

REVERSING The Reformation

The Catholic/Evangelical
Accord Examined

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Reversing the Reformation, The Catholic/Evangelical Accord Examined

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

On March 24, 1994, leading Evangelicals and Roman Catholics met together to sign a document that calls on both groups to stop trying to convert each other and to instead embrace each other as fellow Christians. That 25-page document is entitled: *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium*. According to one author, this document “represents the most devastating blow against the Gospel in at least 1000 years.”¹

For the first time since the Reformation, Evangelicals have re-defined what it means to be a Christian and have declared the world’s one billion Roman Catholics to be true believers. At the heart of this issue are the questions: 1) what really is the Gospel? and 2) what makes a person a Christian? Evangelicals traditionally have held that salvation comes only by believing in the finished work of Christ on the cross and that a person is justified by grace through faith alone. On the other hand, Roman Catholicism has held that salvation comes through faith plus adherence to the Roman Catholic Church and the sacraments. Evangelical Protestants since the Reformation have clearly and consistently declared the Roman Catholic system to be a false religious system based on works, at least until now.

This Catholic-Evangelical accord is another step in what is called Ecumenism. Ecumenism is primarily concerned with laying aside theological differences for the sake of unity. It is my fear though, that what we see going on with this accord is not promoting true, biblical unity. True unity must be based on the truth of God’s Word or else it is a false unity.

My motive in writing this critique of that accord is not out of a dislike for Catholics or because I do not want to see unity in the Body of Christ. It is my heart's desire to see Catholics come to saving faith in Jesus Christ and I am not against biblical unity. However, I must speak out against what I see as a serious perversion of the Gospel. I am convinced that the Catholic-Evangelical accord is in error and has diluted the message of the Gospel.

My purpose in writing this is to give a biblical evaluation of that important document. Though it is not possible to cover every statement of that 25-page document, I have quoted extensively from it and have put the page number next to each quote. It is my intent to honestly represent what the signers of this document said and then hold it up to the light of Scripture.

CHAPTER ONE

The Galatian Heresy Revisited

The one thing that sets true, biblical Christianity apart from all other religions is its emphasis on salvation by grace through faith alone. The Apostle Paul said, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law” (Rom. 3:28). He also stated, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as result of works” (Eph. 2:8–9). Paul could not have been any clearer. Salvation comes by believing in Jesus Christ alone. There are no works that can be done to help in salvation.

However, Paul knew that no matter how clear he made the Gospel, there would be false teachers who would come in and teach another gospel. Upon leaving the Ephesian elders he said, “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock” (Acts 20:29). He knew that whenever the true Gospel was proclaimed, false teachers would come in and promote a false gospel.

That is what happened to the church in Galatia. The church Paul helped found was in serious trouble. A group known as the Judaizers, had come to town preaching a false gospel. Much of what they taught seemed right. They were orthodox in many ways and even preached that faith in Christ was necessary for salvation. However, the Judaizers also taught that in order to be saved, a person must also observe certain aspects of the Mosaic Law, including cir-

cumcision. They added works to the Gospel. This teaching seemed innocent to the Galatians. After all, much of what was being taught by the Judaizers sounded the same as what they had heard from Paul, but there were a few things added. What harm could there be in such teaching? However, Paul had a scathing rebuke for the Galatians for accepting such teaching:

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:6-7).

The teaching that seemed so innocent to the Galatians was in fact, according to Paul, “a different gospel.” All the Judaizers did was add a few things to faith in Christ, but Paul said what they preached was an entirely different gospel, not to be confused with the true Gospel he preached. He then said:

But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:8-9).

The warning is strong and clear. Anyone who adds to the Gospel in any way is “accursed” which means “worthy of eternal destruction.” That is how seriously Paul took the issue of the Gospel. That is an important principle for all Christians to know. The Gospel is not something to be tampered with. Salvation is by faith alone plus nothing. Whoever adds to it is promoting a false gospel and is under the curse of God. The purity of the Gospel is a serious matter.

Paul scolded the Galatians saying, “You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you” (Gal. 3:1). The Galatians had bought into the heresy of the Judaizers, and as a result Paul declared them to be “bewitched.” The Evangelical Church should have learned from the mistakes of the Galatians, yet today the Church finds herself being “bewitched.” Ever since the Reformation, Bible-believing Christians have denounced Roman Catholicism for preaching a works-based, false gospel. However, today that is changing. Almost 500 years after the Reformation, leading Evangelicals have signed an accord

accepting the one billion Catholics in the world as saved. Something that seemed impossible even just a few years ago has taken place.

CHAPTER TWO

What Is a Christian?

What are the issues involved in this accord? Are Roman Catholics and Evangelical Protestants really saying the same thing? Was the Protestant Reformation a mistake?

For clarification, this Roman Catholic/Evangelical Accord is a document recently signed by leading Evangelicals and Roman Catholics. It is not an official document in that the Roman Catholic Church has not yet officially adopted it. Nor do these Evangelical leaders formally represent Evangelical Christianity. However, the fact that leading Catholics and prominent Evangelicals would sign such a document indicates that the effect of this document could be enormous. The names of Evangelicals who have signed this document reads like a list of Who's Who in Evangelicalism: Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ; Mark Knowle of Wheaton College; J.I. Packer; Charles Colson; Pat Robertson; Oz Guinnes; John White from Geneva College in the National Association of Evangelicals; and others. Also included are the many Roman Catholic signers.

The introduction starts off by saying:

- We are Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics who have been led through prayer, study, and discussion to common convictions about Christian faith and mission. This statement cannot speak officially for our communities. It does intend to speak responsibly from our communities and to our communities. In this statement we ad-

dress what we have discovered both about our unity and about our differences. (p.1)

The introduction later says:

- We together pray for the fulfillment of the prayer of our Lord: “May they all be one; as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, so also may they be in us. . . .” We together, Evangelicals and Catholics, confess our sins against the unity that Christ intends for all his disciples. (p.2)

It becomes clear in this document that oneness and unity have become the key issues. According to these statements, Catholics and Evangelicals must start out by confessing their sins of not being unified as disciples of Christ. This assumes that both groups are disciples of Christ without defining what a true disciple is. But how can we agree that both groups are disciples when we have not identified what it means to be a disciple of Christ? Yet this document skips right over this key issue and goes on to discuss confessing sin for not being unified as disciples:

- The one Christ and one mission includes many other Christians, notably the Eastern Orthodox and those Protestants not commonly identified as Evangelical. All Christians are encompassed in the prayer, “May they all be one.” (p.2)

Notice that the word “Christian” has taken on a very broad meaning. When the term “Christian” refers to “Protestants not commonly identified as Evangelical,” who does this include? This must refer to liberal Protestants. Yet many liberal, mainline Protestants would deny the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the sufficiency of Scripture, and salvation by faith in Christ alone. Are they Christians too? So far in this document, the term “Christian” encompasses a broad range. Not only are Evangelicals Christians, so are Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and liberal Protestants. But what is a Christian?

- As we near the Third Millennium, there are approximately 1.7 billion Christians in the world. About a billion of these are Catholics and more than 300 million are Evangelical Protestants. (p.2)

This is what happens when the term “Christian” is not defined. For many centuries Bible-believing Christians have denounced Roman Catholicism as a false religious system. Now we read that all one billion Catholics are Christians. Not only that, if there are 1.7 billion Christians, with Catholics and Evangelicals making up 1.3 billion, that means Eastern Orthodox and liberal Protestants must make up the remaining 400,000 Christians. Again, without explanation, all these groups are lumped together as Christians:

- The two communities in world Christianity that are most evangelistically assertive and most rapidly growing are Evangelicals and Catholics. In many parts of the world, the relationship between these communities is marked more by conflict than by cooperation, more by animosity than by love, more by suspicion than by trust, more by propaganda and ignorance than by respect for the truth. This is alarmingly the case in Latin America, increasingly the case in Eastern Europe, and too often the case in our own country. (p.3)

This statement says there is too much “conflict,” “animosity,” “suspicion” and “propaganda” between Catholics and Evangelicals around the world, especially in Latin America. But Roman Catholicism is the predominant religion in Latin America. The issue is not Roman Catholics and Evangelicals equally converting each other; the issue is that Catholics are converting to Evangelical Christianity in droves and the Catholic Church is disturbed and wants to do something about it.

Who Is Converting Whom?

Christianity Today ran an article entitled, “Catholic Bishops Renew Missionary Efforts to Stem Growth of Sects.” It reads, “Proclaiming a new evangelization, Latin America’s Catholic Bishops have adopted a more Christ-centered strategy to rebuild their flocks and stem the flow of millions of people to non-mainline denominations.”² The Catholic Church is concerned that in Latin America, millions of Roman Catholics are converting to Evangelical Christianity. What is their response? They have adopted a more “Christ-centered strategy to rebuild their flocks.” In other words, the Ro-

man Catholic Church will do what is necessary to keep their people in the Church, and if a Christ-centered approach is what is needed, then they will go Christ-centered.

The article also says, “ ‘Many people in the Catholic Church are now in a panic,’ said a pastor from Buenos Aires. ‘Catholic leaders have had the attitude that Latin America was their property, a false assumption.’ ” The Roman Catholic Church is in a panic over the loss of millions of people to Evangelical Christianity and now we see the Roman Catholic Church signing an agreement with Evangelicals saying we should not be trying to convert each other. When is the last time you heard of groups of Evangelicals crossing over to Catholicism? The Catholic Church gave up nothing in this accord. It is no wonder they would be happy to sign such an agreement.

Identifying the Opposition

This document not only states that Catholics and Evangelicals should not be trying to convert each other; it also says what their focus should be:

- The Christian mission, which is directed to the entire human community, must be advanced against formidable opposition. In some cultures, that mission encounters resurgent spiritualities and religions that are explicitly hostile to the claims of the Christ. Islam, which in many instances denies the freedom to witness to the Gospel, must be of increasing concern to those who care about religious freedom and the Christian mission. (p.3)

Notice what has been done here. These men want to redefine who the enemies of the Gospel are. They are saying that the real enemies to the Gospel are those, such as Muslims, who do not even call themselves Christians. They are the real enemy.

- As Evangelicals and Catholics, we dare not by needless and loveless conflict between ourselves give aid and comfort to the enemies of the cause of Christ. (p.4)

But it must be asked, who are the enemies of Christ? Are Muslims and those who would not name the name of Christ at all the

only enemies to the Gospel of Christ? If this were the case, why didn't Paul embrace the Judaizers he referred to in Galatians? They claimed to believe in Christ. Paul probably had much he would have agreed on with the Judaizers. Yet Paul said they were "accursed." Saying they believed in Christ was not enough. They added works to the Gospel and were condemned by Paul as those who preached a false gospel. Professing to be a Christian does not necessarily make one a Christian. Salvation is by faith alone plus nothing. Whatever group or religion adds to the Gospel is under the curse of God.

The document continues:

- The love of Christ compels us and we are therefore resolved to avoid such conflict between our communities and, where such conflict exists, to do what we can to reduce and eliminate it. Beyond that, we are called and we are therefore resolved to explore patterns of working and witnessing together in order to advance the one mission of Christ. . . . The mission that we embrace together is the necessary consequence of the faith that we affirm together. (p.4)

Do we as Evangelicals have a common faith, witness, and mission with Roman Catholics? Is it true that the one billion Catholics in the world share the same glorious salvation that Evangelical believers in Jesus Christ have? We are to let "the love of Christ" be known but the "love of Christ" does not compel us to sacrifice truth for the sake of unity.

CHAPTER THREE

Do Catholics and Evangelicals Really Agree?

The first, main division of the document is called, “We Affirm Together.” This section contains supposed areas of agreement between Catholics and Evangelicals:

- Jesus Christ is Lord. That is the first and final affirmation that Christians make about all of reality. (p.5)

That is an important and essential belief and one must believe this to be saved. But keep in mind that a number of cults would also make that claim.

- We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ. (p.5)

This issue is where we must be careful. Roman Catholics have no problem saying that faith in Christ is necessary for salvation. But they do not believe that faith in Christ **alone** is all that is needed for salvation. That is what the Protestant Reformation was fought over. The Reformers rightly argued that a person is justified by grace through faith alone, (cf. Ephesians 2:8) apart from any works or sacraments whatsoever. However, Roman Catholicism teaches that the sacraments and obedience to the church are also essential for salvation. That is not faith in Christ **alone**. So when Catholics and

Evangelicals say that “we are justified by grace through faith,” are they saying the same thing? The answer is no. The Catholics are like the Judaizers in this area. They both teach faith, but they also add works. Therefore, Catholics and Evangelicals are not really saying the same thing here. The document would have us believe they are:

- All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ. Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ. (p.5)

What we have here is a jump in logic. The first statement, “All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ,” is true. The second statement, “Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ,” is not necessarily true. That depends on whether a person has truly “accepted Christ as Lord and Savior.” Again we come to the issue of what makes a person a Christian. Can a person be saved by adhering to the Roman Catholic system? This document would have us presuppose broad ideas of what makes a Christian. Once a person accepts their premise, the next step is to make a plea for unity:

- However imperfect our communion with one another, however deep our disagreements with one another, we recognize that there is but one church of Christ. (p.5)

Terms must again be defined. What does each group mean by the “Church?” Evangelicals believe in the universal church that is composed of all true believers around the world who have believed in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 12:5; Eph. 1:22–23). Is that what the Roman Catholic Church defines as the “Church”? Study any Roman Catholic doctrinal book and it becomes clear that the Roman Catholic Church believes there is only one church of Christ—and they are it. The Roman Catholic Church has clearly and consistently taught throughout the centuries that the Holy Roman Church is the only Church and there is no salvation in any other place (M. Eminyán, “Salvation, Necessity of the Church for,” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 12, pp. 995, 996.). It is amazing that such an area can be listed as an agreement:

- We affirm together that Christians are to teach and live in

obedience to the divinely inspired Scriptures, which are the infallible Word of God. (p.6)

It is commendable that the Roman Church holds that the Bible is the divinely inspired, infallible Word of God. But again, there are major differences between Catholics and Evangelicals concerning the authority of the Bible. To their credit, some of these differences are brought out in the document (p.10).

Evangelicals hold that the Bible alone is the sole source of authority for living the Christian life. The Catholic Church places tradition alongside the Bible as equally authoritative. Evangelicals believe that any true believer can study the Bible and interpret what it says. Catholicism teaches that only the Church has the authority to interpret the Bible. Also, Catholics and Evangelicals have radical differences on what the Bible actually says. In light of all these differences, can we say we are unified on the issue of the Bible?

This section on “We Affirm Together” ends with a statement from the Apostles’ Creed. This is used to emphasize the agreements that both groups seemingly have. But in reality, all these areas that Catholics and Evangelicals supposedly agree on are really meaningless and irrelevant. What really counts is disagreements. Paul could have made a long list of what he would have agreed on with the Judaizers, but he did not. He went straight to their errors. Mormons hold to the Apostles’ Creed too. Should we emphasize our unity with them? There is much we can agree on with all kinds of religions and cults but that is not sufficient reason to embrace them as fellow Christians.

CHAPTER FOUR

How Important Are the Disagreements?

The second main section of the document is called, “We Hope Together.” The first section dealt with areas of agreement, this section deals with what we hope together about:

- We hope together that all people will come to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. . . . The church lives by and for the Great Commission . . . unity and love among Christians is an integral part of our missionary witness to the Lord whom we serve. (p.7)

It is assumed that since we have already decided that Roman Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ we must unify with them.

The third section of the document is entitled “We Search Together.” Here it is admitted that there are areas of disagreement between Catholics and Evangelicals:

- We do not presume to suggest that we can resolve the deep and long standing differences between Evangelicals and Catholics. Indeed these differences may never be resolved short of the Kingdom Come . . . we warmly commend and encourage the formal theological dialogues of recent years between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals. We note some

of the differences and disagreements that must be addressed more fully and candidly in order to strengthen between us a relationship of trust in obedience to the truth. (p.9)

This document does admit to differences between Catholics and Evangelicals. There is then a list of the points of difference concerning doctrine, worship, practice, and piety:

- The church as an integral part of the Gospel or the church as a communal consequence of the Gospel. (p.10)

The former part of this statement would refer to the Roman Catholic belief that membership in the Catholic Church is part of and is necessary for salvation. The latter refers to the Evangelical belief that salvation brings one into the community of the Church (cf. I Cor. 12:13). Evangelicals have traditionally held that church membership is a result of salvation not a means of salvation. This is a major difference! Is a person saved by becoming part of the Roman Church or does one become a part of the church as a result of believing in Christ?

- The sole authority of Scripture (*sola scriptura*) or Scripture as authoritatively interpreted in the church. (p.10)

“Sola Scriptura” was the battle cry of the reformation. As mentioned earlier, the Catholic Church has agreed that the Bible is the Word of God, but Catholic doctrine also teaches that the Catholic Church is the only authoritative interpreter of the Bible. Evangelical Christianity has held that Scripture has the authority over the Church, not the other way around.

Other issues included are:

- The soul freedom of the individual Christian or the Magisterium (teaching authority) of the community. (p.10)
- The church as a local congregation or universal communion. (p.10)
- Ministry ordered in apostolic succession or the priesthood of all believers. (p.10)

- Sacraments and ordinances as symbols of grace or means of grace. (p.10)

Evangelicals believe that communion is a symbol of what God has done for us in grace. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that sacraments are a means of grace. In other words, Catholics say God's grace is directly communicated to the person by the partaking of that sacrament(s):

- The Lord's Supper as eucharistic sacrifice or memorial meal. (p.10)

Evangelicals hold to the sacrifice of Christ as being a sufficient, once-for-all event. Catholics see the Mass as the continual re-sacrifice of Christ. Was Christ's death sufficient or not? Must the sacrifice be continual? Evangelicals throughout history have held that the Roman Catholic view of the re-sacrificing of Christ in the Mass is blasphemous and a denial of the sufficiency of His death:

- Remembrance of Mary and the saints or devotion to Mary and the saints. (p.10)

Roman Catholics pray to and devote themselves to Mary and the saints. All these things, Evangelicals have held to be reserved only for God. Devotion to anyone other than God is idolatry.

- Baptism as sacrament of regeneration or testimony to regeneration. (p.10)

This is a key salvation issue. Catholics hold that one must be baptized in the Catholic Church to be saved. But the Bible teaches that salvation is by faith alone. Baptism, according to Scripture, gives evidence that one has been saved, but it is not a part of salvation.

All of these are areas of disagreement as admitted by the signers of this document. Any one of these issues, let alone all of them, should give Evangelicals sufficient reason not to enter into such an accord with Catholics. Yet, in spite of these monumental doctrinal differences, these people are saying, "We have not been able to resolve these issues, but oh well, we are still Christians. We can live with these differences." Can we? These differences are every bit as large as the Judaizer's errors. Somehow Roman Catholics have not

given an inch on any of their doctrines yet they have somehow bewitched Evangelical Protestants to sign an agreement stating Catholics are really Christians.

It is clear, however, that the main issue that cannot be resolved is “How does one become a child of God?” How can we just jump over that and say “We agree on a lot of other things, therefore, we must all be Christians. Since we are all Christians let’s go forward with our mission”? That is not the way to handle doctrinal differences.

CHAPTER FIVE

Is Uniting the Answer?

The fourth section of this document is entitled “We Contend Together.” According to this section, Catholics and Evangelicals should be uniting in a common cause:

- As we are bound together by Christ and His cause . . . (p.11)

Think about all the major doctrinal differences there are between Catholics and Evangelicals. Now consider the fact that the two groups are far apart on what it takes and means to be a child of God. We cannot agree on these issues but we are now all supposed to be together in the cause of Christ? If we cannot resolve these issues we are not bound together in the cause of Christ. These areas of disagreement involve Christ and His cause. The Gospel is the cause of Christ.

The document then says we should be:

- contending against all that opposes Christ and His cause. (p.11)

Amen. If that is true I will be contending against those who teach salvation by sacraments, deny the sole authority of Scripture and teach that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was not sufficient. Defending the faith means fighting against many of the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church. If we cannot agree on the Gospel, which

is the cause of Christ, how can we contend together for the cause of Christ? That is nonsense:

- The cause of Christ is the cause and mission of the church, which is, first of all, to proclaim the Good News that “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.” (pp. 11–12)

We would agree with that. We need to preach reconciliation. But how can we join together with those who hold a false view of how reconciliation occurs? The Catholic Church says reconciliation occurs through the sacraments and obedience to the church, while Evangelicals say it is through faith in the finished work of Christ alone.

Social Unity

- Christians individually and the church corporately also have a responsibility for the right ordering of civil society. . . . We embrace this task hopefully; knowing that God has called us to love our neighbor, we seek to secure for all a greater measure of civil righteousness and justice, confident that He will crown our efforts when He rightly orders all things in the coming of his Kingdom. In the exercise of these public responsibilities there has been in recent years a growing convergence and cooperation between Evangelicals and Catholics. We thank God for the discovery of one another in contending for a common cause. (p.12)

What is the common cause referred to here that brings Catholics and Evangelicals together? Notice it is not theological agreement, but social agreement:

- we thank God for the discovery of one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. . . . Together we contend for the truth that politics, law, and culture must be secured by moral truth. (p.12)

In other words, they are saying we may not agree on what it

means to be saved but we can join together in social causes. Would not Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses join together with us in these areas too?

- we contend together for religious freedom. . . . Today we rejoice together that the Roman Catholic Church—as affirmed by the Second Vatican Council and boldly exemplified in the ministry of John Paul II—is strongly committed to religious freedom and, consequently, to the defense of all human rights. (p.13)

This emphasis on social unity is also seen in the following statement:

- The pattern of convergence and cooperation between Evangelicals and Catholics is, in large part, a result of common effort to protect human life, especially the lives of the most vulnerable. . . . We, therefore, will persist in contending . . . in order to secure the legal protection of the unborn. (p.15)

According to this, the number one reason Catholics and Evangelicals have been brought together is because of the war on abortion. The main unifying factor is not doctrinal agreement but agreement on a social issue. Certainly abortion is a heinous sin and something all believers should be opposed to, but are we as Bible believing Christians supposed to embrace every group who agrees with us on the issue of abortion? Do we adjust our theology so we can continue joining hands with groups who march against abortion? Many of the cults are against abortion too, but does this mean we should drop our theological differences with them and accept them as brothers and sisters in Christ too?

The following refer to the other social issues the accord says are a basis for agreement:

- We will do all in our power to resist proposals for euthanasia, eugenics, and population control. (p.16)
- We contend together for a comprehensive policy of parental choice in education. (p.16)

- We contend together against the widespread pornography in our society, along with the celebration of violence, sexual depravity, and anti-religious bigotry in the entertainment media. (p.17)
- We contend for a renewed spirit of acceptance, understanding, and cooperation across lines of religion, race, ethnicity, sex, and class. (p.17)
- We contend for a free society with a vibrant market economy. (p.17)
- We contend together for a renewed appreciation of Western culture. (p.18)
- We contend for public policies that demonstrate renewed respect for the irreplaceable role of mediating structures in society—notably the family, churches, and myriad voluntary associations. (p.18)
- Finally, we contend for a realistic and responsible understanding of America’s part in world affairs. (p.19)
- The above is a partial list of public responsibilities on which we believe there is a pattern of convergence and cooperation between Evangelicals and Catholics. (p.19)

Many of these things listed are honorable, but what do they have to do with saving faith in Jesus Christ? Years ago, the Church went to battle against the mainline denominations who had adopted a social gospel. Yet the same thing is happening today.

Social issues are important, but they are not the priority of the Church. The Church’s responsibility is to preach the Gospel. This does not mean that we totally ignore social problems, but we do realize what our priority is. Paul in his day was faced with all types of social evils. There was abortion, slavery and ill treatment of women. But Paul did not say, “Get the Judaizers, and whoever else may agree with us on these issues, and we will join together in protesting social injustice. It does not matter what they believe doctrinally as long as they are with us on these social issues.” Paul’s primary purpose was to preach the Gospel.

Even if we could stop every abortion and every social evil in the world, there would still be people on their way to hell. Why? People can be anti-abortion and still be lost and on their way to hell. A social gospel does not deal with the true problem of man. Man's problem is a sinful, depraved heart, and the only remedy for his condition is the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ. Many supposedly moral and upright people who hold the right view on abortion and other areas will still spend an eternity in hell because they never dealt with the real issue in their life—sin. Do not the eternal souls of men and women take priority over social harmony?

- While our sense of civic responsibility is informed and motivated by Christian faith, our intention is to elevate the level of political and moral discourse in a manner that excludes no one and invites the participation of all people of good will. (p.19)

Notice where this is going. According to this statement, we should not want to limit our cause to just Roman Catholics and Evangelicals. We supposedly can get together with anyone who agrees with us on these issues. As this happens, theology just gets weaker and more diluted.

CHAPTER SIX

Is It Wrong to Witness to Catholics?

The fifth main section is called, “We Witness Together.” In this section, Catholics and Evangelicals are instructed to avoid trying to convert each other:

- Today, in this country and elsewhere, Evangelicals and Catholics attempt to win “converts” from one another’s folds . . . such efforts at recruitment undermine the Christian mission by which we are bound by God’s Word and to which we have recommitted ourselves in this statement. (p.20)

What does this mean to the Evangelical? If an Evangelical believer is sharing the Gospel with a Roman Catholic by confronting him with his lost condition and encouraging him to turn to Christ to be saved, this supposedly undermines the Christian mission by which we are bound by God’s Word and this accord. But we are bound by God’s Word to preach the Gospel to the lost. Now there is a redefining of who the lost are. The one billion Roman Catholics are no longer lost because now we have reclassified them as Christians. Therefore, we must stop trying to convert them:

- Three observations are in order in connection with proselytizing. First, as much as we might believe one community is more fully in accord with the Gospel than another,

we as Evangelicals and Catholics affirm that opportunity and means for growth in Christian discipleship are available in our several communities. (p.22)

How did Paul view the Judaizers and the gospel they promoted? He called it a “different gospel” (Phil. 1:6) and “a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you” (Gal. 1:8). These statements also apply to the gospel of the Catholic Church:

- Second, the decision of the committed Christian with respect to his communal allegiance and participation must be assiduously respected. (p.22)

In other words, if a believer is sharing the Gospel with someone who says he is a Roman Catholic, the believer must back off and respect that:

- Third, in view of the large number of non-Christians in the world and the enormous challenge of our common evangelistic task, it is neither theologically legitimate nor a prudent use of resources for one Christian community to proselytize among active adherents of another Christian community. (pp.22-23)

They are saying it is not “theologically legitimate” or a “prudent use of resources” for an Evangelical to witness to a Catholic. What this really says is, it is not correct for a believer to witness to an unsaved person:

- Christian witness must always be made in a spirit of love and humility. It must not deny but must readily accord to everyone the full freedom to discern and decide what is God’s will for his life. (p.23)

Evangelicals are often accused of trying to push their beliefs on and convert other people. Now this document tells Evangelicals to leave other people alone and let them decide what God’s will for their life is. But what are we as Christians here for? Jesus commissioned us to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” As ambassadors of Jesus Christ we are to tell the world what God’s will is. The will of God is for everyone to believe in His Son, Jesus

Christ. We are not to let everyone decide for themselves what they think the will of God is:

- Similarly, bearing false witness against other persons and communities, or casting unjust and uncharitable suspicions upon them, is incompatible with the Gospel. (p.23)

Notice what this statement implies. Witnessing to Catholics and denouncing the Roman Catholic system are characterized as “false witness,” and “casting unjust and uncharitable suspicions.” But was Paul bearing “false witness” against and “casting unjust and uncharitable suspicions” at the Judaizers when he accused them of preaching a false gospel? If someone is promoting a false gospel, are we not to confront it?

- In considering the many corruptions of Christian witness, we, Evangelicals and Catholics, confess that we have sinned against one another and against God. We most earnestly ask the forgiveness of God and one another, and pray for the grace to amend our own lives and that of our communities. (p.23)

The Evangelical signers of this document, in a sense, are apologizing for the Protestant Reformation and all that it stood for. They are saying, “We apologize for making an issue out of justification by faith alone, for holding to sola scriptura, for trying to convert Catholics on their way to hell, and for saying that Roman Catholicism is a works-based religion that is leading people astray.”

This document makes light of the heavy price the Reformers had to pay as they fought for the pure Gospel. What about the millions of godly men and women who gave their lives over such issues? Were they mistaken? Were men like Hugh Latimer, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wycliffe, and other leaders of the Reformation making something out of nothing? Was the Reformation just one big mistake? Apparently, the signers of this document think so. Now we who follow the principles and example of the Reformers, who fought for a pure Gospel, are called on to repent and ask forgiveness:

- Repentance and amendment of life do not dissolve remaining differences between us. In the context of evangeliza-

tion and “reevangelization,” 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. (p.23)

Notice, that when all is said and done, the Catholic Church still teaches the same thing—baptism in the church is a necessary part of salvation:

- For most Evangelicals, but not all, the experience of conversion is to be followed by baptism as a sign of new birth. For Catholics, all the baptized are already members of the church, however dormant their faith and life. (p.24)

The Catholic Church still insists that baptism into the Catholic Church makes one a Christian no matter what. Even if their lives are “dormant” of any Christian character they are still supposedly in a right relationship with God. But that is not what the Bible teaches:

- 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 respected. (p.24)

Adding baptism to the Gospel is serious. If someone is baptized in the Catholic Church and says they are a Christian, they are not supposed to be challenged according to this statement:

- There are then differences between us that cannot be resolved here. But on this we are resolved: All authentic witness must be aimed at conversion to God in Christ by the power of the Spirit. Those converted . . . must be given full freedom and respect as they discern and decide the community in which they will live their new life in Christ. In such discernment and decision, they are ultimately responsible to God, and we dare not interfere with the exercise of that responsibility. (p.24)

The one thing that this document says over and over is, “Don’t try to convert each other.” In the end it is really Evangelicals who are told not to witness to Catholics:

- In this discussion of witnessing together we have touched on difficult and long standing problems. The difficulties must not be permitted to overshadow the truths on which we are, by the grace of God, in firm agreement. (pp. 24–25)

This statement is saying that the theological disagreements we have must not stand in the way of what we agree on. We may not agree on the Gospel and what it means to be saved, but we can agree on social issues, so let’s build on that.

C O N C L U S I O N

As the document ends, the emphasis is on Catholics and Evangelicals joining together:

- As we grow in mutual understanding and trust, it is our hope that our efforts to evangelize will not jeopardize but will reinforce our devotion to the common tasks to which we have pledged ourselves in this statement. (p.25)

The final sentence of the conclusion reads:

- We do know that this is a time of opportunity—and, if of opportunity, then of responsibility—for Evangelicals and Catholics to be Christians together in a way that helps prepare the world for the coming of Him to whom belongs the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. Amen. (p25)

Can this really be happening? How can leading Evangelicals sign this document and say “Yes, this is true”? Men like J.I. Packer, Charles Colson, Bill Bright, and Pat Robertson have all agreed and signed this document. With one blanket statement, one billion Catholics have all been declared Christians. The Roman Catholic Church has given up nothing. But Evangelicals have abandoned historic Christianity.

Whoever dreamed of the day that leading Evangelicals would sign such a document? The Bible has warned that in the last days people will not endure sound doctrine and will turn away from the truth (2 Tim. 4:3–4). People will pay attention to doctrines of de-

mons (1 Tim. 4:1). We as believers need to be aware. With the abandoning of sound, biblical doctrine we must stand for the faith. If Jesus does not come soon, the Church could be in for difficult times. As many Evangelicals and Catholics become more and more unified, true Bible-believing Christians will be viewed as a problem. We will be viewed as those who are divisive.

Should we be discouraged by the future? No. Jesus has promised to take care of us as we are faithful to Him. Our call is still the same—preach the Gospel. Paul said, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). May God give us the grace to remain true to Him and His Gospel in these difficult but exciting days.

N O T E S

- 1 Dave Hunt, "The Gospel Betrayed" *The Berean Call*, May 1994.
- 2 Ken Serbin, "Catholic Bishops Renew Missionary Efforts to Stem Growth of Sects," *Christianity Today*, December 14, 1992, pp. 46-48.

Other Books by Gil Rugh

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