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# Paul Schrottenboer 1922–1998 A Man of Vision and Courage

Bruce J. Nicholls

Dr Paul G. Schrottenboer, a faithful and untiring leader in the WEF Theological Commission, died on July 16 1998 after a long battle with cancer.

I first met Paul when he was General Secretary of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, a position he held for 25 years. I had the privilege of representing the Theological Commission at a Synod held in France and remember his firm but gracious leadership of the meetings. I remember the place he gave to the reading of Scripture at every meal in his home in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. In Paul we have lost a friend and active supporter of evangelical ecumenicity. Global evangelicalism is the poorer for his passing.

After the WEF presented its report on 'A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective on Roman Catholicism' at its General Assembly in Singapore in 1986, Paul, on behalf of the Theological Commission, pioneered the continuing dialogue with the Pontifical Council for the Promoting of Christian Unity of the Vatican. He led brief meetings in Jerusalem in 1988 and Budapest in 1990 and two major consultations, one at Venice in 1993 and the second at Tantur, Jerusalem in 1997. The papers of these latter two consultations have been published in *Evangelical Review of Theology*. At these meetings fundamental issues were clarified on Scripture, Tradition, Justification, the Church, and Mission; many Catholic misunderstandings concerning the evangelical position were removed and foundations were laid for future discussions.

Paul was a man for biblical ecumenicity, a loyal churchman in the Reformed tradition and an able theologian and writer on contemporary issues. During the past ten years ERT has published ten of his articles and reports including some incisive reflections on the publications of the World Council of Churches.

He was also a man of patience and great courage. With steadily declining health and even after major limb surgery, he persevered for the work of the Kingdom. He planned to attend the Theological Commission meetings in Germany in early June, just six weeks before the Lord called him.

Without the support of his wife Bernice, Paul could never have achieved what he did. She was at his side in travel and in meetings and in times of severe weakness and suffering. We commend her and their adult family to the Lord. We thank God for every memory of our dear brother.

**Dr. Paul G. Schrottenboer** was born near Holland, Michigan in 1922 and trained for the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church at Calvin Seminary (graduated 1947) and later studied at Westminster Theological Seminary. He gained his doctorate from the Free University of Amsterdam. He served pastorates in Canada 1955–1963 and was active in a movement there to create a Christian university, becoming part-time development director of Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship (now Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, Canada). In 1966 he moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan as General Secretary of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (later Council). In this post for 25 years, he carried out distinguished work in North America and on the world scene, especially in relationship to the issue of apartheid in South Africa. Upon his retirement,

he again supported the interests of Christian higher education. Although suffering with cancer from 1990, Dr Schrotenboer continued to devote himself to his family, ecumenical and educational interests until his death on 16 July 1998.

# Introduction

George Vandervelde

*World Evangelical Fellowship/Roman Catholic Church Conversations on the nature and mission of the Church, Tantur, Jerusalem, 12–19 October, 1997*

The papers published in this issue of *Evangelical Review of Theology* (ERT) were prepared for the second consultation between representatives of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) and representatives of Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The meeting took place 12–19 October, 1997, at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute for Theological Studies (located between Jerusalem and Bethlehem).

The most recent consultation is part of an ongoing conversation that began formally in 1993 but was prompted by an event that occurred more than a decade earlier. At the 1980 General Assembly of the WEF, held in Hoddesdon, England, two representatives from the Roman Catholic Church had been invited to attend the assembly as observers. Their presence, and especially their official greetings to the Assembly, triggered a heated debate. This led the WEF Theological Commission to establish a Task Force on Ecumenical Issues, which was mandated to present an Evangelical assessment of contemporary Roman Catholicism. When the resultant statement (published in ERT 10:4 (1986) 342–364; 11:1 (1987) 78–94; and in booklet form as *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective*, ed. Paul G. Schrotenboer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988)) came to the attention of the Vatican office on Christian unity, it suggested further discussion of the issues raised in the statement. After some preparatory meetings between representatives of the WEF (headed by Dr. Paul Schrotenboer) and of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the first consultation took place in Venice in 1993. The topics discussed there were Scripture and Tradition, and Justification by Faith. The papers and responses to them were subsequently published in ERT (21:2 (1997) 101–154).

During the discussion in Venice it became clear that intertwined with the topics under discussion are two others that tend to divide Evangelicals and Roman Catholics: the nature of the church as community of Christ and the nature and practice of mission and evangelism. These interrelated topics became the foci of the Tantur consultation. Each topic was addressed in a Roman Catholic and an Evangelical paper. All four papers are published in this issue.

In discussing the ecclesiological papers, various issues sprang to the fore. One of these concerns the question, What is the defining characteristic of the church? Through careful listening to one another, it became clear that it is too easy to contrast Evangelical and Roman Catholic understandings of the church in terms of ‘word’ and ‘sacrament’, respectively. The Roman Catholic discussion partners understand their ecclesiology as placing equal emphasis on both. Nevertheless, from an Evangelical viewpoint, Roman Catholic teaching appears to assign sacramentality a pivotal role in understanding, not only the nature of the church as such, but also the nature, ranking, and validity of ordained