

Roman Synod on the Church, Evangelicals and Pentecostals

April 2013

Bishop Denis Madden

Duration: 20 minutes

1. The Changing Landscape of Catholic Evangelical Relations

The Second Vatican Council of the mid 1960's marked a watershed in the Catholic Church with regard to her relationship with other Christian communities in the United States, as was true throughout the world. In the years immediately following the Council, the Catholic Church ventured into emerging and deepening relationships with many of the historical mainline Protestant Churches. But dialogue between the American Catholic community and the American Evangelical community seemed the furthest at reach. Separated by years of difficulties and mistrust built atop strongly held differences on doctrine, there appeared little immediate hope toward warming relationships between the two communities. An illustrative example is Harold Ockenga, the first president of the National Association of Evangelicals, who led the effort to stop John F. Kennedy from being elected president on the basis that he was Catholic.¹

Yet the tumultuous years of the 1970's, 80's and 90's, with the vast social changes transpiring on America's cultural landscape, brought an unforeseen consequence. Evangelicals and Catholics increasingly found themselves as players on the same field, and often each other's most like-minded and dependable ally. There were a number of factors that contributed to this phenomenon.

a. The sexual revolution and Roe v Wade.

The sexual revolution of the 1960's and 70's brought radical social change in the US, iconized in the 1972 landmark Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion. Many mainstream Protestant churches embraced the legalization of abortion and an ever-widening liberality of sexual expression and practice as the cultural norm in subsequent years.

Rooted in strong convictions about the sanctity of human life, sexual morality, and the role of the family in educating children, Catholics and Evangelical found themselves heavily engaged in related social issues, and in one another a partner with political and social will. Everyday Evangelicals and Catholics were encountering each other on the picket-lines in front of abortion clinics, on the streets of Washington DC marching for life, and before the public square defending the nature of the family. A rising cooperation between Catholics and Evangelicals in the public square over values we both held dear was becoming the new norm.

b. The Growth of the American Evangelicalism

¹ Mark S. Massa, S.J., *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), 77-78.

Evangelical Christianity experienced a demographic burst in the US throughout the 1970's and 80's, bringing an increasing numbers of highly educated Evangelicals to positions of greater political, social and intellectual leadership in the US. As a result, the Evangelical community began searching for deeper philosophical traditions and legal language to enhance its argumentation in defense of a Christian world view. They found much forage in Catholic social doctrine. Evangelicals were the first to comment on their surprise at the discovery.

Similarly, many Catholic activists found in the vast Evangelical social institutions, such as Focus on the Family, The Family Research Council, and the Evangelical home-schooling movements, energy, enthusiasm and models from which to borrow, learn, and imitate unhesitatingly.

c. **Rise of the Catholic Charismatic Movement-**

Since the 1960's the Catholic charismatic movement has had a presence in the United States, perhaps reaching a climax in the 80's and 90's. While retaining a commitment to Catholic teaching, doctrine, and sacramental life, the charismatic movement introduced to the mainstream of the Catholic Church forms of worship and expression that appeared far more akin to Pentecostal revival movements than the liturgical traditions of our Church, emphasizing baptism in the Spirit and the immediate presence of the Holy Spirit and his gifts in the life of the Christian. In this shared experience, Pentecostal, Evangelical and Catholic communities were unexpectedly side-by-side with one another once again, this time in that which is most intimate to the Christian, in his worship. Pentecostal and Evangelical pastors spoke of their surprise to find a growing number of Catholics attending charismatic worship services on Sundays, only to arrive late or leave early because they were rushing to or from their Catholic Mass. Eventually, Protestant charismatic communities began to include well-known Catholic charismatic speakers in their rosters alongside protestant speakers, and vice-versa.² This dialogue of shared worship and spirituality went a long way to thaw age-old misconceptions and mistrust between members of the two communities, more easily able to recognize the person in heartfelt worship at their side as a fellow Christian imbued with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Many Catholic bishops and pastors raised their eyebrows in concern over the emergence of the Catholic charismatic movement. But as the years went on, the presence of the charismatic movement in the US proved to be a force of revitalization in the Church. In many places the charismatic renewal gave birth to a new kind of "dynamic orthodoxy" distinguished for fusing the energy and evangelizing spirit characteristic of the Evangelical churches with a deep love for Catholic tradition. This became particularly attractive to the youth, yielding a new generation of faithful, theologians and vocations in every area of Church life. A phrase has been coined with increasing frequency in young Catholic circles: "Evangelical Catholicism." Appearing in pastoral programs of dioceses and youth or university student movements around the country, the term is meant to describe a fusion between a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and an enthusiastic commitment to the spreading of the Gospel, both characteristics of American Evangelical

² Olson, Roger E. "Catholic-Evangelical Dialogue" March 4, 2012.

Christianity, with a love and appreciation for Catholic traditions and life. This year, George Weigel published his most recent book by the title “Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st Century Church”³, in which he describes the future era of Catholicism with a vision that resonates with the same spirit.

2. Historical Moments in Our Relationship

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops held official dialogues with the Southern Baptist Convention from 1978 to 2000, engaging in theological discourse over topics such as the environment, poverty, racism, sickness and healing, scripture and salvation. Blessed John Paul II’s historic visit to the United States in 1987 was facilitated by Billy Graham who provided the platform and set for the papal event in the University of South Carolina stadium, and who attended the ecumenical service.

The 1994 document “Evangelicals and Catholics Together”⁴ and its 1998 counterpart, while not an official documents representing the United States Bishops but works of independent Catholic theologians and Evangelical colleagues, were landmark documents spelling out the need for Protestants and Catholics to deliver a common witness to the modern world on the eve of the third millennium.

Evangelical and Pentecostal individuals have joined Catholic individuals in sustained conversations on sociological and political research and theology. Jesuit Father Tom Rausch edited a book with help from Richard Mouw and others, *Catholics and Evangelicals: Do They Share a Common Future?*⁵ Ronald Sider and Dianne Knippers edited a volume, *Toward an Evangelical Public Policy*, which included one Catholic voice. This was an important volume because it contained the statement that became the National Association of Evangelical’s policy statement, “For the Health of the Nation.”⁶

Institutes such as the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Dialogue of Baylor University and the Center for Catholic and Evangelical Theology of Loyola University in Baltimore have emerged, producing ongoing scholarship on Evangelical-Catholic relations. Georgetown University was host to the Evangelical-Catholic Dialogue on the Common Good and Public Policy from 2008 through 2013, convened by two of America's most prominent religious leaders; Pastor Rick Warren and Theodore Cardinal McCarrick.

Last year in Rome, Dr. Lamar Vest, President of the American Bible Society, became the first Pentecostal to address the Synod of Catholic Bishops on the New Evangelization, the 25th session since Pope Paul VI established the synod in 1967.⁷ Also addressing the

³ Weigel, George. “Evangelical Catholicism: Deep Reform in the 21st Century Church” Basic Books, 2013.

⁴ <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2007/01/evangelicals--catholics-together-the-christian-mission-in-the-third-millennium-2>

⁵ Thomas P. Rausch, ed., *Catholics and Evangelicals: Do They Share a Common Future?* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000).

⁶ Ronald J. Sider and Diane Knippers, *Toward an Evangelical Public Policy* (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Baker Books, 2005).

⁷ <http://www.news.va/en/news/presentation-of-the-synod-on-the-new-evangelisation>

synod was an American representing the Baptist World Alliance, Dr. Timothy George, Dean of the Beeson Divinity School of Samford University.⁸ While hardly a comprehensive study, these developments can be seen as signs of the times of a rising tide of Catholic- Evangelical relations in the United States.

3. The Primary Issues Catholics and Evangelicals Face Today

There continues to be an ever-growing list of issues which are of common concern to Evangelicals and Catholics in our nation today. We continue to be strong partners in the fight for a right to life from conception until natural death. We have stood together in the defense of traditional marriage as between one man and one woman. We collaborate on many social justice issues combatting poverty, discrimination, and injustice. And recently we find ourselves side-by-side in an increasing battle to protect the first amendment right to religious freedom in our nation, and a human right for religious freedom abroad.

4. Continued Obstacles to Catholic Evangelical Relations

There are still issues of real concern to our individual communities regarding one another. One such issue that comes to mind is the question of converts and how we relate to one another as fellow Christians. For the Catholic Bishops there is concern over the loss of Catholic identity in immigrant communities in the United States that are traditionally Catholic, as well as among the faithful in largely Catholic developing nations.

Catholics read scripture with critical tools and in light of a long tradition of commentary and application of scripture to daily life, acknowledging the teaching office of the church. Evangelicals hold to a belief in the inerrancy of scripture. This is a point of deep historical difference between us. While Vatican II may not have resolved the issue of the relation between Scripture and Tradition, it clarified it to the satisfaction of those Protestant scholars who were watching its outcome carefully, that it was moving forward from a position that was reactionary to the Reformation's emphasis on Bible to one acknowledging a serious need for better study and scholarship. In recent years,

⁸ See the paper by Bro. Jeffrey Gros, "The New Evangelization: Unity in Proclamation and the Proclamation of Unity," soon to be published. Vest's intervention can be found here: [http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02_inglese/b07_02.html#INTERVENTION_OF_THE_SPECIAL_GUEST_DR._LAMAR_VEST,_P_RESIDENT_OF_THE_AMERICAN_BIBLE_SOCIETY_\(UNITED_STATES_OF_AMERICA\)](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02_inglese/b07_02.html#INTERVENTION_OF_THE_SPECIAL_GUEST_DR._LAMAR_VEST,_P_RESIDENT_OF_THE_AMERICAN_BIBLE_SOCIETY_(UNITED_STATES_OF_AMERICA)). George's intervention can be found here: [http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02_inglese/b19_02.html#_Rev._Dr._Timothy_GEORGE,_Dean_of_the_Beeson_Divinity_School_of_Samford_University_\(UNITED_STATES_OF_AMERICA\)](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_25_xiii-ordinaria-2012/02_inglese/b19_02.html#_Rev._Dr._Timothy_GEORGE,_Dean_of_the_Beeson_Divinity_School_of_Samford_University_(UNITED_STATES_OF_AMERICA))

Protestant and Catholic scholarship in cooperation has made available better translations and resources.

As we look toward the horizon of Catholic-Evangelical relations in the United States, we can emphasize the positive if we allow ourselves to delve deeper in what we truly hold in common—the Word of God, our love for Our Lord, and our desire to see Him reign in the hearts of all men and in society at large. Differences in theology should not continue to be an obstacle to our warm and congenial collaboration as fellow Christians who, motivated by the values of the Gospel we hold dear, meet together side-by-side in the public square to combat secularism and relativism while building a more just and charitable society on solid Judeo-Christian values rooted in the natural law, with respect for human life, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion as non-negotiable foundational tenets.