

The Alignment of New Evangelicals with Catholicism

By Richard Bennett

The great difficulties I had as a Catholic priest with New Evangelicals was explained in Chapter Two. The essential problem was with the false gospel message that is given by New Evangelicals. It was quite frustrating for me to find that many of the teachings of Catholicism seemed quite similar to what the New Evangelicals were preaching. Now if the problem was frustrating for me as a Catholic priest back in the seventies and eighties, it is even more difficult now for anyone inside of Catholicism who is seeking for the truth. Besides a false gospel that is given by many New Evangelicals, there is also an increase in false ecumenicism. In recent times there has been a great impetus in movement of New Evangelicals seeking to embrace Catholics as “brothers and sisters in Christ.” It is necessary therefore to address this false ecumenicism. In this chapter we are to see New Evangelicals, like never before, seeking to accommodate themselves to Catholicism. Clever terminology and the backing of the many well-known personages in Evangelical circles have brought all of this together.

Evangelicals throughout the centuries have maintained that by justification by faith—and by faith alone—sinful human beings are in Christ made right before the all Holy God.¹ Justification itself is a judicial declarative act on the part of God alone. By it, He declares that only in Christ is a man perfectly just. His judicial declarative act is not made on the basis of anything within a man, but rather it is made solely and wholly upon the righteous life and sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Saviour lived a perfect life and upon the cross paid the just penalty for all the sins of His people. Historically, Evangelicals have been in agreement with the Apostle Paul, “*to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*”²

¹ *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 1646; *The Baptist Confession of Faith*, 1689; *The Philadelphia Confession of Faith*, Adopted by The Baptist Association, 1742; and others.

² Romans 4:5.

A person calling himself Evangelical is professing to be committed to the Gospel of Christ as proclaimed in Scripture. The true Gospel demands separation from all who teach another gospel. As the Apostle declared, “*But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*”³ “*Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.*”⁴ Without such separation the name Evangelical **signifies nothing**. “New Evangelicalism,” which willingly compromises with and accommodates *another gospel*, has gained ground everywhere, beginning in the early 1960s. Since then, the Evangelical world has changed beyond recognition.⁵

The first and second National Evangelical Anglican Conferences that met at Keele and Nottingham in the UK in 1967 and 1977, respectively, were primed to launch and further the new policy of Anglican Evangelicals towards ecumenism. There was a new desire on the part of New Evangelicals to be united with ritualistic Anglicans, who were essentially Roman Catholic in belief and practice, and with liberals who believed in a fallible Bible. Leading Evangelicals, such as John Stott and J.I. Packer, endorsed the statements from these. John Stott, who chaired the first conference at Keele, made clear that the conference was accepting not only Anglo-Catholics and liberals, but Roman Catholics also, “All who confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek together to fulfill their common calling to the glory of one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit have a right to be treated as Christians, and it is on this basis that we wish to talk with them.”⁶ The conference at Nottingham went further than Keele, giving the compromise already proclaimed a complete seal of approval. Nottingham also endorsed and praised the Charismatic movement and is remembered for David Watson’s reference to the Reformation as “one of the greatest tragedies that ever happened to the church.”⁷

³ Galatians 1:8-9.

⁴ Ephesians 5:11

⁵ This is fully documented in Iain Murray’s *Evangelicalism Divided* (Banner of Truth, 2000).

⁶ Quoted in Michael de Semlyen’s *The Foundations Under Attack: The Roots of Apostasy*, (Herts., WD3 5SJ: Dorchester House Publications, 1998) p.6

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.7-8; also John Capon, *Evangelicals Tomorrow* (Glasgow: Scotland).

The most extensive exodus from biblical faith

The most drastic departure from true Evangelicalism, however, took place in the United States in 1994, some seventeen years after the Nottingham Conference. At the end of March 1994, a group of twenty leading Evangelicals and twenty leading Roman Catholics produced a document entitled “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium” (ECT).

The two main instigators of this ecumenical thrust were Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, a Lutheran pastor turned Roman Catholic priest. The specific task was begun in September, 1992. Larry Lewis of the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Jesse Miranda of Assemblies of God, John White of the Geneva College and National Association of Evangelicals; and others, including two Jesuits, Avery Dulles and Juan Diaz-Vilar, joined Colson and Neuhaus in the writing process. Cardinal Idris Cassidy, the Head of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, was said by Richard Neuhaus to have given “very active support throughout the process.” The Evangelical signatories included J. I. Packer, Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ, Mark Noll of Wheaton College, and Pat Robertson of The 700 Club. Roman Catholic signers included such well know figures as Cardinal John O’Connor, now deceased, Archbishop Sevilla, Archbishop Stafford, and Bishop Francis George, now Archbishop of Chicago.

The Gospel according to ECT

The signers of ECT readily admit to “differences that cannot be resolved here.” Nevertheless, motivated by the desire to face important moral issues together, the authors of ECT flatly state that Evangelicals and Catholics are one in Christ, and that all are truly Christians.⁸ The primary fallacy of the lengthy document is its declaration on the Gospel. The signers state what they believe comes closest to the Gospel of Christ when they declare, “We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Christ. Living faith is active in love that is nothing less than the love of Christ...”⁹ To be biblical, this statement should read, “We affirm together that we are justified by grace **alone**, through faith **alone**, **in Christ alone**.”

⁸ ECT, Section I “We Affirm Together”

⁹ Ibid.

The word “alone” signifies that the perfect righteousness of Christ Jesus—and that alone—is sufficient before the all Holy God to justify unholy sinners.¹⁰ To so define justification, however, would exclude the Catholic sacraments and the priests who control them, both of which are necessary for the Catholic people.¹¹ Thus a subtraction had to be made from the Gospel of Christ by excluding what is signified by the word “alone.” In a similar manner an addition had to be made to the Gospel. The ECT addition that redefines faith is the phrase “living faith active in love.” “Living faith” implies works and to Catholics, baptism in particular. This is documented in present day official teaching of the Church of Rome where Rome teaches, “the very root of the Church’s living faith [is] principally by means of Baptism.”¹² It is the same addition to faith that was proclaimed by the Roman Catholic Church at her Council of Trent in 1547, “For faith, unless hope and charity be added to it, neither unites one perfectly with Christ, nor makes him a living member of his body...”¹³ The theology of the Church of Rome always comes back to the concept of “living faith” so as to include “works righteousness” and particularly in her sacraments, that she defines as necessary for salvation.¹⁴

The New Evangelical signers of ECT have concurred with the Roman Catholic definition of “living faith active in love,” and thus they have formally agreed to an addition to the Gospel that nullifies its message. If the New Evangelicals do in fact believe the Roman Catholic concept of “living faith,” then logically they ought also to endorse Rome’s curse upon all who have simple faith in God’s grace—as was officially done by Rome at the Council of Trent,

“If anyone shall say that by faith **alone** the sinner is justified, so as to understand that nothing else is required to cooperate in the attainment of the grace of justification, and that it is in no way necessary that he be prepared and disposed by the action of his own will: let him be anathema [cursed].”¹⁵

To endorse Roman Catholic teaching, therefore, is to deny the clear teaching of Scripture, “*But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man ap-*

¹⁰ Romans 4:5-8, II Corinthians 5:19-21, Romans 3:22-28, Titus 3:5-7, Ephesians 1:7, Jeremiah 23:6, I Corinthians 1:30-31, Romans 5:17-19. and elsewhere.

¹¹ *Catechism*, Para. 987.

¹² *Catechism*, Para. 249.

¹³ Denzinger, #800.

¹⁴ *Catechism*, Para 1129.

¹⁵ Denzinger, #819.

peared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us."¹⁶

Disturbing effects of ECT

The devastating effect of the New Evangelical compromise with the Gospel is to put a stop to the evangelizing of Roman Catholics across the world. If this compromise of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ is accepted, then Bible-believing Churches will refrain from evangelizing Catholics. The impact on the true Church in third world Catholic countries of Central and South America, in Africa, as well as in Spain, Portugal, and the Philippines, is already apparent. If this anti-evangelical trend continues unchecked it will become ruinous to the spiritual welfare of millions of souls. But this is exactly the policy the ECT signatories promote when they state, ". . .it is neither theologically legitimate nor a prudent use of resources for one Christian community [church] to proselytize [evangelize] among active adherents of another Christian community."¹⁷ Since when has it been theologically illegitimate to expose error and heresy?

Compounded endorsement of Rome

On November 12, 1997, a second document, entitled "The Gift of Salvation," was signed and published by Evangelical and Roman Catholic leaders. Its expressed intention was to demonstrate the "common faith" of Evangelicals and Roman Catholics, and to further "acknowledge one another as brothers and sisters in Christ." It was published in the December 8, 1997, issue of *Christianity Today*. Explicitly, the Roman Catholic signatories such as Richard John Neuhaus and Avery Dulles, S.J., state in the document that they are "Catholics who are conscientiously faithful to the teaching of the Catholic Church." The Roman Catholic doctrine of conferred justification is taught as the Gospel. The New Evangelicals are now joined together in not only giving a clouded Gospel-Justification message, but also in a distinctively erudite manner, endorsing Rome's doctrine of conferred inner righteousness.

A studied denial of the Gospel

This second ecumenical document states, "Justification is central to the scriptural account of salvation, and its meaning has been much debated between Protestants

¹⁶ Titus 3:4-5.

¹⁷ ECT, Introduction

and Catholics.” It then claims that the signers have reached agreement. Their statement of accord is,

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

The subject under review is stated clearly in the first sentence. “We agree that justification...is conferred through the Father’s sheer graciousness.” But it is only by careful reading that one comes to see what the two pivotal sentences state grammatically, “...it [justification] is entirely God’s gift, conferred [rather than imputed]...and by virtue of his [God’s] declaration it [justification conferred] is so.” This is traditional Roman Catholic doctrine. To employ the Roman Catholic word “conferred” instead of the biblical word “imputed” is tantamount to putting aside the authority of Scripture on the issue of justification. Since medieval times, the Roman Catholic Church has clearly distinguished between the concept of imputation and the Thomist concept of God’s grace conferred as a quality of the soul.¹⁸ Since the Council of Trent she has condemned the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone. Present day dogma of the Roman Catholic Church not only upholds the teaching of the Council of Trent but also declares that such Councils are infallible.¹⁹ The Council of Trent proclaims the following curse:

“If anyone shall say that by the said sacraments of the New Law, grace is not **conferred** from the work which has been worked [*ex opere operato*] **but that faith alone in the divine promise suffices to obtain grace: let him be anathema.**”²⁰

Rome’s reason for such a curse on those who hold to “justification by faith alone” and to “justification imputed” is logical because of what she refuses to concede. For her, justification is not an immediate one-time act of God received by faith alone. Rather, she teaches that grace is conferred continually through her sacraments. Thus

¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 2 vols., *Great Books of the Western World*, Tr. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1952) Part I of the Second Part, Question 110, Article 1, Obj. 3 and Article 2, Reply Obj. 1.

¹⁹ *Catechism*, Para. 891.

²⁰ Denzinger, #851, Can. 8.

she is able to make a place for herself as a necessary means through which inner righteousness is given. She teaches this in her *Catechism*, “**Justification is conferred in Baptism**, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy.”²¹ Because inner righteousness, which is claimed to have been conferred, is located in the person, and not located in Christ, it can be lost and may need to be conferred again and again. Thus Rome officially states, “...the sacrament of Penance offers a new possibility to convert and to recover the grace of justification. The Fathers of the Church present this sacrament as ‘the second plank (of salvation) after the shipwreck which is the loss of grace.’”²²

“Conferred justification” is necessary for Rome because of her claim that the work of her sacraments is the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus she states, “**Sacramental grace’ is the grace of the Holy Spirit**, given by Christ and proper to each sacrament.”²³ Calling “sacramental grace” the “grace of the Holy Spirit” is pretentious blasphemy against the All Holy God. What is declared in Scripture is the imputation of God’s righteousness in the Lord Jesus Christ; it is to “...*be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.*”²⁴ The Roman Catholic Church’s persistence in using the word “**conferred**” is an attempt to exchange her sacraments for Jesus Christ, the Lord and giver of life.

Defense of “Evangelicals and Catholics Together”

The most serious apologetic for the document entitled “Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium”(ECT) is in the book of the same title *Evangelicals & Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*.²⁵ The architects of ECT were well aware of the crucial distinctions with regards to the Gospel separating Catholics and Evangelicals, but they chose to by-pass them. J. I. Packer writes in *Common Mission*, “Neither evangelicals nor Roman Catholics can stipulate that things they believe, which the other side does not believe, be made foundational to partnership at this point; so ECT lets go Protestant precision on the

²¹ *Catechism*, Para. 1992.

²² *Catechism*, Para. 1446.

²³ *Catechism*, Para 1129.

²⁴ Philippians 3:9

²⁵ *Evangelicals & Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*, Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus, editors (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995). Hereafter referred to as *Common Mission*.

doctrine of justification and the correlation between conversion and new birth...”²⁶ That such compromise is unbiblical is seen from his statements earlier in the same article when he said, “...Roman teaching obscures the Gospel and indeed distorts it in a tragically anti-spiritual and unpastoral manner...”²⁷ and “Rome’s official doctrinal disorders, particularly on justification, merit, and the Mass-sacrifice, so obscure the Gospel that were I, as a gesture of unity, invited to mass—which of course as a Protestant I am not, nor shall be—I would not feel free to accept the invitation.”²⁸

Packer towards the end of the article speaks of the evils of “humanism,” “materialism, hedonism and nihilism.” To rebuild a Christian consensus, he proposes that “...**domestic differences about salvation** and the Church should not hinder us from joint action in seeking to re-Christianize the North American milieu...”²⁹ These are amazing words from the author of *Knowing God*. The orthodox Evangelical J. I. Packer of old spoke of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, *sola fide*, as “like Atlas, it bears a world on its shoulders, the entire evangelical knowledge of saving grace”! Now the same saving faith is downgraded to the “domestic differences about salvation.” In a 1994 article, “Why I Signed It,” he refers to *sola fide* (faith alone) as “small print.”

Most serious and bizarre defense

Packer, who leads the New “Reformed” Evangelicals, has struggled to explain his position. In a 1996 article he asks,

“Can conservative Protestants, Eastern Orthodox and mainstream Roman Catholics join together in bearing witness to all that I have spoken of? I urge that we can, despite our known and continuing differences about the specifics of the salvation process and the place of the church in that process... To be sure fundamentalists within our three traditions are unlikely to join us in this, for it is the way of fundamentalists to follow the path of contentious orthodoxy, as if the mercy of God in Christ automatically rests on persons who are notionally correct and is just as automatically withheld from those who fall short of notional correctness on any point of substance. But this concept of, in effect, justification, not of works,

²⁶ *Common Mission*, p 167.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 162, 163.

²⁹ *Common Mission*, p. 172.

but of words—words, that is, of notional soundness and precision—is near to being a cultic heresy in its own right and need not detain us further now, however much we may regret the fact that some in all our traditions are bogged down in it.”³⁰

No orthodox Evangelical has ever maintained that “notional soundness and precision,” that is, doctrinal theory, ever saved anyone. Rather, orthodox Evangelicals have always held to Romans 10:10, “*For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*” It appears that Packer is here conducting a little casuistry of his own. He is attempting to preempt his critics by raising an anti-biblical dichotomy between head and heart. This is an old liberal tactic, that is, to create an unbiblical dichotomy and then imply and insinuate that any party who refuses to acknowledge it, must in the nature of the case, be unspiritual, opposed to Christian love. None of the historic Evangelical confessions of faith hold out that mere doctrinal “soundness” saves anyone. This is an absurd caricature. Rather orthodox Evangelicals today, even as they did in the days of the Apostle Paul and at the Reformation, declare that it is the righteousness of Christ Jesus alone that saves a person!

What Packer does in setting aside the crux of the issue that justification is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ Jesus alone is thoroughly in tune with the practice of the Church of Rome. For *Sola Fide*, faith alone, is **the** issue for which the Apostle Paul contended against the Judaizers and for which the Reformers contended against the Roman Catholics of their day. It was the burning issue, foundational to why so many thousands of Evangelicals gave their lives at the stake—John Huss, William Tyndale, John Rogers, Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, Anne Askew, John Bradford, and John Philpot, to name but a few. The ardent desire of true Evangelicals to “*be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith,*”³¹ was and is the heart of the Gospel, not “contentious orthodoxy” nor “cultic heresy.” Christ Jesus’ righteousness is the crown jewel of orthodoxy, the pivotal doctrine of truth revealed again by God in its rediscovery, which began the Reformation.

³⁰ J. I. Packer, “On from Orr,” *The J. I. Packer Collection*, Selected and Introduced by Alister McGrath (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999) p. 264.

³¹ Philippians 3:9

Dr. Packer has chosen to deny the very doctrine that once stood for him like Atlas and bore a world on its shoulders. What Packer has done is to deny the importance of the Scriptures on the precise point of *Sola Fide*. He also denies the Reformation history of those Evangelicals who under the Roman Catholic Inquisition gave their lives, not for any correctness in words, but rather for their faith in Christ Jesus alone.

“Separation for the sake of the gospel is not necessary”

In the same book, Richard Neuhaus stated emphatically, “If, at the end of the twentieth century, separation for the sake of the gospel is not necessary, it is not justified.”³² What Neuhaus was effectively saying is that the Gospel is no longer relevant to Christian unity. This seems to be the precise intent of the 1994 ECT document and equally the 1997 “The Gift of Salvation” document. If true Evangelicals do not combat this heinous attack on the Gospel, then Neuhaus’ anti-Scriptural words “separation for the sake of the gospel is not necessary or justified” might well fall on them and their children after them. If the lie is swallowed that separation for the sake of the Gospel is not justified, then the logical conclusion is that Churches should cave in and submit to the Church of Rome. This has always been the avowed goal of the Roman Catholic Church, as her documents verify.

Neuhaus argues that “to declare it [justification by faith alone] to be the article by which the Church stands or falls in a manner that excludes other ways of saying the gospel is to turn it into a sectarian doctrine.”³³ The true Gospel of grace has in this statement not simply been declared unnecessary, but it has also been labeled a “sectarian doctrine.” This statement by Neuhaus shows the intent of Catholics who have planned and fostered the whole deceitful compromise with Evangelicals. Their purpose is to make the true Gospel of grace through faith in Christ alone to be irrelevant, all the while promoting as truly Christian the Catholic “salvation by works-gospel”—which is no gospel at all but which so acceptable to the natural man.

³² Richard John Neuhaus, “The Catholic Difference,” *Common Mission*, p. 199. Emphasis is in the original document.

³³ *Common Mission*, p. 207.

C. H. Spurgeon's timely words apply now even more than his own day, "Since he was cursed who rebuilt Jericho, much more the man who labors to restore Popery among us. In our fathers' days the gigantic walls of Popery fell by the power of their faith, the perseverance of their efforts, and the blast of their gospel trumpets..."³⁴ The Gospel trumpet is the very issue at stake, for the Roman Catholic and Evangelical signers of ECT I & II first give the false message of Rome, and then in defense of what they have written, declare that the Gospel of Christ is a "domestic matter" or even "a sectarian doctrine."

Since it is the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, His glorious Gospel and the truth of His Word that is at stake we rest only in leaving the matter in the hands of the Almighty God, "*For we know him that hath said, vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*"³⁵ It is sobering to know that the all holy omnipotent God will, for the sake of His own glory, rebuke in just measure all those who would pervert the Gospel and make merchandises of His sheep.

Practical evaluation

As I said at the beginning of this chapter if the alignment of new Evangelicals was frustrating for me as a priest, it is even more difficult for anyone who is seeking for the truth at the present time. The questions that one must ask are these. Do I know the truth about myself according to what the Scripture says is true? Do I believe what the Scripture tells me? Do I believe that I am a sinner? Is my only hope is in Christ Jesus? The Lord Christ Jesus saves His people from their sins. He sends His Holy Spirit into their hearts, so that they are radically changed from what they were previously. The Holy Spirit sends forth the love of God in the hearts of those whom He regenerates. That love is manifested by a deep desire and honest resolve to please the Lord and to serve Him. When Christ Jesus saves a soul, He also delivers that soul from the power of sin. It is true that the Lord has not yet completed His work in believers, and there are still sins that need to be eradicated, but any person that He has truly saved is delivered from the dominion of sin. We truly thank God that those who are saved that do not live in sin. Can you say that this is true for you?

³⁴ Morning and Evening, on Joshua 6:26

³⁵ Hebrews 10:30-31

In the difficult age of compromise in which we live, do you act under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Do you make the Word of God your measure of truth and the grace of God your assurance of life? If you can honestly say yes to these questions you will understand that you are not under the condemnation the law, but that your faith is in Christ Jesus and His righteousness alone! Then with the Apostle Paul you will have great joy in proclaiming, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit...for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”*³⁶ ◆_{RB-27}

³⁶ Romans 8:1, 14