

# Evangelicals and Catholics Together *at Twenty*

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VITAL STATEMENTS ON CONTESTED TOPICS

EDITED BY Timothy George AND  
Thomas G. Guarino



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# Preface

J. I. PACKER

When in 1994 the launching statement *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* was published, envisioning active consensus and collaboration on the kingdom issues of discipling and community, howls of negativity went up from Evangelical isolationists. These critics were reacting in light of their recall of days when Rome seemed bent on political as well as religious control and seemed to be seeking the death of Protestantism as a heretical excrescence. They saw Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) as a subversive Roman Catholic power play and accused some who endorsed it of forgetting what Rome stood for, or, while knowing, going theologically soft about it, or perhaps signing the launching statement without reading it.

But the era that this thinking represented is past, and Vatican II has slammed the door on it, ensuring that it cannot return. Today, so I urge, partnership between historically affirming Evangelicals and historically affirming Roman Catholics for communicating Christ to unbelievers and upholding Christian order in an increasingly post- and sub-Christian world, up to the limit that individual convictions

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allow, does indeed need to grow everywhere, as ECT has insisted from the start. The centuries-old question, “Where do we differ?” has not of course gone away, but ECT’s role is urgently to explore the new question: “How much agreement—doctrinal, ethical, spiritual, ecclesial, and perspectival—can we muster for cooperation in fulfilling the Great Commission, the kingdom task that Christ has given to us all?” In pressing this question, which has surely come to stay, ECT maintains a ministry that in my view is truly prophetic.

Perhaps I should not have been so surprised as I was by the heat of initial negative Protestant reaction. Years back, it dawned on me that fear is a stronger motivating factor in North America than is ever acknowledged. The sitting-on-a-volcano feeling is very American and is easily exploited. And fear clouds the mind, breeds inertia, generates defensive responses that drive wisdom out of the window, and thus keeps people from taking the long view about matters of principle. Also, church communities that are conservative about the contents of the Christian faith tend to react conservatively to any new policy proposals; and ECT is, from one standpoint, a novel policy proposal. So it was perhaps to be expected that there should have been, and will be still, deep suspicion of ECT’s program.

As one who was a committed participant in ECT for its first two decades, until old age ruled out the traveling involved, and who still from the sidelines cheers the project on, I count it a privilege here publicly to welcome this consolidated reprint of ECT’s first nine documents. While not infallible (nobody claims that), these statements seem to me to be model resources for the grassroots “cobelligerence” (Francis Schaeffer’s word) that Evangelicals and Catholics should henceforth be practicing together, identifying common enemies (unbelief, sin, cultural apostasy) and countering them cooperatively up to the limit that conscience permits. The so-called Lund principle, formulated decades ago in light of Jesus’s high-priestly prayer for the active, visible unity of all his disciples, lays it down that ecclesiastically divided Christians should not settle for doing separately anything that they can in good conscience do together, and I see ECT as a noteworthy instance of the Lund principle being put into practice. With thanks to God and prayer for continuance, I hereby commend it as such.

# Preface

TIMOTHY CARDINAL DOLAN,  
ARCHBISHOP OF NEW YORK

The summer of 2014 featured several key encounters between Pope Francis and Evangelical Protestants. The Holy Father hosted influential pastors for a morning of conversation that extended over lunch, and he traveled to an Evangelical congregation in Caserta, Italy, where he visited the pastor in his home and preached in his church. These novelties reflect something of what it means to have a pope from the new world. If the ecumenical priorities of Europe look toward the Orthodox and toward the ecclesial communities of the Reformation—Anglicans, Lutherans, Calvinists, and so forth—the more frequent ecumenical encounters of a bishop from Buenos Aires are with the various worlds of Evangelical Protestantism.

It is no secret that throughout Latin America there has been tension between Catholics and Evangelical Protestants, as some of the former have become the latter. While in Buenos Aires, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio was notable for *not* pointing an accusatory finger against supposed sheep rustling, but rather inviting an examination of conscience about what Catholics lacked in missionary zeal for

proclaiming the joy of the gospel. Though our division is contrary to the will of Christ, the Holy Father judges it Christ's will that until those divisions are healed, we remain fraternal partners in mission.

That would no doubt please the late Father Richard John Neuhaus and his good friend the late Charles W. Colson, who jointly established *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* in 1994. The encounter we celebrate earned no little criticism twenty years ago. That what was criticized then is now celebrated is largely due to the prophetic courage of those two friends and fellow disciples. Indeed, the greater courage was on Colson's part, as he earned the disapproval even of some of his close collaborators. No doubt his courage was sustained by the friendship he forged with Father Neuhaus, whom I was pleased to hold up in my installation Mass homily (as archbishop of New York) as one of those great New York priests whose impact is felt far beyond our city.

The friendship that made *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* possible ought not obscure the substantive work that these friends and their colleagues accomplished. There is a tendency in ecumenical and interreligious encounters to set aside doctrinal questions, often considered divisive, in favor of good fraternal relations, cooperation on the corporal works of mercy, defense of religious liberty, advocacy of justice, advancement of peace, alleviation of poverty, and witness to the sanctity of life and marriage.

There is much good in all of that, but Colson and Neuhaus advanced the more ambitious proposal that Christians who are serious about overcoming our divisions ought to discuss doctrinal matters precisely to overcome those divisions. To the extent that divisions are the result of confusion or historical arguments no longer burdened by the history that shaped them, real breakthroughs are possible. To the extent that divisions over doctrine are irreconcilable, serious theological dialogue about them has the capacity to deepen appreciation for both sides, as it were, of those particular truths of the gospel that their formulations seek to protect.

Two recent books by leading Catholic authors have suggestive titles—*Evangelizing Catholics* by Scott Hahn and *Evangelical Catholicism* by George Weigel. Is it not the case that we Catholics have learned something about the missionary, evangelizing mandate of



the church from our Evangelical Protestant brethren? Is it not likely that Pope Francis, who repeats insistently that the church exists to form “missionary disciples,” learned something about how Christians can be zealous missionaries and devoted disciples from being close to Evangelical Protestants in Argentina? Surely such Evangelical Protestants have also learned from us Catholics some valuable lessons in this exchange of spiritual gifts, but I would leave it to them to enumerate what they are.

Unafraid of tough questions, ECT has over the course of twenty years addressed serious “church-dividing” questions and thereby helped many Christians to understand that we are not as divided as we may have thought. That is no small service as the challenges facing the entire Christian church are growing more acute, from secularist fundamentalism at home to lethal persecution abroad.

What began twenty years ago in the pages of serious journals may have found a popular counterpart in the words and gestures of Pope Francis and his Evangelical friends. Inspired by the meetings of this past summer, I expect that there will be more encounters between Evangelical Protestants and Catholics. When we meet, what shall we discuss? ECT has provided us with a rich agenda for conversation and, perhaps even more important, a model for how to discuss important things—*first things*, we might say. It is a model, to use the more apt phrase from Ephesians, of how to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15).

At the beginning of ECT, the first statement began by noting that the participants did not speak officially for their communities, but quickly added that they did “intend to speak responsibly from our communities and to our communities.”

Christians in America can be very proud that in Chuck Colson and Richard John Neuhaus we produced two who were able to speak better than most. What they and their collaborators said is a gift for the universal church. Their conversation, we pray, now continues in heaven. It remains for us to continue conversing here below as fellow pilgrims through history.

# Foreword

GEORGE WEIGEL

The project that came to be known as *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* began in a most unlikely place: a Washington cocktail reception, the purpose of which I've long since forgotten. In any event, I was there, and the distinguished Evangelical author Herbert Schlossberg was there. Herb pulled me aside to suggest that, given what was afoot in America in the early 1990s, a much more serious conversation between Evangelical Protestant leaders and Catholic leaders in the United States was imperative. I told Herb I'd think about it, and, as I often did in such circumstances, I called my close friend and collaborator, Father Richard John Neuhaus, to talk it through with him. Father Neuhaus was intrigued; I suggested that he take the lead, given his unique standing among both Evangelicals and Catholics. Father Neuhaus called Chuck Colson, and those two large-scale figures proceeded to invite others into the collaboration that became *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*.

It was a collaboration that few could have predicted thirty-some years before. Many Evangelical Protestants, in those days, were not quite sure that Catholics were really Christians. Catholics, for their

part, had little contact with Evangelical Protestantism, found its talk of being “born again” strange, and sensed the doubts that Evangelicals had about Catholic faith and Catholic piety.

Things began to change, not from the top down but from the bottom up, as Catholics and Evangelicals found themselves cobelligerents in the American culture war. These two communities, historically wary of (and often ill-informed about) each other, found themselves occupying the same foxholes in battles on behalf of the unborn—a wholly unexpected by-product of the abortion license imperiously imposed on the entire country by the Supreme Court in 1973. An old saw has it that there are “no atheists in foxholes.” The drama of the pro-life movement—in its contest with those who occupied the cultural high ground in American public life—demonstrated that foxholes are good places to learn who is, in fact, a brother or sister in Christ. Many misconceptions were cleared away in the process, making an initiative like Evangelicals and Catholics Together possible.

Then there was Pope John Paul II, another factor no one could have anticipated. By the courage and resoluteness with which he preached the gospel around the world, this manifestly evangelical Christian leader inspired Catholics to take Evangelical Protestantism’s passion for mission more seriously. That John Paul II had committed the Church to a “New Evangelization” was yet another providential development drawing Evangelicals and Catholics together, with the pope being acknowledged as one of the great Christian witnesses of our time by no less an Evangelical giant than Billy Graham.

At the outset of Evangelicals and Catholics Together, as the first statement suggests, our primary concern was to offer a common witness to our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, particularly as we approached the Great Jubilee of 2000 and the third millennium of Christian history. Concerned as we were with the moral and cultural foundations of American public life, we were convinced that the most important thing we could do together, amid the confusions of late modernity, was to make a simple profession of faith: Jesus is Lord. And it was in light of his lordship that we wished to read and address the signs of our times. That confession of faith led to a common commitment to mission, for we had come to understand that, while there were grave matters of public policy that Christians had an obligation to

address, the long-term health of the American republic was a matter of ongoing conversion. Together, we sensed that the venerable notion of America as a republic of virtue was giving way to the coarser idea that ours must be a republic of the imperial autonomous self. Only a rediscovery and reclamation of the moral truths on which the founders had staked the American experiment in ordered liberty and the American claim to national independence could reverse the deterioration in our public life.

We understood that there were issues dividing us theologically, and we thought it appropriate to identify at least some of them. But this was not a matter of throat-clearing prior to the “real world” business of the politics of virtue. It was important, we believed, to signal to our respective communities that there were things that we could learn from each other: things that could deepen our common faith in Jesus as Lord and our common witness in the public square. And in identifying what divided us theologically, we also wanted to make a statement to the public culture: that (as Father Neuhaus often put it) “tolerance” doesn’t mean ignoring differences as if differences made no difference; true tolerance means engaging differences in the bond of civility. And in a Christian context, that civility is the bond of charity, the “more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31).

Then, and only then, were we ready to address specific issues in American public life.

What we saw there was challenging, and we tried to identify the deeper roots of the distress that many of us felt about the course of American history. Against the notion that democracy and the free economy are matters of mere mechanics, of getting the institutions right and then letting them run by themselves, we affirmed that it takes a certain kind of people, living certain habits of the heart and mind (or what we called “virtues”), to make free politics and free economics serve the cause of genuine human flourishing. Against the complacency that took freedom for granted, we believed that freedom is never free, and that sacrifice for the common good, not the mere aggrandizement of the self, is essential to maintaining free public institutions. Against the moral relativism that was prepared to concede “your truth” and “my truth” but nothing called “the truth,” we wanted to make common cause in proposing that a truly

just society rested on a secure foundation of culturally affirmed and culturally transmitted moral truths—truths that could be known by reason but were most easily apprehended through the lens of reason informed by biblical faith.

And then there was religious freedom. It seemed to us then, as it has ever since, that religious freedom is the first of human rights and that Evangelicals and Catholics, together, must be champions of religious freedom for all.

There were many other matters on which we found ourselves, at the outset, shoulder to shoulder in the battles of American public life: in defending the unborn, the radically handicapped, and the elderly; in challenging the coarsening of our culture by the violence, promiscuity, and antireligious bigotry that too often characterized popular “entertainment” and self-styled avant-garde “art”; in contesting for an educational system that inculcated the virtues necessary for democratic self-governance to succeed; in lifting up the family as the basic unit of society—the list was quite extensive.

And the urgency with which we assayed the current state of American culture, in itself and in its impact on political and economic life, has not abated over the past twenty years. It has, in fact, intensified.

Evangelicals and Catholics Together has addressed grave issues of public policy over two decades, but that could have been predicted at the outset of this collaboration. What could *not* have been predicted, and what seems in the retrospect of twenty years to have been another providential development, was ECT’s evolution into a forum of serious theological dialogue on contested questions like the meaning of salvation, the role of the Bible in the life of the church, the place of Mary and the saints in Christian life, and the other topics on which we have issued the statements collected in this volume. Here, as at the beginning, we have not sought a false and demeaning least common denominator. Where disagreement continued, it was identified as such. But where agreement, perhaps unexpected agreement, was achieved, we were happy to identify that too and to celebrate common understandings achieved as the result of hard digging through the appropriate sources and frank, fraternal conversation and debate.

I think it's fair to say that the first twenty years of Evangelicals and Catholics Together suggested new patterns for Christian ecumenism in the twenty-first century and beyond. At the moment when the post-Vatican II bilateral ecumenical dialogues that had once seemed to hold such promise—Anglican-Catholic, Lutheran-Catholic, Reformed-Catholic, and so forth—were bogging down as a result of the continued implosion of liberal Protestantism, ECT emerged as a new model of biblically grounded and theologically serious ecumenical encounter that addressed hard issues in a spirit of both scholarship and fraternal charity—and that offered others the witness of genuine ecumenical progress where little seemed possible. We did not claim to speak for the churches, but only to and from our respective communities. In having done so, however, we hope that we have offered something useful for official ecumenical dialogue in the future.

There have been other encounters between Evangelicals and Catholics around the world, and the strength that Christian brethren have found in those meetings, conversations, joint biblical study, and common prayer has been important for the world church in its many manifestations. But I don't think I risk a charge of untoward boasting when I suggest that there has been nothing quite like Evangelicals and Catholics Together for seriousness, for depth of theological encounter, and for genuine results.

My hope and prayer for this book is that it inspires many similar efforts throughout the world. For the cause of Christ can only benefit by deepening the conversation between those Christian communities that take revelation seriously and that are committed to a bold, missionary future in the third millennium.

# A Theological Introduction

TIMOTHY GEORGE AND THOMAS G. GUARINO

The ecumenical initiative known as Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) began two decades ago with a stroke of insight by Chuck Colson and Richard John Neuhaus. Their bold intention was to advance unity and fellowship among Christians by establishing a serious theological dialogue between Evangelicals and Catholics, the two largest Christian groups in North America.

Both men were concerned that religion in general and Christianity in particular were being increasingly relegated to the margins of public life in the United States. Religious faith, the most comprehensive and foundational of all realities, was being consigned to the provincial arena of private devotion and sectarian belief. Colson and Neuhaus argued, however, that the Christian faith is indispensable to understanding and addressing the great issues of the day. Evangelicals and Catholics needed to be fully engaged in the complex social, cultural, and political questions that the nation faced—illuminating them with the truth of the gospel. They concluded that if a common and public witness was to thrive and bear lasting fruit, it needed to be founded on a joint commitment to theological and spiritual unity, a unity for

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which Christ himself prayed (John 17). This fraternal union in Christ was the cornerstone on which ECT was founded.

But there was another element central to the founding of ECT. Tensions between Evangelicals and Catholics had been proliferating in various parts of the world, particularly in South America. Colson and Neuhaus feared that “animosities between evangelicals and Catholics threatened to mar the image of Christ by turning Latin America into a Belfast of religious warfare.”<sup>1</sup> They hoped that a sincere and comprehensive collaboration between Evangelicals and Catholics—a collaboration that honestly faced theological differences—could also offer a useful word to the brethren in South America. A sincere ecumenical dialogue would serve to overcome the “stereotypes, prejudices and conventional ideas” that had been entrenched for decades and, indeed, for centuries.<sup>2</sup>

It was with these goals in mind—to work together for Christian unity and to live together with a deep sense of Christian fraternity—that Colson and Neuhaus founded Evangelicals and Catholics Together in 1994.

## Theological Roots of Ecumenism

But the primordial roots of ECT extend far deeper into history, down to the beginnings of the ecumenical movement. The initial impetus for ecumenical dialogue is normally traced to the International Missionary Conference that convened at Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910. On that occasion, several denominations came together to discuss their common witness to Jesus Christ, with the hope of putting an end to useless and counterproductive rivalries.<sup>3</sup>

After this initial meeting, the “ecumenical movement” continued to grow among mainline Protestant churches. Catholicism initially kept its distance from this initiative, fearing that it would lead to

1. *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1995), xi.

2. *Ibid.*, ix.

3. For a history of the ecumenical movement and an examination of the achievements of various dialogues, see *Celebrating a Century of Ecumenism*, ed. John A. Radano (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012).



relativism, with specific doctrines lost in a misguided attempt to achieve baseline beliefs to which all Christians could subscribe. This was the point of Pope Pius XI's encyclical of 1928, *Mortalium Animos*, in which he warned against "pan-Christianity," fearful that this would lead to a vapid faith, absent distinctively Catholic dimensions. Most Evangelicals also held back from ecumenical efforts represented by the World Council of Churches. They feared that a blending of Christian churches would water down the clear and forceful meaning of the Bible.

Even so, interest in ecumenism persisted. In the 1920s, Catholic and Anglican theologians met in Belgium for what were known as the "Malines Conversations" discussing possible unity between Rome and Canterbury. And in 1937, Yves Congar, later one of the principal theologians at the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), wrote a groundbreaking book entitled *Divided Christendom*, in which he argued for the authentic gifts found in Protestantism and insisted that one could affirm the same biblical truth from different perspectives.<sup>4</sup> Authentic Christian unity was possible without uniformity or compromise.

This accent on a healthy diversity within a foundational unity had been gaining theological favor within Catholicism for decades. In the 1930s and 1940s, for example, theologians argued that differing approaches to the mysteries of faith can, in fact, possess a profound harmony, rooted in the gospel itself.<sup>5</sup> It was precisely in service to this notion of legitimate pluralism that led some theologians to champion the axiom *diversi sed non adversi* (different but not opposed), a maxim indicating that there can be diverse approaches to theological issues without thereby sanctioning adversarial paths.<sup>6</sup> Centuries earlier,

4. See Yves Congar, *Divided Christendom* (London: Centenary, 1939).

5. For example, see M.-D. Chenu, *Le Saulchoir: Une école de théologie* (Kain-lez-Tournai: Le Saulchoir, 1937). A 1985 reprint was issued by Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris. See also Henri Bouillard, *Conversion et grâce chez S. Thomas d'Aquin: Étude historique* (Paris: Aubier, 1944). Of the many recent books on the *nouvelle théologie*, we have found helpful Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

6. See Henri de Lubac, "A propos de la formule: *diversi, sed non adversi*," *Recherches de science religieuse* 40 (1952): 27–40, and Hubert Silvestre, "*Diversi sed non adversi*," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 31 (1964): 124–32. We are grateful to Marcus Plested for bringing de Lubac's essay to our attention.

this Latin phrase had been invoked to argue that the accounts of the four evangelists, while different, are nonetheless fully coherent. In the Middle Ages, the slogan was adduced in order to acknowledge that one may speak of a consensus among early Christian writers (*consensus patrum*) even if these authors displayed some differences in their interpretations of the Scriptures. The fundamental point, once again, is that variety in expression does not necessarily mean incommensurable or opposing positions.<sup>7</sup>

On the Evangelical side, the founding of ECT in the early 1990s would not have been possible without the prehistory that included the catalytic ministries of Harold J. Ockenga and Billy Graham. These leaders were pioneers in forging a new way in American Protestant life in the post–World War II era. The “new evangelicalism,” as it came to be called, found itself engaged in a struggle on two fronts. One was *modernism*, as mainline, liberal Protestantism was called in those days. The other front was known as Romanism, a pejorative term for Catholic Christianity. The post–World War II reformers hoped that a reinvigorated Evangelicalism, shorn of its fundamentalist drag, would both restore true biblical Christianity and rescue American society itself by resisting the forces of modernism/secularism, on the one hand, and Catholicism, on the other. When Colson and Neuhaus proposed the ECT project in the 1990s, both of those fronts looked completely different. Protestant liberalism no longer enjoyed the kind of hegemony it had once claimed in American religion. On the Catholic side, the Second Vatican Council had introduced a renewal of the Catholic Church and made Christian unity a priority. At Vatican II, the Catholic Church entered the ecumenical movement and, by doing so, transformed it.

The council should not be understood simply as an event within the Catholic Church. It should be recognized, rather, as perhaps the greatest ecclesial event of the twentieth century, with profound significance for all Christians. Its *Decree on Ecumenism* (promulgated in November 1964) makes clear that unity with the “separated brethren” is one of the principal and essential goals of the Catholic Church. This

7. Congar pursued this point at great length for the sake of ecumenical unity. See, for example, his *Diversity and Communion*, trans. John Bowden (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1985).

*Decree* (and Vatican II generally) endorsed several specific theological ideas—ideas warmly received by the many Protestant observers and theologians in attendance at the council—which have allowed the contemporary dialogue between Evangelicals and Catholics to flourish.

### Three Themes at the Heart of Ecumenism and of ECT

#### (1) *The Content of the Christian Faith*

One central conciliar theme is that a difference exists between the *content* of the Christian faith and the *modes of expression* used to formulate it. Pope John XXIII explicitly sanctioned this point of view in his speech opening the council on October 11, 1962: “The deposit of faith is one thing, and the manner in which it is expressed is another.”<sup>8</sup> So significant was this distinction that Yves Congar, the great ecumenist, remarked that these few words encapsulated the essential meaning of the council.<sup>9</sup> And this distinction is entirely traditional. Already in the early fifth century, Vincent of Lérins had exhorted Christians: *dicās novē nō dicās novā* (speak in a new way but don’t say new things).<sup>10</sup> The Eastern writer John Damascene endorsed a similar position a few centuries later.<sup>11</sup> And the same idea may be found in the great Reformed theologian Karl Barth reflecting on the Augsburg Confession.<sup>12</sup>

8. “Gaudet Mater Ecclesia,” *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 54 (1962): 792.

9. See Congar, *A History of Theology*, trans. Hunter Guthrie (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 18–19. Giuseppe Alberigo, a significant historian of Vatican II, called John XXIII’s distinction one of the decisive motifs of the council. See “Facteurs de ‘Laïcité’ au Concile Vatican II,” *Revue des sciences religieuses* 74 (2000): 211–25.

10. *Commonitorium*, no. 22. Vincent argues that although the specific words *homoousios* (Jesus is of the same substance as God the Father) and *Theotokos* (Mary is the Mother of God) are not found in the earliest tradition, they perfectly express biblical faith.

11. See John of Damascus, *On the Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 71. Gregory Nazianzen expressed the same thought in the fourth century when he said that there exists “a great deal of diversity inherent in names,” for it is a matter of “meanings rather than words.” See *Oration* 31.24. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas argued that new words are sometimes necessary to express the ancient faith. See *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 29, a. 3, ad 1.

12. “The *Augustana* and the other Reformed confessions did not want to be confessions in so far as they had no new faith to confess—but they were confessions

Authentic pluralism allows for complementary concepts and expressions that throw into relief unseen or overlooked aspects of a doctrine's truth. By admitting that traditional Christian teaching could be expressed in new ways, the council sought to make the faith more intelligible to men and women of the day, to expose previously hidden dimensions of the mysteries of faith, and, crucially, to acknowledge that *the formulations of Protestant and Orthodox Christians might differently, but complementarily, mediate the truth of Christian doctrine as found within Roman Catholicism.*

Vatican II's *Decree on Ecumenism* champions this accent on legitimate diversity when it states, "While preserving unity in essentials, let all members of the Church . . . enjoy a proper freedom in the various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in the variety of liturgical rites, and even in the theological elaborations of revealed truth" (no. 4). The decree insists that a proper understanding of pluralism will give "richer expression to the authentic catholicity and apostolicity of the Church." The underlying issue here is always the same: How can the Christian faith speak robustly and vigorously in every age—the new wine of the gospel always in fresh skins?<sup>13</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, a prominent Reformed theologian who was one of the observers at Vatican II, saw the conciliar distinction between the truth of revelation and its historically conditioned formulation as an important ecumenical advance since one formulation alone could never exhaust the mysteries of faith.<sup>14</sup>

It is just this emphasis on authentic diversity within fundamental unity that constitutes one theological pillar undergirding the work of Evangelicals and Catholics Together. As the original 1994 statement launching ECT affirmed, "Not all differences are authentic disagreements." Differences in theological approaches to the Christian faith

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in so far as they did confess the old faith anew." See *Church Dogmatics I/2*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 627.

13. The entire debate over the context/content approach to theological pluralism is discussed at length in Thomas G. Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 141–67.

14. See G. C. Berkouwer, *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism*, trans. Lewis B. Smedes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 63–64. Berkouwer's ecumenical theology (and his evaluation of Vatican II) is outlined at length by Eduardo Echeverria in *Berkouwer and Catholicism* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

need not inexorably mean opposed positions. Could one speak, for example, about the biblical teaching about justification by faith in a way that preserved both of our traditions, but without compromising either?

## (2) *Scripture and Tradition*

A second theological pillar at the foundation of ECT is the new emphasis on Sacred Scripture that emerged in Catholicism at Vatican II—along with the new accent on tradition found among contemporary Evangelical writers. The council, while clearly affirming the importance of tradition in the life of the Catholic Church, also allowed for the interpretation that one could speak of Holy Scriptures as “materially sufficient” for the truths of salvation.<sup>15</sup> In other words, even though tradition is an essential interpretative key for understanding the divine Word (indeed, the council teaches that “it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty about everything which has been revealed”; *Dei Verbum* [*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*], no. 9), nonetheless, Scripture contains within itself all that is essential for salvation.<sup>16</sup> For most Catholic theologians, then, the Bible contains within itself the entirety of salvific truth, while tradition, the life of the Church under the Holy Spirit, enables the Church to penetrate the meaning and teaching of Scripture more fully and clearly.

Vatican II itself says of Scripture, “Since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted

15. Congar has shown that the notion of the “material sufficiency” of Scripture has a long history in the church, even prior to the Reformation. See *Tradition and Traditions*, trans. Michael Naseby and Thomas Rainborough (New York: MacMillan, 1967), 107–18. For Joseph Ratzinger’s comments on *sola scriptura* and the council, see *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, ed. Herbert Vorgrimler (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969), 3:191–92.

16. Congar rightly states that many Catholic theologians “hold that all the truths necessary for salvation are contained, in one way or another, in the canonical Scriptures.” See *The Meaning of Tradition*, trans. A. N. Woodrow (1964; San Francisco: Ignatius, 2004), 106. See also on Vatican II, Avery Dulles, *Revelation and the Quest for Unity* (Washington: Corpus, 1968), 65–81. The preeminent medieval theologian, Thomas Aquinas, taught, “Canonical scripture alone is the rule of faith” (*Sola canonica scriptura est regula fidei*). See his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, chap. 21, *lectio* 6.

by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation” (*Dei Verbum*, no. 11). One of the principal theological architects of Vatican II framed this primacy of Scripture in unequivocal terms: “Scripture has an absolute sovereignty; it is of divine origin, even in its literary form; it governs Tradition and the Church, whereas it is not governed by Tradition or the Church.”<sup>17</sup> This biblical sovereignty is also reflected in the teaching of Aquinas, who wrote, “We believe the successors of the apostles and prophets only in so far as they tell us those things which the apostles and prophets have left in their writings” (*De Ver.*, q. 14, a. 10, ad 11).

Catholicism’s new accent on Scripture was much welcomed by the distinguished Protestant observers at Vatican II. Karl Barth, for example, appreciated the council’s citation of Jerome’s well-known comment, “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ,” and noted that of the six chapters of the *Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation* (*Dei Verbum*), four of them are dedicated entirely to Scripture.<sup>18</sup> Lukas Vischer, one of the Swiss Reformed observers, remarked about the council’s teaching: “It [Scripture] has authoritative validity, and the Church, in its doctrine and life, must refer to it continually.” While acknowledging that tradition is still central to Catholicism, Vischer stated that “the important thing is that it [the Bible] receives a new validity in the life of the Church. For . . . the really decisive thing is whether the Scriptures are read at all and are allowed to develop the strength within them.”<sup>19</sup> This renewed accent on the primacy of Scripture in the Catholic Church was an important affirmation, one that brought Catholics much closer to their Evangelical brethren.

17. Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, 422. Given this unwavering affirmation of the uniqueness of Scripture, it is unsurprising to read Congar’s comment: “Luther, of course, early on was very strongly convinced . . . of the absolute primacy of Scripture over all other authority, and in that he was completely Catholic” (*ibid.*, 140).

18. Karl Barth, *Ad limina apostolorum* (Zurich: EVZ Verlag, 1967), 51. Barth, prevented from attending Vatican II due to illness, later visited Rome and wrote a brief commentary on the conciliar documents.

19. See Lukas Vischer, “After the Fourth Session of the Second Vatican Council,” *Ecumenical Review* 18 (1966): 150–89, at 155, 157.

This Catholic emphasis on the sovereignty of the Bible was complemented by the growing Protestant recognition that tradition, broadly understood, need not be accompanied by negative perceptions. Over the past few decades, Protestantism has acknowledged that *sola scriptura* cannot be understood simply as an antitradition principle since the Reformers themselves were fully committed to the early Christian confessions of faith. For just this reason, the Evangelical theologian Kevin Vanhoozer has stated that the traditional Reformation phrase *sola scriptura* cannot be understood in isolation: “If *sola scriptura* means ‘the Bible alone apart from the church and tradition,’ it has no future. But this is not what *sola scriptura* means. *Sola scriptura* is a protest not against tradition as such but against the presumption that church tradition (interpretation) and Scripture (text) necessarily coincide.”<sup>20</sup> This reevaluation of the relationship between Scripture and tradition had led some Evangelical theologians to think about *suprema scriptura* as an apposite phrase, one that recognizes the unique value of Scripture while also acknowledging a place for ecclesial tradition. For example, the Baptist theologian James Leo Garrett has stated, “*Suprema Scriptura*, not a quite literal and restricted *sola Scriptura*, provides the most representative and accurate Protestant answer to the question as to the ranking of channels of religious authority. This means that the Bible always ranks and stands above church and tradition, the divine-human encounter, and any other possible channel of religious authority.”<sup>21</sup> In 1995, John Paul II offered a new formulation on the relationship between the Bible and tradition, speaking of “Sacred Scripture as the highest authority in matters of faith and Sacred Tradition as indispensable to the interpretation of the Word of God” (*Ut Unum Sint [That They May Be One]*, no. 79). This statement is a

20. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Scripture and Tradition,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 149–69, at 167. G. C. Berkouwer also argued that *sola scriptura* was not meant to be an antitradition principle. Rather, with this phrase the Reformation wanted “to bind the church with its confessions and its preaching to the apostolic witness,” thereby safeguarding the lordship of Christ over the church and tradition. But “the Reformation call to *sola Scriptura* was not a call to biblicism.” See Berkouwer, *Second Vatican Council*, 107, 101.

21. James Leo Garrett, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, 4th ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1990), 207.

forceful testimony to the primacy of Scripture, while recognizing that tradition can never be regarded as inessential. Whether or not one agrees entirely with any of the above formulations, it is nonetheless clear that a new relationship between the Bible and ecclesial tradition has emerged in both Catholic and Protestant thought.

Of course, it must be remembered that new theological thinking about Scripture and tradition is undertaken not for its own sake but for the purpose of faithfully transmitting the self-manifestation of God that has taken place in ancient Israel and, uniquely, in Jesus of Nazareth. Properly handing on to all generations the truth about God as revealed in Christ and enlivened in the church by the Holy Spirit is a second theological pillar on which ECT has been built.

### (3) *Ecclesia semper reformanda/purificanda*

A third pillar of the Evangelical-Catholic dialogue is the call for ecclesial reform that emerged at Vatican II and, specifically, in the aforementioned *Decree on Ecumenism*. Of course, Protestantism has long been associated with the phrase *ecclesia semper reformanda* (the church always in need of reformation on the basis of the Word of God in accordance with the gospel). At Vatican II, the Catholic Church reprised this crucial theme by insisting that the church is “called by Christ to that continual reformation [*ad hanc perennem reformationem*] of which she always has need insofar as she is an institution of men and women on earth” (*Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 6).

Precisely with this reforming spirit in mind, Vatican II summoned the Catholic Church to remedy any deficiencies that exist in conduct, discipline, and even in the formulation of ecclesial teaching (as opposed to the content of Christian doctrine). To cite the council’s own words: “If, in various times and circumstances, there have been deficiencies in conduct, in church discipline, or even in the way that church teaching has been formulated—which must be carefully distinguished from the deposit of faith itself—these should be appropriately rectified at the opportune moment.”

Similarly, the council spoke of the Church as “at the same time holy and always in need of being purified” and as continually following the path of penance and renewal (*Dogmatic Constitution on the*



*Church*, no. 8). The theologian Henri de Lubac noted that the phrase describing the Church as “holy while at the same time always in need of being purified” (*sancta simul et semper purificanda*) appeared to him—and to others, including the Reformed thinker Jean-Jacques von Allmen—as the expression most suitably reflecting the Church’s duty of continual reform in Christ.<sup>22</sup>

Whichever phrase is chosen as most apt, it is nonetheless clear that at Vatican II the Catholic Church placed a decided emphasis on the need for self-reformation. While the council did not reverse any of Catholicism’s foundational teachings, it issued no anathemas or condemnations. And it certainly spoke with a new accent, expressing the Christian faith in more scripturally oriented formulations. One may discern in the conciliar documents a change of tone and genre, with the Church’s message cast in more biblical and evangelical, rather than juridical or scholastic, terms.<sup>23</sup> This change in emphasis reflected the desire of John XXIII, the pope who convoked Vatican II, that the event mark the beginning of a new Pentecost, with the Holy Spirit poured out on the church anew, renewing its life, preaching, and mission. It is no surprise, then, that Benedict XVI, in an important speech, insisted that while the council certainly did not intend a “rupture” with the past, it clearly did engage in a “hermeneutics of reform.”<sup>24</sup>

These axial conciliar themes—legitimate diversity within unity, a renewed relationship between the Bible and tradition, and the call for ecclesial reform—received virtually unanimous support from the many Protestant observers and theologians at Vatican II, thereby launching the Catholic Church into the midst of the ecumenical movement. Taken together, these three themes form the theological background to the subsequent advances made by Evangelicals and Catholics Together.<sup>25</sup>

22. Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, trans. Sr. Sergia Englund (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), 33–34.

23. Vatican II’s change in the style or rhetorical genre of the Catholic Church is a prominent theme in John W. O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

24. See Benedict XVI, “Christmas Address” (Dec. 22, 2005), *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 98 (2006): 40–53.

25. While we think that these three themes have been particularly important for the mission of ECT, we recognize that other theological elements emerging from the

Besides some of the theological points noted above, we should also mention a more personal one. Evangelicals and Catholics have now met face-to-face in theological dialogue for over twenty years. We do not form our views apart from each other's perspectives. We do not formulate our opinions on the basis of old stereotypes of our dialogue partners. We know each other well, as both colleagues and friends, and appreciate each other's deep and lively commitment to the Christian faith and each other's continuing desire to live out that discipleship in a profound way. This appreciative Christian friendship has had enormous implications for our deliberations.

It should also be noted that, from the beginning, ECT has made clear that there would be no false irenicism in our discussions, as if there existed no significant differences between us. As the very first ECT statement affirmed, "We reject any appearance of harmony that is purchased at the price of truth." We do have major differences on issues such as the nature and number of sacraments and the structure of the church and its ministry. Ours has been not an easygoing ecumenism that papers over these differences but a serious theological seeking of unity in truth. While we are not in perfect doctrinal communion, we nonetheless share a significant number of the essential and foundational teachings of the Christian faith: belief in the one Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; in Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word made flesh, the Lord and Redeemer of all humanity; in the Holy Scriptures as the unique, divinely inspired Word of God that, by the power of the Spirit, is able to make one "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim. 3:15 KJV); and in the need for all to be redeemed, a salvation accomplished only by the grace of God. It is on the basis of these common doctrinal affirmations that Evangelicals and Catholics Together has proceeded with confidence over these past twenty years.

Commenting on ecumenism and on the continuing Christian mission, Pope Francis has recently stated:

The immense numbers of people who have not received the Gospel of Jesus Christ cannot leave us indifferent. Consequently, commitment

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council have significance as well, e.g., the "hierarchy of truths" (*Decree on Ecumenism*, no. 11), which teaches that not every element of divine revelation has the same centrality or importance.

to a unity which helps them to accept Jesus Christ can no longer be a matter of mere diplomacy or forced compliance, but rather an indispensable path to evangelization. . . . How many important things unite us [Catholics and Protestants]! If we really believe in the abundantly free working of the Holy Spirit, we can learn so much from one another! It is not just about being better informed about others, but rather about reaping what the Spirit has sown in them, which is also meant to be a gift for us. (*Evangelii Gaudium* [*The Joy of the Gospel*], no. 246)

### The Joint Statements of Evangelicals and Catholics Together

This volume presents the nine statements that ECT has issued between 1994 and 2015. Reading through the documents, one will observe that ECT has moved along two lines of thought: a specifically theological track and a theologically informed cultural track. Examples of the former include the statements on justification (*The Gift of Salvation*) and on Mary, the Mother of God (*Do Whatever He Tells You*), and examples of the latter include the documents on the culture of life (*That They May Have Life*) and on religious liberty (*In Defense of Religious Freedom*).

While there will be more extensive introductions to each of the documents, our intention here is to highlight a few major points with regard to the nine agreed statements.

The first, groundbreaking statement is entitled *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* (1994). This was the innovative document that called forth much reaction, both positive and negative, and that set the tone for the entire project of Evangelicals and Catholics Together. In this statement, ECT insisted on several points: our common witness to, and fraternity in, Jesus Christ; our mandate to seek unity for the sake of the gospel (based on Jesus's prayer in John 17); and the pressing need for Christian cooperation on various societal issues such as the abortion regime.

In reading this initial statement, one is struck by its prophetic power. There is already a strong accent on the importance of religious freedom as the primary and fundamental freedom, reflecting the

dignity of the human person. There is the insistence that the separation of church and state, while legitimate in itself, is not intended to mean, and indeed can never mean, the separation of religion from public life. One is also struck by the rhetorical power of the document in phrases such as this: “To propose that securing civil virtue is the purpose of religion is blasphemous. To deny that securing civil virtue is a benefit of religion is blindness.” In this original statement of 1994, we have the solid foundation on which ECT was built in the ensuing years.

Our second statement, entitled *The Gift of Salvation* (1997), deals with the central Christian theme of justification by faith. We remember well Richard John Neuhaus leaning back in his chair and lighting a cigarette at the very beginning of our discussion in 1996. He opened the conversation by saying that, as a former Lutheran pastor, he had no problem with justification by faith alone. And then Neuhaus related a story: When considering becoming a Catholic, he asked Father Avery Dulles about Catholicism’s position on the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone. Dulles responded, “Justification by faith alone? Justification by faith alone? The only thing the Bible says about that is to condemn it!” (Dulles was referring to the Letter of James.) Ostensibly, we were off to a rocky start.

But we made significant headway. Chuck Colson always felt that the statement on justification was the most important document issued by ECT, precisely because of the importance of this theme at the time of the Reformation and still today. Colson subsequently told one interviewer that Avery Dulles and Richard Neuhaus died in back-to-back months (December 2008 and January 2009), but not before God had providentially allowed them to collaborate on our crucial statement about justification. Colson noted with particular pleasure that Pope Benedict XVI taught that, if properly understood, Luther was right. In a routine Wednesday audience on November 19, 2008, Benedict stated:

Luther’s phrase: “faith alone” is true, if it is not opposed to faith in charity, in love. Faith is looking at Christ, entrusting oneself to Christ, being united to Christ, conformed to Christ, to his life. And the form, the life of Christ, is love; hence to believe is to conform to Christ and to

enter into his love. So it is that in the Letter to the Galatians in which he primarily developed his teaching on justification St. Paul speaks of faith that works through love (cf. Gal. 5:14).<sup>26</sup>

Catholics and Lutherans in the United States had already achieved a significant measure of agreement in their 1985 statement *Justification by Faith*.<sup>27</sup> The ECT statement of 1997, *The Gift of Salvation*, was another significant milestone on the road to the groundbreaking 1999 accord between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation entitled *Joint Declaration on Justification* (an accord subsequently endorsed by several other Protestant churches as well).

Our third statement, *Your Word Is Truth* (2002), deals with the relationship between Sacred Scripture and the church's tradition, long a thorny and controversial theological issue. Over the past fifty years Catholicism has placed an increasingly significant accent on the uniqueness and priority of the Bible, and Protestants have adopted a more complex understanding of the phrase *sola scriptura*, one that does not rule out the importance of tradition (even while subordinating it to Scripture) in the formulation of church doctrine.

We agreed that the Holy Spirit is the true teacher of the church—and that the Bible is, as the traditional axiom has it, the *norma normans non normata* (the rule of faith that is not itself judged by anything else). Of course, even with that said, Catholics and Evangelicals differ on precisely how the Bible is properly interpreted. But this, too, was a significant breakthrough.

Our fourth and fifth statements treat *The Communion of Saints* (2003) and *The Call to Holiness* (2005). In these documents, we affirm that all Christians are called in their personal lives to draw closer to the living Christ and, in so doing, to draw closer to one another—and to the Christians who have gone before us—in both witness and mission.

In 2006, ECT published its sixth statement, *That They May Have Life*, jointly affirming that as followers of Christ, Christians are called

26. See [http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2008/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_aud\\_20081119.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20081119.html).

27. *Justification by Faith: Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*, ed. H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985).

to care for and protect the most marginalized and vulnerable members of our society, including the unborn, the disabled, the dependent elderly, the dying, and the poor. Every human being from conception to natural death is eternally intended by God. Every person then, including those children waiting to be born, should be welcomed in life and protected in law. While written primarily for Christian believers, this statement was also meant to offer guidance to all those in the public square.

Our seventh statement returned to a specifically theological question, the role of Mary in the life of the church. Entitled *Do Whatever He Tells You: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Christian Faith and Life* (2009), the document was described by one wag as “Evangelicals and Catholics Apart.” That’s a humorous comment, but an exaggeration. We do, indeed, have important differences on the role of Mary in salvation history and in the lives of contemporary Christians. Over the centuries, the Blessed Mother has played an intense role in Catholic life, theology, and devotion, whereas the Evangelical community places virtually its entire emphasis on Christ the Savior, seeing in Mary primarily a sinful human being in need of redemption.

In fact, both Evangelicals and Catholics wish to understand the Blessed Mother in light of her son, Jesus Christ, and his unique salvific role. We agreed that Mary is described in Scripture as the blessed, virgin mother of the Redeemer. As such, it is proper to call her *Theotokos* (God-bearer) or “the one who gave birth to the one who is God.” Appropriating the language of the early Christian church (the Council of Ephesus, AD 431) marks an important affirmation by ECT. The Blessed Mother Mary serves as an example of courageous faith, love, and discipleship for all Christians.

The distinguished Reformed theologian Karl Barth once remarked, half humorously, that he had no objection to a Catholic statue of Mary, as long as her statue was placed in the congregation, signifying her eagerness to listen to the Word of God.<sup>28</sup> Insofar as Barth’s remark emphasizes Mary as a disciple of Jesus Christ—a unique one,

28. Karl Barth, *Karl Barth’s Letters 1961–1968*, ed. J. Fangmeier and H. Stoeve-sandt, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 135.

to be sure—then this is a point on which Evangelicals and Catholics are entirely agreed.

In our eighth statement, *In Defense of Religious Freedom* (2012), we outline the bases for religious freedom in the history of Christian thought. Throughout the centuries, a consistent affirmation of Christians (even if not always strictly observed) is that men and women cannot be asked to violate their consciences in religious matters. Indeed, religious liberty goes to the heart of Christian anthropology: all men and women are created in the image and likeness of God; as such, there can be no coercion in matters of faith.

This statement also intends to overcome the manner in which religious freedom is understood by some today: as the right of men and women to worship privately and to cling personally to their beliefs, but without allowing these beliefs to guide all aspects of life in the public square. This profoundly diminished notion of religious freedom is rejected by Evangelicals and Catholics Together, just as it was rejected by the founders of ECT and, indeed, by the founders of the United States. As we said in our statement *That They May Have Life*: “Whatever is meant by ‘the separation of church and state,’ it cannot mean the separation of public life and public policy from the deepest convictions, including moral convictions, of the great majority of a nation’s citizens.”

Both Richard Neuhaus and Chuck Colson dedicated their lives to defending the proposition that religious faith—the most comprehensive of realities—could not be reduced to a private or insular dimension of life. Religious belief affects every aspect of existence; its free exercise must be allowed in every forum, public and private. To affirm this is certainly not to endorse religious imperialism. As Neuhaus frequently said, Christians seek neither a sacred public square nor a naked public square but a civil public square open to a wide range of convictions, where religious speech is fully protected as integral to society. People of all religions have a right to conduct their lives and work in accordance with their most deeply held convictions, without government reprisals or interference.

The most recent statement of ECT is entitled *The Two Shall Become One Flesh: Reclaiming Marriage* (2015) and is concerned with the nature of marriage as both a created and a revealed reality.

Marriage as the permanent bond between a man and a woman has been acknowledged for millennia across highly diverse cultures. Over the past several decades, however, the institution of marriage has been weakened by divorce, premarital sex, cohabitation, and a contraceptive mentality. We together agree that the biblical teaching on human sexuality, marriage, and family life is clear but often overlooked, even by those claiming to be disciples of Jesus Christ. And we insist that marriage, as both a created and revealed reality, is based on male-female complementarity. Indeed, as Paul the apostle says, marriage is a profound mystery, signifying the intimate relationship that exists between Christ and his church.

We further agree that same-sex “marriage” is not marriage at all but a dangerous parody of the marital union. Instead of a unique and permanent bond uniting a man and a woman, marriage is now understood as an instrument created by the state to give official status to the relationship between any two human beings. As Evangelicals and Catholics, we hold—no matter the claims and directives of the state—that marriage is the union of a man and woman, each of whom undertakes a permanent relationship that is open to procreation and to the complementary natural roles of father and mother. We urge Christians to stand firm in this belief despite the accusations of intolerance and bigotry to which they will certainly be subjected.

## Conclusion

This review of the origins and theological foundations of Evangelicals and Catholics Together would not be complete if we did not mention two well-known theologians who were at the heart of this enterprise from the beginning, Avery Dulles and J. I. Packer. Their status as internationally respected thinkers added immensely to the stature of ECT, particularly since a few had suggested that the dialogue was more a convenient political alliance rather than a mature theological encounter. The work of ECT over the years has given ample evidence that the dialogue is a witness to the gospel in all of its dimensions.

At the conclusion of their introduction to the volume announcing ECT’s mission, Colson and Neuhaus wrote that Evangelicals



and Catholics Together exists in service to the claim that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ (2 Cor. 5:19). They added that “the final test of ECT will be whether it strengthens the church’s witness to [this] gospel of reconciliation.”<sup>29</sup> It is our firm hope that Evangelicals and Catholics Together is meeting that challenge. Both editors of this volume joined ECT in 1995, when Colson and Neuhaus were assembling a core group charged with continuing the theological dialogue. In the ensuing two decades, we have seen this ecumenical initiative grow in maturity and refinement, with both Evangelicals and Catholics deeply grateful for our common witness to all that God has done in the history of ancient Israel, and, uniquely, in the Redeemer of the world, Jesus Christ.

Over the past two decades, Evangelicals and Catholics have learned much from one another and our joint commitment to biblical and doctrinal truth. We live in an age when the very idea of truth is often called into question. And yet we believe that the Bible teaches God’s truth, a truth that is able to be known and understood, appropriated and lived, under the agency of the Holy Spirit. It is the task of ECT to formulate that truth in a way that assists contemporary men and women to live as committed disciples of Jesus of Nazareth.

Not long before his death in 2009, Richard Neuhaus made clear that he wished to see the important work undertaken by ECT continue. Chuck Colson, too, just months before his own passage to God in 2012, was insistent that ECT was one of the most powerful initiatives in the United States for communicating the truth of the gospel. No matter the obstacles, he said, Evangelicals and Catholics must stand side by side in their public witness to biblical truth. The intention of ECT is to continue the prophetic mission of its founders.

Evangelicals and Catholics do not know how Christian unity will come about but look forward to that day when we are fully united in the common witness for which Jesus Christ himself prayed. It is the editors’ hope that readers will find theological and spiritual nourishment in the statements collected in this volume. Our prayer is that God may continue to bless the work of Evangelicals and Catholics Together.

29. *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*, x.

## Postscript

The list of signatories to each of the statements is found in an appendix at the end of this volume. In some statements, the institutional affiliation of the signatories was indicated at the time of publication; in other statements, such affiliation was omitted. We have reprinted the signatory lists as they originally appeared.

Further, several of our agreed statements have prefaces that recap earlier agreements and discuss ECT's ongoing theological progress. While these prologues are not constitutive parts of the statements themselves, we have reprinted them here, placing them in italics. They help to establish the context in which the various statements came to fruition.

Finally, we have not asked the contributors for uniformity in biblical citations. Various biblical translations have been utilized; occasionally we have standardized translations, conforming them to the RSV.

We have also made slight orthographical changes in the statements for the sake of consistency.

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## Unity

### Introduction

TIMOTHY GEORGE

In 1534, Abbot Paul Bachmann published a virulent anti-Protestant booklet entitled “A Punch in the Mouth for the Lutheran Lying Wide-Gaping Throats.” Not to be outdone, the Protestant court chaplain, Jerome Rauscher, responded with a treatise of his own titled “One Hundred Select, Great, Shameless, Fat, Well-Swilled, Stinking, Papistical Lies.” Such was the tenor of theological discourse among many of the formative shapers of classical Protestantism and resurgent Roman Catholicism in the sixteenth century. Such rhetoric was brought from the Old World to the New. Fueled by local prejudice and nativist traditions, it continued to deepen the divide between the heirs of the Reformation debates.

Imagine, then, the surprise—in some circles, the shock—when on March 29, 1994, the statement *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* was released in New

York. Here the old hostility between Catholics and Evangelicals was replaced by a new awareness of their common Christian identity—a shared life in Jesus Christ. The core affirmation of the first ECT statement, and of the entire project, was this declaration: “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.”

On the following day, the story of the new Evangelical and Catholic initiative was carried on the front page of the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and other newspapers across the country. The reaction was immediate and explosive. While some saw this new effort as a hopeful sign, others, especially some conservative Evangelicals on the right, were disturbed and distraught. Best-selling author Dave Hunt wrote of the ECT statement: “I believe the document represents the most devastating blow against the gospel in at least 1,000 years.”<sup>1</sup> For their part, many left-leaning progressives, both Catholics and Protestants, dismissed the statement as a publicity stunt tied to conservative politics.

It seemed to me that both of these narratives had badly misjudged the situation. When I was asked to write a lead editorial on ECT for *Christianity Today*, I described the new project in this way:

Here is an ecumenism of the trenches born out of a common moral struggle to proclaim and embody the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a culture of disarray. This is not merely a case of politics making strange bedfellows. It is more like Abraham bargaining with God for the minimal number of righteous witnesses required to spare the sinful city of Sodom. For too long, ecumenism has been left to Left-leaning Catholics and mainline Protestants. For that reason alone, evangelicals should applaud this effort and rejoice in the progress it represents.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, ECT did not come out of the blue. Ever since his 1957 crusade in New York City, Billy Graham had warmly welcomed

1. Dave Hunt, “The Gospel Betrayed,” *The Berean Call*, May 1, 1994, [www.thebereancall.org/content/gospel-betrayed](http://www.thebereancall.org/content/gospel-betrayed).

2. Timothy George, “Catholics and Evangelicals in the Trenches,” *Christianity Today*, May 1994, 16.

Catholic participants in his evangelistic efforts. John Stott, an Anglican pastor with worldwide influence, had long engaged with Catholics in serious theological discussions on issues of mission and world evangelization. Further, an “ecumenism of the trenches” was already at work among many Evangelicals and Catholics in local communities who found themselves standing side by side in opposing abortion on demand and advocating for the traditional values of chastity, family, and community—all derived from deeply held religious convictions.

The 1994 ECT statement, however, did represent something different. First, it was not an official, church-endorsed ecumenical dialogue but rather an ad hoc group of Catholic and Evangelical theologians brought together by Richard John Neuhaus and Charles W. Colson Jr. The ECT participants were clear that they spoke *from* and *to* but not *for* their respective churches and denominations. While ECT might have raised some ecumenical eyebrows, its independent status made it more flexible and more responsive than traditional patterns of discourse. From the beginning, the Vatican was aware and encouraging of the project. On one occasion, Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, then the president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, addressed the ECT group. At the same time, some Evangelical members of ECT continued to participate in official bilateral dialogues between the Catholic Church and Baptists, Pentecostals, and the World Evangelical Alliance.

Second, ECT represented a move beyond cobelligerency. While sharing many common moral concerns in what were then called the “culture wars,” the framers of ECT determined to address these issues precisely as believers in Jesus Christ. They took seriously the prayer of Jesus in John 17:21—“that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”

Third, the framers of ECT were well aware that Jesus’s desire for his disciples to be one also encompassed his prayer for them to be “sanctified in the truth.” As Jesus said, “And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth” (John 17:19 ESV). Both Catholic and Evangelical participants recognized that the only unity worth having was unity in the truth. They determined to practice an ecumenism of conviction, not an ecumenism of accommodation.

In this regard, they were encouraged by the words of Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI: “Our quarreling ancestors were in reality much closer to each other when in all their disputes they still knew that they could only be servants of one truth which must be acknowledged as being as great and as pure as it has been intended for us by God.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, from the beginning, ECT addressed theological matters still dividing Catholics and Evangelicals as well as issues of public policy and the common good.

These concerns were each represented in the five major sections of the first ECT statement. “We Affirm Together” includes a common embrace of the Apostles’ Creed and the christological and trinitarian consensus of the early church. “We Hope Together” quotes the Great Commission of Jesus in Matthew 28 and connects the quest for Christian unity with the Lord’s missionary mandate. “We Search Together” commits ECT to “disciplined and sustained conversation” through a prayerful reading of the Scriptures and honest examination of important doctrinal differences between Catholics and Evangelicals. “We Contend Together” speaks of a togetherness in witness on matters related to religious freedom, the sanctity of life, family values, and moral standards in society. And finally, “We Witness Together” encourages Catholics and Evangelicals to share the gospel of Jesus Christ among all peoples of the world and to do so in a spirit of love and humility, avoiding patterns of coercion or bearing false witness.

Avery (later Cardinal) Dulles and J. I. Packer were the two senior theologians in the ECT group. Their wisdom and expertise would guide the ECT process as it moved forward to take up such controverted issues as justification by faith, Scripture and tradition, the communion of saints, and the role of Mary in the life of the church, among others. Dulles’s renowned work on ecclesiology informed the ECT dialogue and stressed the importance of seeking full visible unity within the body of Christ while emphasizing spiritual ecumenism and intermediate steps that Catholics and Evangelicals could—and should—take together in the meantime.

3. Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2008), 98.

Packer was a major target of the initial Evangelical protests against ECT. In an essay published in 1994, titled “Why I Signed It,” he defended the statement and his continuing involvement in the project. “I am a Protestant who thanks God for the wisdom, backbone, maturity of mind and conscience, and above all, love for my Lord Jesus Christ that I often see among Catholics, and who sometimes has the joy of hearing Catholics say they see comparable fruits in Protestants.”<sup>4</sup>

Packer recognized that the deep division that had separated Protestants and Catholics since the time of the Reformation had changed in a significant way. The most important fault line today, he argued, was between “conservationists,” who honor the Christ of the Bible and of the historic creeds and confessions, on the one hand, and the theological liberals and radicals who do not, on the other. In this new situation, Packer argued that ECT has a vital role to play: “ECT . . . must be viewed as fuel for a fire that is already alight. The grassroots coalition at which the document aims is already growing. It can be argued that, so far from running ahead of God, as some fear, ECT is playing catch-up to the Holy Spirit.”<sup>5</sup>

4. J. I. Packer, “Why I Signed It,” *Christianity Today*, December 1994, 35.

5. *Ibid.*, 36.