

OUR ROMAN CATHOLIC NEIGHBOURS



In his high priestly prayer in John 17, our Lord Jesus asked the Father to ensure all who follow him would “be one as we are one” (John 17:11). Evangelical believers have consistently understood Jesus’ prayer to mean all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are to live in unity with one another according to God’s will, even in the midst of any differences they might have. There is, after all, only one body, one Lord and one Spirit (Ephesians 4:4-5). Historically, however, Evangelicals have struggled to know how the unity of the body of Christ applies when it comes specifically to the Roman Catholic Church.¹ Are Catholics to be counted among this one body of Christ?

¹ From here onwards referred to simply as “Catholic Church.”

To be sure, there are some Evangelicals who are convinced the Catholic Church is a false church with which true believers have nothing in common. Some would go so far as to see Catholicism as a wholly different religion. Many others, however, have Catholic relatives, neighbours, friends and co-workers who share a common vocabulary and are devoted to Jesus Christ, even if some of their Catholic beliefs and practices seem different from—sometimes even contradictory to—Evangelical beliefs and practices. Indeed, it is not uncommon for such Evangelicals to utter, “I know Joe is a Catholic, but I’m sure he is also a Christian!”

It would be irresponsible to ignore the serious theological and practical issues that continue to divide Catholics and Evangelicals, some of which will be dealt with below. But for now, a few examples here should illustrate those ongoing differences.² First, most Protestants continue to question the extent of the authority with which the Pope is invested; in their view the papacy calls into question the Evangelical belief that authority on theological matters arises from Scripture alone (*sola scriptura* is the phrase in Latin, one of several similar Reformation rallying cries from the sixteenth century popularized again among Evangelicals since the twentieth century). Second, Evangelicals remain largely unconvinced of the legitimacy of Catholic practices of praying to the saints and, particularly, the high degree of emphasis given to Mary by many Catholics. While Catholics remark that they pray to Mary as an intercessor to Christ, Evangelicals see no Scriptural support for the practice, but insist it is only through Christ (*solus Christus*) by which we have access to God. And third, though there have been important advances between Catholics and Lutherans on the doctrine of justification by faith to the point where a joint declaration on the doctrine was made,³ many Evangelicals remain nervous that Catholicism appears to make salvation a matter of both faith and good works rather than faith alone through grace (*sola fide, sola gratia*). Catholic doctrine and practice seem, at least on the surface, to contradict core Evangelical beliefs such that some Evangelicals are wary of entering into close personal and/or working relationships with Catholics.

Without downplaying the issues of theology and practice that still divide Catholics and Evangelicals, it is clearly unfortunate that such differences have all too often overshadowed the many similarities and shared commitments Catholics and Evangelicals have. While there has been an abundance of materials from Evangelical perspectives that engage in critique of Catholic theology and practice, fewer publications exist that attempt to find places where there is significant overlap. Consequently, the focus of this publication is not to pretend serious differences between Catholics and Evangelicals do not exist but to encourage readers to become aware of the commonalities we share with our Catholic friends and neighbours.

² For in-depth analysis of similarities and differences, see Norman Geisler and Ralph MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Baker Academic, 1995).

³ *The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* (http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_31101999_cath-luth-joint-declaration_en.html) was crafted and agreed to in 1999 by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. It has also been adopted by the World Methodist Council (2006) and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (2017) and “welcomed and affirmed” by the Anglican Consultative Council (2016).

A Short History of the Roman Catholic Church

Someone once said that what Evangelicals typically demonstrate in zeal, they lack in memory. So it can't hurt to be reminded of a little bit of church history. Where did the Catholic Church come from and how do Evangelicals relate to that history?

Evangelicals and Catholics alike believe that, from the first day of the Pentecost outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus' followers assembled in Jerusalem, the church expanded quickly into the then-known world. Although the official trade language of the Roman Empire was Latin, the Roman Empire was roughly divided into two language groups, with Latin speakers dominating the western regions and Greek speakers dominating in the east. Despite the language barriers, in the first few hundred years of church history there was formally only one Church, even though some divisions were already appearing.

By the early parts of the fourth century, Christianity faced several challenges both theologically and politically. However, under the first Christian emperor, Constantine (AD 272-337), the Latin- and Greek-speaking churches in the empire came to agree on a succinctly worded, biblically derived common confession of the Christian faith called the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene Creed is essentially Trinitarian in structure. It affirms God the Father is the Creator of all things, Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God and yet became incarnate in order to provide salvation for humans, the Holy Spirit proceeds from God the Father and is worshipped as God, and there is only "one holy catholic and apostolic church." In this regard, the Nicene Creed⁴ embodied the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith in the Triune God, a confession which has long guided the Church worldwide in ensuring its teachings remained consistent throughout the ages.

⁴ The final version of the Creed, the so-called Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, was the result of both the council of Nicaea (AD 325) and the council of Constantinople (AD 381).



For Evangelicals who stumble over the word “catholic” as used in the Nicene Creed, it may be helpful to learn that the word derives from the Greek word *kath’holou*, which simply means “in reference to the whole,” and that the Greek word *katholikos* means “universal.” Thus, for the early Church to confess that there is one “catholic church” simply meant that the Church was not restricted in its influence to any one time or place, but that the Church’s mission as a witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:8) was extended throughout time, space and geography, and across political borders.

As the Church of the first several centuries continued to spread throughout the Roman Empire, it was probably inevitable that significant cultural and political differences between the eastern Greek-speaking Church and the western Latin-speaking Church would eventually lead to somewhat distinct theologies, even while they continued to agree at most major points. It is not surprising that eventually they came to clash. Although the history is complex, historians generally identify AD 1054 as a critical point at which disagreements over theological and political matters led representative Bishops from the eastern empire to excommunicate those in the western Church and the other way around. This regrettable incident paved the way for one of the major divisions of Christendom between what are now known as Catholic Churches and their eastern counterpart, the Orthodox churches.

But why the Roman Catholic Church? It is important to understand there are many other Churches that identify as “Catholic.” There are Ukrainian, Greek, Russian, Alexandrian, Armenian and Byzantine Catholics, to name just a few of the twenty-three Churches that also identify as “Catholic” but not as “Roman Catholic.” So what is the relationship of these Churches to the Roman Catholic Church?⁵

The worldwide Catholic Church is structured in such a way that all congregations (or parishes, as Catholics usually call them) in a geographical region are grouped into a geographic area referred to as dioceses or, in the East, eparchies overseen by a Bishop. Though there are many Bishops overseeing churches in different regions, historically one Bishop in particular has been held as having a degree of pre-eminence, namely, the Bishop of Rome. This “primary” Bishop, or pope⁶, was given place of privilege because Catholics believe that the Apostle Peter was the first Bishop of Rome and that Jesus had given Peter a special role in the founding and governance of the Church (see Matthew 16:17-19)⁷. Consequently, today the varying expressions of the Catholic Church in the whole world are called Catholic because they all are in communion with and recognize the authority of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope. However, the Roman Catholic Church is identified as that portion of worldwide Catholics—indeed, the largest portion—who follow the Roman form of Catholic liturgy or worship, the so-called “Roman” or “Latin Rite,” which refers not only to liturgical matters but to theological, spiritual and disciplinary matters as well.

⁵ The relationship between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Catholic Churches was reiterated at the Second Vatican Council, which taught that, despite the differences in liturgical rites and other traditions, “there remains conspicuous the tradition that has been handed down from the Apostles through the Fathers and that forms part of the divinely revealed and undivided heritage of the universal Church” (*Decree Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, 1).

⁶ The word “pope” derives from the Greek word “pappas” or “father.”

⁷ This passage is generally interpreted differently by Protestants, who see Peter’s confession of Jesus as the rock upon which the Church is built, not Peter himself.



Knowing these snippets of church history is important for Evangelicals because of how often they perceive themselves as standing “opposite” to the Catholic Church. This attitude of “opposition” is somewhat of a holdover from our deep Protestant identity in which we tend to view ourselves as perpetually “protesting” the Roman Catholic Church as Martin Luther did in the Protestant Reformation that began in the sixteenth century. Yet in the larger scheme of Church history, it may be a bit surprising to many Evangelicals to learn that we have somewhat closer family ties to Roman Catholics than we do to the Orthodox Churches. This is because the whole Protestant movement (out of which Evangelicalism arose) occurred in the Western Church and is a secondary division occurring in the 1500s subsequent to the primary split between the Western and Eastern Churches some 500 years earlier. In this regard, from a theological perspective, Evangelicals often perceive more of a shared theology between themselves and Roman Catholics than with the Orthodox. This “family relation” will be important to keep in mind as we now turn to describe some of the major characteristics of the Catholic Church and its understanding of the Christian faith.

Basic Characteristics of the Catholic Faith

The Catholic Church can seem quite mysterious to Evangelicals because of how Catholics practise their faith so differently from us. While there are many things that could be spoken about here, three major characteristics will need to suffice.

- 1. Practice:** First, while Evangelicals tend to understand the practice of their faith as focused on one’s growing personal relationship with Jesus Christ, Scripture reading, witness and service, Catholics, in addition to these tenets, also empathize the practice of their faith in connection to their involvement



with the Church. Indeed, one of the central characteristics of the Catholic faith is its attention to the sacraments. For Evangelicals, practising the sacraments or ordinances (usually understood as Baptism and the Lord's Supper) is seen as a way to signal one's growing faith, but for Catholics, participating in the sacraments is a primary way to actually grow in their faith. This isn't to say that Evangelicals don't see a place for the Church or that Catholics don't see a place for a personal relationship with Jesus, as much as to note that their respective spiritual practices tend to lean more heavily in one direction or the other.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (a 1993 document officially sanctioned by the teaching office of the Church for teaching the fundamentals of Catholic faith), sacraments are "efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us."⁸ In other words, the sacraments, for Catholics, are understood as privileged (though not exclusive) ritual practices by which Christians can be ensured of a dynamic and life giving participation in the Pascal Mystery and reception of God's sanctifying grace. Catholics understand that there are seven sacraments given to the Church by Christ. These seven include: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist (or The Lord's Supper as many Evangelicals would call it), Reconciliation (or Confession), Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders and Marriage. According to Catholic teaching, it is not necessary for every individual Catholic to receive all the seven sacraments (especially the last three); however, baptism is taught to be the foundational sacrament which incorporates a person into the Catholic Church (and then becomes a Catholic Christian) and is the sacrament which gives access to all the other sacraments.⁹ Catholics view participation in the Eucharist of particular importance, calling it "the source and summit of the Christian life."¹⁰

⁸ Catechism of the Catholic Church (Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 1131. Also at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P35.HTM.

⁹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1213. Also at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P3G.HTM.

¹⁰ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1324. Also at http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P3X.HTM.

The hope is that every baptized Catholic also chooses to be confirmed and participate regularly in the Eucharist. Indeed, for Catholics the notion of an unbaptized, unconfirmed Christian would be a contradiction in terms and participating regularly in the Eucharist would be understood as a central means of abiding in Jesus.

2. Sacraments: Second, the centrality of the sacraments points to the corporate nature of how Catholics understand their faith. Evangelicals tend to think of their faith in Christ as being individually or personally experienced first and corporately experienced (in worship together with other believers) as a consequence or follow-up to faith. Catholics, however, also think of their faith as a corporate participation in Christ through ongoing and historic sacramental practices followed up by personal acts of service and devotion in their day-to-day lives outside of the Church. Thus for Catholics, being connected to the sacraments of the church is an essential way to live and strengthen their faith, without denying the importance of individual practices such as prayer, service, Scripture reading, etc., that can foster faith apart from the sacraments themselves.

3. Spiritual Authority: A third major characteristic of Catholic belief—and one often viewed suspiciously by Evangelicals—is its understanding of spiritual authority. Technically, Catholics and Evangelicals agree Scripture is the foundational authority by which we come to know and obey God’s revealed Word. However, Evangelicals tend to emphasize the Reformation-era teaching of *sola scriptura*, that is, that Scripture alone is the authority by which judgments about doctrine and practice are informed. This concept is usually used to critique Catholics whom Evangelicals believe have allowed the authority of the Church (as found in its traditions and the judgments of its popes and ecumenical



councils) to supersede the authority of Scripture. However, Catholics tend to question the Evangelical appeal to *sola scriptura*, because they believe this opens up Evangelicals (and more generally all Protestants) to a multitude of possible differing opinions about what it is that the Scriptures actually teach. Catholics believe that Scripture is most authentically interpreted within the Spirit-filled community of the Church.

In this regard, Catholic teaching holds that both Scripture and Tradition are sacred and are to be honoured not as two separate things but as two integrally related realities. In other words, official Catholic teaching does not hold, as it is popularly understood by many Evangelicals, that there are two authorities, Scripture and Tradition. Rather, Catholics believe Scripture and Tradition represent the single authority of God which flow together from their common source, Christ himself. Moreover, Catholics believe that these two sources are completely consistent with one another.

Some Perceptions of Catholics by Evangelicals

Evangelicals view the Catholic Church with varied perspectives. On one end of the spectrum, some Evangelicals remain deeply suspicious and even militantly opposed to Catholicism. Though some in this camp have limited exposure to “living, breathing Catholics” and are simply repeating what they have been taught, others, including many former Catholics, have had firsthand experience with Catholicism and have found it wanting. Some are convinced the Catholic Church is lifeless, or even misleading or dangerous. At the other end of the spectrum, some Evangelicals, especially in recent years, have been drawn to the Catholic Church and formally taken the step of becoming members. Somewhere in the middle are many other Evangelicals who have no interest in becoming Catholic, but who sense that perhaps the Catholic Church is not as “alien” as they might have been sometimes taught.

Despite the varied opinions held by Evangelicals about Catholics, it may be helpful to examine more closely the second group noted above: those Evangelicals who have actually become Catholics. What is it that draws these people to the Catholic Church? Here a number of things can be noted.

1. History: For many Evangelicals who have not been accustomed to participating in a church that places a deep value on its own history, Catholicism offers a depth of connection to the whole history of the Church back to the New Testament era which is rarely, if ever, emphasized in Evangelical churches. For many Evangelicals who feel their faith lacks a sense of deep roots, the Roman Catholic Church and its long history and set of traditions, therefore, can be greatly appealing. Even those Evangelical denominations that have a stronger sense of their own history tend to look back at best only to the Protestant Reformation for their foundational roots—that is only about 500 years of a 2,000-year history of the church. Contrast this with the Catholic Church which traces its theological heritage right back to the Apostles themselves, and one can see why such a deep sense of history and tradition can be so appealing to Evangelical Christians who often have heard little about Church history at all, other than perhaps a short history of their own denomination.



2. Liturgies: Second, and related to the Catholic Church's own extensive history, is the enduring spiritual and aesthetic appeal of the Catholic Church's solemn liturgies. For many of those same Evangelicals looking not only for rootedness in tradition, but also for counter-cultural ways to express their worship, the liturgies of the Catholic Church can be deeply attractive. Many such Evangelicals say Catholic worship services better capture a sense of "reverence," which they perceive is sometimes lacking in Evangelical services. Thus, while some Evangelicals believe the worship of God's people needs to resonate with the culture in which they are found, others are convinced the Church should resist capitulating in its worship to the forms of the surrounding culture. Consequently, participating in a liturgy that can seem foreign to our modern culture highlights that worship is something done for God and not for the people or for the culture.

3. Structured Authority: Third, some Evangelicals are drawn to the Catholic Church's structured authority in matters of what Scripture teaches. Weary of the endless debates about correct interpretation that sometimes occurs in Bible study groups, or alternatively, the appeals that are made to one prominent Bible teacher or theologian over another, some Evangelicals have been drawn to the relatively clear ways in which the Catholic Church declares the proper interpretation of Scripture and how that applies to doctrine and ethical issues. Thus, while Evangelicals might have trouble coming to a consensus position on a particularly thorny ethical or doctrinal debate, it is appealing to the individual to know the Catholic Church often has an "official position" on matters such as abortion and marriage, to name just a couple.

Of course, for every positive perception to which one can point, there are persisting negative perceptions among Evangelicals of the Catholic Church as well. Unfortunately, perception is all too often mistaken for reality, though many such misperceptions contain a grain of truth. Evangelicals remain “Protestant” precisely because there are still aspects of Catholic teaching and practice with which they disagree and continue to feel the need to protest.

1. Faith and Works: The first common negative perception Evangelicals have of Catholics is that they are engaging in a religion of “works” whereby the individual Catholic seeks to “earn” her or his salvation by going to church and celebrating in the sacraments and/or by living a morally upright life. Evangelicals will also sometimes point to how this can lead Catholics to be deceived into thinking that by celebrating in the sacraments they do not have to “live out” their faith in their everyday lives. Consequently, Evangelicals often feel Catholicism produces nominal Christians: people who are Christian in name only because they have participated in church practices, but who do not have a living day-to-day relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. In short, Evangelicals are wary about what they might call “Easter and Christmas Christians” and sometimes have concluded that many self-identified Catholics practise their faith only on these high points of the Christian calendar. Evangelicals thus often stumble over the life and moral decisions of the less active Catholics they meet who don’t seem to connect their faith with their daily lives or their ethical decisions.

To be sure, the leadership of the Catholic Church has become increasingly aware of the problem of nominal Christians in western society. Since the 1980s Pope John Paul II and his successors have called for a “new evangelization” which seeks not only to lead new people into the Church but also to bring distant or fallen-away Catholics to a deeper personal appropriation of their faith in Jesus Christ. In this regard, Catholics have looked with admiration at Evangelicals because of their desire to live out their faith in their day-to-day lives and not only through their involvement in officially sanctioned church activities. That said, Evangelicals might do well to consider their own home situation as well: To what extent today are Evangelicals seeing the presence of nominal Christians within their own ranks? Perhaps evangelization for Catholics and Evangelicals alike will need to begin at home.

2. Practices: Second, Evangelicals will often observe that it is difficult to find support in Scripture for what appear to them to be strange practices by Catholics. Evangelicals might point to practices such as praying to specific saints for special situations (for example to Saint Jude, the patron saint of lost causes), honouring a particular holy item (like a relic or a rosary) or talking about or praying to Mary almost as if she were, in the Evangelical’s mind, a fourth member of the Godhead. It is these practices, some of which have approval from the highest levels of Catholic authority, that Evangelicals often associate with Catholicism and which cause Evangelicals to be somewhat suspicious of Catholicism as a whole. This, however, points to a deeper issue, namely, that there can be a gap between official teachings of the Catholic Church and the beliefs and practices of its members. Just because some Catholics practise one or another particular devotion or act of piety does not mean that this always represents the fullness of Catholic teaching. This is something Evangelicals will need to continue to remind themselves about as they increasingly interact with Catholics who find themselves at odds with, or representing only partially, what the Catholic Church officially teaches.

Yet here it may be instructive for Evangelicals to remind themselves that some of the same problems exist in Evangelical congregations as well. This is especially the case when one considers that many Evangelicals are not living up to the ideals which are presented as the normal Christian life. For example, Evangelical teachers and preachers regularly emphasize how important daily reading of Scripture and prayer is to the Christian life, yet many Evangelical Christians fail significantly to uphold these practices consistently. Consequently, Evangelicals must learn to exercise charity when it comes to generalizing about Catholics, just as Evangelicals would want Catholics to exercise charity towards them and not make judgments on what Evangelicalism is about on the basis of isolated practices of individuals.

How does this work itself out, then, as Evangelicals seek to better know their Catholic neighbours? Perhaps it is important to remember that just because there are nominal Catholics does not mean Catholicism is a nominal religion and just because there are Catholics who dispute, disobey or misunderstand the teaching of the Catholic Church does not mean the Church's teaching is undermined. Or, to turn the whole thing around, just because many Catholics are wary of Evangelicals who are overly captivated with teachings about the end times leading to the promised return of Jesus Christ, or those who are too closely aligned to certain political parties or movements or who appear on TV shows teaching a health-and-wealth gospel, does not mean that these individuals represent the totality of Evangelical faith. In this regard, the best practice is probably to do as Jesus commands: Do to others as we would have them do to us. Or to put it another way, we Evangelicals should not assume all our perceptions about Catholics are accurate or even that the practices of the individual Catholic



represents official Catholic teaching, just as some misguided Evangelicals ought not to be perceived as representing everything about Evangelicalism.

Another perception many Evangelicals have about Catholicism is that the Catholic practice of going to a ministerial priest for confession and/or praying to the saints appears to deny the proper place of Jesus as the one mediator between God and humans (as articulated for example in 1 Timothy 2:5). To be fair, Evangelicals are properly concerned, together with our Protestant forebears, that mere human spiritual authorities not be allowed to prevent people from having access to the Father through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit (for example as articulated in Hebrews 4:14 and ensuing verses). Consequently, Evangelicals will likely continue to reject the Catholic practice of praying to (or with) the saints, or more particularly, the various manifestations of Catholic devotion to Mary—but it is also important for Evangelicals to ensure that what they are rejecting is the official teaching of the Catholic Church and not just misunderstandings of some Catholics. As in any denominational context, there are abuses of practices and misunderstandings of “official” theology that should not be allowed to represent what the Church *really* teaches.

3. Mary: Finally, and perhaps at a much more serious theological level, Evangelicals have sometimes heard that some Catholics teach that Mary is a “co-redemptrix” together with Jesus—an alarming notion that clearly does not sit well with Evangelicals who see Jesus Christ as the one and only Redeemer. While it is true there is a movement of some Catholics trying to get this teaching accepted as Catholic teaching, it should be noted the teaching of Mary as Co-Redemptrix with Jesus is not an official teaching of the Catholic Church. On the contrary, together with Evangelicals, the Catholic Church formally teaches that Jesus alone is the unique mediator between God and humans.¹¹

All this should illustrate that differences between Catholics and Evangelicals are real and are not negligible. Indeed, there are some aspects of belief that will likely continue to present major challenges to doctrinal unity between these two branches of Christianity. Evangelicals are not likely to, for example, acknowledge papal authority, engage in prayers to the saints or believe that the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ at the time of consecration during Mass, which Catholic theology refers to as the doctrine of transubstantiation. Nevertheless, these differences should not overshadow the reality that Catholics and Evangelicals share many of the same fundamental beliefs, an aspect to which we now turn.

¹¹ The Catechism puts it this way: “Mary’s function as mother of men in no way obscures or diminishes this unique meditation of Christ, but rather shows its power ... No creature could ever be counted along with the Incarnate Word and Redeemer; but just as the priesthood of Christ is shared in various ways both by his ministers and the faithful ... so also the unique meditation of the Redeemer does not exclude but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a sharing in this one source.” Catechism of the Catholic Church, 970.

Catholics and Evangelicals: Some Important Commonalities

A danger of reviewing some of the distinctive characteristics of the Catholic faith is that it could only highlight the gap that remains between Catholics and Evangelicals and therefore make us lose sight of what both hold in common. Indeed, so much effort has been exerted to cataloguing our differences that both Catholics and Evangelicals have sometimes been blinded to our similarities. It is something akin to siblings who may exert tremendous amounts of energy trying to be their own person only to forget the fact that they have common parents and even a shared DNA.

As previously mentioned, early Christianity eventually became predominantly expressed by both Western (Latin-speaking) and Eastern (Greek-speaking) traditions. Pope John Paul II would later refer to these legitimate traditions as one Church breathing with two lungs.¹²

From a theological perspective, such an approach makes it easier to recognize there are actually a great number of doctrinal questions on which Evangelicals share a common heritage with Catholics. For example, Catholics and Evangelicals agree on the fundamental teachings about God: that God is the Creator of all things and exists eternally as Three Persons in one eternal Essence, that Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine and is the sole atoning sacrifice for the sins of mankind, that the Holy Spirit is divine and is given to the church for empowerment for its witness and for conviction of the Church and world for sin, and that Jesus Christ is returning again to a general resurrection of all people when Christ will judge all people and will welcome some into eternal bliss and others to eternal damnation.

Catholics and Evangelicals have also stood together on many social and ethical issues that are being debated in society today. In Canada, for example, Catholics and Evangelicals became aware during the same-sex marriage debates in the mid-2000s that they were allies on this issue, with both contending that marriage as defined by God was to be a union between one man and one woman.

¹² Ut Unum Sint, 54



On defending the sanctity of life, Catholics have undoubtedly been in the forefront, with a good majority of Evangelicals sharing similar views. Whether it be on matters of abortion, euthanasia, or defense of the handicapped, poor and homeless, Catholics and Evangelicals have largely agreed that all persons, from conception to natural death, are created in God's image and are to be afforded life protection.

In education, too, Catholics and Evangelicals have historically been on the forefront of delivering Christian education, from primary through to post-secondary institutions. Here Catholics and Evangelicals, though rarely actually working together to deliver education, have nevertheless shared common concerns about the rights of families and churches to provide Christian religious and moral education to their children. Consequently, when governments have sometimes tended to extend their reach too far into matters of religious conviction, Catholics and Evangelicals have been able to agree, at least in principle, that the rights of families and churches to provide religious instruction to their children is a right that needs to be protected.

When it comes to post-secondary educational contexts, Catholics and Evangelicals have found themselves as informal allies in contexts such as university campuses where it is common today to assume that young people are there to leave behind their "religious shackles" and where it is assumed that these emerging adults will abandon their Christian convictions. Consequently, Catholic ministries such as Canadian Catholic Campus Ministry, the Canadian Catholic Students Association, Catholic Christian Outreach and the Newman Centres exist to strengthen faith and introduce students to Christ and to edify and encourage Catholic university students, while Evangelical ministries such as Power to Change, Navigators and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship similarly seek to reach students for Christ while edifying young believers. Such groups often find themselves making common cause and forming friendships on campus. Perhaps even greater awareness and cooperation between these types of campus ministries might be another area where Catholics and Evangelicals can work together for the common cause of the gospel.

Finally, in Canada a national Roman Catholic-Evangelical Dialogue has been formed at the initiative of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops and The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada.¹³ The members of the Dialogue represent a cross-section of pastors, ministry leaders and theologians who meet biannually for prayer, study and joint initiatives. Such dialogues have existed for decades in international contexts, but it is a hopeful sign that participants are seeking the Holy Spirit's leading to serve together in Canada in new ways for the cause of Jesus Christ and his very Good News.

¹³ In fact, this publication has a counterpart, produced by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, entitled, *Our Evangelical Neighbours*, with input from members of the Roman Catholic-Evangelical Dialogue. It is available at <http://www.cccb.ca/site/eng/media-room/4596-our-evangelical-neighbours-a-catholic-reflection-on-evangelical-christianity>.



Conclusion

The spirit of this document is one of hopeful realism. It was written in a spirit of hope insofar as it seeks to help Evangelicals take another look at their Catholic neighbours and to realize that, while real differences remain, there are many areas where they are not quite so “different” as we might have thought. In this regard, the hope is that Evangelicals will realize that, despite major differences, Catholics might well be the Evangelical community’s best ally when it comes to matters of defending faith-based education, speaking out for the weak and disadvantaged in society and for insisting that the Good News of Jesus Christ still needs to be heard by Canadians. That said, the document has also been written in a spirit of realism whereby Evangelicals exercise discernment in realizing that, despite the unlikelihood of any formal reunion between Evangelicals and Catholics, cooperation at many levels is already possible.

Theologically, Catholics and Evangelicals already agree at a fundamental level about who God is and what he has done in Jesus Christ. However, the best way for Evangelicals really to get to understand Catholics is to begin where every relationship begins: by taking a risk and getting to know our Catholic neighbours and co-workers in an open spirit of conversation and dialogue rather than in a spirit of antagonism and debate. As we begin talking with them, we just might come to realize that we share more in Jesus Christ than we could have ever thought possible.

In 2011 a Roman Catholic-Evangelical Dialogue was established by the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB) and The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC). The Dialogue has supported the work of these two national bodies, especially as they collaborate in addressing societal issues.

A resource titled *Our Evangelical Neighbours* was produced by the CCCB and distributed among Catholic communities in October 2016. The EFC is pleased to provide this sister resource, *Our Roman Catholic Neighbours*, as a means of helping more Canadian Evangelicals listen carefully and prayerfully to God and our neighbours, which brings us all into deeper fellowship as we follow Jesus in the world together. Both resources were reviewed by the Roman Catholic-Evangelical Dialogue as well as the two sponsoring bodies.

A copy of a letter written by The Most Reverend Lionel Gendron, P.S.S., Bishop of Saint-Jean-Longueuil, President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, indicating that the EFC resource provides a further important milestone in the relationship between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals in Canada can be viewed on the EFC website at www.TheEFC.ca/InterfaithInterchurch.



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