

# ***Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World in the light of God's Word***

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## **Abstract**

*After five years of preparation the world's three most influential Christian bodies – World Council of Churches, Pontifical Council on Inter-religious Dialogue and World Evangelical Alliance – have published together in 2011. the document “Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct” about the ethics in Christian mission. In the text it is discussed about the historical, cultural and ecclesiastical-political context of the making of the document, the importance of the document for evangelical Christianity and explains its relationship towards the Word of God, especially towards Jesus' Great Commission and the possible spiritual positive and negative consequences of its acquisition and application.*

*Key words: the Gospel, mission, the Great Commission, evangelical Christianity, dialogue, ecumenism, inter-religious dialogue.*

## **Introduction**

Ever since the Day of Pentecost to this day, Christianity has encountered numerous challenges in its attempts to proclaim the Gospel and to obey Jesus' command to go and make disciples of all the nations (Mt 28:19). In these times of globalization, and the dictatorship of relativism, pluralism and dialogue, these challenges are multiple and manifold. One of the challenges is a common objection made by certain religious communities from different parts of the world,

which is that Christians use unethical methods in their mission. In some cases these objections have led to the passing of laws against converting to and accepting Christianity, and sometimes even to violence against Christians, as well as their banishment. There has been an increased awareness in Christendom that all Christians should adopt ethical standards in their missionary endeavors. Therefore in 2011 three of the most influential Christian bodies in the world, the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council on Inter-Religious Dialogue, and the World Evangelical Alliance issued a document called, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, which deals with the ethics of Christian mission.

In this discussion I will be emphasizing the question of the historical, cultural, and political contexts surrounding the writing of the document, the significance of the document for Evangelical Christianity, and I will address its relationship to the Word of God, especially to Jesus' Great Commission, as well as the potential positive and negative ramifications of its adoption and application.

## **Processes and movements for uniting Christians in the 20th century**

During the middle of the 20th century three separate groups of processes occurred, all of which emphasized the unity between Christians, and which, each based on its own principles and appropriate methodologies, prepared and developed the ecumenical theology and practice for the 21st century. These dynamic processes gave rise to three significant theological, cultural, and ecclesiological and political solutions for Christian unity: first, the movement "Unity in the Gospel", which strongly represents conservative Evangelical Christianity; second, ecumenism of the World Council of Churches; and third, the Roman Catholic Church ecumenism.

### **The process "Unity in the Gospel"**

The process "Unity in the Gospel", which began in the 17th and 18th centuries among English Evangelical Christians and the continental Pietists who were encouraging Christians to become involved in evangelization and mission,<sup>1</sup> gained stronger momentum at the end of the 18th and the beginning of 19th century due

1 For details see: "Ecumenism". Encyclopaedia Britannica. <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/178836/ecumenism>.

to the Second Great Revival in Great Britain and the USA,<sup>2</sup> and it was strengthened through various gatherings of Evangelical believers, who aimed to evangelize the world. For example, the Evangelical Alliance of Great Britain was founded in 1846,<sup>3</sup> after which Evangelical alliances were organized in some countries. In the United States, the National Association of Evangelicals was founded in 1942, and 1951 saw the founding of the organization, World Evangelical Fellowship, which is known as World Evangelical Alliance today. Now at the beginning of the 21st century the World Evangelical Alliance gathers and networks churches from 129 countries in which the Evangelical Alliance has been established, as well as over 100 international organizations, thus representing over 600 million Evangelical Christians, who work together for the purpose of holiness, righteousness, and the renewal of society at all levels.<sup>4</sup>

For Evangelical Christians who promote and nourish unity in the Gospel, the Bible is the one and only authority, and their purpose is proclaiming the Kingdom of God to every creature, where unity strengthens the witness. The following was adopted and proclaimed in the *Lausanne Covenant*, in 1974:

“We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness and authority of both Old and New Testament Scriptures in their entirety as the only written word of God, without error in all that it affirms, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice. We also affirm the power of God’s word to accomplish his purpose of salvation. The message of the Bible is addressed to all men and women. For God’s revelation in Christ and in Scripture is unchangeable. Through it the Holy Spirit still speaks today. He illumines the minds of God’s people in every culture to perceive its truth freshly through their own eyes and thus discloses to the whole Church ever more of the many-colored wisdom of God.” (LC, 2)

“We affirm that the Church’s visible unity in truth is God’s purpose. Evangelism also summons us to unity, because our oneness strengthens our witness, just as our disunity undermines our gospel of reconciliation. We recognize, however, that organizational unity may take many forms and does not necessarily forward evangelism. Yet we who share the same biblical faith should be closely united in fellowship, work and witness. We confess that our testimony has sometimes been marred by a sinful individualism and needless duplication. We pledge ourselves to seek a deeper unity in truth, worship, holiness and

- 2 The Second Great Awakening, which saw its greatest expansion in the Great Britain and the United States; it began in 1791 and lasted until 1842, motivating Evangelical Christianity from various denominations, cultures, and geographic areas to enter closer fellowship.
- 3 A large global interdenominational conference was held in London in 1846, with over 900 church leaders present from 15 denominations and representatives from 53 Evangelical bodies. The first Evangelical alliance was founded at this conference.
- 4 For details see: <http://www.worldea.org/howeare/introduction>

mission. We urge the development of regional and functional cooperation for the furtherance of the Church's mission, for strategic planning, for mutual encouragement, and for the sharing of resources and experience." (LC, 7)

After an extremely exhausting struggle with liberal theology at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, Evangelical Christianity began recovering during the middle of the 20th century. The conservative Evangelical denominations have not joined the World Alliance of Churches or their ecumenical processes, but have instead developed processes and institutions with the aim of achieving unity among Christians, where becoming converted and establishing a relationship with God is the foundation, and the Bible is the only authority for living and belief. However, what has remained inside the renewed Evangelical Christianity are strong and excellent influences of Evangelical fundamentalism, while at the same time processes have been developing which have led to Evangelical liberalism and have consequently shown, at the beginning of the 21st century, a wide spectrum of Evangelical Christianity, in which the leading part is played by conservative Evangelical Christianity as the most numerous and influential branch, both in the world at large and in Croatia.<sup>5</sup>

With the *Lausanne Covenant* Evangelical Christianity confirmed its commitment to the unity in the Gospel in numerous documents, the most prominent of which are the *Chicago Declaration About Biblical Inerrancy* (1978), the *Chicago Declaration About Biblical Interpretation* (1982), the *Chicago Declaration About Biblical Application* (1986), the *Manilla Declaration* (1989), *The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The Evangelical Celebration* (1999), *The Amsterdam Declaration* (2000), and *The Cape Town Declaration of Commitment* (2010).

When the Protestant denominations formed the World Alliance of Churches (1948), Evangelical churches had already been gathering in Evangelical alliances. Along with the process of gathering Evangelical Christians from various denominations, which became known as "unity in the Gospel", by the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century ecumenical processes were beginning to develop among believers from Protestant and Roman Catholic backgrounds.

5 In Croatia there are over 150 active local churches which can, judging by their fundamental characteristics, be included in Evangelical Christianity. Just like in the world, the most numerous churches in Croatia are those belonging to conservative Evangelical Christianity, while the churches which promote the liberal Evangelical view are in the minority. Evangelical churches in Croatia are gathered in several denominations, the most numerous of which are the Evangelical Pentecostal Church and the Alliance of Baptist Churches. The Protestant Evangelical Council (PEV) has been active in Croatia since 1992, as a member of the European Evangelical Alliance and World Evangelical Alliance. Members of the PEV include: the Evangelical Pentecostal Church, Alliance of Baptist Churches, Assemblies of God, Council of Churches of Christ, and their institutions.

In the second half of the 20th century these developed as ecumenism for the World Council of Churches, and the ecumenism of the Roman Catholic Church. Even though in the beginning of the ecumenical movement the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church agreed that they would cooperate in the one single ecumenical movement,<sup>6</sup> a clear distinction was made at the end of the 20th century between those who promoted the supremacy of the social dimension of ecumenism (World Alliance of Churches), and those who promoted the supremacy of the spiritual (Evangelical Christianity), or the ecclesial dimension of ecumenism (Roman Catholic Church).<sup>7</sup>

### **The ecumenism of the World Council of Churches**

As an organized movement with the goal of achieving cooperation and unity among Christians and churches, ecumenism had a stronger presence between the two world wars. At the conference held in 1948 in Amsterdam, some 350 delegates representing 147 denominations from 44 countries founded the World Council of Churches.<sup>8</sup> The World Council of Churches was joined by the majority of theologically liberal Protestant denominations, and later on they were joined by some Eastern Orthodox Churches as well. The World Council of Churches was not joined by Evangelical denominations, or by the Roman Catholic Church.

In the last 50 years the World Council of Churches has been developing and leading ecumenical processes which are largely rooted in theological liberalism,

- 6 As is emphasized in the document, *Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC (CUV)*: An important affirmation made in the early phase of collaboration between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches was that the two share in “one and the same ecumenical movement”.
- 7 By clarifying the need for integrating two Biblical visions into one, the *Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC (CUV)* (2.5) emphasizes: “Within the ecumenical movement the WCC has sought to integrate the vision of John 17:21 (‘that they may all be one... so that the world may believe’) with the vision of Ephesians 1:10 (God’s ‘plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth’). But the effort to integrate these two biblical visions has been challenged by a continuing tension and sometimes antagonism between those who advocate the primacy of the social dimension of ecumenism and those who advocate the primacy of spiritual or ecclesial ecumenism.”
- 8 The World Council of Churches gathers churches, denominations, and church groups in more than 110 countries, representing more than 500 million Christians, including most of Eastern Orthodox Churches, as well as Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed and Free churches. “The World Council of Churches is a community of churches which acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior in accordance with the Scriptures, and which therefore seek to fulfill their common calling, for the glory of one God, Son, and the Holy Spirit.” (<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us>).

secular humanism, postmodernism, and universalism, and woven with meditations characteristic of big and small world religions and spiritual traditions, such as theosophy. That is why the ecumenism promoted by the World Council of Churches is closer to syncretism than to biblical teaching about the unity of Christians, even though it is referring to it. Under the strong influence of universalism<sup>9</sup> by the end of the 20th century, alongside ecumenism the World Council of Churches began to emphasize and lead inter-religious dialogue, where the main goal of ecumenism is to unify all world religions into one world religion,<sup>10</sup> and then to unite all of mankind, as was emphasized by Bill Perkins, the promotor of ecumenism in the World Council of Churches.<sup>11</sup>

In the 21st century, ecumenism as an organized movement with the purpose of achieving cooperation and unity among Christians and churches has been steadily taking over and changing all churches which call themselves Christian, even those who have been resisting the powerful ecumenical influences for decades. Even though at the beginning, at the International Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, ecumenism had the purpose of achieving cooperation between Protestant mission agencies, one hundred years later, at the beginning of the 21st century, the goal has received multiple political additions and has become globalized and encompasses numerous endeavors regarding the unification of the entire “ecumena”<sup>12</sup>, i.e. “inhabited land”, including all Christian churches, all religions, spiritual movements, worldviews, and political options. That is why by the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century ecumenism became

- 9 Universalism is a theological teaching which claims that all people will be saved, because a kind and loving God will not condemn people to eternal suffering in hell. Some universalists believe that, after a time of purging, God will deliver, save and reconcile to Himself all the people who were in hell. Others think that after death people will be given a new opportunity to become reconciled with God. Universalism focuses on God’s love and grace, and it largely implies the existence of multiple paths to God.
- 10 For details, see *Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC (CUV)* (2.6): “More recently, a growing number of voices from the churches, especially in Asia but also in Latin America, have spoken of the need for a “wider ecumenism” or “macro-ecumenism” - an understanding which would open the ecumenical movement to other religious and cultural traditions beyond the Christian community.”
- 11 Perkins (2000) writes: “We must reimagine Blake’s 1960 vision for this new century. The ecumenical task is to promote networking among the particular churches, cross-fertilizing their particularities. It is to create ‘open space’, opening doors, enlarging the table, enabling churches and faiths to meet, to have dialogue and to learn from one another, to share their diversity, to become more inclusive, and to strive for justice and peace, for the integrity of all creation and for the unity of all humanity.”
- 12 The word “ecumena” comes from the Greek word, *oikoumene* (inhabited world), and the word “ecumenism” is derived from the Greek words *oikoumene* and *oikos* (house).

a cultural and political trend which, in addition to churches and liberal groups of Christians, included major involvement from influential members of spiritual traditions, as well as liberal cultural and political options. Liberal Christianity is prone to sacrificing and marginalizing the Word of God as the absolute truth at the dialogue table, especially the teachings of Jesus as reported in the Bible, for the purpose of greater love, peace, and the common good of society and humanity. Under the heavy influence of relativism, liberal Christians often forget, or intentionally neglect, Jesus' statement that "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away" (Mt 24:35). All the philosophies, plans and accomplishments of man will cease, but the Word of God is, was, and shall remain eternal and absolute.

The development of ecumenism as pertaining to inter-religious dialogue as it has been manifested during the previous decades under the leadership of the World Council of Churches was announced in the 1940's by English writer, theosophist and occultist Alice Ann Bailey, when she wrote down the revelations of her spiritual guide, Djwhal Khul:

"The day is dawning when all religions will be regarded as emanating from one great spiritual source; all will be seen as unitedly providing the one root out of which the universal world religion will inevitably emerge. Then there will be neither Christian nor heathen, neither Jew nor Gentile, but simply one great body of believers, gathered out of all the current religions. They will accept the same truths, not as theological concepts but as essential to spiritual living... Such a world religion is no idle dream but something which is definitely forming today." (Bailey and Khul, 1947, 141)

Further on, Bailey emphasizes that only those principles and truths which have been generally recognized and which have a place in each religion are really essential for salvation, and that Christ's only concern was to make people realize that God is love, and that all men are children of one Father, and therefore brothers (Bailey and Khul, 1947, 127-128). Key elements of this theosophical-occult teaching can be found today, enrooted in ecumenical meditations and teachings, especially when it comes to inter-religious dialogue.

In her lectures about the new world religion, Bailey (1947, 292) writes: "Thereby three major world religions – the Christian, the Hindu, and the Buddhist – will be intimately related, whilst Mohammedan faith will be found to be linked to the Christian faith because it embodies the work of the Master Jesus as He overshadowed one of His senior disciples, a very advanced initiate, Mahomet." Theosophical meditations of Alice Ann Bailey were founded in spiritism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, and her teaching about Master Jesus is not a biblical doctrine, but rather a gnostic teaching which says that Jesus is one of the highly developed teachers of ancient wisdom who rule human civilization. Bearing in mind the in-

fluence of theosophy on Christianity, it becomes clearer why liberal Christianity tends to emphasize Jesus Christ more as a teacher whose example needs to be followed, rather than the Lord who should be obeyed, worshipped, and served.

On one hand, I would like to believe that ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue of the World Council of Churches is not deeply rooted in spiritism and occultism. However, the happenings in the world point to a great, and in some areas, a prevailing spiritistic and occult influence on the global ecumenical, inter-religious, and political scenes. Especially accurate are Bailey's predictions regarding the inter-religious dialogue and relationship between Christianity and Islam. Apart from numerous processes involving inter-religious dialogues, their guidelines, documents and incentives, another thing that speaks loudly in favor of creating a one world religion is the emergence in the West and a rapid spread of *Chrislam*<sup>13</sup>— frequent common prayer gatherings of Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims, as well as appealing to Christians that, besides the Bible, they should also study the Koran and sacred texts from other religions. In the past few decades there has been a noticeable intensity of theological thinking regarding the relationship between Christianity and Islam; gatherings of Christians and Muslims have been intensified on global, regional, and local levels; meetings are organized where Christians and Muslims meet and study the Bible and the Koran simultaneously, with the proclaimed purpose of mutual enrichment of believers, while the real goal is to dispute and to dilute biblical truths, while strengthening syncretism.

No matter how hard inter-religious dialogue tries to present itself as “merely” a dialogue—meetings between Christian leaders and the leaders of other religions, common prayers and rituals, accepting and promoting religious pluralism<sup>14</sup>

13 *Chrislam* (Christianity + Islam) is a Nigerian syncretic religion which combines elements of Christianity and Islam. It was founded in the 1970's in Lagos, Nigeria. Its members consider the Bible and the Qur'an to be sacred texts. Elements of *Chrislam* have spread and have been partially within liberal Protestant and Catholic ecumenical and inter-religious centers of power, which offer repeated appeals for dialogue between Christians and Muslims, as well as studying of the Bible and the Qur'an together. The guiding notion of *Chrislam* is the idea that Islam and Christianity are compatible, and that one person can be both Christian and Muslim at the same time.

14 Religious pluralism in this context implies the view that beliefs of two or more religions are equally valuable and acceptable. No one religion contains a literal, complete, and exclusive truth; instead, each of them speaks of final and objective truth. Religious pluralism accepts the view that there are multiple paths to God – or gods – and that every religion leads to God. On the other hand, Evangelical Christianity holds a firm belief in Jesus' words: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” (Jn 14:6). This claim made by Jesus is true and exclusive, which is why Evangelical Christianity, which is based on the teaching of Jesus, and not on human theologies, should be true and exclusive when it comes to religious pluralism.



among Christians—these are all clear signs of the process of creating a one world religion.

### **The ecumenism of the Roman Catholic Church**

Since the 1930's the Roman Catholic Church has been developing and directing its own ecumenical processes, which resulted in adopting the *Unitatis Redintegratio* decree about ecumenism at the Second Vatican Council in 1964. Under the strong influence of the World Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church has aptly accepted ecumenical ideas, formed them in line with their centuries-long tradition and teaching, made them a part of their ecclesial and political program, and then made it known through the *Unitatis Redintegratio* decree of ecumenism, as well as other encyclicals and documents. Unlike Evangelical Christianity, which has been developing the spiritual process of Christian unity in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and the World Council of Churches, which has been developing its pluralistic process of socially relevant ecumenism, the Roman Catholic Church has been developing the process of ecclesial ecumenism, in which the most important goal is uniting Christian churches into one Catholic Church with the Pope as the head. It has therefore kept its traditional statement that: "For it is only through Christ's Catholic Church, which is 'the all-embracing means of salvation', that they can benefit fully from the means of salvation. We believe that Our Lord entrusted all the blessings of the New Covenant to the apostolic college alone, of which Peter is the head, in order to establish the one Body of Christ on earth to which all should be fully incorporated who belong in any way to the people of God." (UR, 3) In order to achieve this, the Catholic Church had to suggest certain concessions. Therefore, for the first time after the Reformation and the Trident Council (1545 – 1563), in the Second Vatican Council in 1964 the Catholic Church was willing to accept that there are true Christians ("separated brothers") even outside the Roman flock. It was the time when Evangelical Christianity in the world was rapidly developing and growing in numbers, but still did not have a strong ecclesial and political power with which to influence and correct the Roman Catholic ecclesial-political and ecumenical thought and practice. Debating and adopting the document, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, shows that global Evangelical Christianity as lead by the World Evangelical Alliance, which purports to represent more than 600 million Evangelical Christians (whatever this means), has reached a sufficient level of social, ecclesial, and political power to be invited to the global trilateral ecumenical table, without a significant possibility of influencing the ecumenical happenings.

Ecumenism of the Roman Catholic Church is exclusive, and is based on se-

veral cornerstones, which include sacramental theology and liturgical practice centered around the Eucharist, the central and prevailing model of Church as the institution, hierarchic Church leadership with the Pope at the head, and folk and Marianist (im)piety.

## **The document, *Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World***

### **The making of the document**

In a globalized and pluralistic world, which by the end of the 20th century became the mission field for all religions from all places, the question of converting from one religion to another arose. Proselytism became a global problem, and the need for a set of mutual rules of behavior toward one another in a pluralistic society a burning one. In order to respond to this and other urgent challenges, in 2006 the Office for Inter-Religious Relations and Dialogues of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue of the Roman Catholic Church started a perennial process of study and dialogue, which involved intra-religious and inter-religious dialogues and happenings in an attempt to find a solution for the issue of conversion and proselytism in a pluralistic religious world. The project was called, "An inter-religious reflection on conversion: from controversy to a shared code of conduct." It lasted from 2006 to 2011, and the debate took place in three sessions. The initial inter-religious session in the project, which was called, "Conversion: Assessing the Reality", was held in Lariano, Italy, in May 2006. It gathered around thirty representatives of Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islamic, Jewish, and Yoruba religious traditions, who shared their opinions and experiences regarding the issue of religious conversion and freedom of religious confession from a multi-religious standpoint.<sup>15</sup>

The second session was held in Toulouse, France, in August 2007, as an inter-Christian council on the subject, "Towards an ethical approach to conversion: Christian witness in a multi-religious world." Some thirty theologians and church leaders from Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, Pentecostal, and Evangelical traditions from Europe, Asia, Africa, and the United States gathered to discuss and debate the questions of family and community, respect toward others, economy, marketing, and competition, as well as the issue of violence and politics.

15 More details in: "Vatican and WCC to pursue common code of conduct on religious conversion", World Council of Churches News, 10. May 2006. <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/vatican-and-wcc-to-pursue-common-code-of-conduct-on-religious-conversion>

Discussing these subjects became a background for a theological reflection and adopting the principles from the document, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*. The participants of the third session of this inter-Christian council met in Bangkok, Thailand, January 25-28, 2011 and finalized the document.

Representatives of ecumenical Christianity (World Council of Churches, including contributions made by Eastern Orthodox and Protestant denominations), Roman Catholic Christianity (Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue), and Evangelical Christianity (World Evangelical Alliance, including contributions made by the Lausanne Movement, Pentecostals, and Evangelical missionary alliances) were involved in discussing and preparing the document. Upon the invitation of the representative of the World Council of Churches, the discussion was joined by representatives of the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) at the second session.<sup>16</sup>

The document, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, is the result of several years of cooperation between The Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue (PCID) and the World Council of Churches' Program on Inter-Religious Dialogue and Co-operation – WCCIRDC.<sup>17</sup> The document primarily supports the theology, policy, and practice of the World Council of Churches, and then those of the Roman Catholic Church, while the influences of biblical theology and Evangelical Christianity are barely noticeable.<sup>18</sup>

Immediately upon its publication, the document was called important and historical for several reasons.<sup>19</sup> First, the document deals with some of the more significant and more challenging aspects of Christian mission in today's pluralistic religious world (Richie, 2012). Second, the document was signed by representatives of three bodies which collectively hold around 90% of all Christians—more

16 More details in: "Christian code of conduct on religious conversion wins broader backing" World Council of Churches News, 15. August 2007. [http://ecumenism.net/2007/08/christian\\_code\\_of\\_conduct\\_on\\_religious\\_conversion\\_wins\\_broader\\_backing.htm](http://ecumenism.net/2007/08/christian_code_of_conduct_on_religious_conversion_wins_broader_backing.htm)

17 In the addendum, the document *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct* **emphasizes**: "Examples of themes on which the PCID/WCC-IRDC have collaborated in the past are: Inter-Religious Marriage (1994-1997), Inter-Religious Prayer (1997-1998) and African Religiosity (2000-2004). This document is a result of their work together."

18 For example, the document omits Jesus' Great Commission, the Roman Catholic emphasis on sacraments and the Evangelical emphasis on evangelism.

19 The document was challenged by numerous commentators from various Christian traditions. Among them are chief secretary of the World Evangelical Alliance, Geoff Tunnicliffe, and the president of the World Evangelical Alliance Committee For Religious Freedoms, John Langlois.

than two billion in the whole world.<sup>20</sup> Third, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct* is literally the first document in history which was co-signed by the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue in the Catholic Church, the World Council of Churches, and the World Evangelical Alliance. Fourth, the World Evangelical Alliance which, as is emphasized, represents around 600 million Evangelical Christians (Tunncliffe, 2011, 1), becomes more intensively involved with the ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, which is lead by the Pontifical Council For Inter-Religious Dialogue and the World Alliance of Churches.

### **The purpose of the document**

The main purpose of this document is emphasizing and adopting ethical standards and “recommendations for conduct” in Christian missionary organizations, especially in inter-religious contacts and the practice of Christian baptism and conversion in a multi-religious context. The document states: “The goal of the document is to encourage churches, church assemblies, and missionary organizations to reconsider their current practices and, with the aid of offered recommendations divulged in this document, to prepare (if appropriate) guidelines for witnessing and mission among members of other religions, as well as among persons who do not confess any religion.”

John Langlois (2011), the presiding member of the Committee for Religious Freedoms in the World Evangelical Alliance, points out that in the last several decades there have been noticeable accusations of Christians acting unethically in their attempts to win people over from other faiths, especially in converting the poor and the weak to Christianity by using various incentives, financial or otherwise. After the Sri Lanka tsunami in 2004, there have been noticeable accusations against Evangelical Christians, because they have allegedly made their aid of the homeless and the hungry conditional upon their conversion to Christianity. In 2009, the Congressional Committee of Sri Lanka accused over 400 NGO’s who were active in Sri Lanka of unethical conversions. Radical Buddhists and Hindus in many Asian countries, explains Langlois, use these arguments in order to impose and uphold anti-conversion laws, which make coercing people into unethical conversions a criminal act.

20 *Catholic News Service* in 2012 reported that by the end of 2010 there were 1.196.000.000 Catholics (details at <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/1200999.htm>). World Council of Churches points out that it represents more than five hundred million Christians (<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us>), while the World Evangelical Alliance claims to represent over six hundred million (<http://www.worldea.org/whoware/introduction>).

Similar data is also cited by John Baxter-Brown (2011) in *The Church of England Newspaper*, and he adds that the best response to these challenging circumstances is not abandoning Jesus' call to evangelism, but even more and better evangelism. That, emphasizes Baxter-Brown, is what this new document, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, is trying to do by helping churches, para-church and ecumenical organizations, missionary agencies, and individual Christians, improve on what they do and how they do it. This is not just another boring ecumenical text, which people either leave on the shelf to gather dust, or blessedly ignore. On the contrary, says Baxter-Brown, this is a text which addresses the debatable issue of conversion (turning and going from one religion to another); it is a missionary text. It addresses the global multi-religious context which all of us are a part of, which is why it is a multi-religious and ecumenical text, and has been harmonized over the period of five years among three of the world's largest communities of Christian believers.

Although the main purpose of the document is purported to be adopting ethical standards and "recommendations for behavior" for Christian missionary organizations, after a detailed analysis of the text and the context of its creation, the main purpose of the document is seen as strengthening the foundations and realization of a new paradigm of inter-religious dialogue, as well as involving conservative Evangelical Christianity in the main courses of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, one of the goals of which is accomplishing the unity of mankind.

Namely, in its crucial documents Evangelical Christianity has clearly stated its ethical standards for evangelism and mission. The *Lausanne Covenant* likens the church to the stumbling block in "the task of evangelism when it betrays the Gospel or when it lacks a living faith in God; an authentic love for our neighbor, i.e. unblemished integrity in all its activities, including promotion and finances" (LZ, 6). The *Manila Manifesto*, on the other hand, leads Evangelical Christians in repentance: "We repent for every time we neglect God's truth in the Scriptures, and we decide to proclaim it and defend it. We also repent for being indifferent to the position of the poor, and for showing partiality to the rich, and we decide to follow Jesus in preaching the Good News to all people, both in word and deed." (MP, 2) By adopting the *Manila Manifesto*, Evangelical Christians have once again pointed out the centrality and uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Aware that they are called to proclaim Jesus Christ in a pluralistic world with a multitude of religions, Evangelical Christians emphasize that even in the 1st century there were "many gods and many masters", and yet the apostles "boldly confirmed Christ's uniqueness, necessity and centrality. This is what we need to do as well", they concluded. (MP, 3) Convinced that there is only one Gospel, because there is only one Christ, who is the only way of salvation due to His death and resurrection, Evangelical

Christians also discard the “relativism which considers all religions and spiritualities to be equally valid approaches to God, as well as syncretism which attempts to combine the faith in Christ with other faiths.” (MP, 3). Along with confessing and repenting of the guilt for assuming the attitudes of ignorance, arrogance, disrespect, and even enmity towards followers of other faiths in the past, Evangelical Christians have decided to bear a positive and uncompromised witness to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in His life, death and resurrection in all aspects of evangelical activities, including inter-religious dialogue. (MM, 3)

## **Contents of the document**

The document consists of four sections: Introduction, The Basis of Christian Witness (seven points), a list of guideline Principles (twelve points), and Recommendations for Action (six recommendations).

The Introduction provides a brief summary which states that proclaiming the Word of God and witnessing to the world are basic tasks which the church must fulfill “in accordance with the principles of the Gospel, with full respect and love towards human beings”. It then goes on to explain the purpose of the document: “This document is not a theological mission statement; rather, it is its purpose to deal with some practical issues which are related to the Christian witness in the multi-religious world.”

The second section, “The Basis of Christian Witness”, offers rather questionable biblical argumentation, which reflects the current reflection and condition of relationships between those who created the document. The impression is given that the document is attempting to connect and harmonize biblical teaching with contemporary inter-religious reflections and practice.

The third section offers 12 principles which Christians should adhere to in their attempts to fulfill Christ’s Commission in order to provide an appropriate witness, especially in an inter-religious context. And finally, the fourth section proposes six recommendations for “consideration in churches, national and regional denominational bodies and missionary organizations, especially those who work in inter-religious contexts.”

Since the document outlines the hope that “Christians in the whole world will study this document in light of their own practice of witnessing to their faith in Christ, both in word and in deed”, in this article I will attempt to offer an analysis of the document in the light of God’s Word, especially in Jesus’ Great Commission, as well as in the light of the most significant documents of Evangelical Christianity in the 20th and 21st centuries.

## **Jesus' Great Commission and the *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World***

Since the document *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World* pertains to Christian evangelism and mission in the modern world, it is important to study it in the light of Jesus' timeless Great Commission as recorded in the Bible. Even though in the Introduction the editors do point out that the "document does not purport to be a theological statement regarding missions, but rather has a purpose of pointing out practical questions relating to the Christian witness in a multi-religious world," the document is indeed a theological statement regarding missions, which does not call on "churches, church assemblies, and mission organizations" to "reconsider their current practices" and realign them with Jesus' Great Commission, i.e. the Word of God, but instead it calls them to realign their practices in regard to evangelism and mission with the recommendations offered in the document. That is why it is important to study the document in the light of God's Word, and especially Jesus' Great Commission.

After the brief Introduction, the document outlines seven statements which form a "Basis for Christian Witness". As I already mentioned, these seven bases reflect current thinking and conditions in the relationships among the creators of the document; they do not provide extensive biblical foundations for Christian witness, nor do they reflect biblical priorities in reflecting on evangelism and mission. So the first basis puts man (the Christian) in the center, because it is his privilege and joy to give witness, gently and with respect, to the hope which is in him (cf. 1 Pt 3:15). However, according to the Bible, God always comes first. Humanism puts man in the center, while the Bible repeatedly claims that God is in the center; He is the Beginning and the End; He is the One who gives people new birth through the Holy Spirit (Jn 3:4-8). Without the new birth through the Holy Spirit and an established relationship with God, a person has nothing to witness about. Therefore, the first basis can only be the Triune God, His work of rebirth and establishing a relationship with man, "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Col 1:13-14).

The second and inevitable basis of Christian witness is the authority and commission of Jesus. Jesus proclaimed: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Mt 28:18-20). Then the second and the third bases can follow as laid out in the document.

The fourth basis is incomplete, if we want to understand it and to consider it

a biblical basis, because it is referring to a biblical passage which has been taken out of context. On the other hand, if we understand it as a humanistic and liberal theological basis, then it should not need a biblical reference as confirmation. The report of Paul's testimony in Athens, which is recorded in Acts 17, begins in verse 16 and ends in verse 34; it is not a passage consisting of verses 22-28, as is stated in the document. It is only the full text that gives us a complete picture, including the context, contents, goal, and results of the dialogue. But since this document refers to a biblical text in order to encourage Christians into a dialogue with people belonging to different religions and cultures, it is important to have a more detailed look at the biblical report of Paul's dialogue with people coming from different cultures and religions in Athens. Even after a very superficial review, we quickly come to notice some facts:

- While Paul was in Athens, waiting for his co-workers in the Gospel to arrive, "his spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols" (v 16).
- He was reasoning (διελέγετο) with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles in the synagogue, and also in the square with those who were present (v 17).
- He proclaimed Jesus and the resurrection as the Good News (v 18).
- He outlined the biblical teaching in detail for the Athenians, using references which were familiar to them (vs 22-28). He directly confronted those present who were non-Christians with these claims: First, "Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man"; and second, he claimed that they had been living in times of ignorance (vs 29-30).
- Paul proclaims God's message of forgiveness (without regard for the times of ignorance) and His call to all men everywhere to become converted (v 30).
- God has instituted "a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead" (v 31).

The consequences of Paul's "involvement in dialogue with people from different religions and cultures" were manifold. A group of Athenians and foreign settlers who were united in wasting time on storytelling, listening to the latest ideas and some kind of religiousness, divided into three groups after Paul's evangelistic message. Upon hearing the message of the resurrection of the dead, one group started to scorn Paul. The second group made it very clear to Paul that they would not accept his Gospel message, with the excuse that they would listen to it at some other time. Paul did not continue wasting his time with them, and left them. Thus Paul's dialogue with "people from different religions and cultures" ended very quickly, never to be continued. The third group consisted of those who remained with Paul and believed the Gospel message he had preached. They



included Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others (vv. 32-34). In other words, dialogue in the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ always initially divides “the light from the darkness” (cf. Jn 1:9; Jn 8:12; Mt 5:14,16), and after that, those who receive the Gospel of Jesus Christ and live by it remain united in it. Dialogue in the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ gives believers a solid foundation in the Word of God, points them to the method of dialogue and preaching of the Gospel which, in addition to Jesus and Paul, was used by all the other apostles; ascertains clear standards for the successfulness of the dialogue through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and obedience to His Word; and points the dialogue towards His goal, i.e. eternal life (Jn 17:3). This is the kind of dialogue Evangelical Christians were called to.

So, the fourth basis of the document encourages churches and believers to include dialogue with members with various religions and cultures in their witnessing, but it omits to mention the biblical purpose of the dialogue, which is clearly laid out in the omitted lines from Acts 17:29-34. Based on the text in question, dialogue with members of other religions and cultures has an exclusive pre-evangelistic purpose of bringing the members of various religions and cultures to a recognition of their ignorance, and to an acceptance of God's calling for all people everywhere to be converted, because the day will come when God the Father will judge the world righteously through Jesus Christ.

*Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World* outlines the following as one of the bases for Christian witness: “In some contexts, it is difficult, discouraged, and even prohibited to live and proclaim the Gospel, and yet Christ did send Christians out to continue faithfully witnessing about Him, in solidarity with one another” (see Mt 28:19-20, Mk 16:14-18, Lk 24:44-48, Jn 20:21, Acts 1:8).”

The key commandment given by Jesus, known as the Great Commission (Mt 28:19-20), is placed by the document at the low fifth place in the list of bases for Christian witness, and it only does so in the context of difficult living and proclaiming the Gospel. It also adds a symptomatic addition to Jesus' commandment: “faithfully witnessing about Him, in solidarity with one another”. What is implied by witnessing about Him “in solidarity with one another”?

Since the document hardly uses the word “evangelism”, and when it does, it is in a negative context (“Abusing situations in which there is poverty and scarcity has no place in Christian evangelism”), the impression is given that evangelism is being sacrificed on behalf of the humanistic greater good of mankind, in the spirit of ecumenical cooperation.

The Great Commission, i.e. the task of evangelizing the world, which the Lord Jesus Christ has entrusted to His disciples, is recorded in all four Gospels (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:14-18; Lk 24:46-49; Jn 20:21-22) and Acts (Acts 1:8). Dialogue with members of other religions and cultures that is conditioned by culture,

trends, and worldviews must be subjected to Jesus' command and His promises. According to Matthew's Gospel (28:18-20), "And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.'"

The Great Commission begins with an absolute statement made by Jesus: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." (Mt 28:18). By receiving all authority in heaven and on earth, Jesus confirmed that He is Lord over all, and that everything and everyone must obey Him, because all celestial resources are at His disposal. His statement is more than just a Christological/cosmological proclamation, as recorded in Phil 2:9-11 ("For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"). It is also a proclamation of a fulfillment of the prophecy from Dn 7:14 ("And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed"); and of course, a firm foundation for all that will follow (Day, 2007, 378). Jesus' statement is the basis for Christian witnessing, evangelism, mission, dialogue, and overall operation. The disciples of Christ are not doing this by their own strength, wisdom, and power, but by Christ's authority and power which He has given them, and behind which He himself stands as the all-powerful Lord of all. It is important to note that here Jesus acts as Lord and Ruler who is commanding His disciples. Even though Jesus is an excellent teacher and an exemplary agent of the Father's love who should be followed by Christians (which is emphasized by liberal Protestant and liberal Evangelical and Catholic theologians), in the Great Commission He is Lord and Ruler, whose commandments must be obeyed by His disciples in their unchanged form without questioning (as is emphasized by conservative Evangelical Christians).

It is worth noting that Jesus had been carefully preparing his disciples for their acceptance of His authority and working through Him. "Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness... These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: ... 'And as you go, preach, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.'" (cf. Mt 10:1-15; Lk 9:1-6; 10:1-20). During three years of teaching and discipleship, He taught them how to preach

the Good News, proclaim the Kingdom of God, make disciples, heal the sick, drive out evil spirits, raise the dead, deliver the captives, feed the hungry, and right those who are wrong. He taught them how to proclaim the Gospel in various circumstances in life, as well as in particular situations. During the learning process, the disciples would often come back to Jesus full of joy and report, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name!" (Lk 10:17). They learned how to use His authority in everyday situations, which were often ridden with conflict. They saw how Jesus Himself used His authority in dealing with the proponents of Jewish traditions, in dealing with the Pharisees and the ruling authorities.

Christian witness in a pluralistic world must be primarily rooted in Jesus' authority. Christians should discover the principles for leading a dialogue in a pluralistic world in the Bible, the Old and New Testaments, because "That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one might say, 'See this, it is new'? Already it has existed for ages which were before us." (Eccl 1:9-10) Rarely has any subject been so thoroughly written about in so many places, as is the subject of the relationship of God's people to other religions. The Bible lays out very clear and unambiguous principles for the relationship between His people and other religions and cultures, which is why I am baffled as to why representatives of big Christian bodies, who like to boast that they represent more than 90% of all Christians, would decide to suggest the implementation of a humanistic principle in Christian churches and missionary organizations, in an attempt to Christianize it by referencing a few quotes, usually out of context.

Christians were sent to preach (proclaim) the Gospel to every creature, all nations, and in every place. The result of this proclamation (i.e. evangelism) involves obedience to Christ, joining His church, and responsibly serving the world (LZ, 4).

Not only does the document, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct* rarely use the term "evangelism", which is so common in evangelical Christianity, but it also does not use the biblical terms such as "preaching" and "proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom of God", except for two secondary purposes. Furthermore, the document encourages Christians to try and adhere to the recommended twelve principles in their attempts to fulfill the Commission of Christ, in order to do it in an appropriate manner, especially in an inter-religious context. So, what is this "appropriate manner, especially in an inter-religious context"? The content of the phrase "appropriate manner" is not explained, which means that anyone can understand "appropriate manner" to mean whatever they want it to mean. It is important to note that these principles are mostly humanistic and theologically liberal, and only somewhat biblical. And it is not possible to fulfill Christ's Commission through humanistic or

liberal principles.

*Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious world: Recommendations for Conduct* points out acting in the love of God as the first principle of Christian witness. This is based on Scriptures from Matthew 22:34-40 and John 14:15, with the explanation that Christians believe that God is the source of all love and that they are accordingly called to live in love and love their neighbor as themselves as part of their witness. This principle needs to be given a more proper biblical explanation for better understanding. For example, the Gospel of John 3:16-21 emphasizes:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God.”

This portion of the Word of God provides a significant supplement to the texts recommended in the document. God has manifested His limitless love for the world by sending His only begotten Son, with the desire that all people would believe in Him as Savior, and to receive and have eternal life. God’s love is connected to faith in Jesus Christ, and with knowing the one and only true God and Jesus Christ, who was sent by God (cf. Jn 17:3). First and foremost, Christians are called to “practice the truth” and to be in fellowship with Jesus Christ, and only then will their works be “wrought in God”. Jesus said to the disciples: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments... He who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and will disclose myself to him... If anyone loves me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our abode with him.” (Jn 14:15,21,23). A Christian’s love is rooted in God’s love, in knowing God, and in obeying the Word of God. When this same Holy Spirit descends upon the believer, He empowers him with the strength to witness (Acts 1:8) and develop fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, meekness, and self-control (Gal 5:22). Without loving God, it is impossible to love oneself, and without loving oneself, which includes primarily eternity, and only secondarily the present, it is impossible to completely love one’s neighbor, especially if this love does not imply fellowship with the Triune God, and the acting of the Holy Spirit in and through the believer in proclaiming the Gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ.

The second principle of the document, which is entitled "Following Jesus Christ", should be logically rooted in Jesus' commandment, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28:19), but it is not. By emphasizing following Jesus Christ, this principle follows liberal theological thought, which says that Jesus and His teaching are just a good example by which to live and behave. The document strongly supports the views of religious pluralism, according to which the beliefs of two or more religions are equally valid and acceptable, namely that no one religion, including Christianity, contains the literal, complete and exclusive truth, and there are many ways to God, or gods, and therefore every religion leads to god. In line with the teaching of religious pluralism, the document makes no mention of sin as the foundational human problem, which is the source of all other problems. Thus it also mentions no salvation or the Savior as the only and real solution for peace and the common good.

Preaching and accepting the Gospel creates a basis for making other people Christ's disciples. The model for Christian discipleship can be seen in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, who calls on people to follow Him (Lk 9:23-24; Mt 10:38-39; Mk 8:34). A disciple is a believer, a person who lives a life of conscious and continuous identification with the Lord in His life, death, and resurrection, through words, actions, attitudes, motives, and intentions. A disciple understands Christ's absolute ownership of his life, joyfully accepts Him as Savior, enjoys His Lordship, lives in Christ's constant presence, models his life after Christ's and worships his Lord and Savior (Peters, 1996:187).

The disciple-making process includes baptizing the disciples in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to do all the He has commanded. Preaching the Gospel brings people to a decision to accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior and Lord, to a baptism in the water in church, into the fellowship with other disciples, i.e. saints in Christ, which is then followed by teaching and training in doing all that Christ has commanded.

Jesus' order to "(teach) them to observe all that I commanded you" has been altered by some Christians in their life and practice. If we were to align it with the document, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, Jesus' order could go something like this, "and teach them to lead ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue regarding all that I commanded you." Christians are supposed to obey the commandments of the Lord, not negotiate them or have dialogues about them. As the disciples of Christ, and apart from obeying Christ's commands, Christians are to teach both Christians and non-Christians to submit to the will of God, as revealed in Jesus' ministry and teaching. Demonstrating the power of the Kingdom of God should be an integral part of their teaching, as can be seen in Paul's ministry of preaching the Gospel, where words and actions were inexorably connected and strongly emphasized. "For I will not

presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me, resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed.” (Rom 15:18)

Disciples of Christ are called and sent to serve people in the world by word and deed, introducing and mediating into people’s lives all that God has in store for them, and all that He has decided to do and fulfill through Christians by the power of the Spirit.

The Great Commission was preceded by Jesus’ extensive preparations of His disciples for the fulfillment of the Commission. Acts of the Apostles, the New Testament epistles, and early church history testify to the fruits of obeying Jesus’ commandment. The Scriptures keep reminding us that the Great Commission and the task of proclaiming the Gospel and making disciples, baptizing them and teaching them, as well as serving the needy, cannot be separated from the power and presence of the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Christ promised to be with those who will obey His Commission in all the days until the end of the world. Just like it was then, Jesus’ disciples today are also called and sent to carry out the Great Commission—to make disciples, in Christ’s authority and in His presence.

The third principle, which is entitled “Christian Virtues”, the document emphasizes that Christians are “called to act honorably, compassionately, with empathy and humility, overcoming all arrogance, ingratiating, and vilification.” Here the document is referencing Gal 5:22. However, the Scripture that the document is referring to does not speak about Christian virtues at all, but about the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the believer. Of course, it has been quoted out of context here as well. The key biblical exhortation is living by the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:16-26). Christians are called to live by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who then brings forth the fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22). Paul goes on to conclude: “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit” (Gal 5:25). It is particularly important for Christian witnessing, especially in a multi-religious world, to reflect and find solutions in the Holy Spirit for the deeds of the flesh (both one’s own and those of other dialogue participants), which are: “immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these” (Gal 5:19-21).

As far as Evangelical Christians are concerned, the *Amsterdam Declaration* (2000, 6) sums up the only acceptable solution for Christian witness in a pluralistic world:

Today’s evangelist is called to proclaim the gospel in an increasingly pluralistic world. In this global village of competing faiths and many world religions, it is important that our evangelism be marked both by faithfulness to the good news of Christ and humility in our delivery of it. Because God’s general revelation extends to all points of his creation, there may well be traces of truth,

beauty and goodness in many non-Christian belief systems. But we have no warrant for regarding any of these as alternative gospels or separate roads to salvation. The only way to know God in peace, love and joy is through the reconciling death of Jesus Christ the risen Lord. As we share this message with others, we must do so with love and humility shunning all arrogance, hostility and disrespect. As we enter into dialogue with adherents of other religions, we must be courteous and kind. But such dialogue must not be a substitute for proclamation. Yet because all persons are made in the image of God, we must advocate religious liberty and human rights for all.

*We pledge ourselves to treat those of other faiths with respect and faithfully and humbly serve the nation in which God has placed us, while affirming that Christ is the one and only Savior of the world.*

Since the other eight principles do not refer to biblical teaching, but rather mediate for general humanistic principles, we will not be covering them in this paper. The subjects that principles 4-11 point to are thoroughly covered in the Bible as well as key documents of Evangelical Christianity, such as *The Lausanne Covenant*, *The Manila Manifesto*, *The Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Evangelical Celebration*, *The Amsterdam Declaration*, and the *Cape Town Statement of Commitment*.

## **Document's recommendations in light of God's Word**

In the fourth section of the document the editors suggest that, in the spirit of ecumenical cooperation, the document should be considered in churches, national and regional denominational bodies and missionary organizations, especially in those which operate in a multi-religious context. The recommendations unite six activities which should help Christians strengthen their witness in a multi-religious world.

The first recommendation calls for studying the issues which were set forth in the document, and forming guidelines for conduct in relation to Christian witness in a local context. Where possible, the document points out, this should be done in an ecumenical way and in cooperation with representatives of other religions. How shall we interpret this recommendation in the light of God's Word? Can we include in these guidelines Jesus' command to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned" (Mk 16:15-16)? Not only can we do it, but it is inevitable in Christian recommendations for conduct. According to Jesus' command, every ecumenical and inter-religious meeting ought to be focused on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Christians should preach the Gospel in every inter-religious gathering, because followers of other religions

need to hear the message of salvation in Jesus Christ, and this message needs to bring them to a decision as to whether or not they will accept and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior. People from other religions must know that they condemn themselves if they do not believe in Jesus Christ according to the biblical report.

The recommendation for building a relationship of respect and trust toward people from all religions is a good incentive for “resolving conflicts, renewing righteousness, healing the memories, reconciliation, and establishing the peace”, but it is futile, because there is no power, no strength for implementation behind it—or at least that is what centuries of history ridden with conflicts, wars, and injustices in a society with the efforts at peace-making policies and practices tell us. The problem with people and social communities of all times, including those of today, is sin, which gives birth to the deeds of the flesh (Gal 5:16-26), as well as not knowing and rejecting the Triune God, the Lord of all that exists. Which is why the exhortation for Christians to become involved in an ongoing inter-religious dialogue as part of their Christian commitment can only find its spiritual justification if the Christians who live in inter-religious contexts live and act in obedience to the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:16,25). Living in line with the Holy Spirit does not only involve relationships of respect and trust toward all people with no regard for their religious affiliation, but also those relationships which stem from the fruit of the Holy Spirit in Christians, including “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal 5:22).

The third recommendation outlines four exhortations to Christians. First, it exhorts Christians to strengthen their own religious identity and faith. However, the document does not reveal what is implied by religious identity and faith. Since it is not referring to any Scriptures, the document is leaving a lot of space for including just about anybody who has any religious identity or any kind of faith. What does this mean for Evangelical Christians? Are the recommendations from this document taking them away from the Word of God by establishing some new authorities and standards for living and acting?

The second exhortation sheds light on the first one. A further strengthening of religious identity and faith is recommended, with simultaneous deepening of knowing and understanding other religions. Instead of leading Christians toward the knowledge and consistent obedience to the Word of God, as well as building a relationship with the Triune God, it leads them toward syncretism as promoted by religious pluralism. This is why the document emphasizes the strengthening of religious identity and faith with no mention of the Word of God as the only authority, with the attitude that all religious books have the same authority. The third exhortation is connected to the first two, and instead of calling on Christians to be consistent in their actions from the perspective of the Kingdom of God, they call on them to consider the perspectives of followers from other religions.



The fourth exhortation reminds Christians that they should avoid erroneous interpretations of beliefs and practices of believers of other religions. Evangelical Christians can and should agree with this, and apply it in their life. *The Amsterdam Declaration* (2000, 6) is very emphatic about it: "The only way to know God in peace, love and joy is through the reconciling death of Jesus Christ the risen Lord. As we share this message with others, we must do so with love and humility shunning all arrogance, hostility and disrespect." *The Cape Town Statement of Commitment* in the call to act (III, 1, C), on the other hand, says: "In the name of the God of truth, we (i) refuse to promote lies and caricatures about other faiths, and (ii) denounce and resist the racist prejudice, hatred and fear incited in popular media and political rhetoric."

The recommendation for cooperating with other religious communities in inter-religious promotion of righteousness and general good is acceptable to Evangelical Christians, and it is part of their centuries-long attempts to help solve conflicts, and to ensure a correct and comprehensive appreciation of religious freedoms.

The document concludes with an exhortation to prayer, which all Christians should wholeheartedly respond to, regardless of whether they support this document or not, as they pray for the will of God to be done on earth, as it is in heaven (Mt 6:10), seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, being aware that all other things will be added to them (Mt 6:33).

## Conclusion

The ecumenism of the World Council of Churches and the ecumenism of the Roman Catholic Church are trying, each under its own terms, to gather all people who call themselves Christians under one "roof", i.e. one institution (one world religion, the Roman Catholic Church), regardless of whether they believe in Jesus Christ or obey His Word. However, Evangelical unity in the Gospel has no intention of uniting people into one institution or one religion; instead, it recognizes and accepts as brothers and sisters all those who have been born again by the Holy Spirit and who accept Jesus Christ as God the Son, Lord and Savior, no matter which church or institution they belong to. Born again believers can organize events together, but they will always try and give priority to spiritually relevant happenings over socially, culturally or politically relevant events.

It should be expected that, whether they have conservative and Evangelical views, or liberal and Protestant views, or devoted or nominal Catholic and Orthodox views and experiences, Christians should be basing their thinking about Christian witness on God the Father, His powerful and eternal Word, and the authority and commandments of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The document, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World* did not meet these

expectations; indeed, it cannot meet them. Its unwritten purpose is to dull the sharp edge of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to use inter-religious dialogue in order to stop world evangelism, and to “enrich” Christianity with teaching and practices of other religions.

Unlike the document, *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendation For Conduct*, which was accepted by about a dozen representatives of the World Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and the World Evangelical Alliance, the *Cape Town Statement of Commitment*, a document which is officially accepted by the majority of Evangelical Christians in the world, assesses the cultural, spiritual, and political contemporary situation in a much different manner, based on the Bible:

We are commanded to love and worship the living God alone. But like Old Testament Israel we allow our love for God to be adulterated by going after the gods of this world, the gods of the people around us.[7] We fall into syncretism, enticed by many idols such as greed, power and success, serving mammon rather than God. We accept dominant political and economic ideologies without biblical critique. We are tempted to compromise our belief in the uniqueness of Christ under the pressure of religious pluralism. Like Israel we need to hear the call of the prophets and of Jesus himself to repent, to forsake all such rivals, and to return to obedient love and worship of God alone.

After analyzing *Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World* and the Great Commission given by Jesus, it is obvious that the document was based neither in Jesus’ authority nor in His commandments; on the contrary, the document points Christians towards inter-religious dialogue, which serves as a replacement for evangelizing and for making disciples of Christ. Although the purpose of the document is providing recommendations for conduct of Christians as they witness in a multi-religious context, the document does not make a single mention of Jesus’ promise to His disciples: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) How can one be a witness for Jesus Christ without obeying His commandments, without understanding and obeying His Word, and without the power of the Holy Spirit? Is this possible?

Inter-religious dialogue can contribute to a better implementation of earthly righteousness and common good, and for this reason Evangelical Christians should indeed become involved in the dialogue. On the other hand, we are to reject dialogue which supports syncretism, universalism, and religious pluralism, which try and question the authority and the power of the Bible, the Word of God, each in its own way, and imply that Jesus Christ speaks through all religions, turning the Gospel of Jesus Christ into a social Gospel, and relativizing the truth.

That is why Christians need to adopt a dialogue which is based on the truth of Jesus Christ, while they should reject all those dialogues which, whether directly or indirectly, whether completely or partially, oppose the Gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible, fully aware that we will all appear before God's judgment (cf. Rev 20:12; Mt 16:27; Jas 2:12; Acts 17:31; 2 Cor 5:10). Evangelical Christians today need to put inter-religious dialogue in its proper place, as is emphasized by the *Cape Town Statement of Commitment* (III, 1, E): "We affirm the proper place for dialogue with people of other faiths, just as Paul engaged in debate with Jews and Gentiles in the synagogue and public arenas. As a legitimate part of our Christian mission, such dialogue combines confidence in the uniqueness of Christ and in the truth of the gospel with respectful listening to others."

And finally, it is important to emphasize that the document focuses more on promoting syncretism and religious pluralism than it does on promoting the Gospel of Jesus Christ. At its center it places social and cultural activities of Christians and solving contemporary social problems of the globalized world, whereas proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every creature is only vaguely discernible on the sidelines.

## Abbreviations

- CIOP – Cape Town Statement of Commitment
- CUV – Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC
- LC – Lausanne Covenant
- MP – Manila Manifesto
- UR – The "UNITATIS REDINTEGRATIO" decree on ecumenism

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Stanko Jambrek

***Kršćansko svjedočanstvo u multireligijskome svijetu  
u svjetlu Riječi Božje***

Sažetak

Nakon petogodišnjih priprema tri najutjecajnija svjetska kršćanska tijela – Svjetsko vijeće crkava (World Council of Churches), Papinsko vijeće za međureligijski dijalog (Pontifical Council on Inter-religious Dialogue) i Svjetska evanđeoska alijansa (World Evangelical Alliance) – zajednički su objavila 2011. godine dokument *Kršćansko svjedočanstvo u multireligijskome svijetu: Preporuke za ponašanje* (Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct) o etici u kršćanskoj misiji. U tekstu se raspravlja o povijesnom, kulturnom i crkveno-političkom kontekstu nastajanja dokumenta, značaju dokumenta za evanđeosko kršćanstvo te razlože njegov odnos prema Riječi Božjoj, posebice prema Isusovu Velikom poslanju te moguće duhovne pozitivne i negativne posljedice njegova usvajanja i primjene.

