

Is the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) Moving Away from its Historic Position on Unity? An Open Letter to the WEA Leadership

December 1st, 2017

Since its foundation and until today, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA/Alliance) has been a God-given movement to express unity, fellowship, and cooperation among evangelical Christians around the world. We are grateful to the Lord and proud to be part of the Alliance. We consider it to be our spiritual home, and we are fully committed to its biblical vision. While we are sure of the Alliance's identity historically, we increasingly see perplexing signs indicating significant changes taking place in its theological DNA. The historic positions on biblical unity (among born-again Christians) and biblical confrontation of errors (deviant teachings and practices) that the Alliance has stood for over a hundred years seem now to be eroded and replaced by ecumenical attitudes that revolve around a kind of "unity" that is in conflict with historic evangelical convictions. We have expressed many of the concerns that we will outline in this letter to WEA leaders several times over the years in different contexts and in different ways.

The reason why we are writing this open letter is twofold. First, apart from generic and inconsequential assurances that our voice was heard, there has been a progressive implementation of an ecumenical agenda in WEA without proper discussion at a grassroots level and without involving the different parts of the Alliance in the decision-making process. Second, we sense that this ecumenical trajectory of WEA is about to reach a tipping point in 2018 (unfortunately without being informed by WEA leadership), and we want to exercise responsibility in protecting the heritage and the future of the Alliance from what seem like dangerous moves towards an unqualified "ecumenical unity".

The Alliance's Historic Position on Unity

The World Evangelical Alliance was founded in 1846 to encourage common prayer and mutual support among born-again, Bible-believing, evangelical Christians. Because of its theological convictions about the biblical and experiential nature of the Christian faith, the Alliance was a bulwark against Protestant theological liberalism, Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, which were considered incompatible with basic gospel truth. The dividing line was clear, and it was primarily based on the high view of the biblical gospel held by evangelicals. From the beginning of its history then, the WEA was characterized by a "definite posture of a strong opposition both to Roman Catholicism and also to infidelity"¹. This has been the ethos of the Alliance for its first 150 years.

It is true that the 20th century has seen the beginnings of the ecumenical movement with the formation of the World Council of Churches (1948) and the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), thus seeing both the Liberal Protestants and the Eastern Orthodox, on the one hand, and the Roman Catholic Church, on the other, forming ecumenical bodies and encouraging ecumenical initiatives. The Alliance has seen these developments from a distance, not impressed neither by the

¹David M. Howard, *The Dream that Would Not Die* (Exeter: WEF/Paternoster, 1986), p. 9; also J.B.A. Kessler, *A Study of the Evangelical Alliance in Great Britain* (Goes, Netherland, Oosterbaan & LeCointre N.V., 1968), p. 42. For a detailed study see P. Bolognesi, *A History of the Relationship of the Evangelical Alliance with the Roman Catholic Church*, "Evangelical Review of Theology" 32/3 (July 2008).

left-wing politicization and further liberal trends of WCC nor by the inclusive *aggiornamento* (i.e. update) of Rome. Outside of WEA but within the evangelical movement, the 1974 Lausanne Covenant made it clear that evangelicals remained committed to the biblical gospel, which on crucial points remained fundamentally different from Vatican II formulations (see Appendix N. 1 for examples on the authority of the Bible and the message of salvation).

The new ecumenical fervor by WCC and Rome caused WEA (then WEF) to issue the document “An Evangelical Perspective on Roman Catholicism” drafted by a Task Force and approved by the 1986 General Assembly held in Singapore: the only approved document on Roman Catholicism by a WEA general assembly (see Appendix N. 2).² Its conclusion was that, “Standing in the faith we have encountered *obstacles* in Roman Catholicism as it manifests itself today, which **seriously impede** fellowship and cooperation between evangelicals and Roman Catholics and are **unsurmountable** as long as there is no fundamental reformation according to the Word of God in the Church of Rome”.

Outside of WEA but within the global evangelical movement, the 1989 Lausanne II Manila Manifesto recognized that “Evangelical attitudes to the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches differ widely. Some evangelicals are praying, talking, studying Scripture and working with these churches. Others are strongly opposed to any form of dialogue or cooperation with them. All are aware that **serious theological differences between us remain**. Where appropriate, and so long as biblical truth is not compromised, cooperation may be possible in such areas as Bible translation, the study of contemporary theological and ethical issues, social work and political action. We wish to make it clear, however, that **common evangelism demands a common commitment to the biblical gospel**”.

While recognizing different approaches to Roman Catholicism, Manila still maintained that there are serious standing differences and that without a common commitment to the biblical gospel, there is no warrant to think about working together in evangelism and mission. In the 1980s, John Stott explained it in this way:

“We are ready to co-operate with them (Roman Catholics, Orthodox or Liberal Protestants) in good works of Christian compassion and social justice. It is when we are invited to evangelise with them that we find ourselves in a painful dilemma for common witness necessitates common faith, and co-operation in evangelism **depends on agreement over the content of the gospel**”.³

In 1995 the then Director General of WEA, Jun Vencer, in commenting on the controversy over the US document “Evangelicals and Catholics Together”, stated that

“the critical issue really is the doctrinal differences between the two (i.e. Evangelicals and Catholics) that remain unresolved and must not be denied or underplayed. The use of a common

²*An Evangelical Perspective of Roman Catholicism*, “Evangelical Review of Theology” 10/4 (1986) and 11/1 (1987) and in book form: *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective*, ed. Paul G. Schrottenboer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988).

³“Lausanne Occasional Paper 10 on Christian Witness to Nominal Christians Among Roman Catholics”, Pattaya 1980 and John Stott, *Make the Truth Known. Maintaining the Evangelical Faith Today* (Leicester: UCCF, 1983, pp. 3-4).

religious language does not mean that the connotations are the same. There are reasons to believe that they **are not and have not changed** since the Reformation”.⁴

After the 1986 document a season of dialogues between WEA and the Vatican began, and it produced consultations and papers⁵ and even a the study document, “[Church, Evangelization and the Bonds of Koinonia](#)” (2003), which has never been approved by any WEA General Assembly (see Appendix N. 3 for a critical assessment).

At the level of the European Evangelical Alliance (EEA), a consultation was organized to address the issue of how to relate to Roman Catholicism, and a protocol was drafted and eventually approved by the EEA General Assembly in 2007 (see Appendix N. 4). While encouraging dialogue and collaboration on social and ethical issues, like we are all in favor of, the EEA pledged to consult with National EAs when addressing issues relating to RC and “carefully consider the **implications** for fellow Evangelicals in majority RC countries of any EA-related dialogues that we conduct within our own nations with representatives of the RC Church (as Institution)”. Moreover, according to the EEA protocol, “We value dialogue with the Institution of the RC Church, where it is understood as mutual listening, in a context of mutual respect”.

Our Whole-Hearted Agreement with the Historic WEA Position

We are in total agreement with the openness towards mutual listening and even cooperation with Roman Catholics and the Roman Church on social and moral issues, while maintaining the point that we don’t share the same basic understanding of the gospel. However we must refrain from talking about, and even practising, unity in evangelism and mission, for such dialogue or activity imply the acceptance of the Roman Catholic Church as an institution with its “imperial” structure, dogmatic claims and political outlook.

In 2017 the Spanish Evangelical Alliance issued a [document](#) on the issue of how to relate to the Roman Catholic Church. Its basic outlook is in line with the historic WEA position. Here are some of the conclusions which are relevant for our topic:

“Sadly, the theology of the Roman Catholic Church has not substantially changed in the last 500 years to correct the doctrinal errors that triggered the Reformation”, and therefore, “the truth can never be subordinated to strategic issues”, the EA Spain says to those who advocate ecumenism. The differences between evangelical churches and the Roman Catholic Church are, in many cases, “**insurmountable**”. This position does not close the door to “**ground for common action** with the Catholic Church on ethical issues like abortion and other issues of mutual concern such as the persecution of Christians”. This common social work “can also be possible with other religious or secular organizations and groups”.

In 1999, EA Italy also issued a [statement](#) on the relationship with Roman Catholicism where similar positions can be found:

“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

⁴ Quoted by W. Harold Fuller, *People of the Mandate* (Carlisle: WEF-Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) p. 192.

⁵ Studied by Leonardo De Chirico, *Evangelical Theological Perspectives on Post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism* (Frankfurt-Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003).

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.

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”.⁶

We practice these values on a daily basis and at all levels. **We are for dialogue and even cooperation**, and at the same time we maintain the historic evangelical view about Roman Catholicism and Liberal Protestantism and Eastern Orthodoxy that has shaped the convictions, the history and the ethos of the Alliance. We are in total favor of Christian unity according to the biblical gospel and have no sympathy for sectarian attitudes.

The Drifting Away from the Historic Position

In recent years we have sensed that the leadership of WEA has moved away from the outlined historic position of the Alliance on unity by endorsing a more “ecumenical” attitude and entering the mainstream ecumenical movement *de facto*. Unity has become a blurred term to refer to any relationship even beyond the principles that have always characterized evangelicals. Leaders have become less cautious in talking about unity with the Catholic Church as such and have tended to bypass the historic boundaries.⁷ This has caused embarrassment in our constituencies for undiscerning, wrong-headed and emotionally-driven statements on Popes and ecumenical activities. Over the last ten years or so, we have been witnesses to a gradual, progressive, relentless softening of this historic approach and the attempt to replace it with a mainstream ecumenical stance which resembles that of the WCC.

As far as we understand the drifting, there are two main reasons which are offered to explain it. One is the 1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) signed by mainstream Lutherans and the Church of Rome. This document is often presented as having solved the main theological issue of the Reformation and therefore requesting a new phase in ecumenical relationships. However, what is true about JDDJ is that it introduced ambiguities in language, juxtaposition of terms, and theological nuances that make it difficult to understand where the signatories stand in comparison to Luther’s and Trent’s viewpoints. After the Declaration, Rome’s position on justification is harder to ascertain. This ambiguous context is Pope Francis’s framework when he speaks on the topic.⁸ JDDJ does not give the impression of changing the theology of the

⁶ “Orientamenti evangelici per pensare il cattolicesimo”, *Ideaitalia* III:5 (1999) 7-8; “Le catholicisme romain: une approche évangélique”, *Vivre*, 8-9 (2000) 10-14 and *Fac-Réflexion* 51-52 (2000/2-3) 44-49; “Ein Evangelikaler Ansatz zum Verständnis des Römischen Katholizismus”, Freie Theologische Akademie, 2000 e *Bibel Info* 59/3 (2001) 10-13; “An Evangelical Approach Towards Understanding Roman Catholicism”, *Evangelicals Now*, Dec 2000, 12-13; *European Journal of Theology* X (2001/1) 32-35.

⁷ Evidence can be provided upon request.

⁸ See L. De Chirico, “Where Does Pope Francis Stand on the Doctrine of Justification?” (November 1, 2017): <http://vaticanfiles.org/en/2017/11/143-where-does-popefrancis-stand-on-the-doctrine-of-justification/>.

Council of Trent (1545-1563), according to which grace is sacramental and seen inside of a synergistic dynamic of the process of salvation. This understanding of grace is in line with the Catholic heritage of the Council of Trent, in an updated form, instead of with classic evangelical theology.⁹ In this sense, JDDJ is a clear exercise in an increased “catholicity” (i.e. the ability to absorb ideas without changing the core) on the part of Rome, which has not become more evangelical in the biblical sense.

While praised in mainstream ecumenical theology, JDDJ has been severely criticized by many evangelical theologians.¹⁰ In present-day evangelical theology, its negative appraisals surpass the more positive ones. JDDJ cannot be used to argue that the theological controversy over justification has been resolved.

The other reason for the change in the WEA’s historic position on unity is the 2011 document [“Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct”](#), signed by WEA, WCC and the Vatican. The document is a commitment to live out mission in ethical terms, marked by honesty, transparency, and peace. It does not commit WEA to work together in mission or to recover unity with WCC and Rome. We have already expressed our overall [positive impression](#) on the document, as well as some critical remarks on areas of ambiguity in language. For us it is clear that this document is different from the 2001 “Charta Oecumenica” signed in Europe by the Catholic Church and the WCC-related churches but not by evangelicals. “Charta Oecumenica” is a commitment to work in ecumenical unity in prayer, mission and service, while the 2011 document signed by WEA does not contain such commitment. In and of itself, the document does not require a change of the WEA historic position on unity.

It is true that in recent years the approach of the WEA leadership had softened to the point of becoming superficially ecumenical. This change, which was never approved by WEA nor was it supported by an official document, has given rise to growing concerns from some National EAs. Here is an example:

⁹ Cardinal Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christianity Unity and the individual leading Rome’s involvement in the Joint Declaration, made this point clearly at a press conference that was held when the JDDJ was signed: “*Asked whether there was anything in the official common statement contrary to the Council of Trent, Cardinal Cassidy said: “Absolutely not, otherwise how could we do it? We cannot do something contrary to an ecumenical council. There’s nothing there that the Council of Trent condemns.”* See Paul McCain’s well-articulated argument in “A Betrayal of the Gospel” *First Things*. 12 March 2010. Retrieved from <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2010/03/a-betrayal-of-the-gospel-the-joint-declaration-on-the-doctrine-of-justification>. McCain quotes the Brown, S. (1999, November 1). Lutheran-Catholic declaration a 'fine way of dialogue', says Cassidy. *Ecumenical News Bulletin*, Number 20, p. 36.

¹⁰E. Hahn, *European Journal of Theology* VII/1 (1998) pp. 9-14; W.R. Godfrey, *Banner of Truth* 436 (2000) pp. 17-20; G. Bray – P. Gardner, *Churchman* 115/2 (2001) pp. 110-127; D. Estrada, *Christianity and Society* XI/1 (2001) pp. 12-17; T.M. Dorman, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44/3 (2001) pp. 421-434; A. Greiner, *Fac-Réflexions* 51-52 (2000/2-3) pp. 4-21; D. Vaughn, *La Revue Réformée* 216 (2002/1) pp. 43-64; J. Moreno Barrocal, *Nueva Reforma* 50 (2000) pp. 4-9; L. De Chirico, *Ideaitalia* III (1999/6) p. 3. For more evidence on the negative assessments of JDDJ by many evangelical theologians, see L. De Chirico and G. Pritchard, [“The Need for Clarification: Is the Reformation Over?”](#), (June 1, 2017).

On 14th October 2013 a letter to the WEA and EEA leadership was signed by the Chairmen of EA Spain, Italy, France and Poland after Pope Francis had been elected as pope. The following is an excerpt:

“We are interested in what is happening in the Roman Catholic world after the election of Pope Francis. Many things seem changing. However, we are concerned with some totally uncritical assessments that we are reading and that are coming from some provinces of the Evangelical world. We would like you to be aware of the following points.

It is true that Francis uses a kind of “Evangelical” language that can confuse people. He speaks of a “personal relationship” with Christ, he speaks of conversion and mission, etc. Yet he also advocates a disturbingly strong Marianism that is totally contrary to an Evangelical loyalty to Christ. He is also strongly pushing the idea that what really matters is what one’s own conscience says, an old liberal idea that elevates the individual conscience to a kind of absolute. He is also very strongly saying that grace is in every man, perhaps implying a universalist view and that the Gospel is about the brotherhood of all men, another old liberal idea. In a recent interview, trying to please an atheist, he even ridiculed any form of proselytism. He therefore blends Evangelical language, Marian devotion and liberal ideas.

Moreover, while he is characterizing his papacy around the language of “change”, “renewal”, etc., all these words have to do with structures, governance and attitudes, but there is no hint that he wants to change any dogma that is contrary to Scripture. Change for him has to do with moods and manners, not with substance and doctrine. We cannot be positively impressed by all this. Actually, we are concerned that it will bring more and more confusion even in our Evangelical circles.

We appreciate the dialogue that WEA has been promoting with the Vatican for many years. What happens at the international level also happens at our national levels where we are engaged in different forms of dialogue with the Catholic Church. And because we appreciate it we want the wider Evangelical family to be aware of what is happening.”

After this and other exchanges, official statements by WEA and EEA have been even more problematic as far as their lack of theological discernment is concerned, thus causing embarrassment in our circles and countries.¹¹

The 2018 Rubicon?

Apparently, the ecumenical agenda away from WEA’s historic position on unity is about to reach a tipping point. We learnt this from external sources like a recent [Global Christian Forum press statement](#). In it, we found out that,

“In the journey to overcome internal divisions separating Christians, the top leadership of the World Council of Churches (WCC), Pentecostal World Fellowship (PWF), World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), and the Vatican's officials for promoting Christian Unity met together for the first time, in a historic meeting, spending two days facilitating their support of the Global Christian Forum (GCF)”. “The meeting should be seen as a consultative body preparing for the next meeting of the GCF international committee in Taizé, France, 8-13 February 2018 and the next GCF global gathering in Bogota, Colombia, 24-27 April 2018”.

¹¹An example of this unfortunate communication can be seen in the [press release](#) (3 Nov 2016) where EEA endorses a “love declaration” to Pope Francis.

From another [source](#) (again, not the WEA leadership) we learnt that there is “an ongoing process (under the umbrella of GCF) working toward a common Statement to be signed together by the four co-sponsoring bodies, with others invited also to join in support. A working draft was considered, and further steps identified for the next year”.

It seems, therefore, that WEA is about to sign a statement with the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church on unity, even on “greater oneness”! We are puzzled by what is happening. We see a radical shift taking place without any discussions, communication or helpful information, or a vote amongst WEA constituency.

What is at Stake with “Greater Oneness”

What does committing to greater unity mean for WEA? Of course, the word “unity” is used in different ways according to context, but in ecumenical theology, “unity” has a fairly established and stable meaning. In this sense, unity refers to a harmony of the baptized, i.e. those who have received the sacrament of the initiation to the Christian life, in view of the sacramental unity around the same Eucharistic table and within the same institutional structures of the church. So far, Evangelicals and Pentecostals have been talking about unity among “born again” believers in view of loose partnerships aimed at evangelism, social action, and mission. If they commit to “greater oneness” with the Roman Catholic Church and WCC, they need to reflect on what they are committing to:

1. Unity among the baptized. They will be pressed to consider as “brothers and sisters” all those who have received baptism in Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and liberal Protestant churches, whether or not they are born-again Christians. The reality on the ground is that most of these Christians are baptized only in name, without any personal commitment to Christ. Greater oneness means that we are all “brothers and sisters” not because we are born-again believers in Christ, but because we are all baptized. If we are all “brothers and sisters”, evangelism done by Evangelicals in majority Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox contexts becomes unnecessary. Is this what Evangelicals and Pentecostals believe and find acceptable?
2. Unity as conveyed by the same sacraments and within the same institutions. According to ecumenical theology, “greater oneness” means sacramental unity and institutional unity. This means not only baptism, but the sacramental theologies and practices of Rome (e.g. the Eucharist as sacrifice and re-enacting the cross) and Eastern Orthodox churches need to be accepted as legitimate Christian practice. Moreover, “greater oneness” means that the institutions of the Roman Catholic Church, with its complex political, diplomatic, and economic power (e.g. the papacy, the Vatican state and bank) become legitimate ways of representing the church that Jesus Christ promised to build. Evangelicals have always been clear in denouncing all deviations from clear biblical teaching, yet committing to “greater oneness” means that they have to stop doing so because of ecumenical etiquette. Is this what Evangelicals and Pentecostals believe and find acceptable?

Who Decides What?

For the WEA and WPF to commit to “greater oneness” with Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and liberal churches is to take a huge step that significantly changes historic beliefs and practices. It is a watershed event that impinges on **biblical convictions** (e.g. unity among believers only) that are now stretched in order to make them compatible with mainstream ecumenical correctness. Have we really counted the cost? The issue is that this could be the first step toward the dissolution of the 160-year-old theological consensus that has supported the WEA. If WEA leadership pushes this theological innovation, this in all likelihood will destroy and fracture the WEA coalition.

A final question remains to be asked. Who decided to move forward? Was there any public decision of the WEA constituency that empowered the leadership to move towards “greater oneness”? Was there an open discussion about the **long-term implications**? Was there a decisional process based on the involvement of the grass-roots movements related to the Alliance? As far as it is possible to know, there was no involvement of regional and national discussion, let alone a vote of the General Assembly.

The fact is that current WEA leadership did not ask its constituency to vote to move forward towards “greater oneness” with the Catholic Church and WCC. Given the “historic” nature of the decision and the wide-ranging theological implications, it is awkward to say the least that the local churches and regional networks that this body claims to represent were not even consulted beforehand. This operational mode undermines the trust essential in horizontal networks such as WEA. When a few people decide a question of this magnitude on their own without a serious discussion with the people they supposedly represent, it is **the beginning of the end** of this historical evangelical network and a transformation into a top-down hierarchical organization, which is a completely different thing. Millions of evangelicals are still convinced that this is the case and do not see any biblical reason to move towards “greater oneness” with the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church.

We therefore plead with you **to stop the process** leading the WEA to sign the 2018 statement on “greater oneness” with Rome and the WCC. Doing so will **contradict the historic position** of the WEA, without any discussion within, or voting from a General Assembly; it will be something not **even discussed**, let alone voted for by a General Assembly. Doing so will cause **immense damage** in the evangelical constituency world-wide.

As we are celebrating the 500 years of the rediscovery of the biblical gospel by the Protestant Reformation, we long to see a time of biblical reformation in our churches and impacting the whole world with the Good News of Jesus Christ. The Alliance was born with this ambition, and we pray that it will continue to serve the same cause in the future.

Signatories

The Boards of the Evangelical Alliances of Italy, Malta, Spain and Albania

Alleanza Evangelica Italiana

<http://alleanzaevangelica.org>

The Evangelical Alliance of Malta

<http://teamalta.org/>

Alianza Evangélica Española

<http://www.aesp.net/>

Vëllazëria Ungjillore E Shqipërisë

Appendix N. 1

The Lausanne Covenant and Roman Catholicism

The 1974 Lausanne Covenant is a historic document expressing the basics of the evangelical faith. How close is it to the Roman Catholic doctrine and practice? There is certainly a resemblance of language, but the core of the respective messages is far from each other. Two examples:

Lausanne (2. The Authority and Power of the Bible)

We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the **only infallible rule of faith and practice**. We also affirm the power of God's word to accomplish his purpose of salvation. The message of the Bible is addressed to all men and women. For God's revelation in Christ and in Scripture is unchangeable. Through it the Holy Spirit still speaks today. He illumines the minds of God's people in every culture to perceive its truth freshly through their own eyes and thus discloses to the whole Church ever more of the many-colored wisdom of God.

Vatican II (Dei Verbum 9):

There exists a close connection and communication between **sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture**. For both of them, flowing from the same divine wellspring, in a certain way **merge into a unity** and tend toward the same end. For Sacred Scripture is the word of God inasmuch as it is consigned to writing under the inspiration of the divine Spirit, while sacred tradition takes the word of God entrusted by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit to the Apostles, and hands it on to their successors in its full purity, so that led by the light of the Spirit of truth, they may in proclaiming it preserve this word of God faithfully, explain it, and make it more widely known. Consequently **it is not from Sacred Scripture alone that the Church draws her certainty** about everything which has been revealed. Therefore **both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated** with the same sense of loyalty and reverence.

Lausanne (3. The Uniqueness and Universality of Christ)

We affirm that there is only one Saviour and only one gospel, although there is a wide diversity of evangelistic approaches. We recognise that everyone has some knowledge of God through his general revelation in nature. But we **deny that this can save**, for people suppress the truth by their unrighteousness. We also reject as derogatory to Christ and the gospel every kind of syncretism and dialogue which implies that Christ speaks equally through all religions and ideologies. Jesus Christ, being himself the only God-man, who gave himself as the only ransom for sinners, is the only mediator between God and people. There is no other name by which we must be saved. All men and women are perishing because of sin, but God loves everyone, not wishing that any should perish but that all should repent. Yet those who reject Christ repudiate the joy of salvation and condemn themselves to eternal separation from God. To proclaim Jesus as "the Saviour of the world" is not to affirm that all people are either automatically or ultimately saved, still less to affirm that all religions offer salvation in Christ. Rather it is to proclaim God's love for a world of sinners and to

invite everyone to respond to him as Saviour and Lord in the wholehearted personal commitment of repentance and faith. Jesus Christ has been exalted above every other name; we long for the day when every knee shall bow to him and every tongue shall confess him Lord.

Vatican II (Lumen Gentium 16)

The plan of salvation **also includes** those who acknowledge the Creator. In the first place amongst these there are the **Muslims**, who, professing to hold the faith of Abraham, **along with us adore the one and merciful God**, who on the last day will judge mankind. Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things, and as Saviour wills that all men be saved. **Those also can attain to salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church**, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience. Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life.

Appendix N. 2

WEF, *An Evangelical Perspective of Roman Catholicism*(1986)

Here are some significant excerpts (emphases added):

Ch. 1: The call to Rome is no longer in imperial tones, but it is unmistakably present. **Evangelicals are not prepared** to accept the claim that the Church of Rome is the one true church, not that its supreme teaching office is free from all error in matters of belief, not that the road that leads to Rome is the way of unity

Ch. 3: Mariology is a **major point of controversy** between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals .. Since Mary is a picture of the church, in exalting Mary, the RC Church also exalts itself ... We consider the RC doctrines concerning Mary as a **formidable barrier** between ourselves and Roman Catholics. Moreover, the many syncretistic practices associated with Mary in different parts of the world are **abominations** to an evangelical conscience. We join the author of old in saying: The mother of Jesus is not the papal Mary.... We as evangelical Christians are **deeply offended** by Rome's Marian dogmas because they cast a shadow upon the sufficiency of the intercession of Jesus Christ, lack all support from Scripture and detract from the worship which Christ alone deserves.

Ch. 4: Our position is in **conflict** with the RC acceptance of tradition and the so-called living voice of the church as sources of revelation and authority alongside of the Scriptures. To such acceptance we attribute **the development of dogmas contrary** to what we see an explicit and consistent teaching of Scripture.

Ch. 5: the papacy, with its claim of infallibility, stands in the way of renewal within Roman Catholicism. It also poses an **immense obstacle** to Christian unity.

Ch. 6: Trent remains a **major barrier** between heirs of the Reformation and RC

Ch. 7: The sacraments as works of human merit, which must be mediated through the church, represent **a denial of justification by faith alone** and an infringement upon the sovereign freedom of God.... At bottom our evangelical critique of RC sacramentology points up the **conflict between**

two opposing views of the Christian faith. Rome sees itself as an extension of the Incarnation, thus divinizing human beings as they cooperate with God's grace which is conferred by the church. **Over against** this view stands our evangelical commitment to the free gift of righteousness, imputed solely by the grace of God, received by a true faith which answers to God's word, and based fully upon the once-and-for-all expiation of guilt through the finished sacrifice of the perfect Substitute, Christ Jesus. This confession is for us the gospel.

Ch. 8: The RC Church has at times taken over pagan customs, altering them on the surface, but incorporating them essentially unchanged into its life ... To us as evangelicals this practice amounts to a kind of Christopaganism. ... There is an incipient unbiblical universalism in Rome's view of other religions. ... We believe that the position of the RC Church vis-à-vis these other religions stands in **basic contradiction** to the message of the gospel.

In the same years *Evangelical Affirmations* (1989), a consultation co-sponsored by NAE and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School cfr. *Evangelical Affirmations*, edd. by Kenneth S. Kantzer & Carl F.H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990) addressed a similar issue. In particular Donald A. Carson wrote: "We do not agree with Roman Catholics about the *locus* of revelation, the definition of the church, the means of grace, the source of contemporary ecclesiastical authority, the significance of Mary, the finality of Christ's cross-work, and more. Though we recognize the immense diversity of contemporary Catholicism, we do not find that official pronouncements since Vatican II have bridged the **chasm that remains**", p. 379.

Appendix N. 3

Church, Evangelization, and the Bonds of Koinonia.

A Report of the International Consultation between the Catholic Church and WEA

A Response by the IFED Faculty (Padova, Italy)

As part of the world-wide Evangelical community we are interested in developments which take place in the context of dialogue with other faiths. This is especially true with regard to the theological exchanges between Evangelicals and Catholics which are raising the ecumenical profile to new levels. We consider Roman Catholicism to be the institutionalised theological system which is challenging Evangelicals around the world and therefore are particularly interested in what the WEA is doing in this area.

Our interest dates back to the history of the WEF-Roman Catholic Church dealings. Some of us were actively involved in the drafting of the 1986 WEF Evangelical Perspective on Roman Catholicism and we still recognise this document as a lucid and valid contribution towards an Evangelical analysis of Romanism. Unfortunately, we see the WEA moving away from it. We also wrote a Response to the 1993 Venice consultation (July 1997) as well as a Reflection on the 1997 Tantar conversation (April 2000). Meanwhile, IFED has produced a document titled "An Evangelical approach towards understanding Roman Catholicism" (September 1999) which has been endorsed by the Italian Evangelical Alliance as well as being published in French, German and English. Our present Response to the "Church, Evangelization, and the Bonds of Koinonia" Report (published on *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29:2 [2005]) stems from our on-going interest and growing concern about the direction that the WEA is taking in these matters. While thankful for your effort, we wish to express our strong reservations in three areas, before concluding with a twofold proposal.

1. The approach is itself inadequate

a. The inadequacy of the format. A joint-statement with the Roman Catholic Church is possible and we understand that it was anticipated in previous consultations. But at what cost? Any joint-statements needs to be general and irenic. It tends to ecumenical correctness rather than Evangelical boldness. This has been the case with the present Koinonia Report. There is no hint of controversy, no indication of contrast, no mention of separation. Is this the real picture? Does the format itself induce an inhibition that prevents us speaking the truth in love?

b. The inadequacy of the language. The document speaks of unqualified “differences” (e.g. 30; 42) between Evangelicals and Catholics, whereas previous consultations spoke about “fundamental issues” (e.g. Venice 1993) which divide them. In this we see the tendency to downplay existing differences, diluting their theological significance in order to show their ecumenical compatibility. At the same time, there is a lot of stress on what unites (e.g. ancient creeds, fellowship etc.) even though there is no effort to relate what unites to what divides. Why not point out the fundamental differences which still need to be explored rather than by-passed?

c. The inadequacy of the methodology. The document insists on interpersonal fellowship between believers which can nurture common witness. We do not deny that God is working in individuals within the Roman Church. However, theologically speaking, we should strive to go beyond an atomistic approach in order to formulate a worldview analysis of the Catholic Church. In fact, we always need to be aware that we are dealing with a powerful institution, which has a solid organisation, a long history, and a nuanced theological structure. We are dealing with an agency which has a long-term project and outstanding expertise in achieving it. Although sensitive to people and the specific instances of the Roman Church, the document is lacking an awareness of the claims of the same Church, its self-understanding and its vision. Unless the Evangelical appraisal addresses the Roman Catholic Church as a system of belief, its theological analysis will always lose its primary focus. We cannot stress the individual level at the expense of the institutional level.

2. Standing theological issues which need to be faced

In reading the document, we are disturbed by its silence over theological issues that are organically related to koinonia, but are nonetheless neglected and eventually removed. Because the approach is atomistic rather than systemic, we question the idea that “our future task is to recognize better the aspects that each of us emphasizes in the others’ view” (72). This commitment gives the idea that one is prevented from articulating a theological critique which goes against ecumenical correctness. In the service of Evangelical boldness, we would like to list some of the standing issues which actually impede koinonia:

a. How can we have koinonia with a Church that in modern history has proclaimed as dogmas the immaculate conception of Mary (1854), the infallibility of the pope as he speaks *ex-cathedra* (1870) and the ascension of Mary to heaven (1950)? These dogma are utterly unbiblical, and yet are part of the binding dogmatic apparatus of Rome. Is *sola Scriptura* an outdated Evangelical principle?

b. How can we have koinonia with a Church whose sacramental self-understanding elevates the church to the kingly, priestly and prophetic offices of Christ? How can we have koinonia with a Church whose understanding and practice of the mass is in open conflict with the biblical Lord's Supper? How can *solusChristus* be in accordance with this reified ecclesiology and the active participation of the church in the re-enactment of the sacrifice of Christ?

c. How can we have koinonia with a Church whose anthropology is basically optimistic, whose soteriology is synergistic in outlook and universalistic in scope? How can it be reconciled with *sola gratia* and *sola fide*?

d. How can we have koinonia with a Church which promotes the veneration of men and hyper-veneration of Mary? How can we recognised as a fellow Christian a man whose motto was “Totustuus” addressed to Mary (i.e. John Paul II)? How does it come to terms with *solis Deogloria*?

e. How can we have koinonia with a Church which wants to embrace the whole world in order to gather the whole of mankind within its apparently welcoming arms as it affirms its own centrality and power? How can this be reconciled with the Biblical mandates?

In light of these standing issues, we cannot accept the idea that koinonia with Roman Catholics is real, yet imperfect (e.g. 55, 73). This is the language and concept of Vatican II and is perfectly in line with Rome's ecumenism. Although this kind of koinonia may be true between born again people at the personal level it cannot be stretched into a broad theological statement. We should always take care not to reduce the Evangelical critique to a spurious system like Roman Catholicism which accommodates gospel and heresy, piety and idolatry, mission and power. There cannot be fellowship with an institution which is based on a "yes" and "no" to the gospel, rather than a simple and radical "yes" to the glory of God (2 Cor 1,15-22).

3. Long-term missiological implications

What are the consequences of this koinonia-direction which is endorsed by the document? As far as we can see there are at least two main implications,.

a. The Roman Church becomes a denomination of which born again Christians can become a part without questioning its doctrines and practices. Because of existing koinonia, new converts are not counselled to find a church in which the gospel is preached, the sacraments are duly administered and discipline is wisely practised. They are encouraged to stay where they are. Do you understand that a spurious system and a self-referential church is being constantly legitimised and reinforced?

b. Countries with large Catholic majorities will become less appealing to Evangelical mission. If what the document says about koinonia is true and comes to pass, why insisting in doing mission in countries where the Roman Church is powerful and active? Do you see that the Catholic project is to remove the challenge coming from Evangelical churches and movements in order to assimilate them? Are you aware that the long-term prospect of this approach leads to the constitution of an Evangelical wing of the Roman Catholic Church? This is precisely the Roman master-plan, but is it the Evangelical vision for the future? Should not Evangelical churches be alternative to churches where the foundation is a mixture of Bible and tradition, grace and merit, faith and works, worship and superstition...?

Padova, 27th May 2005

Pietro Bolognesi, Leonardo De Chirico, Paul Finch

Istituto di Formazione Evangelica e
Documentazione Via Pietro Martire Vermigli 13
35129 Padova – Italia
+ 049 619623
ifed@libero.it
www.ifeditalia.org

Appendix N. 4

European Evangelical Alliance RC Consultation (2007)

1. Dialogue

Evangelical and Roman Catholic Churches have related in various ways in modern history. Evangelical Alliance has been central to two significant publications and conversations: the 1986 Singapore Document ‘Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective’ (1), with its Evangelical perceptions of Roman Catholicism, and the on-going dialogue between the WEA and the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity.

Representing large numbers of ordinary Christian people, we, as EEA, are totally committed to conversation (however defined) of every kind, at every level, with Roman Catholic people.

We do have questions about the best way to dialogue with the Institution of the Roman Catholic (RC) Church, with its complex political, diplomatic and economic power (alongside its representational responsibilities of a faith community).

We value dialogue with the Institution of the RC Church, where it is understood as mutual listening, in a context of mutual respect. We are, however, concerned that the wider Evangelical community is often disadvantaged, in practice, in such conversations: not least because there is no Evangelical ‘Magisterial’ parallel to those of the RC Church.

2. Impact

We thank God for everything (conversations, research etc) that sheds fresh light on Scripture and draws us closer to Christ, through His Word. We have no doubts of any kind about the integrity of those engaged in the production of international joint RC/Evangelical statements. In practice, though, they have a very mixed impact at grassroots and national level. We recognise that their production can inadvertently cause great difficulties for Evangelical communities in majority RC countries, while (ironically) not actually being implemented at grassroots within the RC Church.

3. An EEA Protocol

We therefore strongly plead for full involvement of the regional and national Evangelical Alliances (EA) within any WEA-related dialogue with the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity and other Vatican Representation.

As EEA, we covenant that any EEA-related European dialogue with the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity and other Vatican Representation will seek to include a representative cross-section of the region (including national EA’s).

The EEA will convene (if only electronically) a small representative cross-section of EA’s whenever called upon to comment, as EEA, on issues related to the RC Church.

Within the EEA region, we, as national Evangelical Alliances in membership of the EEA, will carefully consider the implications for fellow Evangelicals in majority RC countries of any EA-related dialogues that we conduct within our own nations with representatives of the RC Church (as Institution).

Discussed and agreed in principle, Padova May 2007

Adopted as Protocol, EEA Members’ meeting, October 2007

(1) *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective* [Grand Rapids: Baker 1988] Paul Schrottenboer [ed.]