

*"Watchman,
what of the night?"*

*"The hour has come, the hour is striking, and striking at you,
the hour and the end!"*

Eze. 7:6 (Moffatt)



EVANGELICALS & CATHOLICS PART TOGETHER TWO

WHAT DO THEY AFFIRM? FOR WHAT DO THEY HOPE?
FOR WHAT WILL THEY CONTEND?

The unprecedented statement of accord drafted by a select group of Roman Catholic and Evangelical leaders was conceived during a discussion in 1992 between Charles Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship, and Richard John Neuhaus, a Catholic priest and editor of *First Things*. Two years later this group of 15 released the document - "Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium" (ECT). While the central emphasis is "Christian" mission, the "Introduction" also includes the item of "faith." The statement frankly admits that it will address what was discovered by this select group about their areas of unity and about their differences.

Conscious of the fact that the close of the present decade would bring an end to the Second Millennium, they sought to visualize and formulate their response to what their Christian "mission" should be as they begin the Third Millennium. They stated - "As Christ is one, so the Christian mission is one." While accepting what they termed, "legitimate diversity," they nevertheless affirmed - "There is a necessary connection between visible unity of Christians and the mission of the one Christ." While this accord is primarily focused on the achievement of this oneness between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics, they noted that there were other Christian organizations outside of these communities - the Eastern Orthodox and Protestants not commonly identified as Evangelical - included in the prayer of Christ that "all may be one." (John 17:21)

This select group perceive their two communities - the Evangelical and the Roman Catholic as constituting "the growing edge of missionary expansion at present and, most likely, in the century ahead." They recognize that there has been serious conflict between the two groups, and still is in different parts of the world. They see this "scandal of conflict between Christians" as obscuring "the scandal of the cross, thus crippling the one mission of the one Christ." Their call for a united front is motivated by their perception of the forces which they perceive as facing the Christian community - Islam, in the Middle East, and "secularism" which

dominates Western Society. They declare that "we dare not by needless and loveless conflict between ourselves give aid and comfort to the enemies of the cause of Christ."

What do they plan to do about it? They will seek to avoid conflict between their two communities, and where it does exist, they will do what they can to reduce and eliminate it. They "are resolved to explore patterns of working and witnessing together in order to advance the mission of Christ." However, they do not wish any "appearance of harmony" to be "purchased at the price of truth." They declare:

"Our common resolve is made imperative by obedience to the truth of God revealed in the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures, and by trust in the promise of the Holy Spirit's guidance until our Lord returns in glory to judge the living and the dead."

Because of this resolve, they perceive the mission which they have embraced together as "the necessary consequence of the faith that [they] affirm together."

[Comment:- Who can fault the logic used? Should there not be a common front to the enemy? Are not the divisions and the resulting confusion a scandal? Is it not imperative that we obey the truth of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures? Should we not trust the promise of the Holy Spirit's guidance? But can we embrace the Roman Catholic community whose head is identified in prophecy as one "whose coming is after the working of Satan." (II Thess. 2:9) Has not the embracing of Evangelicalism played havoc in the Community of Adventism and adulterated the truth committed to our trust? Is the united front placed before the enemy to be an accommodation so as to increase the numerical strength? Or should it not rather be pure truth, unadulterated, as the basis for confrontation with error in whatever guise it may appear?]

In the second section of this accord, the formulators set forth what they affirm together.

The first paragraph is typically evangelical. It states that "Jesus Christ is Lord. That is the first and final affirmation that Christians make about all of reality." That the Roman Catholic parties of the accord would affirm this is difficult to understand. It is true that the Pope's book - Crossing the Threshold of Hope - had not been published when this accord was drawn up. However, this affirmation is in direct

contradiction to the premise of the first question asked the Pope. Vittorio Messori prefaced his question with the assertion that the Pope "is defined by the faith as the Vicar of Jesus Christ (and is accepted as such by believers). The Pope is considered the man on earth who represents the Son of God, who 'takes the place' of the Second Person of the omnipotent God of the Trinity." (p. 3) Then read carefully the question asked:

"Have you ever once hesitated in your belief in your relationship with Jesus Christ and therefore with God? Haven't you ever had, not doubts certainly, but at least questions and problems (as is human) about the truth of this Creed which is repeated at each Mass and which proclaims an unprecedented faith, of which you are the **highest** guarantor?" (p. 4)

This position assumed by the Pope, and believed by the faithful, is, however, one of long standing. Rene Noorbergen in his first question for the pope [See WVN, 2(95), p. 2] quoted from The National Catholic (July, 1895) the assertion that the Pope "is Jesus Christ Himself, hidden under a veil of flesh." Who then is Lord? There cannot be two!

It would seem that the formulators of the accord traded off positions held by each to find a common affirmation. The second affirmation reads - "We affirm that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ." A key word, "alone" is missing. The Roman Catholic position as stated in the Council of Trent is that faith plus works is the basis for justification. There are even those among the "independent" ministries of the Adventist Church who advocate the Roman Catholic position as formulated at that Council. But this is not the Protestant position of the Reformation, nor the Biblical teaching as set forth by Paul. This second affirmation statement is so worded that it can be read either way by the two "communities" to the accord.

The third affirmation was declared by Neuhaus to be "the document's most important single statement." (Christianity Today (CT), May 16, 1994, p. 53). This reads:

"All who accept Christ as Lord and Saviour are brothers and sisters in Christ. Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ. We have not chosen one another, just as we have not chosen Christ. He has chosen us, and he has chosen us to be together (John 15). However imperfect our communion with one another,

however deep our disagreements with one another, we recognize that there is but one church of Christ. There is one church because there is one Christ and the church is his body. However difficult the way, **we recognize that we are called of God to a fuller realization of our unity in the body of Christ.** The only unity to which we would give expression is unity in truth, and the truth is this: 'There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.' (Ephesians 4)" (Emphasis supplied)

This is walking straight into the arms of Rome. One well known Evangelical who has opposed ECT regards it as evidence that "the ecumenical church which will be the church of the antichrist, is rapidly forming." (CT, May 16, 1994, p. 53) But another question comes striking home, How will you answer "this truth" that there is only "one body," when faced with the challenge from that "ecumenical church"?

The fourth affirmation only compounds what was affirmed in the third. In its composite formulation it states: 1) "that Christians are to teach and live in obedience to the divinely inspired Scriptures, which are the infallible Word of God;" and 2) "that Christ has promised to his church the gift of the Holy Spirit who will lead us into all truth in discerning and declaring the Scripture." (Can one fault these affirmations?) Two examples are cited of the Spirit's leading: 1) "the formation of the canon of the Scripture;" and 2) "the orthodox response to the great Christological and Trinitarian controversies of the early centuries." The church's "faithful response to the Spirit's leading" led to the formulation of the Apostles Creed, which the accord states, "we can and hereby do affirm together as an accurate statement of scriptural truth." This section closes with the Apostles Creed in full.

Here is where some problems begin in earnest. The 27 books which comprise our New Testament were first listed by Athanasius of Alexandria (4th century) in his 39th Festal Letter addressed to his bishops. This listing was affirmed by regional councils in North Africa in 393 and 397 A.D. This fact causes the Roman Church to claim that she is "the mother of the New Testament" and that the "only authority which non-Catholics have for the inspiration of the Scriptures is the authority of the Catholic Church." (The Faith of Millions, pp. 144-145) Thus she can interpret that of which she is the "mother." We counter claim that "the development of the canon was a

gradual process, presided over by the Spirit of God." (SDA Bible Dictionary, pp. 187-188) Yet at the same time, through these very agencies, the Christological and Trinitarian pronouncements were made plus the establishment of Sunday sacredness. How does one accept the working of the Spirit in one area - the canon of the New Testament - and claim that in the other areas - Christological and Trinitarian pronouncements - it was not the working of that Spirit? Or should we do as Luther did, re-evaluate the canon of the New Testament? To choose this later approach would bring us back to square one, to the eclecticism which caused the drawing up of a canon in its first initiative. The simple answer is that the Scriptures do not sustain the Creeds of the Councils; but this leaves as an open question the workings of God in the centuries between the Apostolic Church and the full formation of the Papacy. Even in the Apostolic period, the Scripture plainly states - "The mystery of iniquity doth already work." (II Thess. 2:7) This fact alone should cause us to give closer scrutiny to the divisive issues which affected the Church as revealed in the New Testament itself.

The third section of the accord expressed what the two groups hoped together. First, they desired that "all people will come to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour." They stated that "the church is by nature, in all places and at all times, in mission." Noting that "unity and love among Christians is an integral part of our missionary witness to the Lord," they "pray that our unity in the love of Christ will become ever more evident as a sign to the world of God's reconciling power." They recognized that the "communal and ecclesial separations" have been "deep and long standing." While acknowledging that they did not know either the schedule, nor the way to "greater visible unity," they indicated that the God "who has brought [them] into communion with himself through Christ intends that [they] also be in communion with one another." They committed themselves to "begin now the work required to remedy what [they] know to be wrong" in what has hitherto been the "existing patterns of distrustful polemic and conflict." This section of the accord reiterates an obvious axiom that as "we are drawn closer to [Christ] - walking in that way, obeying that truth, living that life - we are drawn closer to one another." It further marks out that the work of moving toward visible unity "requires trust and understanding, and trust and understanding require an assiduous attention to truth."

How does the accord propose to accomplish this objective? Recognizing that there are real disagreements between the two communities, they assert that "misunderstandings, misrepresentations, and caricatures of one another, however, are not disagreements. These distortions must be cleared away if [they] are to reach through [their] differences in a manner consistent in what [they] affirm and hope together on the basis of God's Word."

Frankly admitting that they are unable to resolve "the deep and long standing differences between Evangelicals and Catholics" suggesting that "these differences may never be resolved short of the Kingdom Come," in the fourth section of ECT - "We Search Together" - they list "some of the differences and disagreements that must be addressed more fully and candidly in order to strengthen between [them] a relationship of trust in obedience to truth." Here is the list:

- 1) "The church as an integral part of the Gospel or the church as a communal consequence of the Gospel."
- 2) "The church as visible communion or invisible fellowship of true believers."
- 3) "The sole authority of Scripture (sola scriptura) or Scripture as authoritatively interpreted in the church."
- 4) "The 'soul freedom' of the individual Christian or the Magisterium (teaching authority) of the community."
- 5) "The church as local congregation or universal communion."
- 6) "Ministry ordered in apostolic succession or the priesthood of all believers."
- 7) "Sacraments and ordinances as symbols of grace or means of grace."
- 8) "The Lord's supper as eucharistic sacrifice or memorial meal."
- 9) "Remembrance of Mary and the saints or devotion to Mary and the saints."
- 10) "Baptism as sacrament of regeneration or testimony to regeneration."

Recognizing that this list of ten differences is by no means a complete listing, the conferees assert that on some of these questions, even among Evangelical Protestants "there are significant

differences between, for example, Baptists, Pentecostals, and Calvinists." The accord document states that the general contention of Evangelicals concerning these points is that the Catholic Church "has gone beyond the Scripture, adding teachings and practices that detract from or compromise the Gospel of God's saving grace in Christ." The Catholics, however, contend that such practices and teachings "are grounded in Scripture and belong to the fullness of God's revelation." The rejection of their position, Catholics maintain, "results in a truncated and reduced understanding of the Christian reality."

Recognizing that they "cannot resolve these disputes" in this accord, yet the conferees and signatories "testify now that in our searching together [they] have discovered what [they] can affirm together and what [they] can hope together and, therefore, how [they] can contend together." The next section of the document - "We Contend Together" - gets down to the nitty-gritty of ECT - their "political agenda."

The document declares - "Christians, and the church corporately also have a responsibility for the right ordering of civil society." They maintain that they are seeking "to secure a greater measure of civil righteousness and justice, confident that [Christ] will crown [their] efforts when he rightly orders all things in the coming of his Kingdom."

Where did Christ ever entrust His church with the ordering of civil society? In the theocracy of Israel, He did order civil society. Is it the restoration of a theocracy that the formulators and signers of ECT want? If so, who will be the earthly administrator of such a theocracy? Are there two kinds of righteousness, "a righteousness of God by faith of Jesus Christ" (Rom. 3:22) and a "civil righteousness"?

The document further declares - "We contend for the truth that politics, law, and culture must be secured by moral truth. With the Founders of the American experiment, we declare, 'We hold these truths.' With them, we hold that this constitutional order is composed not just of rules and procedures but is most essentially a moral experiment. With them, we hold that only virtuous people can be free and just, and that virtue is secured by religion."

Why this contending? Because in the judgment of the formulators, "Americans are drifting away from, are often explicitly defying, the constituting truths of this experiment in ordered liberty."

In the next "breath," the accord declares - "More specifically, we contend together for religious freedom. We do so for the sake of religion, but also because religious freedom is the first freedom, the source and shield of all human freedoms. ...

"Religious freedom is itself grounded in and is a product of religious faith, as is evident in the history of Baptists and others in this country. 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."

This deduction of the position of John Paul II is difficult to accept in the light of what Malachi Martin declares to be the pope's position. According to Martin, "he insists that men have no reliable hope of creating a viable geopolitical system unless it is on the basis of Roman Catholic Christianity." (Keys of This Blood, p. 492) Further the pope's track record in Ireland, and Bosnia doesn't confirm his commitment to the "defense of all human rights."

In the wording of this ECT document are phrases and terms which create questions as to meaning and application, such as "the right ordering of civil society" as a responsibility of the church. How is the "virtue" of a society to be "secured by religion"? What is "ordered liberty"? How does this relate to "religious freedom"? All of this in the ECT document is set in the framework of "the American experiment," which is declared to be not just a "constitutional order" of rules and procedures but is declared to be "most essentially a moral experiment."

In the community of Adventism the expression, "religious liberty" is used rather than "religious freedom." In the first Amendment to the Constitution, the specific word "freedom" is applied to speech and the press, but not used in defining the limits of government in regard to "the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The dictionary observes that, liberty "may imply more strongly than 'freedom' a release from restraint or compulsion." (Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, art. "freedom") This may be why it is so used in the document, ECT. The conferees write - "We strongly affirm the separation of church and state, and just as strongly protest the distortion of that principle to mean the separation of religion from public life." They declare that "we contend together for a renewal

of the constituting vision of the place of religion in the American experiment."

There is no question that "virtue" is needed in public life, and that "virtue is secured by religion." But is it an imposed virtue, or a virtue developed within the individual as a result of a personal encounter with God? Let the church provide the environment for such an experience, and then let the person so transformed enter the public square, if convicted to do so, and evenhandedly promote law and justice according to the civil constitution. However, to interpret "the American experiment" as "most essentially a moral experiment," and declare that "religion" was a part of "the constituting vision" and must be renewed, is rewriting history, and is fraught with danger to true religious freedom.

The ETC "moral" agenda for government is clearly stated:

1) "With the Founders [of the American experiment], we hold that all human beings are endowed by their Creator with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. ... Our goals are: to secure due process of law for the unborn, to enact the most protective laws and public policies that are politically possible, and reduce dramatically the incidence of abortion."

2) Inasmuch as the present culture in America is perceived as a "culture of death," they "will do all in their power to resist proposals for euthanasia, eugenics, and population control that exploit the vulnerable, corrupt the integrity of medicine, deprave our culture, and betray the moral truths of our constitutional order."

3) "In public education," [they will] contend together for schools that transmit to coming generations our cultural heritage, which is inseparable from the formative influences of religion, especially Judaism and Christianity." They affirm that since in a democratic society that recognizes that "parents have the primary responsibility for the formation of their children, schools are to assist and support, not oppose and undermine, parents in the exercise of their responsibility."

4) "We contend together for a comprehensive policy of parental choice in education. This is a moral question of simple justice... We affirm policies that enable parents to effectively exercise their right and responsibility to choose schooling that they consider best for their children." [This is just another way of saying -

state aid for parochial schools]

5) "We contend together against widespread pornography in our society, along with the celebration of violence, sexual depravity, and antireligious bigotry in the entertainment media."

6) "We contend for a renewed spirit of acceptance, understanding, and cooperation across lines of religion, race, ethnicity, sex, and class. We are all created in the image of God and are accountable to him. That truth is the basis for individual responsibility and equality before the law."

7) "We contend for a free society, including a vibrant market economy."

8) "We contend together for a renewed appreciation of Western culture. In its history and missionary [out]reach, Christianity engages all cultures while being captive to none. We are keenly aware of, and grateful for, the role of Christianity in shaping and sustaining the Western culture of which we are a part."

9) "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."

10) "Finally, we contend for a realistic and responsible understanding of America's part in world affairs. ... U.S. foreign policy should reflect a concern for the defense of democracy and, wherever prudent and possible, the protection and advancement of human rights, including religious freedom."

To some of these contentions, we can say, "Amen," while others are open to critical review and assessment. There can be no question that these, for the most part, constitute a political agenda, reflecting the "religious right" in America. However, those formulating and signing this document "reject the notion that this constitutes a partisan 'religious agenda' in American politics." This section - "We Contend Together" - closes with the following paragraph:

"We are profoundly aware that the American experiment has been, all in all, a blessing to the world and a blessing to us as Evangelical and Catholic Christians. We are determined to assume our full share of responsibility for this 'one nation under God,' believing it to be a nation under the judgment, mercy, and providential care of the Lord of the nations to

whom alone we render unqualified allegiance."

There remains one more section - "We Witness Together," and a "Conclusion."

To be concluded

Note: All direct quotations unless otherwise indicated are from the document - Evangelicals & Catholics Together - as published in First Things, May, 1994, pp. 15-22)

SOME BACKGROUND

This document - ECT - which involved Evangelicals as well as Roman Catholics has never been published in full in the leading voice of the Evangelicals, Christianity Today (CT). The Evangelical conferee Charles Colson, who helped "spark" the dialogue which led to the accord, is a frequent columnist in the journal. Leading Evangelicals were participants in the formulation of the statement as well as signators who endorsed the document. Yet it is from the Evangelical community that the attack on the statement is most vocal and strident.

On the other hand, this document was published in full in First Things, a journal of Religion and Public Life, edited by Richard Neuhaus, the Roman Catholic counterpart to Colson. Neuhaus is a Lutheran minister turned Roman Catholic priest. Among the participants was the Jesuit Theologian, Avery Dulles, son the former Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, who also had reverted to Romanism. To understand the force of what this document is saying, one must understand the thinking of Neuhaus, inasmuch as his imprint is obvious on the statement.

Neuhaus wants religious and moral values returned to public life, or "the public square" as he calls it. Further, in an article in The Christian Century (July 11-18, 1990), he wrote that "for the present and the foreseeable future, the leadership in religion's cultural-forming tasks has passed to evangelicals and Roman Catholics." (p. 672) This is why he perceived the dialogue and statement so important. He also pre-empted negative Roman Catholic official reaction by contact "with appropriate parties at the Holy See" who gave their "strongest encouragement." (CT, May 16, 1994, p. 53) An "educated guess" based on the research done for this brief

observation leads this editor to believe that one of those "appropriate parties" was Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Defense of the Faith. The Center on Religion and Society, which Neuhaus directs, sponsors an annual Erasmus Lecture (even the name chosen for the lecture series is significant). For the 1988 lecture, Neuhaus invited Ratzinger, who then took part in a two-day private conference on modern scholarship and the Bible which was attended by some forty religious scholars. It appears that Neuhaus is in accord with Ratzinger's objective of reasserting orthodoxy and tightening of ecclesiastical discipline under the rule of Rome. (Current Biography Yearbook 1988, p. 424)

Neuhaus took his Lutheran ministerial training at Concordia Theological Seminary in St. Louis. One of the teachers who made a permanent impression on his life was Arthur Karl Peipkorn, an ecumenist who became a leading figure in the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue. Neuhaus has come to believe "that Lutheranism has always been a movement of reform 'within and for the one Church'" He looks upon the Reformation as a "tragic necessity" - a necessity because reform was necessary and a tragedy because the unity and universality of the Church was undermined."

Due to the present moral decline Neuhaus believes that "'this is the moment in which the Roman Catholic Church in the world should be the lead Church in proclaiming and exemplifying the Gospel' and the moment when the Catholic Church in the United States should take the lead in reasserting Christian principles in the American public arena." Further, he believes that "the Reformation understanding of the Gospel is...more boldly proclaimed by Rome than by many of the churches that lay claim to the Reformation heritage." (ibid, p. 423)

His publications have been numerous and have provoked wide spread discussion. In his book, The Catholic Moment, he looked to the Roman Catholic Church in the United States to assume "its rightful role in the culture-forming task of constructing a religiously informed public philosophy for the American experiment in ordered liberty." He agrees with Pope John Paul II's view that the liberalization begun at Vatican II in the Roman Church has been "gravely distorted" and that much of what is called Roman Catholic Christianity is in fact apostate. His final emphasis in the book is on the effort of John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger to restore a conservative balance in the Church." (ibid.)

Neuhaus cannot be dismissed lightly, but must be taken seriously, and this is why the ECT document and what its objectives are must be carefully scrutinized. Further, the comment by Bob Jones III, an Evangelical, that this accord is evidence that "the ecumenical church, which will be the church of the antichrist, is rapidly forming," dare not be overlooked.

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"Those who condemn history as a mere rattling of ancient skeletons only betray their unfamiliarity with the subject... It is impossible to understand our times without a knowledge of the conditions which brought them about; and it is equally impossible to make intelligent decisions for the future if we have only an uncomprehending view of the age in which we live."

John D. Hicks, The American Nation, preface

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