

A New Era in Evangelical and Roman Catholic Relations

Pope Francis and distinguished representatives of the Roman Catholic Church:

On behalf of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) and the 600 million people we represent around the globe, I greet you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are grateful for this meeting, for the time and freedom to discuss together issues that deeply concern us all. It is with a heavy heart that we acknowledge the fact that many Christians do not enjoy such liberty, that many suffer from fear, torture and other forms of violence. For their sake and for the sake of the Gospel, we acknowledge the differences between our traditions, yet also affirm the common tasks we have shared in the past and pray that we can build on those.

Evangelicals are a very diverse group that includes peoples and churches from Pentecostal traditions, Reformed, Baptist and independents. We share a common faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and a desire to serve God's kingdom, we have a heart to encourage personal spiritual renewal and transformation and a passion to make Jesus known around the world. As we seek to obey Christ, we see this time as a new era in Evangelical/Roman Catholic relations. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, God is enlarging our tent, letting the curtains stretch out and lengthening the cords (54:2). Through strengthened collaboration we hope to see justice and peace kiss each other and faithfulness spring up from the ground (Psalm 85:10). It is our hope that this era will be characterized by a new level of cooperation in which we address social problems of injustice, violence and persecution on behalf of billions of neighbors around the world. I propose a new level and quality of public discussion of our core beliefs, including both areas where we agree and areas where we have differences, so that together we might be enabled by the Spirit to find ways to share the love, peace and justice that we have in Jesus with a world suffering from hatred and wars.

In our global information society, where much of the world's population knows what we are doing in a matter of minutes, it is important that the world know that there are many localized partnerships between Catholics and Evangelicals, which are developing into large-scale collaborations in response to tragic social problems. For example, we know that in many cities around the world, Evangelical and Roman Catholic Christians are cooperating to respond to human trafficking, while at the same time Evangelical and Catholic scholars and activists have begun collaborating to analyze and respond to the terrible problems of religious persecution. We know that Evangelicals and Catholics have worked together for many years in numerous crisis pregnancy centers, we have made joint representations to governments and legal bodies, and around the globe together serve as witnesses for the fullness of life offered to us freely by Jesus. Let us now develop these wonderful initiatives into something larger, increasing both the range of social problems to which we respond, and our level of joint global response. For example, we

are terribly worried (and know we must take further action) about the many refugees from the fighting in Iraq and Syria, many of whom are praying to our Father for help. We have to be the giving hands of Jesus together. At the same time, Christians have to work together on the frightening issue of nuclear weapons before another cold war brings humanity to the brink of disaster.

All of us are affected and damaged by particular issues. These include corruption, the role of churches in peace-building, including our efforts to reduce conflict in the Middle East, human trafficking and religious persecution. Thus a careful and joint response to such issues at a global level would strengthen our witness and shed God's light into such darkness. Together we should work to address religious extremism, the needs of refugees, creation care, immigration, humanitarian aid, economic development, and marriage/family problems. The Christian movement as a whole can offer global leadership on the vast range of public concerns, on issues of universal human rights and universal human duties. The quality of our cooperation will be more visible and influential inasmuch as the leadership of the Catholic Church and the World Evangelical Alliance make such collaboration a high priority and work to extend cooperation through the whole range of our Catholic and Evangelical institutions and organizations. Such collaborative work is a clear biblical and loving response to our neighbors in need and should be done in full obedience to the mission God has entrusted to the Church.

As Christians, we consistently and publicly reject coercion, manipulation, and deception as means of convincing others to believe in Jesus. Though most of our members have known this for many years, it is wonderful that we were able to affirm this together strongly and publicly in our joint code of ethics in missions, launched in June 2011, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*. The delegates and participants in this process from the various Christian traditions represented over 90% of the world's Christians.¹ What an achievement and what a sign to the world that despite our differences, we stand together as witnesses for Jesus and affirm the way of Jesus for all our missionary activities! I look forward to further collaborations on this same grand scale.

Yet despite our work in joint projects such as *Christian Witness*, some people still expect either (i) that truly-held convictions will be expressed through the use of force, or (ii) that Christians, especially in the West, habitually of two minds, partly accept themes from secularism while at the same time accept themes from the Christian tradition. How do we persuade and show in our life and practice that we truly believe the message of Jesus and that we invite others to freely believe in this gospel without coercion or manipulation?

Christian love in action is the solution to this problem. Loving our neighbors threatened by trafficking, persecution, conflict, and corruption may not immediately lead other people to

¹ <http://www.worlddea.org/news/3578/WEA-WCC-and-Vatican-launch-historic-joint-document-on-ethics-of-Christian-Mission>.

believe in the incarnation, the resurrection, or the Trinity, but such love can help convince our neighbors that we truly believe in human dignity. Furthermore, we must repeatedly affirm that we believe God has created all people in his image and that the incarnation of the eternal Son of God as a real human being confirms human dignity. Serious efforts to respond to social problems strengthen and reinforce the perception that we stand firm in our official convictions and beliefs. As we address together the challenges of our age we witness in words, deeds and character to the good news of the gospel of Christ. In this manner, loving our neighbors whose lives are threatened or destroyed by terrible social problems can serve as an attracting function; such applied love may convince others that we have a message that is worthy of attention and which we honestly believe.

A new era of Evangelical/Roman Catholic cooperation responding to people in need should raise questions about what we believe in the manner described. Therefore, we propose that it be accompanied by a new level of public discussion of our core beliefs, on matters where Evangelicals and Catholics both agree and where we differ. Deeper levels of joint love of neighbors should be accompanied by higher levels of public discussion of fundamental theology and ethics between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals. This will have educational value for our own church members; it will provide answers for seekers who are interested in the Christian faith, whose interest and questions may have been awakened by our shared love of neighbors; and it sets healthy patterns for principled public discussion in a multi-religious world.

There are particular areas where joint collaboration between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals can serve as a sign of a new era, a sign of the peace and justice inaugurated in Jesus of Nazareth. Even as we hold deliberate and public debates over theological and philosophical matters, these can also be part of larger projects – projects that expose corruption in business and politics with Christian ethics and practices of truth-telling, projects that build up a nation through peace processes rather than violence, projects that shine the light of justice into the dark worlds of trafficking and arms deals; projects of biblical engagement that transform the world. Bible engagement is life-enhancing. It is my hope that together Roman Catholics and Evangelicals engage in renewed passion for the Scriptures and their transformative power, taking the Bible so seriously that we can see our past and our future with the same perspective as Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary, upon hearing that she would bear a child, declared, “Here I am, the servant of the Lord” (Gospel of Luke 1:38). To her relative Elizabeth she narrated her life and the works of God in light of texts from her sacred scriptures. The Bible both guided her thoughts and her actions such that God, through her obedience, made the world a better place. Mary is an embodiment of Bible engagement that I hope is a model for us all.

As we look towards concrete steps for further collaboration, we have developed short documents on some of the themes mentioned, such as nuclear weapons, human trafficking and peace in the Middle East. I would invite Pope Francis to consider these proposals and to endorse publicly Evangelical/Roman Catholic cooperation in these various areas. I further encourage and invite the Pope to meet with Evangelical leaders when he is traveling in the coming year, and I offer

our staff expertise and time to help facilitate such meetings, especially in regions or countries where there are tensions, such as Sri Lanka, Mexico, or even in some parts of Europe.

The World Evangelical Alliance, its senior leadership and staff are eager and committed to building collaboration with organizations and institutions of the Roman Catholic Church at all levels. We do this out of obedience to the Gospel and as a concrete response to Jesus' prayer that through our witness the world will see our mutual love, and through our love, the world will see Jesus.

Finally, in cooperation with our partner First Step Forum, we would like to honor Pope Francis today in presenting the annual Shahbaz Bhatti Freedom award. When Minister Bhatti was assassinated we wanted to do something to honor his memory as a Roman Catholic Christian who was helping suffering people from all religions and who became a brave spokesperson for all minorities in Pakistan and around the world. Therefore the Shahbaz Bhatti Freedom award was created; and so we honor Pope Francis with this award today.

Dr. Geoff Tunnicliffe
Secretary General, World Evangelical Alliance

Rome, November 6, 2014

Meeting of the World Evangelical Alliance, Pope Francis and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.