

## **Introduction**

To recognize that the other, is a brother or sister in the Lord is a very important step, in any fruitful dialogue on doctrinal issues, where there is disagreement.

The attached document, "What is an Evangelical Catholic?" can be a help for those, whose hearts are open to the Spirit, and yet struggle with the question of whether Catholics can be Christians, or whether the Catholic Church is a Christian Church. It can help reassure other Christians that we do have common ground in the basics of the Christian faith, and are indeed brothers & sisters in Christ.

The following document was put together by a group called 'Evangelical Catholic Initiative', who work for reconciliation between Catholics & Protestants, and peace in Northern Ireland. It was put together in Northern Ireland in 1992, as a contribution towards this effort.

Cassius Soares  
Member, Int'l Kerygma Exec Team

## **What is an Evangelical Catholic?**

Millions of Roman Catholics throughout the world have a personal relationship with Jesus, many of them through the various Renewal Movements in the Catholic Church. They are evangelical in the strictest sense of the term in that they have received the basic gospel, accepted Jesus as personal Lord and Saviour and are manifesting the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives.

These "Evangelical Catholics" have a growing love and respect for Scripture as the Word of God. They are born again Christians. They would identify themselves variously as committed Christians, Charismatic Catholics, renewed Catholics, born again Catholics, or simply Catholics who love the Lord. Surely they are brothers or sisters in Christ of all Evangelical Christians in the various Protestant Churches.

### **Evangelical Catholics would affirm:**

- That salvation cannot be earned it is a free gift - however, the evidence of good deeds indicating that one has become a committed Christian must then follow.
- That there is only one mediator between God and men, the person of Jesus Christ (1Tim2: 5).
- The priesthood of all Believers which means that a Christian has direct access to the Father through Jesus.

- That Scripture in its entirety (both Old. and New Testaments) is the inspired authoritative Word of God.
- That the Eucharist (or Mass) is not a repetition of Calvary, i.e., Jesus died once and for all. The priest and people enter into that one all sufficient sacrifice by grace.
- Heaven for those who accept the salvation won by Jesus and hell for those who die unrepentant for their wickedness.
- That all human beings are born into a state of separation from God as a result of the fall.
- That Jesus died on the cross in atonement for all sin, and that in his death, He took the place of all sinners in bearing their guilt (Is.53: 6)
- That Jesus will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

**Note:**

Points above are part of the official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, being found in the Decree on the Laity, chap.2, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, chap. 2, 7, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, chap. 1,3,4 and Constitution on Sacred Liturgy chap. 1.

Evangelical Catholics would subscribe to the tenets of the Lausanne Covenant (1974). This includes the “confessions” in the Covenant: *‘we confess that we have often denied our calling...’* *“we have compromised our message, manipulated our hearers...”* It is important to note that the tenets of the Lausanne Covenant are not at variance with the official teaching of the Catholic Church.

**Evangelical Catholics would believe that:**

1. The Roman Catholic Church is a Christian Church that has taken on some un-Christian practices over the centuries. However a major renewal of the Holy Spirit has and is taking place directly as a result of the Second Vatican Council addressing these issues.
2. The Holy Spirit is moving to bring both Renewal and Revival in the Roman Catholic Church as in other Christian Churches.
3. Many members of the Roman Catholic Church while being perhaps over-sacramentalised have been under-evangelized and therefore its members need to be challenged as adults to accept Jesus as personal Lord and Saviour. In the words of Pope Paul VI in his Encyclical on Evangelisation – *“The Church exists in order to evangelize . . . she begins by first being evangelized herself.”*
4. There are many God-made traditions in the Roman Catholic Church which will stand the test of time.

The Roman Catholic Church affirms the historic doctrine of the Nicene Creed-e.g., virgin birth, bodily resurrection of Jesus etc. and every Catholic Christian is asked to affirm this every time they participate in the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist (Mass).

### **Evangelical Catholics are committed to:**

- Jesus as the only way to Salvation - one day every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is truly Lord.
- The necessity of the empowering of the Holy Spirit for the committed Christian to achieve his/her full potential and do the works of Christ.
- The priority of evangelism (see below) within the life of the local Catholic Church as well as a commitment to join with committed Christians in other denominations in the fulfilment of the Biblical command to take Christ to all the nations.
- A respect for and obedience to the teaching authority of the Pope and Bishops of the Catholic Church unless that obedience goes against one's conscience as enlightened by Scripture and Church teaching

An excellent definition of Evangelism has been produced by the Evangelization 2000 Office in Rome and is:

- To proclaim with the Power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1: 8)
- The Incarnate Crucified, Resurrected and Living Jesus Christ (Acts 2: 32)
- As the only Saviour (Acts 4:12)
- And Divine Lord (Phil. 2: 9-11)
- Of all mankind (1Tim.2:4; 4: 10; Tit.2: 11)
- And of the whole person (Eph.1: 22-23)
- In a joyful, loving and effective way
- That contributes to building the Church (Col.1: 18-23)
- By making Jesus known, loved, honoured, followed and obeyed to the ends of the earth (Mt.28: 19)

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## BACKGROUND NOTES ON "WHAT IS AN EVANGELICAL CATHOLIC?"

### PURPOSE OF DOCUMENT

A number of Catholic lay leaders and clergy drew up this document as one contribution to this Decade of Evangelism. It is a straightforward and clear statement of Catholic Christianity, with an Evangelical emphasis. Part of its purpose is to foster genuine evangelism while avoiding proselytism.

The intention is not to produce a definitive theological statement on all aspects of Catholic belief, such as sacrament, ministry and authority, so much as a relatively short definition of some fundamental beliefs that will hopefully, facilitate a dialogue and a working together in Evangelism.

The **aim is** to focus attention on those areas that are central to the life of every Catholic Christian and thus remove some of the barriers to Christians working together which often derive from wrong perceptions of Catholic Church teaching on the Mass, the role of Mary, salvation by works, etc. Accordingly, the document states that Christians in the Roman Catholic Church believe:

*"... that salvation cannot be earned, it is a free gift..."*  
*"... that there is only one mediator between God and man, the person of Jesus";*  
*"... that the Eucharist (or Mass) is not a repetition of Calvary".*

Evangelical Catholics also hold that a commitment to caring for the poor, the sick and the disadvantaged is an integral element in a commitment to evangelism.

### WHAT DOES EVANGELICAL MEAN?

The word Evangelical has been misunderstood and disowned by Catholics because of its association with the Protestant Churches and fundamentalism. However the word actually originates from the Greek word for gospel in the New Testament (euaggelion) and describes those, whose lives have been transformed by the message of the Gospel which they now seek to proclaim by word and deed.

This emphasis on proclaiming the "Good News" was highlighted by the Vatican Council and subsequently by Pope Paul VI who stated, in his Encyclical "Evangelii Nuntiandi" (Evangelisation in the Modern World) that it was to be the Catholic Church's central mission.

### DECADE OF EVANGELISM

In his Encyclical "Redemptoris Missio", issued in 1991, Pope John Paul II stated that "God is preparing a great springtime for Christianity". He called for a full commitment of all Catholics to a new evangelisation in this Decade of Evangelism, declaring:-

*"I sense the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelisation. No Believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty - to proclaim Christ to all peoples."*

This has been given practical expression in the establishment of the Evangelisation 2000 Office in Rome, whose purpose is to promote this "Decade of Evangelism", as well as through many Renewal movements within the Catholic Church, e.g. Charismatic Renewal, Cursillo, Christian Family Movement, Focolare, Oasis, etc. all of which emphasise the necessity for Catholics to make a personal commitment, as adults, to Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

The primary objective of this Decade of Evangelism are that fifty percent or more of the world's population might be Christian by the end of the decade, and that the existing Christian Churches might be renewed. This is surely impossible without Christians learning to work together in Evangelism and associated areas, e.g. rehabilitation programs, pro-life agencies, etc.

## **WELCOME FOR DOCUMENT**

The document has been welcomed by a wide range of Catholic & Protestant clergy and lay leaders:

*"A greater number of people were finding that the two words (Evangelical and Catholic) were not incompatible."*

**Dr. George Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury**

*"I like the clear focus in the document on the common inheritance of all Christians – the living person of Jesus Christ our Lord. It is a genuine effort in popular language to allay Protestant fears of the Roman Catholic Church and this document should do much good".*

**Bishop Joseph Duffy, Catholic Bishop of Clogher**

*"I believe this document ... will be very helpful as a means towards alleviating the misunderstanding ... as to where the Catholic Church stands in the area of salvation".*

**Fr. Pat Lynch, A Catholic evangelist in England**

*"I commend this document for its evangelical fervour, its faithfulness to Scripture and its gracious spirit".*

**Rev. Derek Ritchie, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland**

*"This is a searching and clear statement that brings us back to Jesus Christ. The heart of this document is love of and for him".*

**V. Rev. Dr. Godfrey Brown, former Moderator Presbyterian Church in Ireland**

*"This document opens new doors for deeper fellowship, greater unity and more adventurous evangelism".*

**Rev. Ken Clark, Rector St. Patrick's Church of Ireland, Coleraine**

*"Evangelical Protestants must welcome this clear Biblical statement coming, as it does, from within the Roman Catholic Church".*

**David Hewitt, Presbyterian Elder and Chairman Steering Group of ECONI**

*"A valuable and practical contribution to the process of reconciliation which will help to create a new understanding of what we hold in common as brothers and sisters in Christ".*

**Gerard Clark, Executive Director City of Belfast YMCA**

Others include the Irish Council of Churches, Salvation Army (International External Relations), Patrick Johnstone (author 'Operation World') etc.

***The document is available at 50p per copy (includes p. & p.) or 15 (Irish) pounds per 100 from -***

Evangelical Catholic Document  
C/o 72 Hilcourt Road,  
Glenageary,  
Down,  
Co. Dublin, Ireland

OR

Evangelical Catholic Document  
c/o Mizpah Forest Drive  
Shore Road, Rostrevor, Co.  
BT34 3AY, Northern Ireland.

It is also available from most Christian Bookshops.

## **NOTE**

The pamphlet "Why you need to read the Bible" (published with ecclesiastical permission) is available from the above addresses.

The following books by Evangelical Catholic leaders give further background information:

1. Evangelical Catholics by Keith Fournier, Dean of Evangelism at Franciscan University, Ohio.
2. One Lord, One Spirit, One Body by Fr. Peter Hocken.
3. Awakening the Giant by Fr. Pat Lynch
4. The Born Again Catholic by Albert Boudreau.

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