

- **Evangelicals and the Roman Catholic Church since Vatican II**
- ***Evangelikale und die römisch-katholische Kirche seit dem zweiten Vatikanum***
- ***Les évangéliques et l’Eglise catholique depuis Vatican II***
- **L. de Chirico**

RÉSUMÉ

Cet essai analyse les réactions évangéliques au catholicisme d’après Vatican II. Dans la première partie, l’auteur présente le travail de trois théologiens, dont les orientations sont globalement considérées comme évangéliques. Pour Gerrit Berkouwer, la question cruciale qui sépare les catholiques et les évangéliques n’est plus la doctrine de la grâce, mais la question ecclésiologique et pneumatologique ; il appelle à un « œcuménisme réaliste ». Pour David Wells, le catholicisme d’après Vatican II est divisé en deux branches, traditionaliste et progressiste, qui se sont juxtaposées en laissant d’importantes questions théologiques sans réponse. Wells propose une approche prudente et attentive. Hebert Carson est plus réservé ; pour lui, le catholicisme reste essentiellement tridentin.

La deuxième partie est consacrée au

dialogue et fait référence à trois documents : « Le dialogue évangélique-catholique sur la mission » (ERCDOM), qui a suivi la déclaration de Lausanne et « Evangelii nuntiandi » ; ce texte étudie les points d’intérêt commun dans le domaine de la mission ; « Perspectives évangélique sur le catholicisme », de l’Alliance Évangélique Mondiale, document qui exprime l’espoir de rapprochements futurs, mais considère que les lignes de séparation sont toujours bien en place ; et le document américain « Évangéliques et catholiques ensemble » (ECT), et son prolongement « Le don du salut » (GOS ou ECT II), qui affirme être une avancée importante vers une compréhension commune du salut.

L’auteur évalue enfin les différentes options étudiées. Il présente le dialogue comme une nécessité, mais pense qu’il faut éviter les dangers opposés du retranchement et de l’aspiration à l’unité.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Artikel diskutiert evangelikale Reaktionen zum römischen Katholizismus nach dem zweiten Vatikanum. Im ersten Teil werden die Beiträge von drei Theologen betrachtet, deren Positionen als relativ repräsentativ innerhalb des Evangelikalismus gelten. Gerrit Berkouwer sah den entscheidenden Punkt zwischen römischen Katholiken und Evangelikalen von der Lehre von der Gnade auf ‘ekklésiologisch-pneumatologische Fragen’ übergehen und

forderte eine ‘realistische Ökumene’. David Wells sah den römischen Katholizismus nach dem zweiten Vatikanum in eine traditionelle und eine progressive Linie aufgespalten, die derart nebeneinander standen, dass wichtige theologische Fragen unbeantwortet blieben. Wells unterstützte eine abwartende Haltung. Herbert Carson nahm eine vorsichtiger Haltung in der Überzeugung ein, der römische Katholizismus sei weiterhin wesentlich tridentinisch.

Der zweite Teil diskutiert eine Phase des Dialogs unter Verweis auf drei Dokumente

(englische Originaltitel in der englischen Zusammenfassung): 'Der evangelikal—römisch-katholische Dialog zu Mission', der dem Lausanner Verpflichtung und 'Evangelii nuntiandi' folgte und Aspekte gemeinsamen Interesses in der Mission untersuchte; das Dokument 'Evangelikale zur römisch-katholischen Kirche' der WEF, das Hoffnung auf weitere Annäherung ausdrückte, aber die trennenden Linien als nach wie vor deutlich vorhanden sah; und das amerikanische Dokument 'Evangelikale

und Katholiken gemeinsam' mit dem Folgedokument 'Die Gabe des Heils', das deutliche Fortschritte auf dem Wege zu einem gemeinsamen Verständnis der Lehre vom Heil propagierte.

Der Autor bewertet abschließend die Optionen der drei untersuchten Positionen. Er verteidigt Dialog als notwendig, denkt aber, dass dieser die gegensätzlichen Gefahren von Abgrenzung und Einheitsbestrebungen vermeiden muß.

Vatican II (1962-1965) is widely regarded as one of the most significant events of the Twentieth century. Beside the immense influence exerted on Catholic theology and life, the Council which has brought 'aggiornamento' to the Roman church, has also stirred evangelicals to 'aggiornamento' in their perception and evaluation of Roman Catholicism (henceforth RC). Following Vatican II, deeply entrenched preconceptions which had accompanied centuries of confessional controversy and polemical attitudes were questioned by a reinvigorated Catholicism which forced non-Catholics to reposition their stance towards it. The history of the last forty years is the story of how the challenge to rethink Evangelical-Catholic relationships has been worked out by evangelicals in the light of the new phase inaugurated at the Council and presents the opportunity to reflect on the criteria of the evangelical involvement in the quest for unity in the present-day ecumenical scenario.

1. Evangelical Evaluations of Vatican II

The task of surveying the variety of evangelical responses to the Council clearly goes beyond the scope of this section which will be limited to three theologians which have dealt with it at length and in detail. The choice, though certainly selective and somewhat arbitrary, is perhaps indicative of different evangelical readings of Vatican II which have in turn contributed to a new

evangelical awareness of the Catholic identity.

1.1 Gerrit Berkouwer

RC represents a significant *locus* of Berkouwer's work as a dogmatician. Apart from the three specific books devoted to it,¹ even his eighteen volume series of 'Studies in Dogmatics' bears witness to his constant and in-depth interaction with Catholic theology which spans a long period of time both preceding and following Vatican II. As far as the Council is concerned, Berkouwer had a first-hand experience as official observer on behalf of the 'Gereformeerde Kerken' which gave rise to the writing of his book *The Second Vatican Council and the New Catholicism* even though the proceedings of the Council were still in progress and the two main ecclesiological documents ('*Lumen Gentium*' and '*Gaudium et Spes*') had not yet been approved.

According to Berkouwer, Vatican II is heavily indebted in its motivations and orientations to the '*Nouvelle théologie*' which he had already surveyed in his 1958 book *Recent Developments in Roman Catholic Thought*. In this respect, the Council might be thought of as being the cautious acceptance, even with tensions and conflicts, by the official Church of the agenda proposed by the new theologians which had been opposed by the Curia in previous years. The 'new Catholicism' that Berkouwer envisages stems from the decisive input

of the 'New theology' with its call to '*ressourcement*', that is reappreciation of biblical and patristic sources, and '*aggiornamento*', an attitude marked by an openness towards inner renewal and new ways of relating with the world. In Berkouwer's view, contemporary Catholicism is experiencing a 'new interpretative phase' of its identity though the outcome of such a process is rather unpredictable. What appears to him as most important are the new emphases endorsed by the Council on the ecclesial self-awareness and ecclesiological self-understanding of the Catholic Church. The insistence on the 'pilgrim Church' as the eschatological congregation of the people of God introduces a dynamic element in the traditionally static and hierarchical perception of the Church which has a bearing on (1) the reinterpretation of the Cyprianic dictum '*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*', (2) the recognition of other churches outside of Rome, (3) the reconsideration of the unchangeability of dogma and (4) the role of magisterial authority. If his pre-Vatican II *Conflict with Rome* centred on the gulf between catholic and protestant theologies concerning the doctrine of grace, his post-Vatican II *New Catholicism* revolves around 'the ecclesiastical-pneumatological issue' (111, 117), with particular reference to the nature of the guarantee of the presence of the Spirit in the Church. Of course, Berkouwer is fully aware these new emphases do not replace old ones but are simply added to the traditional Roman Catholic outlook, thus making the ecumenical agenda with Rome easier on the one hand but more nuanced one the other. Before such a scenario, Berkouwer calls for a 'realistic ecumenicity' (250)—an ecumenicity which would overcome past polemical attitudes while waiting further developments within RC.

1.2 David Wells

In recent years, David Wells has been undertaking a trenchant critique of diffuse trends within contemporary American Evangelicalism. Shaping his analysis in a trilogy of substantial works,² Wells has

pointed out the progressive erosion of its theological profile and has pleaded for an urgent recovery of the sense of God as the biblical God. It has to be remembered, however, that in the Seventies, Wells was one of the few evangelical theologians grappling with Roman Catholicism in the aftermath of the Council. In later years, Wells' focus has progressively turned to another field of research, namely Evangelicalism itself, and this move has left a significant gap in evangelical reflection on RC.

Out of all of Wells' works on RC, *Revolution in Rome*³ well epitomises an evangelical sense of puzzlement before the '*aggiornamento*' proposed by the Council. The main thrust of his reading of the Council is the observation that Vatican II on some strategic points seems to endorse 'mutually incompatible theologies',⁴ one conservative, the other progressive, one restating tradition, the other pushing beyond tradition. These two conflicting tendencies can be found everywhere in the conciliar texts (particularly in the case of '*Dei Verbum*' and '*Lumen Gentium*') and contribute to a shaping of its overall theology marked by an unmistakably Catholic 'both-and' pattern. Confronted with the inherent stereophony if not cacophony of Vatican II, Wells argues that the Council has practised the 'juxtaposition of ideas' in such a way that the reception and interpretation of the final redaction of the documents can be traced both along traditional lines as well as along more innovative ones. Before such display of catholic dialectics, the main problem in coming to grips with RC is a hermeneutical one, namely 'which interpretation is correct?', 'how do we interpret?' (32-33), which is all linked to the issue of magisterial authority: 'who speaks for Rome today?' (10). From the outlook of Vatican II, Rome appears to have a 'divided mind' as the titles of the chapters of *Revolution in Rome* clearly shows: 'Authority: inward or outward?', 'God: in the earthly or heavenly city?', 'Christianity: a broad or narrow definition?', 'the Church: the people or the pope?'. In Wells' opinion, the Council provokes nothing but a set of questions that remain unanswered but cannot be left

unanswered. The book testifies to the evangelical perplexity in coming to terms with the complexity of the Catholic mindset. The issue, though, is whether the problem lies with the Catholic idiosyncratic outlook or with the defectiveness of the evangelical epistemological apparatus in dealing with RC. In other words, what the evangelical Wells perceives as a 'divided mind', the Catholic theologian would admire as the 'Catholic mind' capable of bypassing the apodictic tendencies of heretical thought by reducing them to particular emphases inserted into a wider whole. Moreover, the 'state of flux' that Wells envisages in post-Vatican II Catholicism may not be a temporary compromise between contrasting forces waiting for a final solution but rather the Catholic stable yet dynamic pattern which enables the system to hold together different elements which other theological orientations consider to be incompatible. Before the interpretative crux of Vatican II, Wells propounds for the view that the Council depicts a temporary and transient balance which will eventually lead to the affirmation of one party over the other. A similar 'wait-and-see' approach pursued by Berkouwer is also advocated by Wells for whom, after Vatican II, 'the stereotype of Catholic theology held by many evangelicals has been rendered obsolete and irrelevant' and Evangelicals are in need to construe a 'new apologetic' in their understanding of Catholicism.⁵

1.3 Herbert Carson

In order to gain a wider perspective on the evangelical interpretations on Vatican II, a brief comment may be made on more popular attempts to assess trends within contemporary Catholicism. In the British scene, Herbert Carson's writings on RC well represent the less academic but strongly apologetic way of theologizing which is done in some evangelical circles which are chiefly motivated by evangelistic concerns.⁶ His books on Catholicism can be considered as a single, revised and updated work whose main interpretative thrust and theological critique remain con-

stant even when he interacts with different phases of recent Catholic history and theology. Whereas Berkouwer and Wells show a degree of suspension of judgement in dealing with the event and the outcome of the Council, Carson reads it in terms of the '*semper eadem*' thesis, that is the theological structure of RC may have changed in its linguistic covering but not in its fundamental orientation. According to him, in spite of all appearance suggesting differently, post-Vatican II RC has in no way modified its tridentine, anti-Reformation stance for the simple reasons that, firstly, it has not formally and openly abandoned it and, secondly, the new teaching can be fully harmonised with the old without subverting it. Referring to the 1991 *Catechism* (but an analogous comment could be extended to the documents of the Second Vatican Council), Carson observes that 'the tone may be friendlier, and the presentation more acceptable to late twentieth-century readers, yet the decrees of Trent are still there', particularly as far as transubstantiation, justification by faith and purgatory are concerned.⁷ The inevitable conclusion of such a reading is that if Rome is '*semper eadem*', the evangelical approach to RC will be '*semper eadem*' as well. It is apparent that Carson's analysis lacks all ecumenical subtleties and may also seem an overtly flattened view of a highly complex reality but his basic arguments, surely in need of refinement, cannot be easily dismissed. In fact, they assume the foundational role of the Council of Trent as far as the shape of catholic dogma is concerned and they indicate the practical unchangeability of what has been previously stated by the magisterium, in spite of theological development which augment it but which does not reform it.

2. Seasons of dialogue

In the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the Berlin Congress on Mission (1966), the previously scant and suspiciously framed relationships between Catholics and Evangelicals received a new impulse. The connections between these two events are not direct,

of course, in the sense that one is not the cause of the other and vice versa, but both stem from a parallel rediscovery of a zeal for evangelism. This similar missionary agenda enabled both constituencies to find points of convergence, or at least shared concerns, in their attempt to implement the new vision for mission. However, it took another decade before the first results of the changed climate began to become visible in a new openness towards dialogue between divided Christians devoted to the missionary cause.

2.1 ERCDOM

The coincidence between the publication of the 'Lausanne Covenant' (1974) and Paul VI's apostolic exhortation '*Evangelii Nuntiandi*' (1975) is, in fact, the proximate cause of a pioneering initiative motivated by the common interest in mission and aimed at fostering theological dialogue on the issue. Between 1977 and 1984, in fact, Catholic and Evangelical representatives met for this unofficial dialogue whose ecumenical goal was to provide an inter-confessional forum for serious missiological debate. A significant role was played by John Stott and Basil Meeking who eventually drafted and published a report of 'The Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission' (ERCDOM).⁸ The report is 'a faithful record of the ideas shared' (11) in which a brief exposition of both positions is followed by the indication of points of disagreements as well as areas of agreements. In rather descriptive fashion, ERCDOM starts with 'The nature of mission' and ends with 'The possibilities of common witness', passing through the unavoidable section regarding 'The church and the gospel' where the difference between evangelicals and Catholics comes out more clearly. The parties involved recognise that 'deep truths unite' (82-83) and, as far as certain fundamental doctrines are concerned, their understanding is 'identical or very similar' (88) to the point of admitting that the walls of century-old separation 'do not reach heaven' (81). In fairness, ERCDOM does not hide the reality of the continuing division on 'real and important convictions'

(83), especially the role of the believing community in the task of biblical interpretation, the significance of the work of Christ, the doctrine of sin and mariology. On the whole, while the theological weight of ERCDOM is relative and in need of a more sustained effort, it nonetheless reflects the search for a methodology of dialogue based on mutual respect and commitment to reciprocal listening. The first-fruit of the new season was an emerging attitude which is progressively becoming less hostile and more constructive.

2.2 The dialogue between WEF and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity

Another stream of interaction between Evangelicals and Catholics after Vatican II has a more official profile in that it has involved representatives of the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity. It has to be borne in mind that RC is not part of the WEF agenda until the 1978 Seventh General Assembly held in Hoddesdon (UK). On that occasion, the presence of two Catholic observers and their greeting from the platform caused a stir in the Assembly and sparked the debate over the issue of what evangelical approach towards post-Vatican II Catholicism should be followed.⁹ After the 1978 Assembly, WEF appointed a Task Force in 1980 which receives a mandate to study afresh Roman Catholic theology and practice and to produce a document which would provide an evangelical analysis of RC while consolidating evangelical unity. In fact, the 1986 'Evangelical Perspective on Roman Catholicism'¹⁰ represents the first (and perhaps the only) authoritative evangelical statement after Vatican II and reflects standard yet persisting evangelical concerns over foundational aspects of Catholic doctrine such as mariology, authority in the church, the papacy and infallibility, justification, sacramentalism and the eucharist. While the document welcomes the new phase that Catholicism is experiencing and hopes in further steps particularly brought about by the biblical

movement, the charismatic movement and the base communities, it also reiterates a traditional, clear-cut evangelical critique. The dividing line between evangelicals and Catholics will be in place until 'a reformation according to the Word of God' takes place in the Church of Rome.¹¹ A strong reformed flavour in the basic argumentations of the 'Perspective' has been noted even in the Catholic camp.¹²

Deemed to be the end of a process, the document has become the springboard for subsequent moves. Born out of an internal controversy, it has turned to be the first step of an on-going dialogical initiative. In fact, after having received the somewhat resentful reaction to it by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, both WEF and the Council decided to establish a theological dialogue focussed on primary matters of mutual interest. So far, two conversations have taken place in 1993 and 1997: the former in Venice on 'Justification, Scripture and Tradition', the latter in Jerusalem on 'The Nature and Mission of the Church'.¹³ Leaving to one side a provisional assessment of these efforts that would excessively inflate the paper, such a dialogue shows the willingness of both parties to listen to one another presenting the respective views. So far, a part from the growth of mutual respect, the prevailing impression is that no substantial theological ground has been broken with regards to possible ecumenical developments nor have there been significant changes in the evangelical lines of appraisal inherited from the evangelical interpretations of Vatican II.

2.3 ECT I and II

Attention has been given so far to an unofficial series of conversations with a missiological thrust (ERCDOM) and to the role of the WEF as far as the worldwide evangelical encounter with RC is concerned. Dialogue seems to be the new element, practically unknown in pre-Vatican II times, in the complex relationships between Evangelicals and Catholics. In this preliminary survey of the season inaugurated in the Seventies and whose long-

term effects are still in progress, reference has to be made to another independent initiative which has the USA as its distinct socio-cultural background. 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together' (ECT) is the title of a document released in 1994 but also the name of an on-going informal dialogue whose participants are Christians who are confessionally divided but who share similar concerns for the falling apart of the Christian ethos of American society under the attack of relativistic trends of thought.¹⁴ In this violent 'culture war', evangelicals and Catholics find themselves fighting on the same conservative side and discover a new kind of possible reapproachment, 'an ecumenism of the trenches'.¹⁵ The convergence, however, is not simply a common view on social issues but is said to be 'a theologically rooted alliance'. Thus, the ECT section 'We Contend Together' which is centred on 'culture war' issues, is preceded by the section 'We Affirm Together' where a basic confession of faith is reported. This is followed by the programmatic section 'We Witness Together' where a common commitment to Christian mission is envisaged, entailing the goal of non-proselytization between professing Christians. The 'We-Together' pattern is pervasive in ECT and contains the indication of a significant shift in the evangelical perception of RC, or at least the more evangelically inclined section of it, which the document does not argue for theologically but simply presents as a matter of fact waiting for further explorations in terms of providing the theological warrant of such a move.

Both as a result of the continuation of dialogue and as a response to some evangelical criticism, the ECT architects released another statement in 1997 ('The Gift of Salvation', GOS) whose aim was intended to elucidate the theological connotations of the unity referred to in ECT.¹⁶ The filial connection with ECT is stressed when GOS is sometimes called ECT II. GOS is a courageous attempt to engage the divisive theological issue between Evangelicals and Catholics, certainly the most crucial one historically: justification by faith. Rather boldly, GOS states the

breakthrough: 'for the first time in 450 years, Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics have publicly agreed to a common understanding of salvation'. This announcement sounds triumphalistic and indicates that the same sort of pragmatic ecumenism resulting in ECT I, has operated in ECT II as well. In R.C. Sproul's words, the document 'proclaims too much too soon'.¹⁷ As the whole process demonstrates, RC has become a testing issue for Evangelicals with significant implications as far as the evangelical changing convictions in confronting it are concerned.

3. Prerequisites for dialogue¹⁸

The brief overview of the developments following Vatican II and the Berlin/Lausanne congresses highlighting the interaction between Evangelicals and Catholics on a world-wide scale has underlined the importance of those events in the formation of a new atmosphere of mutual openness and reciprocal interest. On the whole, the situation is extremely fluid and the fact that Evangelicals differ in their evaluation of this trend, from sheer opposition to full support with all shades of positions in between, is an instance of the inner diversity within Evangelicalism which is observable in other areas as well. In approaching Catholicism, Evangelicals reveal something of their deeper selves, their differences and peculiarities. Beside general considerations, there is a crucial area which have to be explored in order to avoid the risk of either absorbing uncritically the mainline ecumenical option concerning unity or of uncritically adopting a distinctly anti-Catholic attitude. These two dispositions appear to be the easiest options but are both radically wanting in terms of theological insight and ecumenical prospects.

Vatican II has brought '*aggiornamento*' to the Catholic church. The word does not denote reformation in the evangelical sense but neither is it a merely political and linguistic device aimed at concealing an unchanging reality. It is instead the Catholic way of responding to the need of some kind of renewal without altering the fundamental structure inherited from

the past. As it has been indicated, some of the most insightful evangelical observers of the Catholic scene after the Council (i.e. Gerrit Berkouwer and David Wells) have expressed a degree of perplexity in their understanding of what was going on. The old critical apparatus seemed to be insufficient or obsolete before such an evolving scenario. After more than thirty years, today's question is whether that 'suspension of judgement' which was thought to be necessary has contributed to much of the present-day evangelical disarray and has even become the typical evangelical impasse in coming to terms with Catholicism. Both resentful resistance based on clichés from the past and undiscerning openness mainly nurtured by 'culture war' concerns lead to a standing-still. Yet, the 'wait-and-see' approach cannot be sustained indefinitely. Evangelicals need a pertinent framework to interpret RC. This needs to reflect their theological identity as well as being able to account for the multifaceted, yet unitary, reality of RC. In the absence of a solidly evangelical theological interpretative model, Evangelicals will continue to be astonished by some of the inner developments within Catholicism which do not change its fundamental structure: they may even be driven to re-polish their ageing critical apparatus which is now rather outdated. The elaboration of such an evangelical hermeneutical model should encourage answers to the simple yet crucial questions involving the basic worldview of RC, its goals, its methods, its vision. This is a task for evangelical theology which can no longer be delayed. The way in which Evangelicals 'feel' Catholicism heavily depends on the way they understand what it is and what is at stake within it. On the present ecumenical scene, Evangelicalism and RC are the two religious constituencies within Christendom which, much more than others, are showing signs of activism and renewal. The Scylla and Carybdis of the situation are indifference, on the one hand, and unity, on the other. Dialogue, frank dialogue should be sought wherever possible. And it must be the kind of dialogue which does not conceal implicit ecumenical assumptions and

is driven by the evangelical commitment to love one's neighbour and to witness to the grace of God to the world.

Notes

- 1 *The Second Vatican Council*, 53. Other references to this book will be indicated in the main body of the paper.
- 2 *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1993); *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids-Leicester: Eerdmans-IVP 1994); *Loosing Our Virtue* (Leicester: IVP 1998).
- 3 D. Wells, *Revolution in Rome* (Downers Grove: IVP 1972). The book has been defined as 'the wisest and most cogently and compactly argued commentary (on post-Vatican II Catholicism) written by an evangelical': cf. J. Armstrong, 'The Evangelical Moment?' in J.H. Armstrong (ed.), *Roman Catholicism. Evangelical Protestants Analyze What Divides and Unites Us* (Chicago: Moody Press 1994) 319-320, n. 11. Other significant writings by Wells are: 'Tradition: a Meeting Place for Catholic and Evangelical Theology?', *Christian Scholar's Review* 5:1 (1975) 50-61; 'Recent RC Theology' in S.N. Gundry- A.F. Johnson (eds.), *Tensions in Contemporary Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press 1976) 287-324; *The Prophetic Theology of George Tyrrell* (Chico: Scholars Press 1981).
- 4 *Revolution in Rome*, 26 and 91.
- 5 D. Wells, 'Change and Decay: Roman Style', *Christianity Today* (Sept 25 1970) 6-8.
- 6 *Roman Catholicism Today* (London: IVF 1964); *Dawn or Twilight? A Study of Contemporary RC* (Leicester: IVP 1976); *The Faith of the Vatican* (Darlington: Evangelical Press 1996).
- 7 *The Faith of the Vatican*, 13.
- 8 J. Stott and B. Meeking (eds.), *The Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission 1977-1984* (Grand Rapids: Exeter: Eerdmans: Paternoster 1986). Quotations from it will be reported in the main text.
- 9 Cf. D. Howard, *The Dream that would not Die. The Birth and Growth of the WEF 1846-1986* (Exeter: Paternoster 1986) 130-136 and W.H. Fuller, *People of the Mandate. The Story of the WEF* (Carlisle: Paternoster 1997) 126-127.
- 10 Published in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 10:4 (1986) 343-364 and 11:1 (1987) 78-94 as well as by P. Schrottenboer (ed.), *Roman Catholicism. A Contemporary*

Evangelical Perspective (Grand Rapids: Baker Book 1987).

- 11 ERT (1987) 93.
- 12 E. Cassidy, 'Ecumenical Challenges for the Future. A Catholic Perspective', *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 18:1 (1997) 27.
- 13 The proceedings were published in ERT 21:2 (1997) and 23:1 (1999), respectively.
- 14 The ECT text and some accompanying essays can be found in C. Colson—R Neuhaus (eds.), *Evangelicals and Catholics Together. Toward a Common Mission* (Dallas: Word 1995).
- 15 T. George, 'Catholics and Evangelicals in the trenches', *Christianity Today* (May 16, 1994) 16-17.
- 16 The GOS text can be found in *Christianity Today* (Dec 8, 1997) 34.
- 17 R.C. Sproul, 'What ECT II ignores. The inseparable link between imputation and the gospel', *Modern Reformation* (Sept/Oct 1998) 213. Further to GOS, both evangelical critics and supporters of ECT have signed the 1999 conciliatory document 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ. An Evangelical Celebration', *Christianity Today* (Jun 14, 1999) 51-56. I have explored in more detail the ECT process in the article 'From ECT to GJC via GOS. Evangelical unity vis-à-vis Roman Catholicism', *Evangelical Review of Theology* (forthcoming).
- 18 In this section, I only touch on certain points without investigating them at any length. For an introductory statement which presents a proposal for a systemic approach, see the Appendix which I consider as being an integral part of the paper.

Appendix

Istituto di Formazione Evangelica e Documentazione (IFED) and the Italian Evangelical Alliance *An Evangelical Approach Towards Understanding Roman Catholicism*

In the years following Vatican II (1962-65) Evangelicals have shown renewed interest in Roman Catholicism. On an international level this interest has led to a series of meetings on the theme of Mission, 'The Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission 1977-1984', and has opened the way for an ongoing dialogue between The World Evangelical Fellowship and the Pontifical

Council for Promoting Christian Unity on the themes of Justification, Scripture and Tradition (Venice 1995) and the Church (Jerusalem 1997). In 1986 the World Evangelical Fellowship also published an important document on Catholicism entitled, 'An Evangelical Perspective on Roman Catholicism'. In the United States more controversial documents have been drawn up such as, 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together' (1994) and 'The Gift of Salvation' (1997). Until quite recently it could be said that the overall evangelical evaluation of Catholicism was invariably critical. Today this is no longer true. In many areas there are clear signs of a definite change in the way many Evangelicals perceive the Catholic Church. The common understanding has given way to a comprehension which is less certain and often confusing. The following document is intended to be a contribution to the evangelical understanding of Catholicism and the criteria which should be used when relating to it.

The nature of Catholicism

1. Roman Catholicism is a complex reality. A global view of Catholicism, must take into account its doctrine, culture, and its institutions. It is a religious worldview which has been promoted throughout history by the ecclesiastical institution whose centre is in Rome. Although there is considerable diversity in its forms of expression, Catholicism is a basically unitary reality whose underlying tenets can be discerned. Any analysis which does not take in to account the fact that Catholicism is a system will fall prey to a superficial and fragmented understanding of the phenomenon.

2. Catholicism's starting point is the Thomist conception of the relationship between 'nature' and 'grace' into which is engrafted the idea of the Church as the extension of the Incarnation of the Son of God. Both of these themes can be presented with subtle diversity and with any number of interpretative variations, but by virtue of the fact that they form Catholicism's ideological framework, they will always be found to be present. This basic orientation in its presuppositions explains why Roman Catholicism has no sense of the tragedy of sin, tends to encourage an optimistic view of man's abilities, sees salvation as a process in which nature is made more perfect and justifies the Church's role as a mediator between man and God.

3. The global objective of Catholicism is

catholicity. In the Roman Catholic understanding catholicity has to do simultaneously with unity and totality. The basic premise is that multiplicity should be brought into a unity. The Church is seen as an expression, a guarantor and a promoter of true unity. As long as the institutional structure which preserves this unity remains intact, everything can and must find its home somewhere within the kingdom of Catholicism.

4. Given the fundamental presupposition and the main objective of Catholicism, the method chosen for its realisation is that of integration. Roman Catholicism is a master at incorporating into its system elements which are not only different but contrasting and perhaps even incompatible. The essential criterion is not that of evangelical purity or christian authenticity but that of a progressive inclusion – the insertion of the particular into a broader perspective which eliminates its specificity by dissolving it in the service of universality.

The strategy behind Catholicism

5. In today's religious panorama it is evident that Catholicism has a very clear programme in its pursuit of catholicity. This is particularly noticeable in its ecumenical strategy following the Second Vatican Council – every opportunity to advance this cause has been seized upon. The apparent signs of willingness for dialogue and availability for interaction with evangelicals should make them ask themselves whether the final goal of the Catholic church is not in actual fact the extension of its own synthesis so as to include the evangelicals' ideals within its own horizons. This strategy, however, does not only include evangelicals, but also extends to all religions and all religious bodies around the world.

6. An important part of this strategy has been the proclamation of the year 2000 as a Holy Year, improperly called a 'Jubilee' Year. The beginning of the new millennium is an event in which the Catholic Church has heavily invested and carefully prepared for. The year 2000, as a Holy Year, is an event which clearly reveals the multifaceted nature of contemporary Catholicism. The Vatican's 'Jubilee' shows very clearly what the dominant tendencies within Catholicism are today and its short term goals in the direction of catholicity.

Evangelical Diversity with respect to Catholicism

7. In seeking to come to a better understanding of Catholicism, evangelicals must examine their own identity: a proper understanding of Catholicism also implies a proper understanding of the evangelical faith. A clear position regarding the one requires a clear position regarding the other.

8. Although there are many differences between Catholicism and the evangelical faith at various levels they are all inter-connecting and in the last analysis stem from a radically different basic orientation. It is a difference which cannot simply be explained in psychological, historical or cultural terms, nor does it derive from different doctrinal emphases which could somehow be complementary. The difference is at the level of the presuppositions, and this necessarily influences and determines both the objectives and the methods of the two Confessions.

9. The doctrinal agreement between Catholics and Evangelicals, which is expressed in a common adherence to the Creeds and Councils of the first five centuries, is not an adequate basis on which to say that there is an agreement concerning the essentials of the Gospel. Moreover, developments within the Catholic Church during the following centuries give rise to the suspicion that this adherence may be more formal than substantial. This type of observation might also be true of the agreements between Evangelicals and Catholics when it comes to ethical and social issues. There is a similarity of perspective which has its roots in Common Grace and the influence which Christianity has generally exercised in the course of history. Since theology and ethics cannot be separated, however, it is not possible to say that there is a common ethical understanding – the underlying theologies are essentially different. As there is no basic agreement concerning the foundations of the Gospel, even when it comes to ethical questions where there may be similarities, these affinities are more formal than substantial.

10. The biblical teaching re-discovered during the 16th Century Reformation regarding the '*sola, solus*' as the crucial point of the Gospel is a crux which an evangelical understanding considers to be 'non-negotiable'. Scripture *alone*, Christ *alone*, Grace *alone*, Faith *alone*, to God *alone* be glory, these together constitute the criteria for the study of Catholicism

and the hermeneutic principle which should be used in interpreting the dynamics within the Roman Catholic Church. On the basis of the *sola, solus*, the distance which separates contemporary Catholicism from the Evangelical faith is no less than it was at the time of the Protestant Reformation. In fact, after the First and Second Vatican Councils, Catholicism continues to add to Scripture the authority of tradition and magisterial teaching; to Christ it has added the Church as an extension of the Incarnation; to grace it has added the necessity of the benefits which come through the sacramental office of the church; to faith it has added the necessity of good works for salvation; to the worship of God it has added the veneration of a host of other figures which detract from the worship of the only true God. When compared to Roman Catholicism at the time of Trent, the contrast concerning the important issues is much less sharply defined today, but no basic change has taken place. The exclusiveness of the evangelical faith concerning the essential elements of the Gospel must be seen as an alternative to the Catholic proposal of an all encompassing catholicity.

11. The current flurry of activity within contemporary Catholicism (the return to the Bible, liturgical renewal, the valorisation of the laity, the charismatic movement, etc.) does not indicate, in and of itself, that there is hope for a reformation within the Catholic church in an evangelical sense. It will only be as these developments make changes in the structural elements underlying the nature of Catholicism, not expanding it further but purifying it in the light of God's Word, that they can have a truly reforming function. In today's scenario, these movements, although interesting, seem to promote the project of Catholicity rather than that of reformation.

Relationships with Catholics

12. What is true of the Catholic Church as a doctrinal and institutional reality is not necessarily true of individual Catholics. God's grace is at work in men and women who, although they may consider themselves Catholics, trust in God alone, and seek to develop a personal relationship with him, read the Scriptures and lead a Christian life. These people, however, must be encouraged to think through the issue of whether their faith is compatible with membership of the Catholic Church. They must be helped to examine critically residual Catholic elements in their thinking

in the light of God's Word.

13. In the fulfilment of the cultural mandate there may be moments of interaction in which there is a co-operation and united action between Evangelicals and Catholics, as in fact may be possible between Evangelicals and people with other religious orientations and ideologies. Where common values are at stake in ethical, social, cultural and political issues, forms of co-belligerence are to be encouraged. These necessary and inevitable forms of co-operation, however, must not be perceived as ecumenical initiatives, nor must they be construed as implying the recovery of a doctrinal consensus.

14. The fulfilment of the missionary mandate demands that its missionaries come from the community of believers who are united in a common confession of faith regarding all the fundamental aspects of the Gospel, especially the crucial points which concern the 5 '*sola, solus*' of the Reformation. In this sense,

all evangelistic activity, at home or abroad, in which there is a co-operation between Catholics and Evangelicals, must be seriously re-examined. A faithful witness to the Risen One must be given to all men and women everywhere quite apart from their religious affiliation.

15. Roman Catholicism is a reality which must be seriously studied and examined. The basic difference between Catholicism and the Evangelical faith is no reason for Evangelicals to ignore the internal developments within Catholicism, or to cultivate an arrogant attitude, or to be excessively polemical. As much as is possible an open, frank and constructive interaction with Catholicism should be sought, especially when it concerns the basic orientation of the two Confessions. Even in this situation, what is currently called 'dialogue' should not be considered as an ecumenical activity, but simply as an expression of the desire to understand and to witness.

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