Evangelical Compromise

Evangelicals and Catholics Together

Richard Bennett (1938-2019)

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Contents

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EVANGELICAL COMPROMISE

1. Introduction

A. Background

Die-hard positions on certain fundamental issues have not changed in literally the last thousand years. According to the teaching authority of the Roman Catholic Church, the final authority is the Pope and papal authority. In the Roman Catholic system, a person purportedly[1] is saved by grace plus one's own good works, plus one's alleged "inner holiness." Further, Catholics are taught to worship and to pray to God, to Mary, and to their "saints."

The biblical position on these issues, clearly enunciated by 16th century Reformation[2] leaders, is diametrically[3] opposed to the Roman Catholic position. Biblically, the final spiritual authority is the Bible only. A person is saved before the Holy God only by grace—only through faith—only in Christ—and to God alone be the glory. And Mary is respected for her role as the earthly mother of Jesus, but not worshipped.

Yet literally for the last thousand years, in spite of the wonderfully increased availability of the Bible and in spite of the Reformation—which brought these crucial issues to the critical attention of the Roman Catholic Church—the Roman Catholic position has not changed, Vatican Council II[4] notwithstanding.

B. Recent Events

The first and second National Evangelical Anglican Conferences that met at Keele and Nottingham in the UK in 1967 and 1977, respectively, were primed to launch, and further, the new policy of Anglican evangelicals[5] towards ecumenism.[6] There was a new

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[1] **purportedly** – supposedly.

[2] **Reformation** – Protestant Reformation of the 16th century led by Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Knox, and many others, which sought a return from some of the erroneous beliefs and practices of the Roman Catholic Church to the truths of the Bible.

[3] **diametrically opposed** – absolutely opposed.

[4] **Vatican Council II** – the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, commonly known as the Second Vatican Council or Vatican II. It met under Pope John XXIII and Pope Paul VI from 1962 to 1965, and addressed relations between the Catholic Church and the modern world, including ecumenical efforts towards dialogue with other religions.

[5] **evangelicals** – Christians who hold to the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ: the Bible as the sole source of religious authority (2Ti 3:16), and salvation only through personal spiritual regeneration (the new birth; Joh 3:3-8) by faith alone in Christ alone (Eph 2:8-9).

[6] **ecumenism** – belief that doctrinal differences, even errors, should be overlooked in favor of establishing a unity among different denominations.

desire on the part of these evangelicals to be united with their more ritualistic Anglican counterparts, who are essentially Roman Catholic in belief and practice, and liberals who believe in a fallible[7] Bible. Leading evangelicals, such as John Stott[8] and J. I. Packer,[9] endorsed the statements from these conferences and, in so doing, set aside gospel[10] truth in favor of accepting fellow Anglicans as true brothers and sisters in Christ. John Stott, who chaired the first conference at Keele, made clear that the conference was accepting not only Anglo-Catholics and liberals, but Roman Catholics also, when he said,

> All who confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek together to fulfill their common calling to the glory of one God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—have a right to be treated as Christians; and it is on this basis that we wish to talk with them.

The conference at Nottingham went further than Keele, giving the compromise already proclaimed a complete seal of approval. Nottingham also endorsed and praised the Charismatic movement[11] and is remembered for David Watson's reference to the Reformation as "one of the greatest tragedies that ever happened to the church."

The most drastic departure from true evangelicalism, however, took place in the USA in 1994, some seventeen years after the Nottingham Conference. At the end of March 1994, a group of twenty leading evangelicals and twenty leading Roman Catholics produced a document entitled *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* (ECT).

The two main instigators of this carefully planned ecumenical thrust were Charles Colson,[12] a leading evangelical, and Richard John Neuhaus,[13] a Lutheran pastor turned

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[7] **fallible** – capable of error.

[8] **John Stott** (1921-2011) – English Anglican priest and theologian, noted as a leader of the worldwide evangelical movement. He was one of the principal authors of the Lausanne Covenant in 1974.

[9] **J. I. Packer** (b. 1926) – English-born Canadian evangelical theologian in the low-church Anglican and Calvinist traditions. He served as Professor of Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia. Author of many books, including the classic *Knowing God*.

[10] **gospel** – the good news of salvation by grace through faith in the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ at the cross of Calvary for the sins of His people (2Co 5:21)—by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

[11] **Charismatic movement** – international trend among historically mainstream Christian congregations adopting beliefs and practices similar to Pentecostalism, which places special emphasis on a direct personal experience of God through "baptism with the Holy Spirit," in which one receives the gift of speaking in unknown tongues and other extraordinary manifestations.

[12] **Charles (Chuck) Colson** (1931-2012) – American lawyer and Christian leader; Special Counsel to President Richard Nixon (1969-1970); became an evangelical Christian in 1973; founded Prison Fellowship International.

[13] **Richard John Neuhaus** (1936-2009) – prominent Canadian American Christian writer and cleric, first in the Lutheran Church and later as a Roman Catholic priest. Born in Canada, he later natu-

Roman Catholic priest. The specific task was begun in September 1992. Larry Lewis of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Jesse Miranda of Assemblies of God, John White of Geneva College and the National Association of Evangelicals, and others, including two Jesuits (Avery Dulles and Juan Diaz-Vilar), joined Colson and Neuhaus in the writing process. All of this was under the watchful eye of Cardinal Idris Cassidy, the head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, who Richard Neuhaus said had given "very active support throughout the process." The evangelical signers included J. I. Packer, Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ, Mark Noll of Wheaton College, and Pat Robertson of the 700 Club. Roman Catholic signers included such well-known figures as Cardinal John O'Connor (now deceased), Archbishop Sevilla, Archbishop Stafford, and Bishop Francis George (now Archbishop of Chicago).

Since the professed purpose of the document is to encourage unity to meet present-day social issues—such as abortion, pornography, and homosexuality—what naturally emerges from *ECT* is, in the words of Galatians 1, "another gospel." Although this "gospel" may be acceptable to those who wish to add their good works to the grace of God, it is, nevertheless, a frontal assault on the Reformation, on five hundred years of conservative evangelical doctrine, on evangelical missions in Roman Catholic nations, and on the doctrine of biblical authority.

A person calling himself evangelical professes to be committed to the gospel of Christ as proclaimed in Scripture. The true gospel demands separation from all who teach another gospel. Without such separation the name *evangelical* signifies nothing. As the apostle declared,

> But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal 1:8-9).

This "New Evangelicalism,"[14] which willingly compromises with and accommodates *another gospel*, has gained ground everywhere, beginning in the early 1960s. Since then, the evangelical world has changed beyond recognition.[15]

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ralized as a United States citizen. Longtime editor of the Lutheran Forum magazine and founder of the monthly *First Things*.

[14] **New Evangelicalism** – not a common term, but used in this text for those evangelicals who have embraced the ecumenism of *ECT* and compromised their separation from erroneous Roman Catholic doctrine in the name of promoting cooperation and unity.

[15] See a fuller report in *Evangelicalism Divided* by Iain Murray (Edinburgh, Scotland; Carlisle, Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000).

2. Doctrinal Errors

Evangelicals throughout the centuries have maintained that justification[16] is by faith, and faith alone. Through justification by faith alone, sinful human beings are, in Christ, made right before the all-holy God. So, for example, the *Thirty-Nine Articles*[17] of the Church of England declared in Article 11,

> We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our own works or deservings: Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.[18]

Justification itself is a judicial declarative act on the part of God alone. By it, He declares that only is a man perfectly just in Christ. His judicial declarative act is not based on anything within a man, but rather it is based solely and wholly upon the righteous life and sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Savior lived a perfect life and paid the just penalty for sins upon the cross. Historically, evangelicals have agreed with the apostle Paul: "to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness" (Rom 4:5).

The following issues from *ECT* will be addressed in this summary:

A. Justification by faith alone versus "living faith"
B. Imputed righteousness versus "conferred" justification
C. Biblical regeneration versus baptismal regeneration
D. Devotion to Mary and the Saints
E. "Soul freedom" of the individual Christian

A. Justification by Faith Alone

1) Conversion

In *ECT* Section V, "We Witness Together," the document makes a statement concerning what it considers conversion[19] to be:

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[16] **justification** – Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardons all our sins (Rom 3:24; Eph 1:7), and accepts us as righteous in His sight (2Co 5:21)—only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us (Rom 5:19) and received by faith alone (Gal 2:16; Phi 3:9). (*Spurgeon's Catechism*, Q. 32) See Free Grace Broadcaster 187, *Justification*; both available from CHAPEL LIBRARY.

[17] ***Thirty-Nine Articles*** – confession of faith of the Church of England and the Episcopal Church, formulated in the Canterbury Convocation in 1563.

[18] Also maintained in *The Westminster Confession of Faith, 1646; The London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1689* (available from CHAPEL LIBRARY)*; The Philadelphia Confession of Faith, as adopted by The Baptist Association, 1742;* and others.

[19] **conversion** – initial turning from sin and self to God by faith in Jesus Christ, the fruit of the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. Conversion is a result of God's work upon men's souls and is immediately manifest in repentance and faith. Once a person is converted, while he is still far from perfect and has great need for spiritual growth and sanctification, there is a definable differ-

It should be clearly understood between Catholics and evangelicals that Christian witness is of necessity aimed at conversion. Authentic conversion is—in its beginning, in its end, and all along the way—conversion to God in Christ by the power of the Spirit. In this connection, we embrace as our own the explanation of the "Baptist and Roman Catholic International Conversation" (1988):

"Conversion is turning away from all that is opposed to God, contrary to Christ's teaching, and turning to God, to Christ the Son, through the work of the Holy Spirit. It entails a turning from the self-centeredness of sin to faith in Christ as Lord and Savior. Conversion is a passing from one way of life to another new one, marked with the newness of Christ. It is a continuing process so that the whole life of a Christian should be a passage from death to life, from error to truth, from sin to grace. Our life in Christ demands continual growth in God's grace. Conversion is personal but not private. Individuals respond in faith to God's call, but faith comes from hearing the proclamation of the Word of God, and is to be expressed in the life together in Christ that is the church."

By preaching, teaching, and life example, Christians witness to Christians and non-Christians alike. We seek and pray for the conversion of others, even as we recognize our own continuing need to be fully converted.[20]

2) The conversion "process"

This confuses the sanctification process[21] with conversion. But what is really at stake here is not growth in the Christian life or sanctification, but rather "witnessing" or evangelization. What is described by *ECT* as "witnessing" is actually the Roman Catholic grace plus works "process" towards the goal of salvation, which goal the Roman Catholic never reaches in his lifetime. In fact, the Roman Catholic Council of Trent[22] condemns the true biblical evangelical faith:

Canon 12 "If anyone shall say that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence alone by which we are justified: let him be anathema [cursed]."[23]

This canon has never been revoked! Further, Vatican Council II ratified the decrees of the Council of Trent formally. How can the New Evangelical signatories to the *ECT*

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ence in his spiritual condition, heart response to God, and lifestyle. He has not only begun an incremental process of change, but has indeed "passed from death unto life," and "all things have become new" (1Jo 3:14; 2Co 5:17). See Free Grace Broadcaster 195, *Conversion*.

[20] *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*, section V; 21.

[21] **sanctification process** – the Christian's daily becoming more holy and set apart from the world by repentance, the mortification of sin, and increasing love for Christ.

[22] **Council of Trent** – Roman Catholic Church council (1545-1563) called by Pope Paul III to respond to the need for reform in light of the Protestant Reformation, and to control the spread of Protestantism. It did make some reforms, but installed as Roman doctrine the supremacy of the pope and the whole system of salvation by meritorious works and keeping the seven Roman sacraments.

[23] Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, translated by Roy J. Deferrari from *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 13th ed. (B. Herder Book Co., 1957), 822.

endorse such language as "recogniz[ing] our own continuing need to be fully converted" and remain evangelical? With whom have the Roman Catholic signers made an agreement?

The declaration that the New Evangelical signatories have embraced is typical of Roman Catholic statements whereby conversion—being made right with the Holy God—is not a one-time sovereign act of God, but rather a process in which man needs the help of God's grace. Officially, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) teaches,

> Para. 1435 "Conversion is accomplished in daily life by gestures of reconciliation, concern for the poor, the exercise and defense of justice and right, by the admission of faults to one's brethren, fraternal correction, revision of life, examination of conscience, spiritual direction, acceptance of suffering, endurance of persecution for the sake of righteousness. Taking up one's cross each day and following Jesus is the surest way of penance."[24]

When one leaves biblical truth and begins to look on salvation as a process, the focal point will always be on man's experience—and not on the objective finished work of Christ on the cross. In Ephesians 2:8-9, the sovereign grace of God is exalted—and the faith through which it is received is so minimized as to be "not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." A straight quotation of these verses is not given in the document.

The biblical message is definitely not "process conversion" or "journey theology." These are instead quite similar to what the Roman Church herself endorses in Hinduism and in Buddhism. Vatican Council II states,

> In Hinduism men explore the divine mystery and express it both in the limitless riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy. They seek release from the trials of the present life by ascetical practices, profound meditation, and recourse to God in confidence and love. Buddhism in its various forms testifies to the essential inadequacy of this changing world. It proposes a way of life by which man can, with confidence and trust, attain a state of perfect liberation and reach supreme illumination—either through their own efforts or by the aid of divine help…The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.[25]

Thus, if in *ECT* the New Evangelicals can endorse such statements as, "Conversion is a...continuing process so that the whole life of a Christian should be a passage from

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[24] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, Missouri: Liguori Publications, 1994).

[25] Vatican Council II Documents, No. 56, *Nostra Aetate*, "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," 28 Oct. 1965, Vol. I, Para. 2, 739.

death to life, from error to truth, from sin to grace," they not only fall into official Roman Catholic theology, but it is also an affirmation of the process theologies of Hinduism and Buddhism!

3) "Living faith"

What comes closest to this biblical message of salvation is stated deceptively by *ECT* as,

> We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ. *Living faith is active in love* that is nothing less than the love of Christ.[26]

Here biblical terminology is used with a conspicuously unwarranted ambiguity[27] of expression. To be biblical, this statement should read, "We affirm together that we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone." The word *alone* signifies that the perfect righteousness of Christ Jesus, and that alone, is sufficient before the Holy God to justify unholy sinners.[28] To so define justification, however, would exclude Catholics and all who look to any inherent righteousness in themselves for justification. Thus a *subtraction* had to be made from the gospel of Christ in excluding what is signified by the word *alone*. In similar manner, an *addition* had to made to the gospel. The *ECT* addition that redefines faith is, "living faith active in love." "Living faith" implies works, and baptism in particular. This is documented in present day official teaching of the Church of Rome:

> The very root of the church's living faith [is] principally by means of Baptism.[29]

The words of *ECT* that qualify faith as "living faith, active in love" is exactly what the Council of Trent declared and Vatican Council II again ratified. The Council of Trent solemnly taught,

> For faith, unless hope and charity be added to it, neither unites one perfectly with Christ, nor makes him a living member of his body.[30]

This was added in order to accommodate the inclusion of the Catholic teaching of "works righteousness" as being necessary for salvation. The theology of the Church of Rome always comes back to the concept of "living faith" so as to include "works righteousness," and in particular her sacraments, which she defines as necessary for salvation.[31]

This Roman Catholic theology is the idea of God pouring goodness into a person's heart. By "sanctifying grace" (a Catholic term), Rome teaches that one begins the process of being good in himself. The Bible, however, teaches continually, as in Ephesians

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[26] *ECT*, 5.
[27] **ambiguity** – unclear meaning or intention.
[28] Rom 4:5-8; 2Co 5:19-21; Rom 3:22-28; Ti 3:5-7; Eph 1:7; Jer 23:6; 1Co 1:30-31; Rom 5:17-19.
[29] *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori Publications, 1994), Para. 249.
[30] Denzinger, 800.
[31] *Catechism*, Para. 1129.

1, that a person's right standing with God—and all the blessedness that comes to him—is because he has been placed in Christ. The hallmark of biblical truth, as rediscovered by the Reformation, is that the righteousness of God credited to the believer is all in Christ, and *not* in himself. Why do the New Evangelical signers of *ECT* actually concur with defining faith in the way in which Rome does?

It is a well-known fact that literally for centuries the Roman Catholic Church has watered down the biblical message of God's sovereign grace. Her present-day teaching is consistent with her age-old assertion that God's sovereign grace is only a "help" to man. This is what the latest universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church* unequivocally[32] states:

> #2021 "Grace is the help God gives us to respond to our vocation of becoming his adopted sons…"

Thus in present day Romanism, faith is not faith alone, but rather faith is redefined to include the unbiblical concept of merit, which in the Catholic *Catechism* comes under the general heading of "Grace and Justification."[33] In this context, faith is not expressed as being the sole means of receiving grace, with no merit in the faith itself. Rather, faith is exalted as "living faith, active in love." The focal point is man's activity, which subtly allows for merit and, therefore, the Catholic position. The wording cleverly opens what looks like a biblical position, but in fact it exalts man's faith as meritorious in itself.

4) "Living faith" and "indwelling morality"

"Living faith, active in love" reverts to Rome's unbiblical concept that indwelling morality (i.e., inherent righteousness) is a necessary preparation for God's grace to be effective. Ephesians 2:1, however, states clearly the moral condition of a person before conversion: "And you hath he quickened,[34] who were *dead* in trespasses and sins." Colossians 2:13 also states this clearly, "And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses."

If the New Evangelical *ECT* signers do in fact believe that the Roman Catholic concept of indwelling morality is the condition of unconverted man—rather than the biblically true understanding of being morally dead (Eph 2:1, 5; Col 2:13; 1Pe 2:24)—then they ought logically to endorse Rome's cursing of all who have that simple faith that trusts alone in God's mercy, as officially was done by Rome at the Council of Trent and again ratified by Vatican Council II:

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[32] **unequivocally** – plainly.
[33] Ibid., 2006-2011.
[34] **quickened** – made alive from spiritual death by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, the "new birth" (Joh 3:6).

> If anyone shall say that by faith alone the sinner is justified, so as to understand that nothing else is required to cooperate in the attainment of the grace of justification, and that it is in no way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will: let him be anathema [cursed].[35]

To endorse Roman Catholic teaching, however, is to attempt to deny the clear teaching of Scripture,

> But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us (Ti 3:4-5).
>
> Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1).
>
> And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace (Rom 11:6).

It was for this biblical faith once delivered to the saints that men and women were burned at the stake during the six centuries of the Roman Catholic Inquisition.[36]

5) Summary

Nowhere in the document is the true gospel of Jesus Christ given. Predictably, therefore, *ECT* totally lacks the cohesiveness expressed by men who are truly unified in purpose. By means of poorly chosen prepositions, by careful multiplication of indistinct phraseology, and by studied juxtaposition of logically disparate[37] concepts, however, *ECT* does manage to attain a certain effeminate bravado[38] about how far good relations between Protestants and Catholics have come.

The signers of *ECT* readily admit to "differences that cannot be resolved here." Yet, motivated by the desire to face important moral issues together, *ECT* proclaims that evangelicals and Catholics are one in Christ, and that all are truly Christians. A key fault of the lengthy document is its misrepresentation of the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

B. Imputed Righteousness

1) "Conferred justification"

On November 12, 1997, a document entitled "The Gift of Salvation" was signed and published by New Evangelical and Roman Catholic leaders. Its expressed intention was

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[35] Denzinger, 819.

[36] **Inquisition** – institution begun in the 12th century within the Roman Catholic Church to combat heresy. Its scope significantly expanded after the Protestant Reformation, often using brutal interrogations and torture, and sentencing those pronounced "guilty" to death.

[37] **disparate** – fundamentally distinct or different in kind; entirely dissimilar.

[38] **effeminate bravado** – outward show of boldness while compromising or neglecting to fight for one's principles.

to demonstrate the "common faith" of evangelicals and Roman Catholics, and to further "acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters in Christ." It was then published in the December 8, 1997, issue of *Christianity Today*. Explicitly, the Roman Catholic signatories such as Richard John Neuhaus and Avery Dulles,[39] S. J.,[40] state in the document that they are "Catholics who are conscientiously faithful to the teaching of the Catholic Church." What might be expected then is in fact discovered in the document: the Roman Catholic doctrine of "conferred justification" is taught as the gospel! J. I. Packer, Charles Colson, Os Guinness, Richard Land, Bill Bright are now joined together with Timothy George, T. M. Moore, John Woodbridge,[41] and others in not only giving a clouded gospel-justification message, but also (in a distinctively erudite manner) endorsing Rome's doctrine of "conferred inner righteousness."

The document states, "Justification is central to the scriptural account of salvation, and its meaning has been much debated between Protestants and Catholics." Then it claims that the signers have reached an agreement. Their statement of accord is,

> 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 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" (Rom 4:25 RSV). In justification, God, on the basis of Christ's righteousness alone, de-

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[39] **Avery Robert Dulles**, S.J. (1918-2008) – Jesuit priest, theologian, and Cardinal of the Catholic Church. Served on the faculties of Woodstock College, The Catholic University of America, and Fordham University. Internationally known author and lecturer.

[40] **S. J.** – Society of Jesus; a scholarly religious brotherhood for men of the Catholic Church founded by Ignatius of Loyola in 1540. Members are called Jesuits, are involved in religious service, and promote ecumenical dialogue.

[41] **Os Guiness** (b. 1941) – Irish-English lecturer, scholar, and Christian apologist; educated at Oxford; currently living in the USA; founded the Trinity Forum; originally Anglican, but left due to religious liberalism in 2006.

Richard D. Land (b. 1946) – President of Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina; formerly president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, the public policy arm of the Southern Baptist Convention; executive editor of *The Christian Post*.

Timothy George (b. 1950) – American theologian and journalist; dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University; executive editor for *Christianity Today*; fellow for The Center for Baptist Renewal.

T. M. Moore – American pastor at Cedar Springs Church in Knoxville, Tennessee. He is a fellow of the Wilberforce Forum and editor of its online journal, *Findings*. His books, essays, reviews, articles, and poetry have been published widely. He is a frequent speaker at churches, conferences, and seminars.

John Woodbridge – American author and research professor of church history and Christian thought at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois.

clares us to be no longer his rebellious enemies but his forgiven friends, and by virtue of his declaration it is so.[42]

The subject under review is stated clearly in the first sentence. "We agree that justification…is *conferred* through the Father's sheer graciousness." Then by careful reading, one comes to see what the two pivotal sentences state grammatically,

> [Justification] is entirely God's gift, conferred [rather than imputed]…and by virtue of [God's] declaration it is so.

This is traditional Roman Catholic doctrine. To employ the Roman Catholic word *conferred* instead of the biblical word *imputed* is tantamount[43] to putting aside scriptural authority on the issue of justification. Since medieval times, the Roman Catholic Church has clearly distinguished between the concept of imputation[44] and the Thomist[45] concept of God's grace "conferred" as a quality of the soul.[46] Since the Council of Trent, she has condemned the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone. Present-day dogma of the Roman Catholic Church not only upholds the teaching of the Council of Trent, but also declares that such councils are infallible [i.e., not capable of error].[47] The Council of Trent proclaims the following curse:

> If anyone shall say that by the said sacraments of the New Law, grace is not *conferred* from the work which has been worked [*ex opere operato*], but that faith alone in the divine promise suffices to obtain grace: let him be anathema [i.e., cursed by God].[48]

Rome's reason for such a curse on those who hold to "justification by faith alone" and "imputed righteousness" is logical because of what she refuses to concede. For her, justification is not an immediate one-time act of God, received by faith alone; rather, she teaches that grace is conferred continually through her sacraments. Thus she is able to make a place for herself as a necessary means through which inner righteousness is given.

2) "Sacramental grace"

The Roman Catholic Church teaches in her 1994 *Catechism*:

> *Justification is conferred in Baptism*, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy.[49]

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[42] "The Gift of Salvation," 1997, paragraph seven; *www.firstthings.com/article/1998/01/001-the-gift-of-salvation*.

[43] **tantamount** – equivalent.

[44] **imputation** – putting something to one's account.

[45] **Thomist** – originating from Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Italian Dominican friar, Catholic priest, philosopher, and scholastic theologian.

[46] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2 vols., *Great Books of the Western World Series*, Tr. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952) Part I of the Second Part, Question 110, Article 1, Obj. 3 and Article 2, Reply Obj. 1.

[47] *Catechism*, Para. 891.

[48] Denzinger, Canon 8, 851.

Because this inner righteousness, which is claimed to have been conferred, is located in the person, and not located in Christ, it can be lost and may need to be conferred again and again. Thus Rome officially states,

> …the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as "the second plank [of salvation] after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace."[50]

"Conferred justification" is necessary for Rome because of her claim that the work of her sacraments is the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus she states, "*Sacramental grace* is the grace of the Holy Spirit, given by Christ and proper to each sacrament."[51]

Calling "sacramental grace" the "grace of the Holy Spirit" is pretentious blasphemy against the all-holy God. Instead, what is declared in Scripture is the imputation of God's righteousness in the Lord Jesus Christ. In the words of the apostle,

> And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith (Phi 3:9).

The Roman Catholic Church's persistence in using the word *conferred* is an attempt to exchange her sacraments for Jesus Christ, the Lord and giver of life.

This New Evangelical distortion claims that both sides now agree on what has been the issue of division between Protestants and Roman Catholics for several hundred years! New Evangelicals such as J. I. Packer, Timothy George, and Os Guinness, known for their writings on the gospel, are accustomed to the biblical word *imputed*. For them to agree to the Roman Catholic word *conferred* in place of the biblical term *imputed* is a major betrayal! The Apostle Paul continually used the concept of imputation (i.e., crediting, reckoning, or counting); for example, he used the term eleven times in Romans chapter four, of which verse five is a summary: "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is *counted* for righteousness."

This pivotal truth of God's righteousness in the Lord Jesus Christ imputed to the believer is undermined in the *ECT's* affirmation of "inner righteousness conferred." Rome has always taught this, from the Council of Trent to the present day. Now the New Evangelicals join them. This is pious professional fraud! What response can one make to these New Evangelical personalities teaching the "conferred righteousness" of Rome? Can one do other than separate from such men? In the words of the apostle, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph 5:11).

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[49] *Catechism*, Para. 1992.
[50] Ibid., Para. 1446.
[51] Ibid., Para. 1129.

C. Baptismal Regeneration

1) Faith or baptism?

The message to the world by New Evangelical personalities as stated in the *ECT* is this:

> In the context of evangelization and "re-evangelization," we encounter a major difference in our understanding of the relationship between baptism and the new birth in Christ…For Catholics, all who are validly baptized are born again and are truly, however imperfectly, in communion with Christ.[52]

These New Evangelicals might as well have quoted from and endorsed the Roman Catholic *Code of Canon Law*, which says the same thing: "Baptism…by which men and women are a) freed from their sins, b) reborn as children of God, and c) configured to Christ…"[53]

Rather than clarifying the differences as indeed major, the document treats this difference as if it were of no consequence:

> These differing beliefs about the relationship between baptism, new birth, and membership in the church should be honestly presented to the Christian who has undergone conversion. But again, his decision regarding communal allegiance and participation must be assiduously[54] respected.[55]

Such statements are simply worldly double-talk. Biblically viewed, the difference is indeed major, for the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration that the Roman Church teaches is contrary to Scripture.

In contrast to the teaching of Rome, the words of the risen Christ in giving the gospel are crystal clear: "He that *believeth* and is baptized shall be saved: but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mar 16:16). Faith is the key of saving grace, and unbelief is the chief damning sin. Faith is what is absolutely necessary to salvation; baptism is an ordinance that follows faith and simply testifies to it. Proof of this is found in the omission of baptism in the second half of the verse. It is not "he that is not baptized shall be damned," but rather "he that *believeth not*."

Baptism is important because the Lord commanded it. It testifies to saving faith. It is a public declaration of the finished work of Christ in an individual soul. Faith is what is necessary, while baptism, though important, is not of the essence of salvation. In Christ Jesus' own words,

> He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life (Joh 5:24).

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[52] *ECT,* 23.

[53] *Code of Canon Law,* Latin-English Ed. (Washington, DC: Canon Law Society of America, 1983), Canon 849.

[54] **assiduously** – diligently.

[55] *ECT*, 24.

This ECT document, which upholds the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, has been consistently defended, both in the USA and elsewhere, by these New Evangelicals. Biblically speaking, this is endorsed heresy!

2) Evangelization?

In the Bible, evangelization is proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ to those who are lost. The "power of God unto salvation" is the essence of evangelization:

> For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek (Rom 1:16).
>
> Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures (Jam 1:18).
>
> Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever (1Pe 1:23).
>
> For in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel (1Co 4:15).

For Paul, to evangelize was not to baptize, but rather it was to preach. The consistency of God's Word in this is presented also in James and Peter. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians chapter 1 are true of evangelization then and now:

> For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness…but unto us which are saved it is the power of God (1Co 1:17-18).

Despite the clarity of the Bible, *ECT* states,

> For Catholics, all who are validly baptized are born again and are truly, however imperfectly, in communion with Christ…Those converted—whether understood as having received the new birth for the first time or as having experienced the reawakening of the new birth originally bestowed in the sacrament of baptism—must be given full freedom and respect as they discern and decide the community [i.e., church] in which they will live their new life in Christ.[56]

In this statement, the definition of "converted" includes baptismal regeneration as a way of conversion. This is truly Romanism, for the 1994 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches,

> Para. 1257 "The [Roman Catholic] Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude."
>
> Para. 1263 "By Baptism *all sins* are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin..."

The whole concept of baptismal regeneration is plainly contradictory to biblical truth. The biblical principle stated by the Lord is,

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[56] Ibid, 23-24.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again (Joh 3:6-7).

ECT claims that "Christians are to teach and live in obedience to the divinely inspired Scriptures" and categorically states that its signers "reject any appearance of harmony that is purchased at the price of truth." Why, then, have they brought "another gospel"? "Charity…rejoiceth in the truth" (1Co 13:6). Is it that now in our time it is more religiously expedient to be "politically correct" than to stand firm on biblical truth?

D. Mary and the Saints

The *ECT* also includes another difference of major significance between evangelicals and Catholics: "Remembrance of Mary and the saints—or—devotion to Mary and the saints." "Remembrance of Mary" is normal for evangelicals, just as we remember many notable persons in the Scriptures. But "devotion to Mary and the saints" is a Roman Catholic doctrine specifically forbidden in those same Scriptures. God's Word declares, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Act 4:12). But the Roman Catholic Church officially declares,

> This motherhood of Mary in the order of grace continues uninterruptedly...until the eternal fulfilment of all the elect. Taken up to heaven, she did not lay aside this saving office, but by her manifold intercession continues to bring us the gifts of eternal salvation…Therefore the Blessed Virgin is invoked in the [Roman Catholic] Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix…[57]

What "devotion to Mary and the saints" entails is explained in *Canon Law*,

> Canon 1186 "To foster the sanctification of the people of God the [Roman Catholic] Church recommends to the particular and filial veneration [i.e., worship] by the Christian faithful the Blessed Mary ever Virgin, the Mother of God, whom Christ established as the Mother of the human race; it also promotes true and authentic devotion to the other saints by whose example the Christian faithful are edified and through whose intercession they are sustained."
>
> Canon 1187 "Veneration [i.e., worship] through public cult is permitted only to those servants of God who are listed in the catalog of the saints or of the blessed by the authority of the [Roman Catholic] Church."
>
> Canon 1188 "The practice of displaying sacred images in the churches for the veneration [i.e., worship] of the faithful is to remain in force…"

Devotion to the Roman Catholic Mary entails prominently displayed sacred images of her in Catholic churches in accordance with Canon 1188. To avoid using the word *worship*, however, the Canon Law text in Latin uses the word *veneratio*. The Latin

[57] *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Para. 969.

roots of this word *veneratio* go back to religious worship offered to the gods, and Venus in particular. Not only is veneration recommended, it is specified as "filial" veneration, or worship from child to mother. All the signers of the document, New Evangelical and Roman Catholic alike, ought seriously to call to mind that the Bible speaks only truth, and it declares, "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (Isa 42:8).

Can any of the signatories, New Evangelicals or Roman Catholic, truthfully brush aside the fact that the Roman Catholic Church, with its teaching magisterium,[58] has blatantly disregarded the Second Commandment of the Decalogue?

> Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them… (Exo 20:4-5).

Clearly distinct from mere "remembrance of Mary," the Roman Catholic *worship* of Mary is demonstrated in Roman Catholic churches the world over.

E. "Soul freedom" of the Individual Christian

The fourth major difference in *ECT's* catalogue of separating issues between evangelicals and Catholics is "The soul freedom of the individual Christian or the Magisterium of the community."[59] This is worded with an expression perhaps lifted from the 1960s. The words chosen to represent the evangelical position, "soul freedom," put a subtle spin on the statement that inclines one to the latter half of the equation. "Soul freedom" is a clever obfuscation.[60] It is intended to represent the biblical truth that each individual believer is accountable directly to God for what they believe, and their authority is the Word of God itself. But this term is not needed, because clear definitions and dependable instruction are readily available in God's Word itself. In opposition to the magisterium of the Roman Church, the biblical principle is that Scripture interprets Scripture.

The Bible, as the basis of truth, demonstrates consistency, harmony, and unity, which show its divine origin. Throughout the Bible there is no contradiction. It is, therefore, to be interpreted in its own light for, as Psalm 36:9 states, "For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light." The origin of an interpretation must be of the same origin as the Bible itself in order to preserve its integrity. The source of the interpretation is God, clearly. For this reason, Scripture interprets Scripture. This is the thrust of the message in 2 Peter 1:20-21:

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[58] **magisterium** – Roman Catholic term: the teaching authority of the Roman Catholic Church.
[59] **community** – local or worldwide Roman Catholic Church.
[60] **obfuscation** – making something unclear or unintelligible.

> Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.

Rather than a human authority seeking to interpret divine truth, the Bible, which is the basis of truth, is interpreted by other passages in the Bible, as 1 Corinthians 2:11-13 makes clear:

> For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

It is not by "the soul freedom of the individual Christian" nor by the magisterium of the Roman Church, but rather by serious study of the Bible, recognizing that it is absolutely true, that the truly converted person finds indeed, "In thy light we see light," that Scripture interprets Scripture. The same light of God's Word commands,

> Prove all things; hold fast that which is good (1Th 5:21).
>
> Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world (1Jo 4:1).

Yet the teaching authority of the Roman Catholic Church, listed in *ECT* as the "Magisterium of the community," teaches these things:

> Canon 749, Sect. 1 "The Supreme Pontiff, in virtue of his office, possesses infallible teaching authority..."
>
> Canon 749, Sect. 2 "The college of bishops also possesses infallible teaching authority…"
>
> Canon 1404 "The First See [the Magisterium of Rome] is judged by no one."
>
> Canon 333, Sect. 3 "There is neither appeal nor recourse against a decision or decree of the Roman Pontiff."
>
> Vatican Council II Document, No. 58, *Dei Verbum*, "Sacred Tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God, which is entrusted to the [Roman Catholic] Church…But the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the [Roman Catholic] Church alone…[The Roman Church] expounds it faithfully…"[61]

Any believer who gives up the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, which is the only offensive weapon he has (Eph 6), sells himself into slavery by disobeying what he has been commanded to do. The magisterium of Rome, claiming infallible teaching author-

[61] Vatican Council II Documents, No. 58, *Dei Verbum*, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation," 18 Nov. 1965, Vol. I, Para. 10, 755-756.

ity, refusing any rebuke whatsoever to her opinion, claims also that she has "faithfully expounded" the Scriptures. Yet, on all the issues discussed here, that same "teaching authority of the community" has shown herself to be obdurately[62] and consistently opposed to the Word of God. She has forgotten, if she ever knew it, that Proverbs 30:5-6 applies also to herself:

> Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.

In Ephesians 6:11, believers are clearly commanded, "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil." Down in the list is the instruction, "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (v. 17). If the New Evangelicals could sign a document that states that they "recognize their own continuing need to be fully converted," what have they done but attempt to throw off the "helmet of salvation"? In compromising biblical truth, they have cast aside the loincloth of truth in favor of a fig leaf. In giving up the interpretation of Scripture to men, they give up the sword of the Spirit—so that they may be easily enslaved.

3. Bogus Defenses of Compromise

A. "Domestic differences"

The most serious apologetic[63] for the document entitled "Evangelicals and Catholics Together, The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium" (ECT) is in the book of the similar title *Evangelicals & Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*.[64] (To distinguish this book from the document, we will call it *Common Mission*.) The architects of *ECT* were well aware of the crucial distinctions regarding the gospel that separate Catholics and Evangelicals, but they chose to bypass them. J. I. Packer writes in *Common Mission*,

> Neither evangelicals nor Roman Catholics can stipulate that things they believe, which the other side does not believe, be made foundational to partnership at this point; so *ECT* lets go Protestant precision on the doctrine of justification and the correlation between conversion and new birth...[65]

That such compromise is heretical is seen from his statements earlier in the same article in *Common Mission*, when he said:

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[62] **obdurately** – stubbornly.
[63] **apologetic** – defense.
[64] *Evangelicals & Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*; Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, editors (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing, 1995).
[65] *Common Mission*, 167.

> Roman teaching obscures the gospel and indeed distorts it in a tragically anti-spiritual and unpastoral manner…[66]

and

> Rome's official doctrinal disorders, particularly on justification, merit, and the Mass-sacrifice,[67] so obscure the gospel that were I, as a gesture of unity, invited to mass—which of course as a Protestant I am not, nor shall be—I would not feel free to accept the invitation.[68]

Packer, towards the end of the article, speaks of the evils of "humanism…materialism, hedonism, and nihilism."[69] To rebuild a Christian consensus, he proposes that,

> Domestic differences about salvation and the church should not hinder us from joint action in seeking to re-Christianize the North American milieu [i.e., environment].[70]

These are amazing words from the author of *Knowing God*. The orthodox evangelical Jim Packer of old spoke of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, *sola fide*, as "like Atlas, it bears a world on its shoulders, the entire evangelical knowledge of saving grace"! Now, however, he downgrades the same saving faith to "domestic differences about salvation." In a 1994 article, "Why I Signed It," he refers to *sola fide* (faith alone) as "small print." The warning of the apostle Paul must now sound again,

> But there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed (Gal 1:7-8).

B. "Notional soundness"

Packer, who leads the New "Reformed" Evangelicals, has struggled to explain his position. In a 1996 article, he asks the question,

> Can conservative Protestants, Eastern Orthodox, and mainstream Roman Catholics join together in bearing witness to all that I have spoken of? I urge that we can, despite our known and continuing differences about the specifics of the salvation process and the place of the church in that process…To be sure, fundamentalists within our three traditions are unlikely to join us in this, for it is the way of fundamentalists to follow the

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[66] Ibid., 153.

[67] **Mass-sacrifice** – Roman Catholic doctrine holds that the body of Jesus Christ is sacrificed again and again in each Catholic worship service (Mass), and His actual blood and body are eaten in the Lord's Supper (Eucharist).

[68] Ibid., 162-163.

[69] [secular] **humanism** – belief that humanity is capable of morality and self-fulfillment without belief in God.
materialism – philosophy that physical well-being and worldly possessions constitute the greatest good and highest values in life.
hedonism – philosophy that pleasure and happiness is the highest good.
nihilism – the doctrine that existence or values are meaningless.

[70] Ibid., 172.

path of contentious orthodoxy, as if the mercy of God in Christ automatically rests on persons who are *notionally correct*, and [that same mercy] is just as automatically withheld from those who fall short of *notional correctness* on any point of substance. But this concept of justification [being], in effect, not of works but of words—words, that is, of *notional soundness and precision*—is near to being a cultic heresy in its own right and need not detain us further now, however much we may regret the fact that some in all our traditions are bogged down in it.[71]

No orthodox evangelical has ever maintained that "notional soundness and precision"—that is, doctrinal theory [or correctness]—ever saved anyone. Rather, orthodox evangelicals have always held to Romans 10:10,

For with the heart *man believeth* unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

It appears that Packer is here conducting a little casuistry[72] of his own. He is attempting to preempt his critics by raising an anti-biblical dichotomy[73] between head and heart. This is an old liberal tactic, that is, to create an unbiblical dichotomy and then imply and insinuate that any party who refuses to acknowledge it, must in the nature of the case be unspiritual—opposed to Christian love. None of the historic evangelical confessions of faith hold that mere doctrinal "soundness" saves anyone. This is an absurd caricature that Packer has invented. Rather, orthodox evangelicals today, even as they did in the days of the apostle Paul and at the Reformation, declare that it is the righteousness of Christ Jesus alone that saves a person!

In setting aside the crux[74] issue of faith alone in Christ Jesus alone, Packer is thoroughly in tune with the practice of the Church of Rome. For *sola fide*, faith alone, is *the* issue for which the apostle Paul contended against the Judaizers and for which the Reformers contended against the Roman Catholics of their day. It was the burning issue, foundational to why so many thousands of evangelicals gave their lives at the stake—John Huss, William Tyndale, John Rogers, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, Anne Askew, John Bradford, and John Philpot,[75] to name but a few.

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[71] J. I. Packer, "On from Orr", *The J. I. Packer Collection*, Selected and Introduced by Alister McGrath (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 264.

[72] **casuistry** – clever reasoning that misleads.

[73] **dichotomy** – division into two parts.

[74] **crux** – crucial; vital; decisive.

[75] **John Huss** or Jan Hus (c. 1370-1415) – Protestant reformer in Bohemia (modern Czech Republic and Slovakia); condemned by the Council of Constance and burned to death.
William Tyndale (c. 1492-1536) – English scholar; heroic translator of the Bible into English; executed by Henry VIII for his success in translation and distribution.
John Rogers (c. 1505-1555) – English clergyman, Bible translator, and commentator; martyred by Mary I of England in her attempt to restore Roman Catholicism.
Hugh Latimer (c. 1487-1555) – Anglican priest and chaplain to King Edward VI; burned at the stake by Queen Mary.

Now Professor Packer creates the absurd distraction of "notional correctness." This ploy and his denial of his former belief is utterly unworthy of anyone who purports to be a Christian. The ardent desire of true evangelicals to "be found in [Christ], not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith" (Phi 3:9) was and is the heart of the gospel—not "contentious orthodoxy" nor "cultic heresy." Christ Jesus' righteousness is the crown jewel of orthodoxy, the pivotal doctrine of truth, revealed again by God in its rediscovery that began the Reformation.

Professor Packer has chosen to deny the very doctrine that once stood for him and, like Atlas, bore a world on its shoulders. What Packer has done is to deny the importance of the Scriptures on the precise point of *sola fide*. He also denies the Reformation history of those evangelicals who under the Roman Catholic Inquisition gave their lives, not for any correctness in words, but rather for their faith in Christ Jesus alone. Since the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ is involved—and these Reformation martyrs loved not their lives unto the death for faith in Him alone—we think this matter is so serious as to demand the judgment of the Lord Himself:

> For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:30-31).

4. Devastating Effects of Compromise

A. Evangelism

The real effect of the document is to stop evangelization of Roman Catholics, especially in predominantly Catholic countries. If the compromise of the authority of the Bible, compromise of the true gospel of Jesus Christ, and compromise of the priesthood of all true believers is right before the Holy God, then Bible believing churches will not evangelize Catholics; they will not send missionaries to Catholic countries in Central and South America, Africa, Spain, Portugal, and the Philippines. The *ECT* states,

> We are aware that our experience reflects the distinctive circumstances and opportunities of evangelicals and Catholics living together in North America. At the same time,

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Nicholas Ridley (c. 1500-1555) – Anglican Bishop of London; burned at the stake with Latimer during the Marian Persecutions.

Anne Askew (1521-1546) – English writer, poet, and Protestant martyr who was condemned as a heretic in England in the reign of Henry VIII.

John Bradford (c. 1510-1555) – English preacher; taught at Cambridge; burned at the stake for refusing to deny his faith by order of the Roman Catholic Queen Mary.

John Philpot (1516-1555) – English Protestant martyr whose story is recorded in *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*; studied at Oxford.

we believe that what we have discovered and resolved is pertinent to the relationship between evangelicals and Catholics in other parts of the world.

Much later in its declaration, *ECT* states,

> It is neither theologically legitimate nor a prudent use of resources for one Christian community [i.e., church or denomination] to proselytize[76] among active adherents of another Christian community.[77]

Since when has it been theologically illegitimate to expose error and heresy? Because these intelligent and educated men have made such biblically illiterate statements, it is time to state that the biblical mandate of separation from such men must be observed!

> Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2Jo 1:9-11).

ECT readily admits of "differences that cannot be resolved here." Based solely upon the desire for union on important moral issues, the authors of *ECT* proclaim that evangelicals and Catholics are one in Christ and one in His church. They claim that we all are truly Christians. This is a major fallacy of *ECT*.

B. Separation

In his essay in *Common Mission*, Richard Neuhaus states emphatically, "If, at the end of the twentieth century, separation for the sake of the gospel is not necessary, it is not justified."[78] What Neuhaus was effectively saying is that the gospel is no longer relevant to Christian unity. This seems to be the precise intent of the 1994 *ECT* document and equally the 1997 "The Gift of Salvation" document. If true evangelicals do not combat this most serious attack on the gospel, then Neuhaus' anti-scriptural words—"separation for the sake of the gospel is not necessary or justified"—might well fall on them and their children after them.

If the lie is swallowed that separation for the sake of the gospel is not justified, then the logical conclusion is that churches should cave in and submit to the Church of Rome. This has always been the avowed goal of the Mother Church, as her documents verify:

> Little by little, as the obstacles to perfect ecclesial communion are overcome, all Christians will be gathered, in a common celebration of the Eucharist [the Mass] into that

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[76] **proselytize** – evangelize; attempt to convert someone to one's own religious faith.
[77] *ECT*, Introduction, 1.
[78] Richard John Neuhaus, "The Catholic Difference," *Common Mission*, 199.

unity of the one and only church…This unity, we believe, dwells in the Catholic Church as something we can never lose.[79]

Neuhaus' conclusion is similar to Packer's—and even more alarming since it comes from the Roman Catholic side. Rome is well known to have sharp legal teeth in its dealings among nations.[80] Neuhaus states,

> But to declare it [i.e., justification by faith alone] to be the article by which the church stands or falls[81]—in a manner that excludes other ways of saying the gospel—is to turn it into a sectarian doctrine.[82]

In this statement, the true gospel of grace has not simply been declared unnecessary, but it has been labeled a "sectarian doctrine." What has already happened and has been reported in both Belgium and France might well one day occur in the USA too:

> The Belgian Chamber of Representatives passed a law creating a "sect oversight organization" which will "scrutinize" the 189 religious organizations listed in the Belgian Parliamentary Sect Report published in April 1997...Minority evangelical, Pentecostal, and Adventist churches not belonging to the United Protestant Church of Belgium, which is recognized by the state, are targeted in the Belgian Sect Report.[83]

5. Warnings

A. Attack on the Gospel

C. H. Spurgeon's timely words apply now even more than in his own day,

> Since he was cursed who rebuilt Jericho, much more the man who labors to restore Popery among us. In our fathers' days the gigantic walls of Popery fell by the power of their faith, the perseverance of their efforts, and the blast of their gospel trumpets.[84]

The gospel trumpet is the very issue at stake, for the Roman Catholic and New Evangelical signers of *ECT* and *ECT II* first give the false message of Rome, go on to uphold baptismal regeneration, and then, in defense of what they have written, declare that the gospel of Christ is a "domestic matter" or even a "sectarian doctrine." The Apostle Paul, before he concluded his letter to the Romans, inserts a final warning against false teachers who cause divisions by perverting the doctrine of the gospel he had delivered. His words were,

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[79] Vatican Council II Documents No. 42, "Reflections and Suggestions Concerning Ecumenical Dialogue," S.P.U.C., 15 August 1975, 541.

[80] See our article "Vatican Prepares to Control through Civil Law," *The Beacon*, No. 6, June 2001.

[81] **the article by which the church stands or falls** – the key doctrine that defines the condition for true salvation and entrance into the body of all true believers.

[82] *Common Mission*, 207.

[83] "Growing Religious Intolerance in Belgium," *Evangelical Times*, August 1998.

[84] *Morning and Evening* on Joshua 6:26.

> Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them (Rom 16:17).

He also instructs Titus with a similar warning,

> A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself (Ti 3:10-11).

How serious is the Word of the Lord to true believers in this commandment? How serious is the truth of the gospel of Christ?

B. Ecumenical Compromise

We have reached a watershed moment in history. Those who truly adhere to the gospel of Christ must hold that the gospel not only is the power of God unto salvation, but that, as such, it cannot be contaminated with any other gospel (Gal 1:8-9). Therefore, those who truly are ambassadors of the gospel of Christ must separate themselves, not only from Roman Catholicism and her sacramental claims, but also from the so-called New Evangelicals who have proposed this declaration of evangelical and Catholic unity, or have been party to it. In the Scriptures we are warned continually to separate from brothers who are in error.

We are considering men of our own day, some of whom have done outstanding work for the sake of the gospel in the past. But now that these men are acting consistently as false teachers, they must be treated as the Scripture directs us: separation *must* take place. "Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jer 23:29).

In the implementation of *ECT* and *ECT II*, J. I. Packer and Charles Colson, together with Timothy George, have been the prime movers. It is necessary now to apply biblical principles to these men and to those who support them. Since the gospel of Christ has been denied in these two documents, it is therefore necessary that they be treated as brothers who are in grievous error.

In our temporal world, infectious diseases are quarantined, and contaminated food is discarded, but the danger involved here is not only temporal. Ought not brothers who would deceive the saints of God—and draw them away into an ecumenical compromise that is contrary to the gospel of Christ—be separated from the saints of the Lord for the latter's eternal safety? God's presence demands holiness, separation from evil. Fellowship with evil shuts out God's gracious favor. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (2Co 6:17).

C. False Teachers

The testimony of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures expressly forewarns God's people of principal teachers becoming false teachers, or grievous wolves. So it was in the early days of the church and right through history. The Church of Rome has been the main

apostate[85] system throughout the centuries because she has embraced "the wise and learned" above Scripture, and because she has been the religion of kings and rulers. In history, as in our own day, she attracts scholars and philosophers, writers and businessmen. She has a form of godliness—notwithstanding errors, impieties, superstitions, and idolatries. And she has now engaged well-known teachers and pastors to lend the weight of their fleshly credit to her soul-destroying errors. The Lord warned of false prophets in sheep's clothing that are really ravening wolves (Mat 7:15). Leaving off sound doctrine is so serious that we are told,

> Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils (1Ti 4:1-2).

The infallible Spirit of God testifies to the danger of apostasy. The apostle Paul cautioned the elders of the church at Ephesus about "grievous wolves…not sparing the flock" (Act 20:29). The same warning is given by the apostle Peter when he calls those who would bring in damnable heresies "false teachers" (2Pe 2:1).

There are several clear warnings in the New Testament from the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles that a serious decline from the revealed truths of the gospel would occur even among professed disciples. It cannot be held that these warnings were only for the first days of the Christian faith! They are directly pertinent to all believers living through New Covenant times.[86] In the religious climate of the present day, it is politically incorrect to say that any man has fallen into error and is acting the part of a false teacher or prophet. It is as though even these clear warnings were only for a certain period of early church history and not for us today.

It is for us, however, to fear the all-holy God and obey His commandment to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3), and to "stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel" (Phi 1:27). J. I. Packer, a world-renowned theologian, like a modern Pied Piper,[87] is leading many thousands of evangelicals astray. Charles Colson, Bill Bright, Pat Robertson, Os Guinness, and many other prominent New Evangelicals have publicly denied the gospel in endorsing the anti-biblical terms and erroneous doctrinal concepts of the Church of Rome. All these men are acting as false brethren by falsely identifying Catholics as "our brothers and sisters in Christ." In doing so, they are reinforcing the tragic and catastrophic delusions of lost souls and denying them the substance of saving truth! Unless they come to public repentance, the church of the Lord Jesus Christ must

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[85] **apostate** – having abandoned the fundamental doctrines of the faith, after earlier professing belief in Christ.

[86] **New Covenant times** – the period extending from Christ's earthly ministry to His second coming.

[87] **Pied Piper** – one who offers others strong yet delusive enticements (after "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," title and hero of a poem by Robert Browning).

not only separate from these men, but also go on to pray that the Lord would vindicate His truth.

Since it is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, His glorious gospel, and the truth of His Word that is at stake here, we are obliged in the Spirit of Christ's love to pray, "O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself" (Psa 94:1). May God, for the sake of His own glory, exhibit His just wrath toward all those who would pervert the gospel and make merchandise of His sheep.

D. Conclusion

Despite its intention of "speak[ing] responsibly from our communities and to our communities," the document entitled *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* was clearly conceived in deception and negotiated by compromise. While declaring that they "reject any appearance of harmony that is purchased at the price of truth," it is clear from the document produced that the Roman Catholic position has been taken on every issue. Never is the biblical standard properly stated, applied, or upheld. The essential differences are put away in a few sentences because of the loose, erroneous definition of the term *Christian* as anyone who makes a profession of faith in Christ, regardless of their reliance upon their own works to earn God's favor for salvation. Although John 17 is quoted, it is misused because there Jesus was praying for His elect, not those who fall under *ECT's* mistaken definition of "Christian." Thus, in order to form this ecumenical compromise, its signers—both Roman Catholic and the New Evangelical Protestant—have to disregard Holy Scripture, because their definition of "Christian" contradicts Philippians 3:8-9, Romans 3:24, 11:5-6, Ephesians 2:8-10, Romans 2:28-29, and many other similar passages. Their position before the Holy God and His Word is indefensible.

Yet *ECT* laments,

> In many parts of the world, the relationship between these two communities [i.e., the Roman Catholic Church and the evangelical Protestant churches] is marked…more by propaganda and ignorance than by respect for the truth.

This statement applies directly to *ECT* itself: the Roman Catholic signatories have successfully propagandized and deceived the compromising, wishful-thinking New Evangelicals. Bible believers the world over need to rebuke in the strongest terms both groups of signatories because, despite all their pious words and good intentions, none of the signatories to the document has respected the truth of Scripture.

By demanding absolute moral obedience to herself, by controlling the Scripture by means of her "teaching authority," and by means of her sacrificial priesthood, the Roman Catholic Church moves once again to gather to herself the power she lost in the late 1700s at the end of the Inquisition. The means by which to regain her power have

not been the rack and dungeon of the Inquisition. Rather, it is primarily through the ecumenical movement that the necessary political power, obtainable through the ignorance of the truth of Scripture and through forced dependence on "Holy Mother Church," is being gathered. Whoever can commandeer this power, which is established and upheld by worldly means, is then the purported "church of Christ." This unmitigated desire for worldly power was the reason that the bloody Inquisition was carried on by the Roman Catholic Church for 605 years. Bible believing men and women all through those bloody centuries were martyred by the Roman Church for daring to confront that power-hungry system of their own day with the truth.

The true church of the Lord, throughout most of history, has been the little flock that remembers the Lord's Word and was not afraid. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luk 12:32). So it was for the Vaudois, the Waldenses, Lollards, and the Bohemians[88] and for the men and women through the time of the Inquisition and the Reformation. One of our Savior's favorite themes was the servant who is faithful. In this day of apostasy and alignment of famous names with apostasy, it is imperative that in the Lord's grace we remain faithful to "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3). Together, we commit ourselves then to the Lord in His sovereignty, to His gospel of grace alone through faith alone, and to His Word—which proclaims, as it is written, "My sheep hear my voice" (Joh 10:27). The distortion and perversion of true biblical doctrine leads to false Christianity and deceitful ecumenism. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage" (Gal 5:1).

Let the trumpet sound loudly with Christian distinctives as it did at the time of the Reformation! God's Word is our only authority on earth. *Sola scriptura!* Let it be known that we are justified by grace only through faith only in Christ Jesus only! *Sola*

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[88] **Vaudois, Waldenses** – two names for the ascetic movement within Christianity founded around 1173 by Peter Waldo, a wealthy Italian merchant. Waldensian teachings were a forerunner of many Protestant beliefs, and also included an emphasis on voluntary poverty. They quickly came into conflict with the Catholic Church and were subject to intense persecution by 1215. Upon finding the ideas of the Reformation similar to their own, they merged into the larger Protestant movement in the 16th century as Calvinists.

Lollards – pre-Protestant Christian movement that existed from the mid-14th century to the English Reformation. It was initially led by John Wycliffe, a Roman Catholic theologian who was dismissed from the University of Oxford in 1381 for criticism of the Roman Catholic Church. The Lollards' demands were primarily for reform of Western Christianity.

Bohemians – residents of the westernmost region of the present-day Czech Republic, and followers of Jan Hus (1369-1415), whose teachings included many biblical truths later embodied in the Reformation. Armed conflict with the Catholic rulers ensued upon his execution. The area remained mostly Hussite until the 1620s, when a Protestant defeat led to a forced return to Catholicism.

gratia, sola fide, solus Christus! And to God only be the glory! *Soli Deo gloria*![89] As the great martyrs such as Hus, Wycliffe, Cranmer,[90] Latimer, Ridley, et al,[91] stood on biblical truth in Christian freedom, so also our clear resounding response to this *ECT* document must be, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Act 5:29)!

[89] The five *solae* (from *sola*, Latin: "alone") of the Protestant Reformation are a foundational set of principles central to the doctrine of salvation. Each *sola* represents a key evangelical belief in contradistinction to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church.

[90] **Thomas Cranmer** (1489-1556) – a leader of the English Reformation and the Archbishop of Canterbury during the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI. He arranged Henry's divorce from the Catholic Catherine of Aragon, resulting in the establishment of the Church of England. He established its first doctrinal and liturgical structures. When Edward came to the throne, Cranmer was able to promote major reforms, including the first two editions of the *Book of Common Prayer*. He was burned at the stake by Roman Catholic Mary I, who succeeded Edward.

[91] **et al** – and others.