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WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

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‘Scripture and Tradition’ and ‘the Church in Salvation’: Catholics and Evangelicals Explore Challenges and Opportunities

*A Report of the International Consultation between the Catholic Church and the
World Evangelical Alliance (2009–2016)*

Introduction: Setting the Frame for Our Consultation

The Biblical Foundations for This Consultation

1. The love of God has been poured out by the Holy Spirit into the hearts of believers (Rom 5:5). This love summons Christians to follow Christ, embracing the way of the cross in humble self-giving (Phil 2:1–11). In this spirit of love all are called to strive for what makes for peace and for building up the body, with all concerned for the whole community, the strong caring for the weak (Rom 14:19–15:2). Being joined to Christ through faith, each person is personally associated with Christ and becomes a member of his body. But what is the Church, and who belongs to the Church, which is his body? We take consolation in knowing that the Lord knows his own and his own know him (Jn 10:14).

Evangelicals understand that through the power of the Holy Spirit, the very moment one enters into a relationship with Christ through a personal commitment in confessing Jesus as Lord and Savior (Mt 16:16) and is baptized, one belongs to the Church, the community which he established (Mt 16:18).¹ As a fruit of this faith, the Christian undertakes the path of life-long discipleship.

Catholics understand that a person is received into the Church at the moment of Baptism, whether as an infant or an adult, and it is expected that the person's initiation into the church will be deepened through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ that is sealed through confirmation and participation in the Eucharist, as they seek to live as his disciples.

2. The unity of the body of Christ is founded on “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all” (Eph 4:5). The church celebrates unity with Christ and with one another in the Lord's Supper/Eucharist in which his death and resurrection are proclaimed and celebrated until he comes in glory. At his second

¹ As stated in the document *Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission* (ERCDOM): ‘Conversion and baptism are the gateway into the new community of God, although Evangelicals distinguish between the visible and invisible aspects of this community. They see conversion as the means of entry into the invisible church and baptism as the consequently appropriate means of entry into the visible church’ (4.3).

coming it will then be revealed in the heavenly community who belongs to the unity of the body of Christ throughout the ages and from all countries and languages. Then, the whole creation will be incorporated into the eternal doxology of praise to God (Rev 5:11–14; Phil 2:10–11; Rom 8:19–23; 1 Cor 15:28). While we look forward to the final consummation of all things, we are called in the Church to be Christ’s body in the here and now.

3. Christ’s prayer for unity in John 17 takes as its premise that his present and future disciples be brought into the unity that he shares with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This unity testifies to the world that “you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (Jn 17:23). There is a unity which the church receives, and which God has given.² But unity also comes to us as a task, one that can only be accomplished by the Spirit working in and through us. The Apostle Paul makes an appeal “that there be no dissensions among you and that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10).

4. We realize that in the history of the Church, continuing even to today, divisions have damaged the visible unity of the Church and shaken the credibility of the Gospel that is to be preached in the world. Unity is something deeply desired by our Lord and empowered by his Spirit. Therefore, the Church may not remain comfortable when the body of Christ is divided (cf. 1 Cor 12:25), but is called to strive for the greatest possible unity which Christ himself calls for (Jn 17:20–23; Phil 2:5). In doing so, we are agreed that the Church must make every effort to preach the Gospel in its truth and purity, though we have not always understood what that means in the same way. We recognize that in the history of the Church, striving for the truth of the Gospel has not always resulted in unity or resolved all of our differences. But we also welcome the renewed effort to address these divisions in our present consultation.

The Challenges Encountered among Evangelicals and Catholics

5. According to the reports our consultation commissioned from 22 countries and from five continents, relations between Catholics and Evangelicals vary according to the regions, local history, public recognition and role in society as well as other new and emerging circumstances. While mutual ignorance and mistrust, fears and prejudices, as well as majority/minority dynamics have prevented relations from being improved in certain countries, in other areas where Catholics and Evangelicals are challenged by the contemporary society, or exist as minorities threatened by religious persecutions, or work in common efforts to confront poverty or various natural disasters, collaboration has been established at different levels.

6. There is a wide range in the quality of local relationships. Sometimes relations

2 As affirmed in the WEA Statement of Faith: ‘We believe in ... the Unity of the Spirit of all true believers, the Church, the Body of Christ’ and in the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* I: ‘Christ the Lord founded one Church and one Church only.’

are characterized by open rivalry and opposition in the missionary field, marred by accusations and counter-accusations of proselytism, persecution, inequality, idolatry, and/or rejection of the recognition of the Christian identity of the other. At other times or places, relationships are characterized by open collaboration in the public sphere, especially in family matters and ethical and moral campaigns at every level, as well as prayer initiatives and evangelistic and common charitable campaigns inspired by the Bible.

7. Members of the Consultation are happy to note that in most parts of the world there is a consciousness of the need to improve our relationship. Catholics and Evangelicals are convinced that "Mission belongs to the very being of the church. Proclaiming the word of God and witnessing to the world is essential for every Christian. At the same time, it is necessary to do so according to gospel principles, with full respect and love for all human beings."³ In accordance with the principles of the Gospel, important steps can be taken together through mutual knowledge and recognition, healing of memories, theological dialogue, as well as encouraging local collaboration between Catholics and Evangelicals wherever possible and appropriate.

The Contemporary Challenges to the Christian Witness

8. Neither Catholics nor Evangelicals can escape the challenges that an increasingly globalized context poses, where the paradigm is shifting more and more to a secular view of society and culture. This raises the question of how the gospel can be preached adequately in this context without giving in to the pressure to conform to the world. Challenges come to us in different forms:

- There is a creeping secularism that is antagonistic to the Christian faith as we live as strangers in an increasingly strange land (1 Pet 1:1). In many places religion has been relegated largely to the private sphere of the individual with little or no public presence of religion allowed. Many people have forgotten that they have forgotten God. There is an increasing erosion of the churches themselves which affects their impact on society and culture. This erosion is not only in the West; this is a global challenge. It is an erosion whose long-term effects are not yet fully understood.
- Our age is experiencing an ethical disorientation, one that often disallows God and his revelation to serve as any type of reference point for ethical discussion. In sexual morality, there is an underlying assumption that everyone is free to do what is perceived to be right in their own eyes; there is no longer basic agreement on the definition of marriage; sexual orientation now is the accepted way of defining who we are as human beings and the redefinition of marriage to include same-sex unions is more and more common. The dignity

3 Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, World Council of Churches and World Evangelical Alliance, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, Preamble, Geneva, 28 June 2011.

and sanctity of human life at all stages is under attack. Euthanasia, assisted suicide, abortion, and some genetic and reproductive technologies threaten and undermine the basic understanding of what it means to be human. This in turn also has repercussions for the primary foundation of society—the family.

- Religious and ideological diversity is the norm in many societies and cultures around the globe. Although that is not necessarily problematic, it does serve as a challenge to the church because the truth of the Gospel can be seen as just one option among many. The exclusive claims of Christ himself (Jn 14:6) are perceived by some as a direct affront to the dominant controlling ethos of toleration. Religious pluralism has had the unintended consequence of intensified violence caused by an increasingly polarized religious environment. A perceived lack of conviction on the one hand is met with religious radicalization on the other. In such a polarized context, those on the extremes use their religious convictions to justify violence against those with whom they disagree. In this context, we note with dismay and sadness that Christians are persecuted in many countries around the world today. It is our duty to pray for the persecuted church and to stand up for religious freedom wherever it is denied.

Response to These Challenges and Our Shared Beliefs

9. To what extent can Evangelicals and Catholics continue to face such challenges alone and apart from one another? What of our present situation? The participants in this consultation, appointed by the World Evangelical Alliance and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, are convinced that the urgency of the present situation makes it imperative that we as Evangelicals and Catholics speak and act together wherever we can to confront these challenges. We are called together by Christ so that the world may come to realize his presence in a world that is fractured and fragmented—a world which he loved even to the point of death and still loves (Jn 3:16; 17:20–23).

One purpose of this consultation has been to explore areas of common concern. Part of discerning what we can do together has been learning more about each other’s personal faith and commitment to Christ’s Gospel and his mission to save a dying world. We have also sought to explore more deeply those issues which continue to divide us. We do so because our divided witness weakens our response to these challenges in the eyes of the world. While we recognize our enduring divisions, we can acknowledge the work that each other is doing and even consider working together in as many areas as possible.

10. We as Catholics and Evangelicals are in agreement that Christians believe: that God is triune, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three persons in one God (Gen 1:1–3; Mt 28:19; Jn 1:1; 10:30, etc.); that he created all things, both visible and invisible, by his Word (Gen 1; Jn 1:3; Col 1:16–17); that human beings brought sin into this world, and as a result, all are born sinful and in need of forgiveness and reconciliation with God (Rom 3:20–23); that the Word, the second person of the Trinity, became flesh (Jn 1:14) as our Lord and Savior, true God and true man in

one person (Col 1:19); that he came to earth as both God and man to save us from our sins (Phil 2:5–11; Col 2:9), that he was born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified for our sins, died, and was buried, he descended into hell (1 Pet 3:18–19) and rose again on the third day and ascended into heaven where he sits at the right hand of the Father and will judge the living and the dead on the last day. We believe in the Holy Spirit who leads us to repentance, calls us to faith, justifies us by grace through faith, and enlightens us with the Word of God as he inspired the Apostles and prophets; therefore we believe that all Christians of any community can have a living relationship with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit which the Spirit himself enables; it is the responsibility and privilege of all Christians to proclaim the saving Gospel to all who have not repented, believed and committed their lives to Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:18); we also believe that the Spirit calls and gathers all believers into his one, holy, catholic,⁴ apostolic Church where we strengthen and build one another up in the body of Christ as we receive his gifts of Baptism and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:23–34; 1 Cor 12:12; Mt 28:19; Mk 16:16; Mt 26:26–29). We look forward to the resurrection of the body and to the time when we will see God face to face and live with him forever (1 Cor 15; 1 Cor 13:12).

11. While we rejoice in holding these elements of faith in common, we also recognize that we are called to grow in understanding of those areas where there has not been full agreement, and address them directly. Two long-standing differences of great significance have been our understandings of the authority of Scripture and Tradition, and the role of the Church in salvation. There are other important areas of disagreement which we hope to address in future discussions, but due to limits of time and resources, in this text we will address only these two historically divisive issues.

12. Finally, in this introduction it is important to note that the Evangelical movement itself constitutes a highly differentiated ecumenical network. The World Evangelical Alliance brings together Evangelical Christians from Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist and Pentecostal traditions. This diversity has significant consequences particularly for ecclesiology—that is, questions pertaining to ministry, authority and ecclesial structures, sacraments, and the nature of the church. These Churches differ greatly in their relationship to the Catholic Church. In view of the doctrinal issues raised in our dialogue, such differences were clearly in evidence. The challenge is made more complex when considering that the Evangelical movement has chosen not to address ecclesiological differences among the members of the WEA, but rather to focus on cooperation in common prayer, evangelism, and witness.⁵

4 The word 'catholic' in the creed means 'universal'.

5 On the ecclesiological convergences and differences between the Evangelical and Catholic understandings, see *Church, Evangelization, and the Bonds of Koinonia; A Report of the International Consultation between the Catholic Church and the World Evangelical Alliance (1993–2002)*, especially Part 1, 'Catholicism, Evangelicals, and Koinonia', Sections B and C.

Method of the Consultation

13. The current round of consultations has built upon the Evangelical–Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission (1977–1984), the 1993 Venice Consultation between the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, and the *Church, Evangelization and the Bonds of Koinonia* document (2002). The current consultation brought together 13 participants from 10 different countries on 5 continents, ensuring that many different perspectives would be given voice in our discussions.

14. The members of this consultation were given the mandate to enter into conversation representing our diverse communities, seeking greater mutual understanding, and attempting to identify the state of our relations and how they might proceed appropriately and responsibly. Over the past six years, we met in São Paulo, Brazil; Rome, Italy; Chicago, USA; Guatemala City, Guatemala; Bad Blankenburg, Germany; and Saskatoon, Canada. In all of these places we met with local Evangelicals and Catholics and heard areas of concern and examples of cooperation in each of their regions.

At our meetings, we presented papers, explained our positions, argued, asked questions, prayed together (and separately) for God’s reconciling grace, gained insights—and asked more questions. We were not in the business of compromise and negotiation, but rather of respectful and frank conversation, aware that nothing other than a deep honesty, graciously articulated, would serve our communities well. When we gathered, we sought to be faithful to Jesus Christ even when we encountered disagreements. The way forward was for us firstly to map out convergences, building on previous consultations, and on the basis of our respective teachings and practices; secondly, to name aspects of the other tradition which give us encouragement, where we rejoice in seeing God at work, and where we may learn from the other; thirdly, with the help of the dialogue partner, to formulate questions to each other in a respectful and intelligent way (hence the term ‘fraternal’), thus identifying issues we were not able to resolve in this round of consultation, which still need to be addressed by our respective communities.

With mutual trust and respect, we have sought to undertake this task in a way which also records the understanding we have gained, the insights which allow us to pose the questions differently than we may have done prior to the current round of consultation. With prayer and a desire to be true to our calling and our convictions, we have posed questions that are intended to stimulate further discussion between Catholics and Evangelicals that will spill over into our own respective communities where we would like to see the conversation continue. It is our fervent hope that the Holy Spirit would enable us to go deeper in our self-understanding as we learn from each other about the God who loves us all and gave himself for us.

Part 1: The Word of God Is Living and Active: Evangelicals and Catholics Reflect Together on the Scriptures and the Apostolic Tradition

Introduction

15. Catholics and Evangelicals have long seen ourselves as standing in opposition to each other regarding the authority of Scripture, and its relation to Tradition. From the time of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, our respective positions seemed well summarized by two radically distinct alternatives: *Scripture alone* or *Scripture and Tradition*. Churches of the Reformation, which are an important part of an Evangelical inheritance, continue to be convinced that the Bible will always be the ultimate authority in matters of faith, doctrine and practice, that the church can and has erred, and that authority is only to be sought in the Word of God. Catholics have stressed the need for and the authority of the Church's teaching office in the interpretation of the Bible.⁶

16. Meeting in our present context, five hundred years after the beginning of the Reformation era, Evangelicals and Catholics taking part in this consultation were able to discern that we have come a long way from the disputes and battle lines of the 16th century. This is not to say that we are now in or nearing full agreement, but we have come to realize that we can rejoice in the growing centrality of the Scriptures in the lives of Catholics as well as Evangelicals. We also rejoice in the convergences apparent to us in our understanding of the significance of the Apostolic Tradition and the transmission of faith through the generations.⁷

17. Under the headings of 'Scripture', 'Apostolic Tradition', and 'Scripture and Tradition', we begin by identifying common ground or convergences; then proceed, in light of a deeper understanding of the other, by indicating areas where each finds encouraging developments within the ecclesial life of the other; then by posing, in a friendly but direct way, remaining questions that challenge the other community to articulate the theological foundations of its convictions in order to search for common ground.

1. The Scriptures

A. Our Common Ground

18. Through discussion, and a study of our respective documents, Evangelicals and Catholics have come to find much common ground regarding the revelation of God and the place of the Scriptures in the Church. We as Evangelicals and Catholics firmly believe that God has spoken to humanity, revealing his divine

6 Regarding the use of the word 'Church' in this document, see paragraphs 50 and following.

7 See section 2 on the Apostolic Tradition, beginning with paragraph 29.

self—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—to us, and also revealing God’s will for the human race. Together, we believe that the fullness of revelation is found in Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, the eternal Word made flesh. In Jesus, the innermost truth about God is revealed. Through his words and deeds, his miracles and teaching, and above all in his death for our sins and his resurrection he has freed us from sin and has brought redemption, has shown us the face of God, and has taught us what it is to be human.

19. After Jesus’ resurrection and ascension to the Father, the Holy Spirit descended upon the community of his disciples, who went forth proclaiming what they had received from and witnessed in Jesus. This proclamation was faithfully recorded in the books which eventually comprised the New Testament. Jesus himself had understood the Old Testament to be the written Word of God, revealed to the chosen people of Israel (Jn 5:39). By his authority, the Christian Church from its very beginning accepted the Old Testament (eventually alongside the New Testament) as the only written Word of God.⁸ The Bible is the written Word of God in an altogether singular way (2 Tim 3:16).

20. Catholics and Evangelicals rejoice in affirming together that the Scriptures are the highest authority in matters of faith and practice (2 Pet 1:20–21).⁹ The purpose of the Scriptures, consistent with the purpose of God’s revelation, is to lead people into faith in Christ, who is ‘the way, the truth and the life’ (Jn 14:6). Christians approach the Scriptures mindful of their internal coherence as the speech of God, and that they are to be read in light of the fullness of God’s revelation in Christ. We hold that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety were written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. God uses human authors with human language to communicate his Word through the sacred texts of Scripture. It follows that the Scriptures teach solidly, faithfully, without error and efficaciously leading us into all truth. We agree that we know Christ through the Scriptures with the help of the Holy Spirit, and hold the authenticity and historicity of what the Gospels record of the life, teaching and deeds, death and resurrection of Jesus. We await no further public revelation before the glorious coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1–2).

21. The Bible has a central role in all Christian ministry and in the worship and life of the Church. The use of the Scriptures in worship and teaching was essential to the shaping of the canon. In the first centuries, the Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, recognized and received from among many writings these 27 books as the canon of the New Testament. Although Evangelicals and Catholics have different views of the extent of the Old Testament canon that has been recognized, we can nonetheless agree that the Old Testament Scriptures

⁸ As stated in Lausanne Movement, *Cape Town Commitment*, 2010, Part 1.6: ‘We affirm that the Bible is the final written word of God, not surpassed by any further revelation, but we also rejoice that the Holy Spirit illumines the minds of God’s people so that the Bible continues to speak God’s truth in fresh ways to people in every culture.’

⁹ ⁹ Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* 79.

testify to the promise of the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ (Lk 24:27; Jn 5:39). These Scriptures are authoritative for the Church.

22. Evangelicals and Catholics are in agreement that prayer should accompany the reading and study of the Scriptures and that the Holy Spirit can and will lead us into all truth (Jn 16:13). We also agree that the written Word of God is foundational to theology and catechesis. As the Church Father Jerome said, 'Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of God.'¹⁰ Finally, Catholics and Evangelicals believe that we are called to shape our lives in all their dimensions according to the Scriptures. We firmly believe that the closer we come to Christ, the closer we come to one another; so too, the more we attend to the Scriptures and live by them, the closer we draw to God and to one another, as individuals and as communities.

B. Words of Encouragement to Each Other

23. As **Catholics**, we are encouraged by ...

- The Evangelicals' faithfulness to the great commission, their engagement in proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ and their zeal for evangelizing;
- The Evangelical commitment to a morality and ethics based on the Scriptures, and to a moral life lived according to the Scriptures;
- The place of Scripture in the devotional and theological life of Evangelicals;
- The recognition that Scripture needs to be read in community;
- The move among some Evangelicals towards reading Patristic interpretations of Scriptures (such as that found in the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* or *The Church's Bible*);
- Finally, the role the Bible has in shaping community among Evangelicals.

24. As **Evangelicals**, we are encouraged by ...

- The stronger witness to the Word of God in the Catholic Church of today. We rejoice in the renewed emphasis on Scripture as the foundation for faith and practice as found, for instance, in parts of Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* (1965) and in the Apostolic Exhortation from Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (2010);
- Seeing that the Scriptures are considered as 'the highest authority in matters of faith' (*Ut Unum Sint* 79) in the Catholic Church;
- The fact that Catholics see the written Word of God as authoritative and as the standard and foundation for all matters of faith and life;
- Finally, the Catholic Church's efforts with regard to the translation and distribution of the Scriptures among both clergy and laity and the further pastoral encouragement to not only have the Scriptures but to read and study them.

C. Fraternal Questions of Concern

25. As **Catholics**, we believe along with Evangelicals that the Scriptures are the normative account of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. With you, we believe that Jesus Christ is the definitive Word spoken by God. Catholics are also encouraged

10 Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Book 18, Prologue; PL 24:17b.

by the Evangelical acknowledgement of the oral tradition (*kerygma, viva vox evangelii*, the preached Word of God) preceding the written New Testament. Nonetheless, we would like to ask:

- Whether the Evangelicals’ equation at times of the Word of God with the Sacred Scripture adequately takes into consideration the Incarnation of the Word as a person rather than as a text?
- Does the principle of *sola Scriptura* and its identification of the Word with Scripture, with seemingly no reference to Tradition, unduly limit our receiving of God’s revelation?
- Does the Evangelical stance on Scripture alone sufficiently account for the ongoing value and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church in preserving her doctrine and teaching, especially in the articulation and development of the Tradition?
- We observe diverse interpretations of the Scriptures even among well-intentioned Christians. If the sense of the Sacred Scripture were plainly evident, as Evangelicals maintain, would it not be easier than it is to maintain unity among Christians?

26. Nonetheless, we are grateful that Evangelicals take the Scriptures and the challenges they present to us seriously in forming our understanding of who God is and how God works in the world, and have avoided relativizing the Scriptural message in addressing the modern world.

27. As **Evangelicals**, rejoicing in the growing role that Scripture has taken in the life of the Catholic Church, we would nonetheless like to ask Catholics ...

- We both agree that the holy Scriptures are the inspired Word of God and, therefore, are the true, unchangeable revelation of God. However, we continue to struggle with how, according to Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum* 9, ‘both sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of loyalty and reverence’—a basic restatement of the fourth session of the Council of Trent (1546). How are these positions compatible?
- Regarding the inerrancy of the Scriptures in *Dei Verbum* 11, with which we joyfully concur, we would like clarification on the implications of this stance on inerrancy and what it means in relationship to the challenges that the modern historical-critical method poses and which a number of interpreters within the contemporary Catholic Church seem to favor;
- How their understanding that the Bible is the supreme authority for faith and doctrine can be reconciled with the most recent dogmatic pronouncements since the 19th century (for instance, the 1854 dogma of the Immaculate Conception, or the 1950 dogma of the bodily assumption of Mary) which seem to us as Evangelicals to have little, if any, clear explicit Biblical support;
- And finally, we would like to ask Catholics about the authority given to Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament in the formation of doctrine when it seems that many in the ancient church distinguished the Apocryphal books from the canonical books as not being authoritative in matters of doctrine or practice.

28. None of these questions should take away from the fact that we are truly grateful for the stronger witness that Catholics have shown in their defense of Scriptural truth and our united appeal to the authority of Scripture in matters of faith and life. The fact that Scripture has become a growing focus in Catholic piety and church life is extremely encouraging to us as Evangelicals.

2. Apostolic Tradition

A. *Our Common Ground*

29. Catholics and Evangelicals, while looking back to the history of the spreading of the Gospel, recognize and rejoice in the action of the Holy Spirit in the mission of the church, evangelizing people and transforming cultures. The Holy Spirit has a history. We have witnessed that the Holy Spirit has never ceased to act in history by giving birth to true believers and summoning us to remain faithful to the revealed truth, ‘No one can say that “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit’ (1 Cor 12:3). Therefore, we listen to what our predecessors in faith have received from God, how they have understood the Scriptures, and how they have lived the Christian life (Heb 11).

30. Paul says, ‘What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also’ (2 Tim 2:2). This passing on of the faith is a dynamic process that continues in the life of the church at different times and places, with constant reference to the Scriptures, which remain the highest authority in matters of faith and life (cf. *Ut Unum Sint* 79). Catholics and Evangelicals believe that the revealed Word of God to which the apostolic church once and for all bore witness in the Scriptures is received and communicated through the ongoing life of the whole Christian community. As a church, led by the Spirit, generation after generation we pass on the apostolic witness that we have received from our forebears and teachers in the faith.

31. This Consultation has been able to affirm the above as valued and appreciated by Evangelicals and Catholics alike. We have defined ‘tradition’ differently, but we have all done so with reference to this dynamic process of passing on the apostolic faith in time. In this context, it is important to look back to the period of the Reformation. The Reformers were seeking to deal with traditions and practices that had arisen in the church that they believed not only had no Scriptural warrant but were in contradiction to Scripture. They were not seeking to jettison tradition altogether. Luther, and to a certain extent Calvin, had a critical, but overall favorable view of the tradition.¹¹ They saw much value in the creeds and the confessions of the church and often appealed to the ancient church as an

¹¹ The Reformers confessed the three ecumenical Creeds, Melancthon and Luther often quoted the Church Fathers, including many citations of them in the Lutheran *Book of Concord*, which later included a *Catalog of Testimonies* compiled by Jakob Andreae and Martin Chemnitz; for Calvin’s use of the Church Fathers, see also Anthony Lane’s *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 1991).

authority for their interpretation of Scripture. All of these fell within the purview of their understanding of tradition.

32. In our contemporary context, there is a shared sense of the post-modern critique of individualism by both Evangelicals and Catholics that realizes and recognizes the importance of community in strengthening and supporting the individual members of the body of Christ. Both Evangelicals and Catholics understand that the individual in concert with the whole community throughout space and time—past, present and future—are important components for supporting the body of Christ and remaining in the faith that has been passed on from generation to generation through the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit.

33. Evangelicals and Catholics both can have a critical appreciation of the contributions the Church Fathers have made to the Christian faith, even as we continue to grow in our understanding of tradition’s role in the subsequent articulation of the faith of the Apostolic community. Further exploration is needed into the role of the historic liturgy in explicating and internalizing Scripture, and aspects of the sacramental life of the church which have had such an enduring history; these are also areas where there is much more we can learn from one another.

34. While giving thanks for some common ground in this dialogue, we need to note that Evangelicals and Catholics also have significant differences in their understanding of tradition and that these remain matters for further discussion.

35. The Catholic Church makes a key distinction when it treats the subject of tradition. In its primary sense, Tradition is the living transmission of what the apostles, empowered by the Holy Spirit, learned and handed down to us from Jesus’ teaching and life. This ‘is to be distinguished from the various theological, disciplinary, liturgical or devotional traditions, born in the local churches over time ... (and) adapted to different places and times, in which the great Tradition is expressed. In the light of Tradition, these traditions can be retained, modified or even abandoned’ under the guidance of the Church’s teaching office,¹² which ‘is not above the Word of God, but serves it, teaching only what has been handed on’ (*Dei Verbum* 10).

36. Evangelicals remain uncomfortable with any concept of tradition that could possibly elevate tradition above Scripture. Catholics would agree. However, how this works out in our different communities continues to be a point of contention. Nonetheless, we all want to affirm an openness to tradition that does not contradict Scripture.

B. Words of Encouragement to Each Other

37. As **Evangelicals**, we are encouraged by and have benefited from ...

- The fact that the Catholic Church has fostered the *ressourcement* movement¹³ in

¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC] 84.

¹³ A movement in the 20th century among Catholic scholars that engaged in a recovery of the ancient sources for use in liturgy, theology, and Biblical interpretation.

- a recovery of the full patristic tradition for the whole church;
 - The Catholic Church's commitment to upholding the historic deposit of faith (*depositum Fidei*)—the unchanging truth of the Christian faith (Jude 3; 1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 1:13–14)—in the face of the challenges that modern secularism and its philosophical values pose;
 - The fact that Reformation emphases, such as the centrality of the Word and the importance of preaching in worship, are considered and recognized as part of the rich tradition of the whole church.
38. As **Catholics**, we are encouraged by and have benefited from ...
- The increasing Evangelical recognition of the continuous action of the Holy Spirit in the 2,000-year history of the church;
 - The Evangelical engagement with patristic writings and other sources of the Church of the first centuries (*ad fontes*) by some Evangelical scholars and their communities;
 - Seeing among some Evangelicals an understanding of the differentiation between Apostolic Tradition and local traditions.

C. Fraternal Questions of Concern

39. As **Evangelicals**, we have learned the reasons for some aspects of Catholic popular piety that may have positive benefit. We have also been pleased to hear that in many instances Catholics have sought to address some of the excesses in their piety.¹⁴ We would nonetheless like to discern from Catholics ...

- Whether there is a critical principle that Catholics use to address what Evangelicals view as extra-biblical teachings that form the basis for certain aspects of Catholic Tradition, for example, the doctrines of purgatory and indulgences, and the dogma of the Immaculate Conception?
- How do you ensure that the development of doctrine and the appearance of new traditions remain faithful to the teaching of the whole of Scripture if some doctrines and traditions seem to be attested more from an implicit Scriptural attestation rather than an explicit Scriptural witness?
- Mindful that Evangelical piety has its own share of questions concerning our own practices, Evangelicals nonetheless would like to ask Catholics how they deal with a piety that often seems to be shaped more by tradition(s) than by Scripture (for example, Marian piety and the cult of the saints)?

40. Again, these questions should not detract from what we can say and do together as we rejoice in the faith once received and passed on throughout all generations under the guidance of the Holy Spirit who has promised to lead us into all truth (Jn 16:13).

41. As **Catholics**, we have come to a new appreciation of how Evangelicals increasingly speak of the work of the Holy Spirit in the history of the Church, and

¹⁴ Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy* (Vatican City, 2001).

how some Evangelicals are turning to the Church Fathers. But we would ask:

- How does the evaluation of whether to accept or reject what the Church Fathers have to say occur? For example, in addition to Baptism and Eucharist, why are what Catholics refer to as other sacraments a challenge for Evangelicals to accept when the church in the first centuries accepted them as such (and some of them have explicit Scriptural warrant, for instance, forgiveness of sins, Jn 20:23 and Mt 16:19, and the sacrament of the sick, Jas 5:14–15)?
- Is the tendency to rediscover the Church Fathers a Global North development, or is this trend shared by Evangelicals in the Global South? In what sense is the teaching of the Church Fathers affecting the life of the Church?
- We have been made aware through our consultation that the World Evangelical Alliance brings together Christian communities with a common statement of faith, but also with great diversity, including diverging understandings of tradition. There are those who see tradition as of minimal importance to the present and future life of the church and those who are increasingly attentive to tradition. What are the values at stake in this process? Given your vision of unity and the diversity among Evangelicals, how do you discern whether the unity you uphold is a sufficient response to the summons to unity in the New Testament (Jn 17:20–21; 1 Cor 1:10)?

42. Even as we ask these questions of brotherly concern, seeking further clarification, we rejoice in the faithful witness we have seen among Evangelicals to the unchanging truth of the Gospel.

3. Scripture and Tradition

A. *Our Common Ground*

43. There has been mutual suspicion and distrust, and perhaps a bit of caricature of one another's views regarding Scripture and tradition and the relationship between the two. Behind such criticism and distrust lie not only misrepresentations and misinterpretations but also real differences in doctrine and practice that have divided us and continue to prevent us from testifying to our unity in faith (Jn 17:11). As Evangelicals and Catholics, we seek to live as disciples of Jesus and come together in the task of mutual conversation, consolation, and the search for reconciliation. Our goal is to come to a clearer understanding of the truth of God's Word even as we acknowledge the need to be taught by our mutual, as well as our separated pasts. The words of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, remind us, however, that 'our quarrelling ancestors were in reality much closer to each other when in all their disputes they still knew that they could only be servants of one truth which must be acknowledged as being as great and as pure as it has been intended for us by God.'¹⁵

44. There is a realization among both Evangelicals and Catholics that Scripture

15 Joseph Ratzinger, *Church, Ecumenism and Politics* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 98.

need not necessarily be pitted over against tradition or over against the Church, nor need tradition and church teaching be opposed to Scripture. Both Evangelicals and Catholics have seen progress in moving beyond the disputes of the 16th century with the Reformers and Trent, even while acknowledging the continuing validity of many of their critical insights.

In the context of conversations with other worldwide communions deriving from the Reformation, the Catholic Church has gained insights and come to a greater appreciation of the Reformers. These dialogues have made significant progress in articulating a shared understanding of the relationship between Scripture and tradition.¹⁶

There is a noticeable return among many Evangelicals to the sources (*ad fontes*), which includes reading the ancient Christian writers, gaining a new appreciation for the Creeds of the church, and becoming reacquainted with their Christian past before the 16th century. In an increasing number of Evangelical circles at the beginning of the 21st century, the tradition and insights of the Fathers, as well as those who came after, are being appealed to in aiding Biblical interpretation and doctrinal exegesis, albeit with a critical eye, something Catholics also would affirm. Evangelicals would stop short of saying that the interpretation of the Fathers is authoritative, but have also begun to realize that they ignore the interpretation of the Fathers to their own peril. The Fathers knew their Bibles better than most of us. They are our teachers in the faith, teachers who have years if not, cumulatively, centuries of experience. We can also learn much from their doctrinal treatises which were, more often than not, simply focused exegesis that took into account the whole of Scripture in explicating a particular doctrine.

We have together identified what might be called an interweaving and interconnection between Scripture and tradition.¹⁷ Tradition can serve as an important touchstone for the interpretation of Scripture and its explication of doctrine, even as Evangelicals remain committed to *sola scriptura*.

B. Words of Encouragement to Each Other

45. As Evangelicals, we are encouraged by ...

- The movement we perceive occurring with many—both laity and clergy—in the Catholic Church who see the increasing importance of Scriptural study in their worship and devotional lives;
- The insistence of Catholics on the importance of the community of the church in our encounter with Scripture, while still recognizing the importance of individual conscience, personal conversion and the value of our own Evangelical sense of a deepening personal relationship with Jesus Christ;
- The discerning eye of the Catholic reading of the Church Fathers, in whom

¹⁶ Cf. Walter Kasper, *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue* (London: Continuum, 2009), 87–89.

¹⁷ Another term that has been used is 'coinherence'. See *Evangelicals and Catholics Together, Your Word Is Truth* (2002) for further explanation.

there is much wisdom to be found, notably in their exegesis of Scripture. They are our common teachers, but Scripture is the authoritative text.

46. As Catholics, we are encouraged by ...

- The Evangelical reading of the Church Fathers and the recognition by them of the reverence the Fathers held for the Sacred Scripture; the growing Evangelical recognition of the importance of the patristic interpretation in engaging Sacred Scripture;
- The value of fraternal correction by prominent Evangelical leaders as a ‘sort of authority’ in the Evangelical world;
- The keeping of a *sensus fidelium* among those in the Evangelical movement witnessing to a continuity of the Biblical witness;
- A growing attentiveness among Evangelicals regarding the importance of community particularly in strengthening the individual members within the context of the Christian community.

C. Fraternal Questions of Concern

47. Evangelicals realize in light of all these encouraging signs and the convergences we have found, there is much to celebrate. And yet questions still remain that must be addressed. We would still like to ask Catholics ...

- How the statement that ‘the relationship between Sacred Scripture, as the highest authority in matters of faith, and Sacred Tradition, as indispensable to the interpretation of the Word of God’ (*Ut Unum Sint* 79) can be reconciled with the statement of *Dei Verbum* that ‘both Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture are to be accepted and venerated with the same sense of devotion and reverence’ (*Dei Verbum* 9), the latter of which to us seems to put Scripture and Tradition on the same level?
- In light of new relationships developing between Evangelicals and Catholics, how the principle of *Sola Scriptura* has been received and incorporated into the life of contemporary Catholics and Catholic theology?
- Recognizing our own sinfulness and need for correction, Evangelicals would further like to ask Catholics if the Church can recognize mistakes in its tradition expressed in its devotional piety, in light of human fallibility, and if so, could those mistakes be corrected in the light of Scripture?
- Since Paul exhorts us ‘not to go beyond what is written’ (1 Cor 4:6) and even the people of Berea in Acts 17:11 examined the Scriptures to see if everything the Apostles said was true, how therefore would Catholics reconcile this with papal infallibility?
- Understanding that on the one hand Christ has promised that his Holy Spirit would lead his church ‘into all truth’ (Jn 16:13), but on the other hand that Scripture itself declares that ‘all Scripture is inspired by God’ (2 Tim 3:16), Evangelicals would want to ask Catholics if the guidance of the Holy Spirit works in the same way in the subsequent life of tradition as it does in Scriptural inspiration of the written text?
- Is there a sense of what Evangelicals call *ecclesia semper reformanda* (the

church always reforming) in the Catholic Church today?

- In light of the Catholic stance on Scripture and Tradition, how do Catholics deal with clergy and lay members, nuns and professors at universities, for instance, who disagree with Scripture and the Church? What is the process for dissent and is it followed?

48. **Catholics** also realize the helpful convergence that is developing between Evangelicals and Catholics in the mutual affirmation of the authoritative nature of Scripture and an increasing appreciation of tradition. We still wish to ask Evangelicals the following questions:

- We see the strong Evangelical practice of using Scripture to interpret Scripture, working with an understanding of the internal coherence of the biblical message. We also appreciate your understanding that the Scriptures are read in the context of the Christian community while stressing the role of the Holy Spirit in the reading and interpretation of Scripture. Yet we note that among Evangelicals, just as among Catholics, differing and sometimes conflicting interpretations of the Scriptures arise. Without reference to a magisterium, how do Evangelicals maintain unity and guard against internal conflict in their interpretation of Sacred Scripture? What role does tradition play in the interpretation of Scripture? Faced with differing interpretations of Scripture, what is the methodology for discernment and discipline within the Church?
- Evangelicals have maintained a strong traditional morality, for which we are grateful. We nonetheless want to ask how you guard against moral relativism when it arises in the teaching of individual pastors or lay people?
- Given that Evangelicals believe that the Holy Spirit is active in history and that the Spirit leads us to unity, where do you see the Spirit at work in the Reformation period which brought about division in the Church? Is the Holy Spirit active solely in the Reformers and their communities or also in the Catholic Church of that period? How are the 16th-century Reformers viewed by Evangelicals today, and what role do their teachings play in the life of Evangelicals? How do communities formed after the Reformation period link themselves to the Reformation?
- Liturgical renewal has been a pronounced feature of ecclesial life over the past century. We see a diversity of liturgical and spiritual practices within Evangelical worship and devotional life, at times drawing on practices that derive from the early church. Could Evangelicals look to the sacramental and liturgical forms expressed in the period of the Church Fathers as an expression of the Word of God in the life of the Church? If so, how might this affect doctrine and practice?

49. Rejoicing in the saving message of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, who died for sinners to bring them forgiveness and life, Catholics and Evangelicals together affirm that Scripture is the authoritative rule and norm for faith and life. Jesus Christ, the Word through whom God has revealed himself, speaks through and in his Word to a world in urgent need of the Gospel. God has also given his church his Holy Spirit who not only inspired the Scriptures but ensures that

the truth of the Gospel endures and is transmitted in the life of the church as it proclaims that Gospel truth anew in every day and age. Differences remain concerning how we perceive Tradition and its relationship to Scripture and concerning the level of authority Tradition holds. Ongoing mutual questioning does not, however, bring our conversation to an end, but should motivate each of us to dig deeper into our theology, practice, and piety, and continue our discussion for the sake of the Gospel and its mission. Only as we stand together with the Word facing the world through the power of the Spirit can we hope to offer a message that has stood the test of time and remains unchanging. To this world, we offer Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever (Heb 13:8).

Part 2: God’s Gift of Salvation in the Church: Evangelicals and Catholics Reflect Together on Salvation and the Church

A. Our Common Ground

50. Christ’s redeeming death and resurrection took place once and for all in history. Christ’s death on the cross, the culmination of his whole life of obedience, was the one, perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the world. There can be no repetition of or addition to what was then accomplished once for all by Christ.¹⁸ The gift of salvation is freely given, freely received (Rom 3:24; 1 Cor 2:12). For Catholics and Evangelicals alike, the question of salvation in Jesus Christ is of supreme importance; it plays a defining role in our lives of faith and in the shaping of our theologies. Salvation is a free gift of God (Eph 2:8–9). It does not come simply by being born of a Christian family, not even by being a formal member of a Christian church; it is God’s gracious initiative. ‘Salvation belongs to the Lord’ (Ps 3:8). Salvation denotes God’s total plan and desire for humanity and responds to the fundamental human need for redemption. Acts of the Apostles assures us that this salvation comes to us through Jesus, and that ‘there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12).

51. Wherever two or three come together in that name, Christ is there (Mt 18:20). The Scriptures tell us that from the very beginning the Church was part of God’s plan of salvation (Eph 1:4–10, 22–23). Beginning with Adam and Eve and extending throughout the covenant history recorded in Scripture, God has formed for himself a people, Israel, who are called out (*ekklesia*) from the world into a community that is then sent back out to be a light to the nations (Is 60:3). The fullness of this community is found in Christ the Word Incarnate, Israel reduced to One, who came to earth to redeem his people by saving them from their sins through his suffering, death on the cross, and his resurrection to life. God made known to the world this plan of salvation in his Son (Jn 3:16) who has brought

¹⁸ Neither Catholics nor Evangelicals hold to the idea that Christ is re-sacrificed in the Eucharist by the presiding priest.

forth a new covenant people (Jer 31:31–34; Rom 9) in the community of His Church. He tells us that he himself will build this Church and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it (Mt 16:18).

Christ tells us later how he provides for his Church in Matthew 18:15–20 and John 20:23 by ensuring that the forgiveness of sins that he won for us and for our salvation is and always will be central to the purpose and message of the church. He has given the gift of ministers to his Church (1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11–13) who are then called to be stewards of the mysteries and servants of God's people (1 Cor 4:1). The primary task to which Christ has called the Church, its ministers, and people is to go and make disciples, baptizing and teaching all that Christ has commanded us (Mt 28:19–20). He gave the promised Holy Spirit to his Church at Pentecost to empower the Church in its mission. As such, the Church is evangelized by God, but it also evangelizes for God. The disciples who are created by this work of God the Holy Spirit are then cultivated and grow in their faith as a community of believers (Acts 2:42–47) whose faith and trust is in the One who has saved them. The Spirit flourishes in this community, which Christ has called his Church, enlivening it with his gifts (Acts 2:1–4; 1 Cor 12; Rom 8:10–11) to witness to the world the love of God while also strengthening and building one another up in the body of Christ (1 Thess 5:11).

52. The Apostle Paul provides two primary metaphors (there are others) which describe this community. 1 Corinthians 12 describes the Church as the body of Christ with Christ himself as the head. Apart from the head, there is no body, just as there are no branches without a vine (Jn 15). Salvation comes by being grafted on to the body of Christ through the work of the Spirit since no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3) and a branch cut off from the vine will wither and die (Jn 15:1–6). As Jesus said, apart from him we can do nothing (Jn 15:5). The body cannot exist apart from the Spirit, nor can it exist apart from the head which is Christ. But with the head and the Spirit there is indeed a body, a communion of forgiven saints who, animated by the Spirit, produce works which God prepared in advance for us to do, not to merit salvation but to give glory to him (Eph 2:10) and to draw still others to his body, the Church (Mt 5:16; 28:19–20).

53. A second metaphor for the Church related to that of the body is what Paul presents in Ephesians 5. There he presents the imagery of the Church as the bride of Christ, with Christ, again 'as the head of the Church, his body, of which he is the Savior ... who loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless' (Eph 5:23, 25–27). In this metaphor, we see the sacrificial giving of the Bridegroom's very life in order to present the bride as his own by virtue of giving his own flesh on the cross. Through his sacrifice of himself, Christ has cleansed his bride, presenting her pure and undefiled, so that he also may take her to be his own to live with him in holiness and righteousness. The Church is not the one who sacrificed, nor is it the one who cleanses. Rather it is

the Bridegroom who sacrifices himself for his bride and cleanses her, he is the one who feeds and cares for her, i.e., for the members of his body (Eph 5:29–30). The bride, the Church, is in this sense joined to and submits to her Beloved; as such, she does what he himself has given her to do, promising that he will be with her until the very end of the age (Mt 28:19–20).

54. The Church, then, is God’s gift to the world. While not all Evangelicals agree that the Creeds are authoritative, Catholics and Evangelicals can affirm that in the Creeds we found an expression of core Biblical teaching in many areas of doctrine, including the Church. After professing the Christian faith in God the Father and his work, in our Lord Jesus Christ and his life, and in the Holy Spirit and his sanctification of believers, we say that we believe ‘in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church’. Christians profess faith in the Church which exhibits the marks of unity, holiness, catholicity¹⁹ and adherence to the apostolic faith and teaching.

But we do not believe in the Church in the same way that we believe in the divine persons of the Trinity confessed earlier in the Creed.²⁰ When we say ‘we believe in God the Father ... in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God ... and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life’, we profess our faith in the work of salvation of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit. We put our confidence and faith in our triune God. We trust him and commit ourselves totally to him, our rock and our salvation. Our faith is in God alone, our salvation comes from him (Ps 62:2). The Church and its ministers are in service to this salvation wherever the marks of the true Church are found. The pure preaching of the Gospel and the right use of the sacraments/ordinances which Christ commanded his Church to observe (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:15–16; Lk 22:19–20; 1 Cor 11:23–25) are life-giving gifts for the nurturing and feeding of his flock.²¹

55. The Church is in service to the Gospel, as Paul says, because when Christ has reconciled us to himself he has also given to us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that ‘God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation’ (2 Cor 5:19). The world will not hear this message of reconciliation apart from the Church, her ministers, and her people, who are to proclaim this message so that people may hear it (Rom 10:14–17; Mt 28:19–20). ‘But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?’ (Rom 10:14 NRSV).

Therefore, the Church has the obligation and privilege to preach the Good

¹⁹ See footnote 4.

²⁰ The English translation of the Creed can be misleading, because in Latin we say: *Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem ... Et in unum Dominum Iesum Christum ... Et in Spiritum Sanctum ... Et unam, sanctam, catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam*. We ‘believe in’ the Divine Persons, but the Latin text does not include ‘in’ before ‘the Church’.

²¹ Catholics would also point to Acts 2:11 (Confirmation); Jn 20:22–23 (Penance and Reconciliation); Jas 5:14–15 (Anointing of the Sick); Num 11:25; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 5:10 (Holy Orders); and Matt 19:6; Gen 1:28; Mk 10:9 (Matrimony) to refer to the other five sacraments.

News of Jesus Christ. The Church, as the body of Christ, is the usual place where the offer of salvation is heard and extended. By the power of the Holy Spirit, she proclaims Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, with a view to persuading people to repent and come to him personally and so be reconciled to God and become part of his community of faith (Mt 4:17).

Salvation presupposes a conversion, a turning to God, and regeneration as we receive God's grace, resulting in a reorientation of life according to the new life revealed in Jesus Christ. For many if not most Evangelicals, baptism is the primary means by which God incorporates people into his Church (Mt 28:19). Once in the Church, it is expected that members of Christ's body will live out their Christian life in faithful service to him and one another.

B. Words of Encouragement to Each Other

56. As **Evangelicals** we are encouraged by:

- The seriousness shown by Catholics in upholding the Apostles' Creed especially as it speaks of the glorious reality of the Triune God and his gracious work that brings about 'the remission of sins';
- The renewed emphasis in Catholic teaching on the biblical metaphors of the church as they also relate to salvation (e.g. the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Spirit), the diminished role of past understandings of the church that seemed to exclude other Christians from the possibility of salvation (e.g. *societas perfecta*, *ark of salvation*); and the view that 'separated churches and ecclesial communities' are used by Christ as a means of salvation;
- The more recent focus of the church and her ministers on the ministry and preaching of the Word as an increasingly important aspect of Christian faith and life both corporately and individually;
- The communal dimension of salvation we see evidenced over against individualistic tendencies which have characterized some trends in Protestantism;
- The insistence on the centrality of conversion, the many Catholic initiatives to take the Gospel of salvation to the whole world, as well as the more recent emphasis on a personal encounter with Jesus Christ for salvation.

57. As **Catholics**, we are encouraged by ...

- The Evangelical trust and confidence in what God has done for us in Jesus Christ and the continuous loyalty of Evangelicals to the biblical teaching regarding God's promise of salvation as a matter of primary importance;
- The recognition that the strong Evangelical focus on the saving character of Christ's death is coupled with an equally strong focus on his resurrection from the dead and the hope which comes from it;
- The Evangelical conviction that there is no such a thing as a completely private Christianity; in other words, their understanding of salvation as relational, linking conversion and regeneration by water and the Word, leading to new life in Christ; and the conviction that conversion to Jesus Christ necessarily entails incorporation into the Church;

- The Evangelical conviction that salvation is not reducible to such things as formal church membership, but summons forth an active life of discipleship;
- The Evangelical understanding that Christian faith leads to a strong commitment to evangelization and mission for the sake of the salvation of all.

C. Fraternal Comments and Questions of Concern

58. As foregrounding for our questions, we as Evangelicals would like to, first of all, make the following observation. We have noted and appreciated the Catholic emphasis in our discussions on the love and mercy of God when dealing with the question of the assurance of salvation. We can see that Catholics are convinced of both the love of God and the mercy of God, as well as the fact that God takes sin seriously. Therefore, when Catholics are asked about whether they can be sure of salvation, they will respond in hope and trust but also with what appears to Evangelicals as uncertainty. The uncertainty stems from the fact, they tell us, of being confronted by almighty God who is transcendent and holy but also all merciful, and yet still before whom we are unworthy because of our sin; this is the cause for the Catholic reticence about language of assurance of salvation, whereas Evangelicals speak of their confidence in being saved. But Evangelicals have come to realize that when Catholics speak of hope, they do so in the context of Romans 5:1–5 and 8:24–25 where it speaks of a hope that does not disappoint which is grounded in Christ. We also understand that Catholics are also concerned that the doctrine of the assurance of salvation of which Evangelicals speak can be misused to imply that those who do not express such assurance do not have faith, which is indeed what some Evangelicals often mean to say.

59. As Evangelicals, we appreciate the insight into the mercy of God and the humility that Catholics express in the face of the holiness of God. We understand that they do not feel it is their place to speak for God in saying that they can be sure of their own personal salvation: they would consider this as presuming on God. When Catholics are asked whether they are saved, they often will say ‘I hope’, or ‘I trust.’ As Evangelicals, we have come to realize through our discussion that when Catholics say they hope they are saved, they are not necessarily saying ‘I hope I can do something to please God’ or ‘I hope I’m good enough’, but they may well be saying that they trust that God is love and that God is faithful, and they are putting their hope in that love and faithfulness which is beyond anything they or we deserve. This love is revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And they hope for salvation, then, because they have experienced the mercy of God through the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives, and trust in his promise. To say, however, that they are saved as an accomplished fact, we understand, would be perceived as presumption on their part and is not in line with Catholic teaching.

60. Evangelicals would still like to ask Catholics, however:

- What practical hope and comfort can you give to those with troubled consciences or those who have fear concerning their eternal destiny, if they can only offer hope (Abraham’s ‘hope against hope’, Rom 4:18)? Can Catholics

live with the hope of the promise without the assurance of the fulfillment? What makes Catholics hesitate or doubt when we have the clear promises in Scripture that forgiveness is ours in Christ Jesus and that Christ himself wills our salvation (see Gen 3:15; Ex 15:2–3; Ps 62:2–3, 6–9; Is 53:3–12; Jn 3:16, 10:27–30; Rom 8:1–5, 26–39; 2 Cor 5:17–21; Eph 1:1–14, 2:8–10; 1 Thess 5:9–11; 1 Tim 2:4; as well as many others)?

- In the Second Vatican Council, you speak of the possibility of God offering salvation even to those who have not received the Gospel (*Lumen Gentium* 16) and that this belief is grounded in God’s mercy. We Evangelicals have come to appreciate through our discussions the fact that you want to emphasize the mercy and love of God and that this view is grounded in the confidence you have that God loves all and wants all to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). The fact that Scripture does say that God is love (1 Jn 4:8), that God will be all in all (Eph 1:23), and every knee will bow in heaven and earth and under the earth (Phil 2:10–11) do emphasize the mercy of God, which we would also want to emphasize. And yet we still wonder if saying something on which Scripture has not spoken, i.e., the view that even those who have not received the Gospel can be saved, could still be misconstrued by some Catholics to lead to the conclusion that there is no need to evangelize (Mt 28:19–20)?
- From the Evangelical point of view, Christ’s forgiveness, in view of the Last Judgement and beyond, not only does away with sin as enmity against God but also all the consequences of sin. There is no further need for cleansing after death because that cleansing has occurred by Christ on the cross which we appropriate by faith. In our discussions, when Evangelicals heard Catholics speak of purgatory, we heard you speak about the transforming work of God’s mercy that you believe goes on even after death, where the purging of the effects of sin still needs to occur before one approaches the throne of God. While we understand that you do not see this purging as meritorious, we still would like to ask on the one hand where this can be found in Scripture, but also why purgatory is still needed if Christ has redeemed us completely in both soul and body? In this connection, we would also like to ask: If you truly believe in an all-merciful and loving God who redeems us in Christ and that it is not by your merits that you are saved and salvation is given, why do you continue to use the language of the treasury of merit, satisfaction, and indulgences?
- As far as churches which baptize infants, we require preparation for baptism. We Evangelicals understand that Catholics too require preparation for baptism and spiritual formation for the parents of the children, which is very important. But we also understand that the family many times does not appear in church after the Baptism which seems to make Baptism simply into a work that is performed. We would like to ask what follow-up occurs when an infant is baptized? Is the impression given that Baptism is just simply a work that needs to be performed? We were glad to hear that there is an emphasis on catechesis which needs to occur with the baptismal family, but what is the role of discipleship in relation to Baptism? Is the Church doing enough after the child is

baptized to ensure disciples are being made? What is the role of the clergy in this as well as the larger Church community?

- We have come to understand in our discussions that the sacraments play a central role in salvation, especially Baptism and the celebration of the Eucharist. We also have discerned that the efficacy of the sacraments in the Catholic Church is largely bound and tied together with the sacraments of ordination and more specifically episcopal ordination. On the one hand, we are grateful to hear you saying that our sacramental acts do accomplish something, although you are unclear what that something is. We also want to reaffirm that we know you do recognize our baptisms as valid and do not require a rebaptism. Nonetheless, because you tie the efficacy and benefit of the sacraments to the episcopal orders we still need to ask: Does not the way that your church restricts the full benefit of church acts to the ordained clergy of the Catholic Church still end up devaluing and ultimately calling into question what, if any, benefit occurs for the salvation of members in Evangelical churches? In other words, if the sacraments are central to the life of the church, but the sacraments of Evangelical churches (at least those which have them) do not accomplish as much in our churches as they do in Catholic churches, does not that end up saying that our ministry is less effective than the ministry which occurs in the Catholic Church? This also becomes a key issue with regard to absolution. Can Evangelicals who confess their sins and receive forgiveness from their pastor—or from a fellow Christian in those without ordained clergy—know for sure that their sins are forgiven?

61. As foregrounding to our questions, we as Catholics would note that our conversations have brought us much clarity into the Evangelical understanding of the assurance of salvation. As Catholics, we had thought that when you spoke of having been saved, you were saying that there was nothing further to be done; that you had a ‘once saved always saved’ mentality; and that you believed that you could then do whatever you wished and it wouldn’t affect your salvation. We have now come to understand that this moment of assurance of salvation is a decisive point to be followed by turning back to Christ day by day, trusting in him only and referring daily to what God has done for you by his grace. We have been grateful to learn that you stress the need to be diligent in daily living your faithfulness to Christ through repentance and faith.

62. We have also learned that Evangelicals distinguish between certainty and security. In terms of a morally rational self-awareness of Christians, there may never be a certainty of salvation in the formal sense, but a certainty which gives peace with God to the conscience burdened with temptations. This happens when with faith you boldly appeal to God’s promise in his Word in the face of your own weakness and temptation. We had heard in your claim of assurance or certainty a presumption, perhaps even an arrogance, in the self-referential claim that ‘you have decided’ to follow Jesus and were thus saved. Now we hear your focus on the promise of God, and your trust in that promise, which places things squarely on Christ’s shoulders. Your assurance doesn’t come from yourself, but from the work

that God has done in Jesus Christ and in his paschal mystery. The Gospel is the Good News of the promise of salvation, and you trust God and his promises, and thus have assurance and certainty.

There is not as big a gap between Catholic language of trust and hope and Evangelical language of assurance as we had thought. We too believe that God wants to forgive and redeem us, that God the Son died to forgive us and to reveal a boundless mercy to us. We too have heard this promise in the Scriptures, have felt it stirring in our inmost being, and hear in the Gospel an invitation to live in joy because God is doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves, in all of this, we have found more common ground than we had anticipated.

63. Catholics nonetheless would like to ask Evangelicals the following questions:

- We often find the language that we hear from you—in the personal claim that 'I am saved' and in the hymn refrains 'Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine', and 'I have decided to follow Jesus'—seems to place the focus on the person's decision and personal conviction, and not God's decision. The subsequent question to others 'are you saved?' often lacks the nuance of the way in which God calls and converts us. In practice, how does this language move past a self-referential focus to place the emphasis on the great mercy and faithfulness of God?
- We have come to understand that there is some divergence among Evangelicals about whether or not you can lose your salvation and that there is no one definition of 'assurance of salvation'. Addressing in particular Evangelicals who hold that the gift once received cannot be lost, how do you deal with those who turn away from the faith or don't seem to take seriously the daily challenge to be faithful to the Gospel? How do you deal with sin committed after giving your life to the Lord? And how do you interpret Heb 6:4–6, which speaks of turning away from the Gospel after having "tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come"?
- How does the confidence that comes with the assurance of salvation allow you, in your evangelizing efforts, to recognize with humility the many ways that God has been at work in the other (mindful that God's engagement with others is always larger than our efforts); in particular, what is an appropriate pastoral approach to those who do not claim the same assurance of salvation, although they confess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and profess the Gospel of salvation?
- When Catholics listen to Evangelicals, we understand the desire for an explicit biblical warrant for doctrines such as purgatory. We also understand that Evangelicals wish to affirm the efficacy of the saving action of Jesus' death on the cross. For Catholics, purgatory is the state of those who die in God's friendship, assured of their eternal salvation, but who still have need of purification to enter into the happiness of heaven. We believe that because of the communion of saints, the faithful who are still pilgrims on earth are able to help the souls in purgatory by offering prayers in suffrage for them, especially the Eucharist. While the explicit scriptural warrant for purgatory is in the book of Maccabees in the Septuagint (2 Macc 12:46), which is not accepted as

Scriptural by Evangelicals, there is reference in the Old Testament to punishment for sin even after one has received forgiveness (2 Sam 12:13–18). In the New Testament, as well as in the Old Testament (Ps 15:1–2), there is reference to the need for purification because nothing unclean will enter the presence of God in heaven (Rev 21:27 and Mt 5:48). Heb 12:22–23 speaks about a way, a process, through which the spirits of the “just” are “made perfect.” 1 Cor 3:13–15 and Mt 12:32 affirm there is a place or state of being other than Heaven or Hell. While affirming the once for all saving power of the cross, which Catholics also affirm, might there be an openness from Evangelicals to the possibility of recognizing such an intermediate state of purification as compatible with Scripture? Could you understand the communion of saints as having a role to play in this period of purification?

- Regarding the possibility of salvation for the non-Christians, we have heard from you that Evangelicals do not want to presume on the mercy of God and extend hope beyond what Scripture explicitly states in this regard. We also appreciate and agree that the Gospel is to be proclaimed to all creatures, and share a sense of obligation and privilege to preach Jesus Christ to those who have never heard the Gospel message. Yet faced with those who died without having heard the Gospel preached, or heard it proclaimed in a way that lacked integrity, we would suggest that the great mercy revealed in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus’ dying and rising gives us grounds for a profound hope that such persons should not be automatically excluded from God’s salvific plan and they too can obtain eternal salvation through Jesus Christ. The Second Vatican Council noted that a sharing in the paschal mystery is made possible “not only to Christians but to all people of good will in whose hearts grace is secretly at work. Since Christ died for everyone, and since the ultimate calling of each of us comes from God and is, therefore, a universal one, we are obliged to hold that the holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in this paschal mystery in a manner known to God” (*Gaudium et Spes* 22; cf. *Lumen Gentium* 16, *Ad Gentes* 7). While it is neither our mission nor our biblical calling to give a definite answer to what God will do, we trust that God’s mercy is much greater than ours and dare to hope that God’s offer of salvation will extend well beyond the parameters of the Church. This affirmation, however, does not exempt Christians from proclaiming the Gospel unto the ends of the earth; this mission remains of utmost importance. We would ask Evangelicals if the same paschal mystery which allows you to speak of an assurance of salvation for believers would not allow you to have a more hope-filled view of the possibility of God offering salvation to nonbelievers in a way that is known only to God?
- In our conversations, we have appreciated the emphasis Evangelicals place on eternal salvation, which of course is central to the Scriptures. And yet in our conversations, we often heard an emphasis on salvation in the next life without much consideration for the human condition in this life. Perhaps this was due to the limited number of topics discussed. Still, we would want to ask: does the fact that you are saved make any difference for this life (Is 58:6–7; Heb 13:1–3; Mt 25:31–46)? Could there be some benefit to balancing your

concern for the next life with Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God for this life with its concerns for social justice and the welfare of humanity? Might we look for transformation in the present world as well as the world to come?

- There is much to appreciate among Evangelicals with their vibrant worship life and the commitment many of the churches seek from their membership. We understand that there are differences among Evangelicals regarding the role of the sacraments in the life of the Church. There does seem to be at least some agreement that Baptism and the Lord's Supper play an important part in our Lord's teaching about the Church and the benefits they bring to the believer (Mt 28:19; Mk 16:16; Jn 3:3; Tit 3:4–7; Mt 26:26–29; Mk 14:22–25; Lk 22:14–23; Jn 6; 1 Cor 11:17–34).²² Mindful of the differences between various Evangelicals about the place of the sacraments in the life of the Church, Catholics would want to ask differing questions to different Evangelical churches, including the following: Why have the sacraments lost their primary role, and what might you be missing by not celebrating the sacraments? How can they be recovered as gifts of God to his people as expressed in the New Testament? Do all forms of worship and sacred actions have the same value in your tradition? Is it contrary to the New Testament to define sacred actions as signs and instruments of salvation? Is the Sunday celebration of the Lord's Supper not a privileged place where the Gospel is heard and the faith is lived, proclaimed and professed? Could Evangelicals gain insight about the sacraments/ordinances by retrieving the teachings of the different Reformers? Could Evangelicals begin to study how these gifts of God might be put to a deeper and more prominent use in the life of the Church?

64. Catholics and Evangelicals rejoice in the gifts of salvation and the Church which God has given to the world he loves so much. They are gifts freely given, and freely received. The Scriptures tell us that from the beginning the Church has been a part of God's plan for salvation (Eph 1:4–10, 22–23). Christ has told us how he provides for his Church ensuring that the forgiveness of sins he won for us and for our salvation will always remain central to the purpose and message of the Church. Both Evangelicals and Catholics rejoice in the gift of the ministry of reconciliation which is given to the Church by Jesus Christ. "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 NRSV). Having received this gift from the crucified and risen Lord, the Church is then entrusted and empowered by the Holy Spirit to deliver that message of hope and forgiveness to our world in desperate

22 Catholics understand that there are seven sacraments, all instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord, though the Church identifies Baptism and Eucharist as major sacraments. The sacraments are 'the masterworks of God' (St Augustine, *De civo Dei*. 22, 17), 'powers that come forth from the Body of Christ, which is ever living and life-giving' (CCC 1116; cf. Lk 5:17, 6:19; 8:46). The sacraments are for the Church and they make the Church, since 'they manifest and communicate ... the mystery of communion with the God who is love, One in three persons' (CCC 1118). Catholics are convinced that in a sacrament, the Church does more than profess and express its faith; it makes present the mystery it is celebrating.

need of reconciliation with its creator. In the words of the Samuel J. Stone hymn sung by many Catholics and Evangelicals:

The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord,
She is His new creation
By water and the Word.
From heaven He came and sought her
To be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her
And for her life He died.

Conclusion

65. We are committed Christians—Catholics and Evangelicals—from Guatemala, Colombia, Brazil, the Philippines, Ghana/Kenya, Spain, Italy, Germany, Canada and the USA. We come from places where there are very good relations and places where the relations are marred by tension and mistrust. But we were entrusted to represent our own ecclesial traditions faithfully and to reflect the realities of Catholic and Evangelical relations around the globe. It became clear early on that Evangelicals represent a wide diversity of Christian communities. Each community had its own perspective to offer which, while challenging at times, also offered the opportunity to discover the rich and legitimate diversity of the people of God, as well as the bonds of communion.

66. One purpose of this consultation was to learn from one another and also to challenge one another in what we believe, teach and confess. A second purpose was to clarify the current state of relations between us and to provide a way forward that would help us to improve those relations where there are difficulties and to support and encourage those places where the situation is more positive. During the consultation, we also had the opportunity to see the deep and committed faith of our partner even as we also were able to share our own faith experiences in an open and candid way. We also sought to address issues of doctrine and practice, always attentive to the perspective of the local communities.

67. Over the past six years, we have built up trust with our dialogue partners, allowing us to address difficult issues in a frank but gracious way. We invite our churches to take time to engage in a process of study and reflection on the issues, challenges, and questions they will encounter in this document. Our consultation has learned that it is when we respect and treat one another in a Christian manner that our communities are able to make progress in our relationships with one another in Christ. In humility, we have learned that we must put aside our own self-assurances and focus on Jesus Christ, “the way, the truth, and the life” (Jn 14:6). We have also learned that we need to understand the words of the other as they are intended. We each came with preconceptions of the other, but we have opened up to listen to and discover how the other views the doctrines chosen for discussion in this consultation: Scripture and Tradition, and the Church and

salvation. We entered into new experiences and insights that we might not have had otherwise. Through these experiences, we have come to know one another and ourselves better.

68. Our consultation has confirmed that real differences remain between Evangelicals and Catholics about certain aspects of the life of faith, but also that we share convictions about Jesus that ground our call to mission. As well, our communities share similar convictions about the Christian life: Christ is forming us by the Holy Spirit into a faithful people called together and sent into the world to obey and serve Him by participating in his life and mission. The Lord calls us not only to enter into conversation but to live out the implications of that conversation. The unity he desires for his disciples is not a theoretical unity but a lived one, "so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21).

69. In this concluding section, it is our intent to address local communities of Evangelicals and Catholics worldwide, mindful of very diverse contexts and states of relations. We would invite them to consider both the convergences noted in the text above and the areas of divergence and mutual questioning. Where there have points of agreement or convergence, we would invite local communities to ask: what does this then make possible for us? What can we appropriately and responsibly undertake together, without compromising our convictions, without overstating our current level of agreement? How is the Lord asking us to grow together at this moment in time?

70. There are limits to what can be said in response to each of these questions. Furthermore, there will be differences from place to place. What is possible in Canada may not be possible in Guatemala; what is possible in Germany may not be possible in Spain.²³ We also recognize that it took our international consultation years of getting to know each other and engaging in discussion before some of these convergences could be confirmed. If at first glance in your local situation, significant steps forward do not seem possible, or the convergences named seem problematic, we would encourage you to ask each other the questions you have and to discuss them; and we would nevertheless encourage you to ask what small steps are possible here and now. In all of this, we are mindful that reconciliation is always the work of God, not us; but the Lord has invited us to play our part in our reconciliation towards one another.

71. In those areas where our conversation has noted convergences, we would invite you to ask the following questions:

- In light of those convergences, how is it possible to cooperate in building up the common good and strengthening the community? Are there things that are critical for our communities to do together now?

23 In some parts of the world, Catholics and Evangelicals speak of engaging in 'common mission'. By this they are not speaking about planting churches together, but rather, jointly pursuing humanitarian objectives, working together for justice, peace, human rights, and the common good. In other parts of the world, Evangelicals and Catholics would be very uncomfortable with language of common mission.

- In light of social and moral upheaval in the world around us, and of the world’s need to hear the Gospel of Christ, how can we responsibly witness together to our shared values, addressing some of the social and political questions in our world that we are facing today? Should we take the opportunity of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation to reflect together afresh on what the Gospel means for us and how it brings good news to our needy world?
- While for some Evangelicals and Catholics, praying together is not seen to be acceptable, many would want to ask: Are there any times and places where it would be appropriate for us to pray together? If yes, what ought to shape our common prayer?

72. We would also invite you to ponder the divergences and questions which our document has noted. As we have stated, divergences and remaining questions need not signify the end of our relations, but can fruitfully set the agenda for future discussions. While convergences may appropriately lead us to common action and growth in our relations, further clarity about convergences and divergences alike can lead us to study, especially at a local level, so that what we hold in common and what separates us might be better understood. A key feature of this document was the mutual questioning in a spirit of striving to understand. Some of these questions we asked could be fruitfully discussed on a congregational level; others might be better discussed in ministerial associations or in seminaries and theology faculties. The questions that we have asked each other are not exhaustive. We have asked them in part to stimulate discussion, self-understanding, and learning, about the other, and about ourselves.

73. Perhaps we haven’t been asking your questions at all. Perhaps your local experience suggests more convergences than we have named; perhaps less. We encourage you to ask further questions in your own context, using the methodology which we used. We invite you to consider gathering together a group of interested Evangelicals and Catholics in your area to hold a series of discussions on matters of importance in your own contexts. It needn’t be complicated. Choose a subject that you would like to address, of mutual interest, and invite participants to offer presentations or share on what is being discussed. Enter into the process with your convictions, but also with humility and an open heart. Ask each other questions, and listen deeply to the responses of your conversation partner. Look for areas where you can encourage each other, where you can learn from the other. Try to answer each other’s questions, and ask new questions. Pray that the Holy Spirit guide your conversations. The World Evangelical Alliance and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity would be grateful to hear the results of your conversations.

74. Finally, we invite you to view dialogue and consultation as a way of engaging your faith, and as a standing together before Christ. Christ is the truth and the fullness of truth can only be found in him. We invite you to consider joining us in pledging ourselves to mutual conversation, consolation, and continuation in admonishing and encouraging one another to remain faithful to the Word who gave us his word that he would be with us to the end of the age (Mt 28:20).

75. “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:20–21).

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