

An Evangelical Catholic Response to EA UK Statement on Reformation



The EA Statement on the Reformation, Evangelicals and Roman Catholicism (Jan 2017) is a concise overview of RC/Evangelical relationships since the Reformation and captures Martin Luther's motivation to reform not divide the Church of his day. It is great that EA UK affirms the significant work done between many different International Dialogues Groups including Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) in the US, the Manhattan Declaration, Global Christian Forum etc.



We set out some specific issues to consider that, in our opinion, would greatly advance the cause of evangelism and real unity among evangelical Christians. In particular we encourage EA to embrace Evangelical Catholics, recognise what the Holy Spirit has been doing in RC in and since Vatican Council in 1965 and reflect more on the consequences of Luther's anti-Semitism. We will refer to three relevant official documents, which the EA Statement does not mention along with 2 evangelical Catholic Documents:

- 1) Extracts from Lutheran/Catholic Commemoration of the Reformation 2013 (LCCR)
- 2) Extracts from Catholic/Pentecostal International Dialogue 2006
- 3) Extracts from RC/World Alliance of Reformed Churches agreement on Eucharist 1997
- 4) "What is an evangelical Catholic?" (WIEC) (Published with official permission of RC)
- 5) "How You can Get to Know Jesus." Tract
- 6) Evangelicals & Catholics Together in Ireland (produced with ECT in the US approval)

Seven specific Issues to Consider:

1. Reformation: Luther's Motivation was Reform not Division:

The EA Statement states Luther's *"initial purpose was to reform the church of Rome from within, rather than establish a new church or set of denominations."*

Surely EA could acknowledge that RC now agrees that Luther's motivation was to reform the Church. In the LCCR it now recognises that it misjudged his motivations and had engaged in a **"one-sided approach"** which sadly led to Luther being characterized **"as a destroyer of Christendom, a corrupter of morals and a heretic"**

2. Negative Consequence of Reformation: Church Disunity

EA Statement acknowledges that the Reformation also *"meant that a Church which Jesus had called to be one body became one only in a more abstract, ethereal sense, or even that it too often modelled division and fragmentation rather than the unity for which Jesus himself had prayed (cf. Mk 14:22; John 17:20-24)"*.

However it would have been very helpful if there was more reflection on the consequences of Disunity. Would the EA not strongly commend those working for Church unity, providing such unity was Christ centred and scripturally based. Millions of evangelical Catholics would strongly support this, as would, we believe, RC. A good example for EA UK is the document Evangelicals & Catholics Together in Ireland signed by 134 evangelical Christian leaders from Protestant, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal and New Churches from the North and South of Ireland. This document built on the ECT Document in the US but included some additional areas

3 Is the Central point of the Reformation not now agreed?

EA Statement acknowledges that *"In 1999, the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church signed a Joint Declaration which affirmed a "consensus in basic truths of the doctrine of justification", even while recognising persistent divergence on more detailed aspects of it."*

The new reality is that: "Both the RC and the World Lutheran Federation agree on this key issue of the Reformation: **'Together we confess: By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to good works'**" (LCCR). Why doesn't EA give a greater acknowledgement to this breakthrough agreement?

4. Large Measure of Agreement on Biblical authority and Justification

EA Statement implies that there are still fundamental differences on *"the foundational issues of biblical authority and justification."* Is this correct? It is not correct re justification – witness above paragraph. Re Authority RC and evangelical Protestant/Pentecostal Christians agree that Scripture in its entirety is the inspired authoritative **Word of God**. However, there is still disagreement on the need for an external discerning body to weigh up different interpretations of Scripture, which RC strongly believe in.

The “What is an evangelical Catholic?” Document, which is published with formal RC permission, states that:

- **“Salvation cannot be earned**, it is a **free gift** - however, the evidence of good deeds must then follow.
- There is **only one mediator** between God and men, the person of **Jesus Christ** (1 Tim. 2:5)
- **The priesthood of all believers**, which means that a Christian has direct access to the Father through Jesus.
- **Scripture** in its **entirety** (both Old and New Testaments) is the inspired authoritative **Word of God**”

The agreed final statement of the Catholic/Pentecostal International Dialogue 2006 affirmed that: “Pentecostals and Catholics, along with other Christians, **acknowledge the uniqueness of the Bible as the inspired and authoritative Word of God**, normative for the faith and life of the church. Both Catholics and Pentecostals honour the authority of Scripture, and both look for ways in which Tradition carries biblical truth”.

It would be really helpful to relationships to with RC if EA could acknowledge this.

5. Eucharist and sacrifice:

EA Statement states *“Evangelicals... disavow Catholic teaching on Communion as a Eucharistic sacrifice.”*

Is this not a misunderstanding of how RC views the Eucharist? The “Eucharist (Mass) is not a repetition of Calvary. Jesus died once and for all. The priest and people enter into that **one all-sufficient sacrifice by Grace.**” (WIEC)

This is spelt out in many RC documents and is specifically covered in the attached World Alliance/RC agreed document on the Eucharist: “The **Reformed and Roman Catholics...believe we have reached a common understanding of the meaning and purpose and basic doctrine of the Eucharist, which is in agreement with the Word of God and the universal tradition of the Church** ... What clearly matters is the fully Trinitarian context which is guarded by this doctrine and the Christological presuppositions on which there are **no fundamental disagreements between Roman Catholic and Reformed traditions.**The sacrifice brought by Jesus Christ is his obedient life and death (Heb 10.5-10; Phil 2.8). **His once-for-all self-offering** under Pontius Pilate is continued by him for ever in the presence of the Father in virtue of his resurrection. In this way he is our **sole advocate** in heaven.”

6. Luther’s Anti-Semitism and its Consequences:

The statement just hints at the rabid anti-Semitism of Luther before he died – “at times, for instance, both Rome and Luther colluded with an anti-Semitism which is rightly repudiated now.” It makes no other comments. Is this not a major omission in having a balanced view of Luther?

Lets take a brief look at the consequences of this anti-Semitism: If someone were to reveal an eight-step plan for the removal of Jews from Europe, one would associate such a plan with Hitler. One would not, however, think of Martin Luther, though he wrote an essay in 1543 entitled **“Concerning the Jews and their Lies”**, outlining such a plan:

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| 1) Burn Jewish Synagogues | 4) Forbid Rabbis to teach | 7) Force Jews to do physical labour |
| 2) Destroy Jewish homes | 5) Do not allow Jews to travel | 8) If all else fails, expel them |
| 3) Take away Jewish holy books | 6) Forbid usury in all forms | |

Hitler admired Luther. In MEIN Kampf he ranks Luther as one of the three great German cultural heroes. The first large scale Pogrom against the Jews when over 1,000 synagogues were burned, 91 Jews killed and 30,000 Jews sent to Concentration Camps occurred on Nov 9th 1938 in order to honour Luther’s birthday.

In the Lutheran/Catholic Commemoration of the Reformation 2013 the Lutheran side acknowledged that it was **“ashamed of the Dark side of Luther: Lutherans will also remember the vicious and degrading statements that Martin Luther made against the Jews.”** (LCCR) RC repented of its prejudice against the Jews at the Vatican Council in 1965 and renounced replacement theology. Would the EA not consider that the consequences of Luther’s anti-Semitism need to be addressed and perhaps encourage constituent churches to address this issue?

7. Is it not time for the EA to acknowledge the millions of Evangelical Catholics within RC?

The EA Statement seems to imply that it is only on **Abortion, Euthanasia and Same-sex relationships and marriage** that evangelicals can work with RC. However the EA Statement does acknowledge the work done by Alpha International and the Billy Graham Association in joint evangelism with RC: *“in the past century there has been growing mutual understanding and effort between Catholics and Evangelicals in the work of evangelism”*

From personal experience we know that it is those Catholics, who are evangelical, that want to use the Alpha Course to evangelise* and want to work with the Billy Graham Association. The “How You can Get to Know Jesus” tract is an example of a joint evangelism tract used in Ireland. Is it not now time for EA to acknowledge Evangelical Catholics? Didn’t Jesus pray for unity among his followers so that the world might believe?

ECI 3rd August 2017

NB: Millions of Catholics have come to know Jesus as personal Lord and Saviour through attending an Alpha Course. Some find fellowship in Protestant or Pentecostal Churches but the vast majority find fellowship within RC. ie they now are Evangelical Catholics