as markers not merely of the national identity of the Jews, but of their piety. Works such as these are inadequate to justify because particular deeds of obedience that we are able perform do not encompass the whole of our lives and persons. Some may achieve outward conformity to the demands of the Law, as Paul himself indicates that he did: "As to the righteousness which is in the Law, (I was) blameless" (Phil 3:6). Yet he could not expunge coveting from his heart. The same was true of the rich young man who departed from Jesus in sadness. Although outwardly he had kept all the commandments, Jesus' call to discipleship exposed the refusal to love God and neighbor that ruled within his heart (Mark 10:17-22). Those in Paul's day who sought their justification in "works of the Law" attempted to substitute partial obedience for the whole which God demands. To seek righteousness in the works we may perform is to hide from the fallenness of our own heart: "by the works of the Law, no flesh shall be justified before (God), for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin" (Rom 3:20). Paul rejects the "works of the Law" not because these deeds are wrong in themselves, but because of the opinion attached to them that they could justify, which made them nothing other than expressions of rebellion against God and his work in Christ.<sup>27</sup>

We may turn now to the matter of faith itself. The “new obedience” of those who belong to Christ consists in nothing other than, “the faith which comes from the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal 2:20). Paul uses these very words in Romans 6 when he rejoices over the faith of the Roman Christians: “Thanks be to God that you were slaves to sin but became obedient from the heart to that teaching unto which you were delivered, and being freed from sin, you became slaves of righteousness” (Rom 6:17-18). Here Paul significantly inverts the expected locution and speaks of Christians being delivered to the gospel rather than the gospel being delivered to them. Faith is a manifestation of the new creation itself, as is apparent in Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 4:6: “God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ is the one who has shone in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ” (cf. Gen 1:3). Faith is *God’s* work alone, a creation *ex nihilo*, and therefore cannot be reduced to a mere condition of salvation. To be “in the faith” is to be indwelt by Christ: “Test yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves. Or do you do not know concerning yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you—unless you are indeed unapproved?” (2 Cor 13:5).<sup>28</sup>

Because faith is God’s work, faith works in the world. Indeed, it is inseparable from its works and neither requires nor tolerates any works outside itself. In it the Law of God and its demand for love of God and neighbor comes to fulfillment. According to Paul only “faith working through love” has force in Christ Jesus (Gal 5:6). Faith meets the demand of the Law in “love,” not as an idea or theological conception, but as the reality of the age

to come, which has entered the world in Jesus Christ: “For the (commandments) ‘Do not commit adultery,’ ‘Do not murder,’ ‘Do not steal,’ ‘Do not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, it is summarized in this word, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does not do evil to the neighbor. Love therefore is the fulfillment of the Law” (Rom 13:9-10).<sup>29</sup> Paul does not offer here an ethical criterion by which to judge the course of one’s action. He rather speaks of the presence of Christ, in whom love is effective. As he urges his readers in this context, we are to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh” (Rom 13:14).<sup>30</sup> Love has its source in faith, not merely as gratitude for grace received, but in the Christ who is present within it.<sup>31</sup> In this light, the priority that Paul gives to love over faith in 1 Corinthians 13 becomes understandable. Faith does not have intrinsic value for Paul, but exists as a reflection of Christ and his work. Considered in itself, even a faith that is sufficient to move mountains is nothing (1 Cor 13:2). Love is greater than faith and hope, since it incarnates the eschatological life that faith and hope already apprehend. For this reason Paul does not define love in this chapter, but describes its manifold expressions. The “love” of which he speaks in the most stirring and sublime terms is a gift from God, a gift that the Corinthians are to seek above all others since it abides forever (1 Cor 13:13). If faith is considered as an isolated “gift” operative in the world, love far exceeds faith. Considered in relation to God, however, faith has a priority over love, since it is by faith alone that the divine reality of love is given to us in Christ: “faith works through love” (Gal 5:6).

In this light it is clear that there is no final conflict between Paul and James on the relationship between faith and works in justification.<sup>32</sup> James 2:22 speaks of faith “working with” Abraham’s works, not adjunctively but concursively, accomplishing them just as the body with the spirit performs deeds.<sup>33</sup> When, therefore, James speaks of faith “being perfected” by Abraham’s works, he does not mean that works supplied something alongside faith, that faith inherently lacks (Jas 2:22). Faith came to its own perfection by means of works. James understands Genesis 15:6 in prophetic terms: the sacrifice of Isaac was the fulfillment of the Scripture that announced Abraham’s faith in God (Jas 2:23). Faith has a course to run, deeds that it must do in the world. As James makes clear at the very outset of his letter, faith necessarily undergoes testing so that those who believe may come to perfection (Jas 1:2-4). Consequently, James freely draws the conclusion that the justification of Abraham, Rahab, and all others is by works (Jas 2:21; Jas 2:24; Jas 2:25).<sup>34</sup> His formulation is important: he does not say that they were justified “by faith and works,” but that they were justified by works alone. James’s concluding illustration of the body and the spirit sheds light on his language at this point (Jas 2:26). When describing the basis or substance of salvation, James speaks of faith, which he calls “the body.” When, however, he views salvation in its completeness and perfection he speaks of the works that justify, “the spirit” that makes the body something more than a corpse. He certainly does not suppose that works in themselves justify, despite his bold language. The works that justify are never alone, but are an outworking of faith, which is present with them: “You see that

a person is justified by works, and not by faith alone” (Jas 2:24). This point becomes especially clear in James’s example of Rahab, whom he explicitly calls “the harlot” (Jas 2:25). She obviously was not justified on account of her occupation, but on account of the works in which her faith was present. Both James and Paul understand justification as the justification of the ungodly.

For James as well as Paul, the faith that leads to justification arises from the saving word of God.<sup>35</sup> The promise made to Abraham lies behind the Genesis narrative (Jas 2:23). The spies whom Rahab received were “messengers,” who implicitly brought the announcement of coming judgment (Jas 2:25). Furthermore, the justification that Abraham and Rahab experienced took place at the point of crisis. In accord with Jewish tradition, James speaks as if Abraham completed the act of sacrifice, “offering up Isaac upon the altar” (Jas 2:21).<sup>36</sup> Rahab was delivered from the destruction of Jericho, when she “received the messengers and sent them out by another way” (Jas 2:24). These points of crisis arose from God’s contention with the world. This is most apparent in the conquest of Jericho, in which divine judgment falls on the inhabitants of the land. But it is also present in James’s appeal to Abraham, who in being justified came to be called “a friend of God,” and therefore an enemy of the world (Jas 2:23).<sup>37</sup> The experiences of justification by Abraham and Rahab were prolepses of the day of judgment, which now stands immediately before the Church (Jas 5:9).

In this light, James and Paul vary in their understanding of justification only in their emphases. Both understand that salvation is by faith, of which the risen Christ is the source and basis. Both

understand that at the last judgment justification take place according to works. Both understand that these works belong to faith, and that they are God's works, not our own.<sup>38</sup> Both understand that this justification at the last judgment will be a justification of the ungodly. Both understand justification as the triumph of God over the world. Both understand that the final judgment is present here and now in justification of those who believe. They differ only in that James is concerned to describe the character of saving faith itself, and not its source and basis. Paul elaborates the theme that James presupposes, namely, the crucified and risen Christ who dwells in faith and is its object. Paul speaks of Christ's cross and resurrection as the prolepsis of the final judgment. James speaks of God's past vindications of justifying faith as prolepses of the final judgment, finding examples of these in Abraham and Rahab, just as he elsewhere appeals to the "prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord" as models of patience and final blessing (Jas 5:10-11). The two cohere in that they both understand that Christ is the word of God which at once saves us and in saving us calls us to obedience.

Not only is the second commandment fulfilled in faith, but the first and primary commandment that we should have no other gods before the Lord is fulfilled here in faith as well. Faith is not abstract or general, but is fixed upon the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ: "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe with your heart God raised him from the dead you shall be saved" (Rom 10:9). As we noted earlier, in laying hold of the crucified Christ, faith gives God justice, acknowledging his righteous contention that we are liars and idolators.

We believe in Jesus who was delivered up for *our* transgressions (Rom 4:25). With Paul we confess that "he loved me and gave himself up for *me*" (Gal 2:20). Like Abraham and David after him we believe in the one who justifies the ungodly (Rom 4:5). In so believing we acknowledge that we are the ungodly ones who require such a justifier. We are the sick, who require a physician. We are the wretched tax-collectors who must cry out, "God be merciful to me the sinner!" Like Peter who was silenced, and finally allowed Jesus to wash his feet, faith is passive toward God and merely receives what he has given and done in Jesus Christ. Yet this passivity is precisely the first and primary obedience that God requires of us, to acknowledge the truth of his word, which charges that there is no one of us who understands, no one of us who seeks for God (Rom 3:9-20; Psalms 14, 53). Faith fulfills the first commandment in that it lets God be God, and allows his claim against us to stand. As Paul makes clear, Abraham's faith was an act of obedience toward God the Creator, who "makes alive the dead and calls into existence the things which are not" (Rom 4:17).

### **Conclusion**

We have not "solved" the biblical paradox that we are justified by faith in Christ alone, and yet shall be judged according to our works. We rather have come face-to-face with the saving work of God in Jesus Christ, at which we shall wonder into all eternity. The biblical tension has no solution, only resolution in Christ crucified and risen *for us*. The works that God shall judge in us are not our own in the proper sense, but those of the risen Christ who has been given to us in faith. These

works spring from the judgment that has been passed on us already in Jesus Christ. They are the fruit of a justification already given. These works, moreover, are nothing more than faith at work, the apprehending of Christ's work in situation after situation of daily life. They are, as Paul says, the "reckoning" that we have died to sin, but are alive to God in Christ Jesus. This faith does not seek the grace of God in our pious moments, when we feel ourselves to be especially good. This faith, if it is faith at all, knows to pray in the midst of sin, difficulty and failure, that is, in those rare occasions when we vaguely sense what we are before God. Faith also knows that the cry of wretchedness, if it is an expression of faith and not mere self-torment, must be followed immediately by the shout of joy, "Thanks be to God, through Christ Jesus our Lord!" This is the obedience which before all else God demands from us, that we see the crucified Christ as the "earnest mirror" in which we and our sins are reflected, and that we grasp the justifying verdict of God our Creator manifest in Christ's resurrection for us. The Reformational understanding of justification to which we are heirs hangs simply on this, that we find all our righteousness outside ourselves in Jesus Christ who has been given to us in faith. We have this righteousness in him, but we do not yet possess it, and shall not possess it until we are raised from the dead. Faith, therefore, cannot be separated from hope. It is a constant turning of the heart and life toward that which is yet to come, a forgetting what lies behind and looking forward to what lies ahead (Phil 3:13): "We, through the Spirit, by faith are waiting for the hope of righteousness" (Gal 5:5). The one good work that God requires of us according to Paul, is

that we seek after the glory, honor, and immortality that we do not have. They are found in God the Creator alone, who has been revealed to us nowhere but in the crucified and risen Christ (Rom 2:7; Rom 4:17, 23-25). It is this seeking that God shall reward on the last day. In the end, we have been speaking all along about the matter of Christian assurance. The New Testament knows nothing of assurance as a mere psychological state. It knows only of the "boasting," "boldness," and "full confidence" that calls us away from this world of sin and death and into the life of the age to come. This confidence, I will suggest in closing, is the significance of the biblical paradox that we have considered. This is the purpose for which Jesus Christ died and rose again.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>E.g., Matt 7:21-27; John 3:19-21; Heb 6:10; 1 Pet 1:17; Rev 2:23; 20:13; 22:12.

<sup>2</sup>See the survey in Kent L. Yinger, *Paul, Judaism, and Judgment According to Deeds* (Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 105; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 1-16.

<sup>3</sup>So Calvin J. Roetzel, *Judgement in the Community: A Study of the Relationship between Eschatology and Ecclesiology in Paul* (Leiden: Brill, 1972) 176. See Rom 2:6-11; 2:12-16; 2:17-29; 14:10-12; 1 Cor 4:3-5; 2 Cor 5:6-10; Gal 6:4-5; 6:7-10; Eph 6:8; Col 3:24-25.

<sup>4</sup>Rom 2:6-11; 14:10-12; Gal 6:7-10; 1 Thess 5:9.

<sup>5</sup>E.g., Michael Eaton, *No Condemnation: A New Theology of Assurance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995) 175-185.

<sup>6</sup>E.g., Matt 5:5; Mark 10:17; Rom 4:13; 8:17; 1 Cor 15:50; Heb 6:12; Jas 2:5; 1 Pet 1:4; Rev 21:7.

<sup>7</sup>We may think in particular of the par-

able of the laborers in the vineyard, Matt 20:1-16.

<sup>8</sup>Eph 4:32; Col 3:13.

<sup>9</sup>So, e.g., Yinger, 283-291.

<sup>10</sup>See also Deut 4:1-2; 5:29; 6:1-5; 8:1; 10:12-13; 13:4, 18; 17:19-20; 26:16-17; 28:1-2, 15; 30:4-10; 31:12-13.

<sup>11</sup>In this encounter Jesus exposes the failure of the young man to obey the first commandment, that is, to have no other gods before the Lord, despite his remarkable external conformity to the Law. At that moment, love toward God was to be expressed in discipleship to Jesus, into which the young man was unwilling to enter (Mark 10:21-22). Jesus takes the same stance in the Sermon on the Mount, when he warns his disciples that “unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20). Indeed, he calls them to “be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48).

<sup>12</sup>See also the question on the greatest commandment of the Law, Mark 12:28-34; Matt 22:34-40.

<sup>13</sup>See also Num 15:22-31.

<sup>14</sup>See, e.g., Isa 1:10-17; Amos 5:21-24; Hos 6:6; Mic 6:6-8. Much like the prophets before him, Jesus regards the rectification of a wrong done to a brother as having priority over any offering given to God. Unless the disciple is reconciled with his brother, his offering is to no avail (Matt 5:21-26). Love for the neighbor does not here become an ideal but remains an unmitigated demand, even in the face of a temporary lapse.

<sup>15</sup>In Matthew’s Gospel, where Jesus

twice makes appeal to the words of the prophet Hosea, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (Hos 6:6), he accepts the equation his contemporaries made between deeds of obedience and the sacrificial system (Matt 9:13; 12:7). This extension of the Temple cult has its precedents in earlier Jewish literature (e.g., Sir 3:3; 3:30-31; 35:1-13; 45:23), and was undoubtedly furthered by the Pharisaic movement. In the larger context of Matthew’s Gospel Jesus’ appeal to the prophet Hosea carries unmistakably overtones of fulfillment and supersession of the sacrificial system, placing him on the same ground as the author of Hebrews.

<sup>16</sup>In the earlier part of the verse, Paul alludes to Ps 116:11, “every human being is a liar.”

<sup>17</sup>Rom 2:5; 3:5; 1 Thess 1:10.

<sup>18</sup>We meet it in a similar form in John’s Gospel, according to which the time of judgment, the confrontation between the fallen world and its Creator has arrived in Jesus, the incarnate Word. See especially John 3:18-21; 9:39-41; 12:27-33.

<sup>19</sup>Cf. Rom 6:6; 1 Cor 1:26-31; Gal 5:24; 6:14. As we can see from this brief citation, it is the Law of God that gives Christ’s cross its punitive significance. Indeed, this is the primary purpose of the Law as it appears in Paul’s letters. The Law brings wrath, condemnation and death, in order that we might have life (Rom 4:15; 2 Cor 3:4-11). It has imprisoned all things under sin, in order that the Son of God might come to redeem us: “When the fulness of time came, God sent forth

his Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that he might redeem those under the Law, that we might receive the instatement as sons” (Gal 4:4-5). See Gal 3:21. Not only does the Law interpret the cross, the cross interprets the Law. In statements such as these, Paul does not suppose that the Law thereby effects a psychological preparation for the gospel. He rather understands it to provide the context for the cross.

<sup>20</sup>Here, as is so often the case, Jesus’ words seem to anticipate the message of Paul: “Truly, truly I say to you, the one who hears my word and believes the one who sent me has eternal life and does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24).

<sup>21</sup>Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. and ed. G. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 177.

<sup>22</sup>In this respect, too, the Law provides the basis for Paul’s thought. As Paul indicates by appeal to the Law’s regulation of marriage, the authority of the Law ends with our death (Rom 7:1-6). According to its own precept, once the sentence of death has been passed upon us, relationship to it has been severed (Gal 2:19; cf. Rom 6:14; 1 Cor 9:20; Gal 3:25; 4:5; 4:21).

<sup>23</sup>See Timothy F. Lull, ed., *Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 46-47.

<sup>24</sup>Gal 5:16-26.

<sup>25</sup>In 1 Corinthians 4:5 Paul speaks in an even more pronounced way of the day of judgment as a day of revelation: “(the Lord) shall bring to



light the hidden things of darkness and shall make manifest the intents of hearts. And then each one's praise shall come to them from God" (1 Cor 4:5).

<sup>26</sup>See also Rom 2:27-29; 14:10-12.

<sup>27</sup>We should not forget that Paul pronounced a curse on those who were offering a "gospel so-called" that supposed such works had to supplement the work of Christ (Gal 1:6, 9)

<sup>28</sup>This final passage, we may suggest, represents a prolepsis of the day of judgment itself.

<sup>29</sup>See also Gal 5:13-15.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Gal 2:20; 2 Cor 10:3.

<sup>31</sup>See Mark Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification* (Leicester/Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000/2001) 138-139, from which I am citing a brief section.

<sup>32</sup>See Seifrid, 179-183.

<sup>33</sup>The verb *synergō* bears the sense of concursive action as in Rom 8:28 and 1 Cor 6:2, as is confirmed by James's subsequent illustration of faith as the body and works as the spirit (Jas 2:26).

<sup>34</sup>On James's understanding of the Law, see Timo Laato, "Justification According to James: A Comparison with Paul," *Trinity Journal* 18 (1997) 47-61. I would only add that in my view James does not view the (eschatological) "law of freedom" (Jas 1:25; 2:12) and the "kingdom law" (Jas 2:8) as the continuation of the Law that condemns us as transgressors, but as the transcendence of it (Jas 2:11; cf. 2:12-13).

<sup>35</sup>On the broader implications of this theme in James, see Laato, 47-61.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. Heb 11:17-19.

<sup>37</sup>Cf. Jas 4:4; 5:1-6.

<sup>38</sup>Even for James, these are qualitatively different from human works, by which we might hide our ungodliness in boasting.

# The *SBJT* Forum: Key Points in the ECT Debate

*Editor's note:* Readers should be aware of the forum's format. Thomas J. Nettles, James White, Mark Dever, and John Armstrong have been asked specific questions to which they have provided written responses. These writers are not responding to one another. The journal's goal for the Forum is to provide significant thinkers' views on topics of interest without requiring lengthy articles from these heavily-committed individuals. Their answers are presented in an order that hopefully makes the forum read as much like a unified presentation as possible.

**SBJT: Are there historical precedents to encourage hope that evangelical/Roman Catholic dialogue might have positive results?**

**Thomas J. Nettles:** No one can rule out the possibility, given the power of the gospel, that honest dialogue might benefit the individuals involved. This was the case in the Reformation when Luther defended and expanded his views in the early attempts of the Papacy to bring him to recantation. Notably, the Dominican, Martin Bucer, came under the influence of Luther and embraced the gospel at the Heidelberg Disputation in 1518. After that his zeal for reformation and his influence for the leading principles of the Reformation were immense. Hopefully, some of the Roman Catholics might be led to believe the gospel in the same way.

The best chance for the success of this kind of dialogue in the Reformation occurred during the colloquies of the sixteenth century. A *Colloquy*, as distinct from a *Confutatio* or disputation which aims at victory and an imputation of heresy to one's opponents, focuses on friendly discussion with a view of achieving conciliation. The concept of the colloquy developed at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530 when Melancthon objected to a "devilish"

strategy of John Eck. Eck sought to fix on reformation churches extremist positions he had culled from a number of reformation writings and have those churches denounced as heretical should they not be able successfully to defend those ill-conceived positions. Due to Melancthon's counter strategy, the colloquies used the Augsburg confession as a basis for the discussion.

The participants, appointed by Charles V and including theologians as well as civil rulers, agreed on fifteen articles after brief discussion. On issues such as the doctrine of God, the Son of God, baptism, civil government and the return of Christ they found little reason to dispute. Surprisingly, brief discussion brought substantial agreement on such issues as justification and the freedom of the will. The colloquy at Worms, 1540, brought about agreement concerning the original integrity of humanity in its creation, the cause of sin, and original sin. The agreement included John Eck's explanation that "in baptism the guilt of original sin together with all sins is forgiven through the merits of Christ."

Regensburg of 1541 had the most ambitious agenda and historically advantageous opportunity of all the colloquies.

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At Regensburg, twenty-three articles underwent close scrutiny. Further developments in Reformed thought, particularly through the influence of Calvin's *Institutes*, brought into question the legitimacy of some of the former areas of agreement. Justification was up for discussion again. A carefully worded article on justification gained agreement from many of the participants from both sides. The Roman Catholic participants wanted to avoid the libertarianism they inferred from the Protestant doctrine, while the Protestants wanted to avoid the merit theology they inferred from the Romanists. "The sinner is justified," they agreed, "by a living and effectual faith, for through such faith we will be acceptable to God and accepted for the sake of Christ." Though the participants sought to avoid language that would obscure differences, their efforts to address a commonly held matter, justification, in language emptied of partisan polemics failed to please enough people. In the end, the carefulness of the wording seemed to hide the distinctive assumptions essential for honest theological formulation. Lutheran princes rejected the final document because it implied a slander on the Augsburg Confession; Rome rejected it because it lent itself to different interpretations.

Another important consideration for Baptists in these discussions is that the Zwinglian understanding of the Lord's Supper gained no adherents. All participants conceded that the Anabaptist view of baptism as an ordinance for believers, symbolic and non-sacramental in character, should be rejected as heretical. Baptists are much further from Rome than other evangelicals on ecclesiology and the character of the ordinances. Paedobaptists

of all sorts will come closer to Rome more quickly than historic Baptists; the gravitational pull of paedobaptism always is toward sacramental efficacy. Like Bilbo Baggins's ring, it is restless till it reunites with its owner.

Hopes for amicable discussion and acceptance as equal partners in dialogue ended with the spirit of anathematization that dominated the Council of Trent. By January 1547, the council's longest decree, the one concerning justification, occupied the attention of the theologians. Consisting of sixteen chapters and thirty-three canons of anathema, the decree condemned reformation theology and crystallized the Roman system. Although Protestants agreed with several points of both affirmation and condemnation, the theologians of Trent specifically and emphatically rejected the distinctive doctrine of justification by faith alone by the imputed righteousness of Christ alone. Having earlier, in session four, embraced a dual source of authority including Scripture and unwritten tradition and a single source of authoritative interpretation, "Holy Mother Church," little room for discussion remained but only the necessity of isolating and condemning any views that threatened their laboriously contrived doctrinal hegemony. For them justification includes "the sanctification and renewal of the inward man" by which faith cooperates with good works so that believers "increase in that justice received through the grace of Christ and are further justified." "If anyone says," so goes canon eleven, "that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of Christ or by the sole remission of sin, to the exclusion of the grace and the *charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost. . .*, let him be anath-

ema." Likewise canon twenty-four says, "If anyone says that the justice received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase, let him be anathema."

While the Protestants emphasized the necessity of sanctification and defined carefully the nature of saving faith as a holy and lively faith that works, they refused to admit any of these works, even the holiest, into the arena of justification. The righteousness that justifies is constituted solely by the obedience of Christ. If we are instructed to trust in any degree of our sanctification for the matter of justifying righteousness, we must count our instructors as soul-destroyers. Moreover, we denigrate the full satisfaction of Christ's work and dishonor the Law of God by settling for a standard less than un failing, perpetual, and absolute obedience as constituting true righteousness.

The narrowing process continued with subsequent developments such as the *Syllabus of Errors*, Vatican I (that constituted the doctrine of papal infallibility as dogma), and the increase in Mariolatry in establishing such dogmas as the *Immaculate Conception* and the *Bodily Assumption*. John Paul II, in harmony with the spirit of Vatican II, has removed the atmosphere of anathema and has given an attractive congeniality to the papal persona, but, understandably, remains entirely consistent with historic Roman doctrine. In *Dominus Iesus* he asserts with elegance that the church constitutes a salvific mystery; Christ's salvation comes by means of the Church. This saving church subsists in "the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him." Other ecclesial

communities "not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church" have elements of sanctification in them through apostolic succession, baptism, and a valid eucharist. Their refusal to submit to the papal primacy, which "the Bishop of Rome objectively has and exercises over the entire Church" interrupts their full communion with the true Catholic church. Baptists and like-minded ecclesial communities, are not churches in "the proper sense," and only because they practice baptism are they in a certain, albeit imperfect, communion with the Church. Though one may be impressed with the congeniality of his expressions in the declaration, the Pope's ecclesiastical sacramentalism does not raise confidence in the "evangelical" integrity of the gospel he propounds. None of the three marks mentioned by John Paul II, the succession of bishops, baptismal regeneration, and the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, do Baptists view as having any power for salvation or as in any sense a mark of the true church.

Though the present dialogue recognizes with candor that several, in fact many, "differences and disagreements . . . must be addressed more fully," the rather blunt assertion that "Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ" (13) begs the question. Recognition that historic Catholicism and historic Protestantism maintain Christian theism, trinitarianism, and Christology does not get to the heart of the question, "What is a Christian?" Though the dialoguers encountered a "major difference in our understanding of the relationship between baptism and the new birth," this did not seem to hinder the full confidence that both types of belief constituted saving faith. The issue of salvation brought

on the Reformation and is the clearest distinctive between Protestants and Catholics. Success in the discussion can only mean that evangelicals have compromised doctrinally, minimized the importance of the issue, or so muddled the vocabulary that no one can really be certain about what is affirmed.

The agreement on “Witness” seems to have incorporated a bit of all three of these ominous possibilities. Evangelism, infelicitously labeled “Proselytization” or “sheep stealing” or “recruiting people from another community for the purposes of denominational or institutional aggrandizement,” (52) of Catholics is “neither theologically legitimate nor a prudent use of resources” (53). How stupid of Calvin to send preachers into France to die for the sake of preaching the gospel to those who should be considered “brothers and sisters in Christ.” We are now to believe that this was denominational aggrandizement. How misguided and how imprudent Southern Baptists have been in seeking to evangelize in Mexico, Central America, and South America when any supposed conversions were not conversions at all but just submission to the pressures of “proselytization.” Evangelism in Brazil really amounts only to “sheep stealing” according to the enlightened progress made in evangelical/Catholic dialogue.

If the historical development of ideas has discernible meaning, dialogue cannot bridge the gap that is fixed. Evangelicals and Catholics must remain antagonists on the issue of the gospel, no matter how many other cultural and political issues may provide common ground. As long as this antagonism remains, and the weapons of our warfare are spiritual, conversion remains a distinct possibility. If the

dialogue capitulates to post-modern relativism in which neither words nor history have communicable meaning, conversion becomes impossible. In losing our antagonists, we would lose the gospel.

**SBJT: What is the chief theological issue standing between Roman Catholics and evangelicals?**

**James White:** While the most important division between Roman Catholics and evangelicals concerns the gospel itself (justification by grace through faith alone versus Rome’s sacramental system that mediates grace and makes baptism the initial means of justification), a more fundamental issue is authority. All discussions with Rome regarding justification, grace, faith, sacraments, purgatory, indulgences, or any other relevant issue, boil down, in the final analysis, to the authority claims of Rome, which clash directly with the authority claims of the written Word, the Scriptures.

Nothing substantive has changed since the Reformation. Just as the “material” principle of the Reformation was justification by faith alone, so too the “formal” principle was *sola scriptura*, the ability and sufficiency of the Scriptures to function as the sole *infallible* rule of faith for the Church. The changes since the Council of Trent (1546-1564) are cosmetic in nature: Rome is not nearly as strident in her official language and posture. Meanwhile non-Catholics have become distracted by a myriad of other issues, so that precious few are *passionate* about the very basis of their theology and proclamation. And why should they? Surveys show that the door still swings widely away from Rome and toward evangelicalism, especially in traditionally Catholic ethnic groups, such as among Hispanics. Does it not make

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sense to be conciliatory and non-offensive, given that the battle really does not seem to be taking place on this portion of the battlefield any longer?

In reality, the battle rages on, whether the majority of those on both sides are intent upon ignoring it or not. Entire divisions of the respective armies may be away on theological retreats, but that does not mean the battle has been decided. Roman Catholic apologists have launched a counter-offensive that is often effective because the average evangelical is unprepared to defend the need to ground one's beliefs in the Scriptures *alone*. Assuming that their nominal Roman Catholic neighbors represent the entirety of Catholic experience, many an evangelical has been blindsided by the zealous Catholic witness who challenges them to demonstrate their belief in *sola scriptura* from Scripture itself. Throw in a few challenging passages (2 Thess 2:15, Matt 23:1-2) and a handful of normally context-less citations from ancient Christian writers, and many find themselves far outside their element.

Over the past decade, no less than five works explicitly attacking the doctrine of *sola scriptura* have been widely distributed. One of these, a collection of essays by various authors, exceeds six hundred pages. While they all lack serious exegetical and historical merit, such that the biblical exegete and historian can detect numerous cases of question-begging and simple anachronism, their potential impact on their target audience—evangelicals in the pew—is immeasurable. Their explicitly stated desire is to remove the evangelical's confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture, outside of an infallible Magisterium with access to "divine tradition" (however that is defined), and replace it with an equally implicit trust in

the infallible authority of Rome, headed, they claim, by the direct successor of Peter in Rome.

It is not as if these claims of Rome have not been dealt with dozens of times in the past. Yet the average evangelical is hard-pressed to locate a copy of Whitaker's *Disputations on Holy Scripture* or Goode's *The Divine Rule of Faith and Practice*, even if they knew to look for such monumental works. Thankfully, modern authors have taken up the cause, and the recent publication of the Webster & King three-volume work, *Holy Scripture, the Ground and Pillar of Our Faith*, fills a major need. Yet, surely one will not find this work sitting next to the *Left Behind* series on the best-selling charts at the local Christian bookstore. Many pastors are likewise unaware of available resources. It is thus vital that sound teaching be maintained in our seminaries and colleges.

There may well be another reason for the decline in the zealous belief, defense, and propagation of *sola scriptura*. This doctrine presupposes the *highest* view of Scripture itself, which view has been eroded in much of Protestantism in the wake of the rise of modernistic liberalism. Those who do not believe that Scripture is *theopneustos* will hardly be in a position to defend its sufficiency to guide Christ's Church as the very embodiment of His voice and authority in her midst. It falls, then, to a narrower spectrum of "evangelicals" to engage the battle and once again defend and establish the supremacy of Scripture in matters of faith and doctrine. To believe that God speaks in Scripture literally demands that one then cannot remain silent when other alleged "voices" are offered to the Christian people. *Sola scriptura* is the logical and necessary continuation of our affirmation

of the inspiration and authority of God's Word.

Rome's denial of the sufficiency of the Scriptures, coupled with her claim to possess "apostolic tradition" within the context of an "infallible magisterium" creates a *de facto* position of *sola ecclesia*, the Church as the final and sole authority. This is the foundational apologetic issue between evangelicals and Roman Catholics, and there is no evidence that Rome intends to abandon her claims regarding tradition. We must, then, continue to defend the life-blood of biblical theology, *sola scriptura*.

**SBJT: What is the biblical doctrine of imputation and why is it important?**

**Mark Dever:** Through his Word, God teaches us that sometimes he accounts the guilt or righteousness of one to another. This is called imputation. And, in no small part, the Reformation was all about clarifying this very point. If you don't understand imputation, you don't understand the evangelical faith. A failure to grasp the biblical doctrine of imputation is a failure to grasp the gospel.

The Hebrew family of words *hsb* meaning to reckon, account, affirm or consider was sometimes translated "impute" in the Authorized Version. We find the idea most clearly in Genesis 15:6 when Abram believed God and God *credited* (or *counted*, AV) it to him as righteousness. This is the *locus classicus* for the Bible's teaching of imputation. Here we clearly see God observing Abram's trust in God's word of promise, and counting it, imputing it to Abram as righteousness.

Again, David in Psalm 32:2 celebrates the condition of being one "unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity" (AV). While the NIV and ESV have decided to

render this by the simpler idea of "count" (as the AV did in Genesis), the RSV/NRSV family has kept the older language of imputation. Either word conveys the idea.

In the Septuagint and in the New Testament, the idea of imputation is expressed in the Greek word *logizomai*. In the New Testament *logizomai* occurs 40 times, almost half being citations from the OT (i.e., the LXX). And the meaning is again to account or reckon.

Paul most frequently uses this word in Romans, especially in chapter 4 where he gives an extended meditation on Abraham as the father of our faith. Taking Genesis 15:6 as his springboard, Paul considers how it is that "when a man works, his wages are not *credited* to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is *credited* as righteousness" (Rom 4:4-5). Paul proceeds to cite Psalm 32:2, saying that David was also an example of a blessed man because his faith was credited to him as righteousness. Or, to say it in another way, righteousness is imputed when believers are "fully persuaded that God has power to do what he had promised. This is why 'it was credited to him as righteousness.' The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Rom 4:21-24).

This biblical teaching about imputation is important for us as Christians in a number of ways, most significantly, in our understanding of our sin, Christ's atonement, and our justification. Let's look at those each briefly in turn.

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### **Imputation Important in Understanding Our Sins**

The Bible's teaching on imputation affects how we understand our sins. In what sense are humans sinful? Are we sinful only because of our own sins? Are we sinful only because of our own sinful nature? Or, is the sin of Adam actually accounted our sin? Are we punished for Adam's sin?

According to the Bible, Adam's sin is actually imputed to us. Romans 5:12 says, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned . . . ." So through Adam's sin we all sinned (*hēmarton* is in the aorist and suggests a past completed action). Again, in Romans 5:19 we find that "through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners . . . ." Both the inclination to sin and the guilt of Adam's sin are part of what Christians have traditionally called "original sin." Imputation has to do not with the corruption, but only with the guilt of Adam's sin being put to our account. Commenting on this verse Douglas Moo has said that "Adam, like Christ, was a corporate figure, whose sin could be regarded at the same time as the sin of all his descendants."<sup>1</sup> That this doctrine is offensive to many is clear. That it is biblical seems equally clear.

The imputation of Adam's sin to us is very significant. If God the Father views Adam's sin as belonging to us, then it does! In fact, this is how Paul explains the universality of death—it is because of our first father's sin. That everyone born dies proves that everyone has been implicated in Adam's sin. How much more amazing does this make Christ's love for us? He died for us "while we were yet sinners"

(Rom 5:8), and that includes those of us alive today as well, for he regarded us, too, as sinners in Adam. How fruitless does this make our questions about the possibility of salvation apart from the gospel of Christ? We don't need to look for people who are perfect, or devise theories about "good pagans who have never heard" because by definition (apart from Jesus Christ) no one is born in this fallen world who is finally and fully good. We are all willing co-conspirators in Adam's rebellion.

### **Imputation Important in Understanding Christ's Atonement**

The Bible's teaching on imputation also affects how we understand Christ's atonement. How could Christ bear the penalty for our sins? What could our sins have to do with his death?

According to the Bible, our sins are imputed to Christ. The cross of Christ was obviously a place of great physical suffering. We also understand from our Lord's crying out in the words of Psalm 22:1 (cf. Mark 15:34; Matt 27:46) that God the Father in some mysterious way forsook God the Son. To speak of such high and holy, such deep and tender issues requires the greatest of circumspection and care on our part, but it seems clear that in some way the full fellowship between Father and Son was interrupted.

But why was it so? It was so because "the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. . . . He bore the sin of many" (Isa 53:6, 12). What did it mean for Jesus Christ to "bear" sins that were not his own, that he had not committed? It means that our sins were imputed to him so that Paul could even say under inspiration that the Incarnate Son of God was made to be sin (2 Cor 5:21), and that he became a curse



for us (Gal 3:13). As Peter says “He Himself bore our sins in his body on the tree,” (1 Pet 2:24). God declared that our sins belonged to Christ, and so they did. He, in mercy and grace, accounted our sins to Christ—our voluntary Lamb of God who willingly offered his life for us—and so he was liable for our punishment.

If the imputation of Adam’s sin to us is significant, how much more so the imputation of our sins to Christ. Christ’s sufferings were not endured for himself—they were borne for us. As such, they both demonstrate his love and effect our deliverance, either one of which are tremendous reasons for us to praise God for this divine transference! Never has justice been sweeter than when God ordained to love us so!

### **Imputation Important in Understanding Our Justification**

Finally, the Bible’s teaching on imputation also affects how we understand our own justification. Are we justified because of our own righteousness? Is our faith ultimately the only substitute that God accepts for righteousness? How are we related to Christ in justification?

The Bible teaches that even as Adam’s sins are imputed to us, and our sins are imputed to Christ, so Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us. God reckons us as righteous. And here we return to Paul’s discussion of Abraham’s faith in Romans 4, and his citation of Psalm 32:2. This is why the righteousness we possess as Christians is called a “free gift” (Rom 5:17). God reckons Christ’s righteousness to us. So just as imputation has been at the heart of the Bible’s teaching about original sin and Christ’s atonement, so it is also at the core of understanding our justification.

This is why Paul calls Christ “our righteousness” (1 Cor 1:30; cf. Phil 3:9). This is the most shocking demonstration of the depths of the love of a holy God for sinners. We read in Romans 4:5, “And to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.” This One who justifies the ungodly, is the thrice-holy God! “Holy, holy, holy” is said only about this One (Isa 6:3; Rev 4:8). And it is this Holy One who justifies not those who are made righteous through the infusion of grace (as the Church of Rome teaches) but those who are still ungodly, but who believe. This is the difference that gave us the Protestant Reformation, and this is one significant obstacle to any reuniting of Protestant and Roman Catholic churches.

The significance of Christ’s righteousness being imputed to the believer is incalculable. If it were not so, you and I would be consigned to perdition, eternally lost. But if his righteousness is accounted to us, then we have been ransomed, as the Lord Jesus said he came to do (Mark 10:45; Matt 20:28). For you to be so ransomed, for you to be saved from the penalty of your sins, there is no way but the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to you, O believer.

So, is the Bible’s teaching on imputation important? It is as important as the salvation of your soul, and as the glory of the God who saves by so accounting us righteous. For your own soul’s sake, for Christ’s sake, for God’s sake, study and teach this precious doctrine of God’s just accounting of us as sinners, of our sins to Christ, and of Christ’s righteousness to us.

### **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup>Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (New International Commentary on the

New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 328.

**SBJT: The Roman Catholic Church has consistently maintained that she is *the catholic church*. For this reason other Christians, or what Vatican II called “separated brethren,” can share union with Christ through the mystery of Rome’s life. How do you respond to Rome’s claim regarding her exclusive claim to “catholicity”?**

**John Armstrong:** I believe we must first understand the meaning of the historic word *catholic*. Sadly, evangelicals are often uncomfortable with the word. Some have even deleted the term when reciting the *Apostles’ Creed* by substituting the word “Christian” for *catholic*. This change makes no sense. The framers of the earliest creeds, both the *Apostles Creed* and the *Nicene Creed*, conceived of no other church than the Christian church!

Strictly speaking the Greek word *katholikos* means “general.” The term refers to “what is encompassed by the whole.” By the second century Ignatius of Antioch, a post-apostolic church father, used this word to refer to that from which certain heretics departed. The term was also widely used to refer to the visible church that was both orthodox, in holding to the doctrine of the apostles, and universal, in its missionary purpose. The idea that the term refers only to geographical universality misses an important point. The term *catholic* came to mean a *quality* that exists intrinsically in the church itself, not simply a specific, or universal, presence. The range of meanings found in the first few centuries does not allow *limiting* catholic to a single expression of the church in one place, or to a particular expression of church govern-

ment. This is especially true with regard to one group of churches existing under the rule of one bishop, or a pope. From the earliest biblical and post-apostolic usage, the word “catholic” referred to the reality of Christ’s spiritual body that took expression in a visible form wherever the orthodox Christian faith was truly confessed and practiced. Every church (or congregation) that confessed the ancient faith of the apostles (as revealed in Holy Scripture) was understood to be part of this holy catholicity, distinctly created by the Holy Spirit. (This is why the two earliest creeds, in their Trinitarian approach, both link catholicity to the work of the Holy Spirit!)

Furthermore, the catholicity of the church must be understood in the light of both the Old and New Testaments. The “little flock” (Luke 12:32) to whom Jesus first revealed the special nature of his kingdom were the Jewish inheritors of an ancient hope and of distinct biblical promises. Their hope was earthly and physical—a land, a temple and a distinct future. Jesus demonstrated again and again that these realities were united with the one who has now called his people to be one flock, one holy church. All the promises of God belonged to this church. The redemption of the earth, in this unfolding *historia salutis*, was now understood in terms of Christ’s life and death, Christ’s resurrection, Christ’s ascension and heavenly intercession, and Christ’s coming judgment and the final establishment of his universal kingdom. All who were in Christ were “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (1 Pet 2:9). The evidence of Scripture, as well as the evidence of extra-canonical writing from the early church, is clear: the first readers of the

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New Testament considered the church to be *the people of God*—a multi-ethnic, multi-racial, pluriform fellowship of people “purchased for God with [Christ’s] blood from every tribe, and language and people and nation” (Rev 5:9).

Thus this idea of catholicity was widely stressed in the early decades after Christ’s ascension. There is no serious doubt, unless one falls into one of several historical errors that crop up in history (e.g., Landmarkism among the Baptists), that the New Testament speaks *not* only of particular congregations as the church but of *all* congregations as the church (cf. Ephesians 2-4). Clearly each local church is related vertically to its head, Christ; however, each local church is also related to one another horizontally because of the union believers have with Christ. (This is most clearly evident in John 17.) This pattern is also seen in the letters and writings of important early theologians and ordinary believers, as statements from several early church documents reveal.

Yet this concept of biblical catholicity was challenged even in the earliest days of the church. To an important degree we might say it was lost, or at least confused, as early as the third century. In the light of Ephesians 2:11-22, and the clearly revealed plan of God to make both Jews and Gentiles into “one new man,” we see the intention and design of God’s redemption. As the church expanded into new social and geographical areas it took cultural forms that strengthened its missionary resolve and yet at the same time some of these same forms worked against the church’s inherent catholicity. Both Christopher Dawson, in his classic *The Making of Europe*, and Mike Kelly, in his insightful work *The Impulse of Power*, have argued that by the third and fourth cen-

turies the church at Rome was consciously imitating the organizational structure of the collapsing Roman Empire. The “new” Rome they desired was to be ecclesiastical rather than political. The bishops of the church were “good patriots” who saw the obvious defects of a pagan Rome. They held out hope that the Roman Church would become an “imperial” replacement. Since empires require emperors, the doctrine of the papacy was eventually needed to guide the effort. In spite of the pattern seen in Acts 15, where amazing efforts were made to preserve the visible unity of the church’s catholicity, a few centuries after these biblical high points cultural, rather than biblical, patterns began to determine church practice. Sadly, by forfeiting a biblical response to the Jews after 70 A.D., the church lost another vital element of the visible expression of its inherent catholicity even before the end of the first century.

What then happened to the earliest concept of catholicity? It underwent development and change. No one seriously questions this. Rome claims that these changes were a necessary part of what constituted the “holy catholic church” in its development of dogma and its essential essence. By this argument Rome further insists that she alone is the *catholic* church. Why? Because she alone has *historical* continuity with the *hierarchical* organization that eventually developed in the ancient city of Rome. (By this means she leaves out the churches of the East as well as all non-Roman Catholic churches in the West!) Shifts that came in the second and third centuries are noteworthy. Ignatius, the third bishop of Antioch, is sometimes cited in this debate because he equated the presence of a bishop with the presence of Christ in a congregation. (Clearly the

sub-apostolic leaders of the church in the second and third centuries were concerned that truth could be twisted in many directions by false teachers, a doctrine itself contained in the New Testament.) Ignatius's quote regarding the church has been stretched in many directions. The danger is that tradition reads into these statements ideas that were only widely *developed* by the third and fourth centuries. What Ignatius plainly does *not* do is correlate the work of bishops with that of apostles, a conclusion reached several centuries later. This conclusion now stands solidly behind Rome's claim to be *the catholic* church because she alone has continuous union with the bishop of Rome and the magisterium, and through the bishop and the magisterium, with the apostles and Christ.

What Ignatius does say is that "wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church" *not* "where the bishop is there is the church." Certainly, he could not conceive of a church without a bishop (a presbyter or pastor) since he believed a bishop was necessary for the worship of a well-ordered congregation. He does not, however, ground the catholicity of the church in bishops, but in the presence of Christ by Word and sacrament.

It is my conviction that the truth of catholicity was meant to underscore the wholeness of the church, both apostolicity in doctrine and holiness in practice. Forms of government were simply *not* the issue in the early concept of *catholicity*. (This does not mean forms of government are irrelevant or unimportant for a local church today.) The fullness of the church is properly understood as inherent in the fullness of Christ, because of the vital union that exists between Christ and his flock. The church, as a specific congrega-

tion in local expression, and as a collection of congregations making up the whole body of Christ visibly represented in the earth, expresses this catholicity when it grows into the fullness of Christ, both in doctrine and practice. Conrad Bergendoff notes: "To identify the catholicity of the Church with a form of government of the third century is to make of a means an end, and to raise to an absolute place what is a relative form."<sup>1</sup> For this reason I do not believe Rome is correct to claim that she alone expresses catholicity in the earth. This claim is far too narrow, far too limited and far too sectarian to be rooted in either the world of the Bible or that of the earliest creeds and confessions of the Christian Church.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Conrad Bergendoff, *The One Holy Catholic Apostolic Church* (Rock Island, IL: The Augustana Book Concern, 1954) 64.



# Book Reviews

*God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism.* By Bruce A. Ware. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001, 240 pp., \$15.99, paper.

The origin of this book is traceable to three lectures given at Western Seminary in Portland, Oregon, in 1999. The aim of this book by Southern Seminary's Bruce Ware is to set out the basic tenets of open theism and to evaluate them. Open theism is the view that specific, complete divine sovereignty and human freedom are incompatible. This means that God only has partial knowledge and control of the future, so that the future is open, at least to some extent. The task of this book is accomplished in three main sections.

Part One is a summary of the central beliefs of open theism and their supporting evidence. Open theists believe that the classical Arminian understanding of divine providence is inadequate. The classical understanding of God's complete knowledge of the future is without ground. Further, they hold that such knowledge of the future is incompatible with human freedom. Finally, simple foreknowledge of the future is no benefit to God in controlling that future. Ware follows this with an excursus on middle knowledge.

The support for such a view of God is found along five lines of argument. First, this is the only way in which the divine-human relationships portrayed in the Bible can be meaningful. Second, God has created creatures who are genuinely free and thus beyond his complete control. God has taken significant risks in the creation of such a world. Third, biblical state-

ments about the repentance of God do not have to be taken as anthropomorphisms; rather, they may be taken as cases of genuine repentance in light of new information. Fourth, open theism is able to understand straightforwardly statements in Scripture that God reassesses his plan in the light of new and unforeseen developments. Fifth, God's response to human suffering and pain is genuine. He wishes things would be otherwise.

Part Two is an evaluation of the biblical, theological, and philosophical arguments for open theism. Ware argues that the Bible teaches that God has exhaustive, comprehensive knowledge of all things including the future, that he is not a risk taker but has all things under his control, and that these truths are the ground for claiming that God is all-wise.

Part Three examines the consequences of open theism on a believer's daily life in three areas: prayer, direction and guidance, and pain and suffering. Defenders of open theism claim that their understanding of God has benefits for each of these areas of a believer's daily life. Ware argues that that is not the case. Perceived benefits do not exist. As a matter of fact, the real benefits are on the side of the classical view of God. Ultimately, open theism diminishes the glory of God.

How successful is Dr. Ware in showing that open theism ought to be a concern to those desirous of sound theology? Undoubtedly one's preunderstanding will influence one's assessment of this question. I am in theological agreement with Ware, so I find what he has to say both correct and convincing. I wholeheartedly recommend this book to anyone who

is interested in knowing what open theism is and what objections might be raised to it. I do think, however, that it is possible to set out at least three issues on which open theism depends. First, open theists depend on a certain view of human freedom called *libertarian* freedom. On this view of freedom, for an act to be free the agent must have contra-causal power. That is, the agent must be able either to do or refrain from that act. It is insufficient for the agent simply to will it. If God knows the future, including free acts, then either the agent must do what God knows or it is within the agent's power to cause God to have a false belief. Open theists, middle knowledge proponents, and classical Arminians all hold this view of human freedom. Compatibilist freedom is the alternative. It is the view that specific sovereignty or providence is compatible with human freedom. For an act to be free all that is necessary is that it be willed by the agent without external constraint. From a philosophical perspective either is possible. In my judgment compatibilist freedom is required from a biblical point of view.

Second, does the Bible teach that God has exhaustive knowledge, not only of the past and the present, but also of the future? Another way of putting this is, how does the Bible define omniscience? For the future to be open God must not know a good deal of the future. Furthermore, biblical prophecy in many cases must be reinterpreted. I find these reinterpretations to be entirely inadequate.

Third, one must decide the adequacy of classical Arminianism. Open theism is a radical revision of Arminianism in the light of the aforementioned problems. On this matter I think that open theists are right about the problem, but wrong in

their solutions. It is for that reason that I favor a Reformed understanding of divine providence, as does this helpful book by Bruce Ware. I hope the book enjoys a wide readership.

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*World Christian Encyclopedia*. Second edition. Edited by David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, vol. 1 vi + 823 pp., vol. 2 xii + 876 pp., \$295.00.

When the first edition of this work appeared in 1982, it was lauded as a monumental achievement of research, useful for mission strategists, church historians, and teachers of world religions and cults. My copy was bought for me by my wife as an anniversary present (that's a wife who understands a theologian!), and I made extensive use of it over the years, especially after I began teaching world religions and cults.

The problem with such a book, of course, is that it soon becomes dated, requiring a new edition (and a new investment). This new edition is about twice the size of the original, and is loaded with new features, such as an atlas, and special sections in which information can be seen at a glance (needed in a work so voluminous) on religions of the world ("Religiometrics"), cultures of the world ("Ethnosphere"), language profiles ("Linguametrics"), and overviews of major cities ("Metroscan"), and provinces ("Provincescan"). Whatever one may think of the postmodern neologisms used to designate these categories, the respective sections are quite helpful.

In addition, all of the demographic data have been brought up to date. The volume follows a country-by-country survey of living conditions, lifestyle, religious orientation, Christian impact, types of churches, and so on of each country and territory in the world. The information is presented in graphic form, and is easy to read and digest, though the type is small—a complimentary magnifying glass would have been nice. Each section ends with a brief discussion of “Future trends and prospects.”

It is hard to overemphasize the value of such a work. All libraries will need immediately to obtain this important new tool, as will many individuals who teach in the areas of missions, world religions, church history, and cults. Put in your request for next year’s Christmas present early, or skip a couple of dozen lunches till you can afford to pick this one up.

Chad Owen Brand