

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

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

—Anonymous evangelical theologian to Fr. Richard John Neuhaus

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

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

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

The Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) Controversy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

truth of God in Christ.”⁹

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

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

ating institutions in society: the family, church, and voluntary associations.¹³

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

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

While on the surface *Evangelicals and*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In April of 1995, following a year of

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Catholics were largely untroubled by ECT. As Richard John Neuhaus

announced,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Gift of Salvation Document (TGS) Controversy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reactions to TGS again showed signs of a fundamental misunderstanding about

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

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

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

In an April 1999 statement addressing

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In a rather forthright paragraph, Neuhaus retorts:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

troversy in the ECT projects.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New Testament scholar Robert Gundry and theologian Thomas Oden partici-

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

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

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

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

stage in the dialogue will be a collection of essays on the scripture versus tradition debate among evangelicals and Catholics to be published by William B. Eerdmans Publishers under the title, *Your Word is Truth*, in March 2002.⁸⁹ Whether these essays will advance the discussions or set them back is yet to be seen. One thing seems certain, they will be controversial.

Conclusion

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

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

unwaveringly.

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

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

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

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

ENDNOTES

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

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

³ECT, 15.

⁴Ibid. A helpful sociological analysis of the way coalitions work is Kevin W.

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

⁵Ibid., 16.

⁶Ibid., 17.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid., 18.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., 18-19.

¹²Ibid., 19.

¹³Ibid., 19-20.

¹⁴Ibid., 21.

¹⁵Ibid., 22.

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

¹⁷Ibid., 17.

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

¹⁹Ibid., 35.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., 36.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., 37.

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

²⁵Ibid., 2.

²⁶Ibid., 8.

²⁷Ibid., 9-10.

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

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³⁷*Ibid.*, 252.

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

³⁶ECT, 16. Emphasis added.

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

³⁷*Ibid.*, 53.

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹*Ibid.*

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

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

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

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

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

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴*Ibid.*

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶TGS, 35-36.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸*Ibid.*

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

⁵⁰Timothy George, "An Evangelical Assessment," 35.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

⁵²"Theological Disputes," *WORLD*, 27 December 1998.

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

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

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