

American Evangelicals and Christian Unity: The Case of ECT

by Timothy George

On October 16, 1978, two events happened in Europe that together symbolized a changing relationship between Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants in North America—and indeed around the world. On that day, at the Vatican Karol Jozef Wojtyła, the cardinal archbishop of Krakow, was elected as the 265th successor to St. Peter as the bishop of Rome and vicar of Christ on earth. He was the first non-Italian pope to assume this office since the friend of Erasmus, Adrian VI, from the Netherlands was elected pope in 1522, succeeding Martin Luther’s nemesis, Leo X.

The election of the Polish pope was a media sensation, so much so that almost no one noticed what was happening at his home parish, the Church of St. Anne, back in Krakow. There was a guest preacher, and his name was Billy Graham. In fact, Wojtyła was the chief sponsor of Graham’s evangelistic ministry in a still Communist country. Graham’s foray into Poland saw within the

Polish Catholic hierarchy Catholic priests and Protestant ministers working side by side in preaching events and rallies throughout the country. One of the stops on the Graham tour was the famous Polish Shrine of the Black Madonna at Częstochowa, a favorite devotional retreat for Wojtyła with his Carmelite-inspired love for the Blessed Virgin Mary. Without commenting on the Catholic Church's dogmatic teaching about Mary, Billy Graham welcomed pilgrims to this holy site associated with her veneration. Two years later, in 1981, Graham would travel to the Vatican for a two-hour audience with the Polish pope, deepening their friendship and reconnecting with their collaborative evangelistic work in Poland.

A great deal has happened in evangelical-Roman Catholic relations since 1978. Earlier this year, on April 27, John Paul II along with Pope John XXIII moved from being a "blessed" to becoming a saint. The ecumenical vision set forth in the most-quoted encyclical of his long pontificate, *Ut Unum Sint*, has been affirmed and strengthened by his two successors, Benedict XVI and now Pope Francis. Although Billy Graham will turn 96 this coming November, he continues, with limited capacity, to proclaim the

Gospel, focusing on the centrality of Jesus Christ, the gospel of grace, and the hope of eternal life extended to all persons everywhere. He has yet to be replaced as, in Mark Noll's words, "the most attractive public face that evangelical Protestantism has offered to the wider world in the half-century since the Second World War."¹At the Synod of Bishops for the New Evangelization, which met at the Vatican in October 2012, the work of Billy Graham and other evangelicals was referred to with honor on several occasions as leaders of the Catholic Church considered how the apostolic mission of carrying the Good News of Christ could be fulfilled in a new, challenging context.

The rapprochement between Dr. Billy Graham and the Holy Father is one indicator of an overall shift in the relations between evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics that theologian J.I. Packer has called "irreversible and transformational." There are many other signs of this, let us call it, "*perestroika* of faith," including, to name just two, the widespread acceptance of the popular Alpha program for evangelization and discipleship in

¹ Mark A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 53.

Catholic countries around the world and the close fellowship and joint ministry of Cardinal Julio Bergolio with evangelical and Pentecostal ministers in Latin America.

In this talk, however, I want to focus on one particular strand of the evangelical-Catholic encounter, namely the theological project known as Evangelicals and Catholics Together. The year 2014 marks the twentieth anniversary of this distinctive project, which was founded by the late Father Richard John Neuhaus, a Catholic convert from Lutheranism, and his close friend, the late Charles W. Colson, best known for his involvement in the Watergate scandal and his subsequent work for prison reform and prison ministry. Father Thomas Guarino, the theological co-chair with me of ECT, and I are editing a volume titled *Evangelicals and Catholics Together at Twenty Years: The History, Successes and Future Prospects of ECT*, which will bring together the nine public statements issued by ECT over the past two decades along with commentary and a brief history of reception. My aim in this talk is to situate ECT in the context of American religion in the late twentieth century and to ask how it fits within the wider ecumenical context.

It is important to note upfront that ECT has always been an ad hoc ecumenical venture; it has neither sought nor received official approval from any ecclesial body. For this reason, it has been compared by some to the Roman Catholic-French Protestant movement known as the Groupe des Dombes, an ecumenical initiative that traces its origins back to 1937. ECT, at least in its beginning, was part of what I once called an “ecumenism of the trenches.” This term was first used in an editorial I wrote for *Christianity Today* in 1994, soon after the release of the first ECT document, “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission.” By “ecumenism of the trenches,” I meant the fact that those Catholics and those evangelicals had been brought together as Christians at a particular moment in their common history to bear witness together and to stand as allies in a struggle too easily caricatured as a “culture war.” The struggle had to do with issues of moral concern, family life, civic life, and with life itself, in terms of the welcome and protection owed to those children still waiting to be born.²

²Timothy George, “Catholics and Evangelicals in the Trenches,” *Christianity Today* 38/6 (May 1994), 16.

Having met and developed a comradely friendship, we evangelicals and Catholics alike recognized one another not as enemies but rather as fellow belligerents in a common spiritual and moral struggle. To have ignored this struggle, we believed, was to have been willfully blind or irresponsible. But we also began to look at one another in the trenches, standing together, shoulder to shoulder, side by side, heart to heart, and we discovered the reality of what was said in the first ECT statement: that we are and recognize one another to be brothers and sisters in the Lord. Thus, the initial “ecumenism of the trenches” led on to a deeper, spiritual ecumenism, to a process of collaboration, dialogue, and common witness. Our belief was this: the closer we came together toward unity in Jesus Christ, the freer we were to explore with candor both our commonalities, which were stronger than we first imagined, and our differences, which persisted despite our good will toward one another. Thus ECT has been guided for the past two decades by what might be called an ecumenism of conviction, not an ecumenism of accommodation.

Today, as it enters its third decade, ECT has become “old news.” On the American religious scene, it is generally accepted and only occasionally elicits a stout rejoinder or negative comment from one critic or the other. However, such was not the case back in 1994 when the first ECT statement, which was carried as a news story on the front page of *The New York Times*, created a raging furor within the American evangelical community. Why such publicity in the secular press, not to say the religious press, and why the deafening hue and cry among some evangelicals? To answer these questions, we need to look briefly at the longer history of evangelical-Catholic relations in North America. Why has it been so difficult for evangelicals, especially those in North America, to enter into meaningful dialogue with Roman Catholics?

The Difficulty of Dialogue

First, a brief definition of evangelicalism. The most succinct definition of evangelicalism is Scottish Baptist historian David Bebbington’s oft-cited “quadrilateral.” Evangelicals, Bebbington says, emphasize four things: (1) the authority and sufficiency of Holy Scripture, the only normative rule of faith and

practice for all true believers; (2) the uniqueness of redemption through the death of Christ upon the cross, the benefits of which are received by believers who are justified by faith alone; (3) the necessity of personal conversion, wrought by the Holy Spirit through personal repentance and faith and issuing in a life of obedience and growth in Christ; and (4) the priority and urgency of evangelism and mission in fulfillment of the Great Commission of Christ himself.³

While such a listing of the “marks” of evangelicalism as a distinctive variant within historic Protestantism is useful, it needs to be complemented by a more diachronic approach. Thus, as I define it, evangelicalism is a renewal movement within historic Christian orthodoxy with deep roots in the early church, the Reformation of the sixteenth century (in both its mainline and radical expressions), and the great awakenings of the eighteenth (and, for North America, also the nineteenth) centuries. In this broad sense, North American evangelicalism is inclusive of puritanism,

³ See Alister McGrath, *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 183. Bebbington’s formulation is found in D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Cambridge: Unwin Hyman, 1989). See also Timothy George, “If I’m an Evangelical, What Am I?” *Christianity Today* 43/9 (August 1999), 62.

pietism, pentecostalism, as well as fundamentalism. Throughout the history of evangelicalism, there has been a paradoxical tension between the church as a sectarian enclave on the one hand and the church as the Body and Bride of the undivided Christ on the other—just as in the United States there has been tension between being an alienated outsider and a quintessential American as well as tension between global mission and national revival on the one hand and a turned-in-on-itself piety and exclusivism on the other.

Back in the early 1990s, ECT received the attention it did, in part, because it attempted to overcome, or some might say to exploit, these historic tensions with a new formulation. ECT was resisted in part because it was sailing into the headwinds of four strong currents that had shaped both the political and ecclesial culture of many conservative Protestants in the United States.

First, American Protestants in general and evangelicals in particular have been deeply influenced by a virulent strain of nativism that is deeply embedded in the history of the country. The rise of the Know-Nothing party in the nineteenth century and the spread of the Ku Klux Klan in the early twentieth century are only

two of the more visible indicators of this phenomenon. The first presidential election I can remember with any clarity was the contest between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy in 1960. Although my father, like most good Southerners in those days, always voted Democratic, I remembered him being great agitated at the prospect of a Catholic in the White House. If Kennedy were elected president, it was said, it would not be long before the United States of America would become a fiefdom of the Church of Rome. The national security of the country would be jeopardized since the president would owe a deeper loyalty to the pope than to his own country. It was assumed that he would doubtless be constantly on the phone to Rome seeking papal advice on every decision of State. One of the turning points in that campaign was Kennedy's address to Southern Baptist ministers in Houston in which he sought to assuage such fears. As it turned out, there was not very much to worry about, not least because Kennedy was not such a good Catholic to start with and certainly not ultramontanist in his approach to religion and politics. The kind of anti-Catholic rhetoric heard in the 1960 presidential campaign is far more subdued within the evangelical subculture today, but it is not completely

absent. In subtle and sometimes overt ways, it continues to shape fundamentalist and evangelical perceptions of Roman Catholics.

Second, the long history of deep-seated antipathy and hostility between Catholics and Protestants stemming from the Reformation era still informs our perceptions of one another. The scars of religious wars, the centuries of hatred, bitterness, separation, isolation, and mutual recrimination have become deeply lodged in the collected memories of the two communities.

I shall never forget my first visit to Cambridge, England, some years ago now. Near one of the common greens in that city stands the Church of the English Martyrs. On a beautiful sunny afternoon, I sauntered into that church, not really noticing where I was going, thinking to myself that this must be a church dedicated to the memory of Cranmer, Ridley, Hooper, and Latimer, the great martyrs of John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*. In fact, to my surprise it turned out to be a Roman Catholic church dedicated to the memory of recusant martyrs, that is, Catholics who were loyal to Rome and hence faced persecution and sometimes death at the hands of the Protestant authorities. Both sides have their horror stories to

remember and recount. We have yet to achieve a reconciliation of shared memories between our two communities, and this makes it difficult to sit down and talk about our commonalities in Christ.

A third reason why it is difficult for evangelicals to talk to Roman Catholics is the continuing tradition of apocalypticism in which the Roman Catholic Church and the pope are assumed to play a very definite role. In many popular evangelical understandings of eschatology, the harlot of the Book of Revelation is equated directly with the Church of Rome or the pope. This construal was not invented on American soil, as readers of the Westminster Confession, which refers to the pope as antichrist, will surely know. But this old line of interpretation has resurfaced with a vengeance in recent decades along with the explosion of popular interest in the details of the end time revealed in numerous best-selling books, from Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth* to Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins' *Left Behind* series. To these items can be added Dave Hunt's explicitly anti-Catholic *A Woman Rides the Beast: The Roman Catholic Church and the Last Days*, published in 1994, the same year as the launch of ECT.

This kind of apocalyptic eschatology reinforced a radical cultural dualism and provided a cosmic urgency for true believers to “come out from among them and be separate” (2 Cor. 6:17). In the mid-twentieth century, one of the key American fundamentalist leaders to make anti-Catholicism a major plank in his platform was Carl McIntyre. Born in Oklahoma and graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary, McIntyre was a disciple of J. Gresham Machen, who left Princeton to establish Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia in 1929. Machen was a true scholar who had studied in Germany and commanded the respect of even H.L. Mencken, who once dubbed him “Dr. Fundamentalis,” as opposed to the populist William Jennings Bryan, whom he called “a fundamentalist of the barnyard school.” Machen was a conservative of a distinctively Presbyterian stripe, and he knew well the depth of the historic divide between Catholicism and his own Protestant confessional tradition. And yet, in the context of the modernist crisis of his day, he was willing to say that the gulf between Rome and Geneva was negligible compared to the gaping chasm—he used the word *abyss*—separating classic orthodox Christians, including Catholics, from others (he had in mind liberal Protestants, such as

Harry Emerson Fosdick) who eviscerated the central teachings of creedal Christianity.

McIntyre, with his apocalyptic premillennial theology, was cut from a different cloth. For example, when McIntyre discovered that the first general assembly of the World Council of Churches was to be held in Amsterdam in 1948, he arranged to arrive a few weeks earlier to protest the new ecumenical initiative. Although the Catholic Church had bluntly rebuffed an overture to participate in the WCC gathering (with Pius XII even forbidding Catholics from attending), the very fact that they were invited, together with the presence of Orthodox participants, not to say Protestant modernists, was enough for McIntyre to see in this event the emergence of the one-world church of the last days foretold in the Book of Revelation. The political counterpart to the World Council of Churches was the United Nations, which he saw as the great beast of Revelation 13.

While Carl McIntyre was loudly protesting outside the World Council of Churches meeting in Amsterdam in 1948, a young, twenty-nine-year-old American observer was on the inside listening

to theologians such as Karl Barth and Lesslie Newbigin. His name was Billy Graham, and he was there as a representative of Youth for Christ, a student evangelistic movement for which he was the first full-time employee. Over the next decade, Graham would come more and more into the crossfires of McIntyre, whose talk radio program, *The Twentieth Century Reformation Hour*, was heard on hundreds of stations across the country. When Graham was severely criticized by McIntyre and others for including Catholics in the planning and counseling follow-through for his 1957 New York crusade, which lasted for eight weeks in Madison Square Garden, the evangelist responded by saying: "I intend to go anywhere, sponsored by anybody, to preach the Gospel of Christ if there are no strings attached to my message. I am sponsored by civic clubs, universities, ministerial associations, and councils of churches all over the world. I intend to continue." It was precisely this attitude of openness that led Graham to accept an invitation of Karol Cardinal Wojtyła to conduct a preaching mission in Poland two decades later.

For these and other reasons, ecumenical ventures of any kind have been greeted with deep suspicion by many American

evangelicals and fundamentalists and still are today in some quarters. Many evangelicals find it difficult to imagine that serious discussion and conversation with Catholics about fundamental theological issues could be done without compromising the essential tenets of the Reformation. Some of the most severe critics of ECT are those who want to preserve at all costs the distinctive emphases of the sixteenth-century Protestant reformers. Frequently enough, though, they have little appreciation for the true ecumenical intentions and efforts of the reformers themselves.

Both Luther and Calvin saw the Reformation as, to use Jaroslav Pelikan's apt phrase, "a tragic necessity." Some of the latter-day champions of the reformers appreciate the necessity well enough but fail to discern the tragic element in that great rupture half a millennium ago. At the same time, there is often a lack of appreciation for the development of doctrine within Catholic theology. While the whole complex of issues related to the relative authority of Scripture, tradition, and the magisterial teaching office presents enormous problems for Catholic and evangelical dialogue, to imagine that nothing has changed within Catholicism since the

Council of Trent is to be historically naïve at best. It should also be said that, while most of the incoming fire toward ECT came from evangelical constituents, certain Catholic critics of ECT have leveled similar charges against Catholic members of the ECT team, accusing them of having given away the shop by signing on to Protestant-sounding language, including the affirmation of justification by faith alone.

Ecumenical Context

For most of the twentieth century, then, American evangelicals and Roman Catholics stood not only in opposition to one another but also in isolation from one another. On the part of Protestants, it must be said that this adversarial posture stemmed not only from the fundamentalist and very conservative quarter of church life but also from more mainline and even liberal elements. The key figure here is Paul Blanchard, one of the most important anti-Catholic writers in the mid-twentieth century. Blanshard had studied at Harvard Divinity School (my alma mater) and served as a minister in a Boston congregational church. He was, in other words, “an example of the secular rise American Protestantism of the

period.”⁴His book, *American Freedom and Catholic Power*, published in 1947, was avidly read among religious intellectuals on the left. His main point was that “the Catholic doctrine of union of church and state contradicted the United States’ constitutional separation of church and state.”⁵In short, according to Blanshard, one could not be a good American and a good Catholic at the same time.

This theme would surface again in the presidential election of 1960, but certain events at mid-century gave them extra punch, including President Harry Truman’s appointment of the first American ambassador to the Holy See, Catholic requests for public funding of parochial schools, and support of the Catholic hierarchy for authoritarian regimes in Spain, Portugal, and, according to some, Nazi Germany. Catholicism and democracy seemed at loggerheads, a view that George Courtney Murray would go to great lengths to refute. Blanshard’s attack on the Catholic Church differed from that of McIntyre in that it was not shaped by prophetic apocalyptic schemes of the last days. Blanshard’s critique of the Catholic Church was more institutional and political; he objected

⁴William M. Shea, *The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and Catholics in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 72.

⁵ *Ibid*, 74.

not to a church as such but to “a state within a state, a state above a state, and a foreign-controlled society within American society.”⁶ Nonetheless, many evangelicals and other conservative Protestants read Blanshard and found their own suspicions of Rome confirmed by his analysis. This included a number of Southern Baptist leaders, such as J.M. Dawson, who joined with others to establish in 1947 what was called at the time Protestants and Other Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Today this group is known simply as Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Along with Billy Graham, the catalytic ministry of Harold John Ockenga was a crucial factor in the pre-history of ECT. In 1942, Ockenga, the pastor of Boston’s Park Street Church, brought together a group of neo-evangelical reformers to organize the National Association of Evangelicals. Representing a variety of denominations, including Pentecostals, Ockenga and his friends were pioneers. They were intent on forging a new way in American Protestant life over against their separatist, fundamentalist, and somewhat obscurantist co-religionists, many of whom they had

⁶*American Freedom*, 43.

known and grown up with and whose theological views they still largely shared.

The “New Evangelicalism,” as it came to be called, found itself engaged in a struggle on two fronts. On the one hand was modernism, liberalism, or mainline Protestantism—it is referred to in various ways—which was still dominant in the early forties and well into the fifties. For example, conservative evangelicals and Pentecostals were not invited to the table at the meetings of the National Council of Churches and doubtless would not have accepted such invitations had they been proffered. This was despite the facts that by 1960 the Southern Baptist Convention had bypassed Methodism as the largest Protestant denomination in the country and that the Assemblies of God was quickly becoming the fastest-growing Christian denomination not only in America but in the world. *Christianity Today* was founded by Billy Graham in 1956 in order to offer a counter-voice to the more progressive *Christian Century*. Within less than one year the new magazine had greatly surpassed its rival publication in circulation. The other front was known by the pejorative of term *Romanism*. The post-World War II

reformers hoped that a reinvigorated evangelical church, shorn of its fundamentalist drag, would both restore true Christianity and rescue American society itself by resisting the forces of modernism/secularism on the one hand and Romanism on the other.

Today, both of those fronts look completely different to us than they would have to Ockenga and the founders of the NAE in the 1940s. For a variety of sociological and church political reasons, the hegemony of mainline Protestantism had largely vanished by the 1990s. On the Catholic side, of course, there was the revolution that began on January 26, 1959, when Pope John XXIII called for a new ecumenical council—the first one held in almost 100 years (since Vatican I in 1870-71).⁷ Both of these developments, the decline—some would say collapse—of Protestant liberalism as a dominant religious voice in the culture on the one hand and the renewal of the Roman Catholic Church, stemming from the reforms of Vatican II, on the other had radically changed the ecumenical

⁷ John W. O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

landscape by the time the first ECT statement was released in 1994.

Central to the program of ECT were the documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) and the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*), both promulgated on November 21, 1964, fifty years ago this fall. These documents, together with the establishment of what is now called the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, opened a new chapter in the history of ecumenical engagement.

Many of the themes set forth in the documents of Vatican II were picked up and developed further in *Ut Unum Sint*, the landmark ecumenical encyclical released by Pope John Paul II on May 30, 1995. This document both underscored the importance of interconfessional dialogue and called for ongoing practical cooperation among Christians who are still ecclesially separated from one another. *Ut Unum Sint* was studied carefully by the participants in ECT, who saw their own work in line with this statement in the encyclical: “Love for the truth is the deepest

dimension of any authentic quest for full communion between Christians....The unity willed by God can be obtained only by the adherence of all to the content of revealed faith in its entirety in matters of faith; compromise is in contradiction with God, who is the Truth. In the Body of Christ, ‘the Way, and the Truth, and the Life’ (John 14:6), who could consider legitimate a reconciliation brought about at the expense of the truth?”

Unlike the official bilateral dialogues between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the World Evangelical Association, the Baptist World Alliance, and the historic Pentecostal churches, ECT was not appointed by any ecclesiastical judicatory, nor did it report to anybody beyond itself. It neither had nor sought official standing on either the evangelical or Catholic side.

Nonetheless, there was an interface between the Vatican and ECT at several levels. Among the Catholic participants in ECT were the esteemed theologian Avery Dulles, who was made a cardinal while serving with ECT, and, for a brief time, Francis Cardinal George of Chicago. In 1997 Idris Cardinal Cassidy, then the president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, participated in the

ECT discussions and gave a major paper on ECT and Catholic ecumenism. Also, in recent years an observer from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops participated in the ECT meetings. On the evangelical side, the best-known theologian was the Anglican scholar J.I. Packer. Other evangelical team members came from the Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, and Reformed traditions, the Evangelical Free Church, the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and Pentecostal denominations.

From the beginning, ECT has run on a dual track in terms of its agenda, dealing with both social and cultural concerns, a number of which were listed in the first statement, and more strictly theological, historically church-dividing issues such as soteriology, the nature of authority, and the role of Mary. The greatest achievement of the first ECT statement was the frank recognition that faithful evangelicals and believing Roman Catholics could and should refer openly to one another as “brothers and sisters in Christ.”

The second ECT document, published in 1997 as “The Gift of Salvation,” was a response to two important topics of perceived

ambiguity in the earlier ECT statement: the doctrine of justification by faith alone and the biblical mandate for world evangelization. “The Gift of Salvation” declared that justification was not earned by any good works or merits of our own, that it was entirely God’s gift. Further, this document stated that “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.” Although the use of *sola fide* language remained problematic for some Catholic members, there was a joint affirmation that the view of salvation expressed in the document was “in agreement with what the Reformation traditions have meant by justification by faith alone.” Although the ECT statement on “The Gift of Salvation” was released two years before the *Joint Declaration on Justification* between the Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican, the detailed historical and theological groundwork which led up to that historic statement—from both the American Lutheran-Catholic dialogue and discussions of longstanding in Europe—was carefully read and digested by members of ECT. At the same time, there was a candid recognition that more work remained to be done: “While we rejoice in the unity we have discovered and

are confident of the fundamental truths about the gift of salvation we have affirmed, we recognize that there are necessarily interrelated questions that require further and urgent exploration.”

The next round of ECT meetings led to a fresh examination of the controverted relationship between Scripture and tradition. Historically, this issue had been framed in terms of a fundamental difference on the very source of Christian teaching. Is that teaching based on Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*), on the one hand, or Scripture and authoritative tradition, on the other? In a document titled “Your Word Is Truth” (2002), the Catholic and evangelical interlocutors recognized persistent differences in their views of the church, the scope of the biblical canon, and both the shape and jurisdictional authority of the magisterial office in the church (*episcopé*). However, in a key passage, the framers of this document were able to break through to an important consensus:

Together we affirm that Scripture is the divinely inspired and uniquely authoritative written revelation of God; as such it is normative for the teaching and life of the church. We also affirm that tradition, rightly understood as the proper reflection of biblical teaching, is the faithful transmission of the truth of the Gospel from generation to generation through the power of the Holy Spirit. As

evangelicals and Catholics fully committed to our respective heritages, we affirm together the coinherence of Scripture and tradition: tradition is not a second source of revelation alongside the Bible but must ever be corrected and informed by it, and Scripture itself is not understood in a vacuum apart from the historical existence in life of the community of faith. Faithful believers in every generation live by the memories and hopes of the *actus tradendi* of the Holy Spirit. This is true whenever and wherever the Word of God is faithfully translated, sincerely believed, and truly preached.

Subsequent ECT statements were titled “The Communion of Saints” (2003); “The Call to Holiness” (2005); “That They May Have Life” (2006); “Do Whatever He Tells You: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Christian Faith and Life” (2009); and “In Defense of Religious Freedom” (2012). A forthcoming ECT statement on marriage is expected to be completed later this year. Other topics proposed for future discussion in ECT include the development of doctrine, biblical exegesis, catechesis, and evangelization. The longest statement, and the most difficult topic, taken up by ECT was the project on the Blessed Virgin Mary. “Do Whatever He Tells You: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Christian Faith and Life” is the only ECT statement that could not be jointly written and issued by the entire team. Rather, after a joint introduction, the document breaks down

into two parts: “A Catholic Word to Evangelicals” followed by “An Evangelical Word to Catholics.” At points, these two admonitory letters bristle with polemic just beneath the surface as neither side could reframe the dogmatic and devotional issues surrounding Mary in a way that the other side could recognize as faithful to the apostolic witness—however much both Catholics and Evangelicals wanted Mary to be an instrument and not a stumbling block to the unity in Christ we all affirmed. Still, in the conclusion of this paper, both Catholic and evangelical members of ECT were able to join together in a common prayer.

Almighty and gracious God, Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who was in the fullness of time born of the Blessed Virgin Mary, from whom he received our human nature by which, through his suffering, death, and glorious resurrection, he won our salvation, accept, we beseech you, our giving thanks for the witness of Mary’s faith and the courage of her obedience.

Grant to us, we pray, the faithfulness to stand with her by the cross of your Son in his redemptive suffering and the suffering of your pilgrim Church on earth. By the gift of your Spirit, increase within us a lively sense of our communion in your Son with the saints on earth and the saints in heaven. May she who is the first disciple be for us a model of faith’s response to your will in all things; may her “Let it be with me according to your word” be

our constant prayer; may her “Do whatever he tells you” elicit from us a more perfect surrender of obedience to her Lord and ours.

Continue to lead us, we pray, into a more manifest unity of faith and life so that the world may believe and those whom you have chosen may, with the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints, rejoice forever in your glory. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and forever. Amen.

Conclusion

In 1994, the year of the first ECT statement, Wolfhart Pannenberg presented the annual Erasmus Lecture sponsored by the Institute for Religion and Public Life in New York City, one of the two organizations that provide support for Evangelicals and Catholics Together. Pannenberg’s topic was “Christianity and the West” (*First Things*, December 1994). He noted the increasing failure of churchly traditions stemming from the Reformation to shape the general culture of the West by means of an accommodated *Kulturprotestantismus*. The deathknell for such a project was sounded precisely one hundred years ago by the devastations of the First World War and its global consequences.

But out of the ashes of this wasteland emerged in the twentieth century a renewed interest in the doctrine of the church on the part of both Protestants and Catholics and, arising from unexpected and unusual places, an ecumenical movement toward ecclesial unity that emerged into full consciousness at the Second Vatican Council.

Peering into the new millennium just ahead, Pannenberg made a tentative prediction: "It is quite possible that in the early part of the third millennium only the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches on the one hand, and evangelical Protestantism, on the other, will survive as ecclesial communities. What used to be called the Protestant mainline churches are in acute danger of disappearing. I expect they will disappear if they continue neither to resist the Spirit of a progressively secularist culture nor try to transform it." In this context, Evangelicals and Catholics Together came into being as an ad hoc, unofficial, and somewhat controversial endeavor. For twenty years, ECT has been a part of an emerging ecumenical phalanx that will surely be more prominent at the end of this century than at its beginning. For faithful evangelicals and believing Catholics alike, this is a time to sew, not

a time to rend. We work toward common witness, and we share the Gospel mandate for world evangelization. In expressing our common convictions about Christian faith and mission, we can do no better than to heed the words of John Calvin, who was once a pastor here in Strasbourg, and who later (1552) wrote to Archbishop Thomas Cranmer that he would gladly be willing to cross ten seas in order to bring about the true unity of God's people. John Calvin wrote: "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."

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