

# **The Need for Clarification: Is the Reformation Over?**

By Leonardo De Chirico and Greg Pritchard

## **Introduction**

In 2015, the Evangelical [Reformanda Initiative](#) was established to describe and analyze the Roman Catholic Church's beliefs and practices. It was created because many Evangelicals seem to be uncertain about what Roman Catholics actually believe. Do they believe in the same Gospel, or something significantly different? One of the first articles produced by the Reformanda Initiative was [“What Do You Think About Pope Francis?”](#), co-authored by the writers of this paper, Leonardo De Chirico and Greg Pritchard.<sup>1</sup>

In response to this article, Thomas Schirmacher, the World Evangelical Alliance Associate Secretary General for Theological Concerns (with Thomas Johnson, the World Evangelical Alliance Ambassador to the Vatican) wrote the article [“Why We, As Evangelical Reformed Christians, Seek to Dialogue with Pope Francis.”](#)<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the article was emotionally reactive and lacked academic rigor.<sup>3</sup> But more seriously, it accused our article “*of painting a very negative picture of the Pope's character*” and charged that we “*impugn both the Pope's motives and his character. They seem to suggest that Pope Francis is an expert at deluding people.*”<sup>4</sup> At that time, we did what one often should do in response to false accusations: nothing.

In October of 2016, the Reformanda Initiative released the statement [“Is the Reformation Over?”](#) (“Is the Reformation Over?” Statement or the Statement), which was signed by over two hundred global Evangelical leaders and scholars and translated into French, Spanish, Polish, Portuguese, Italian, Swedish, Slovakian, and Romanian.<sup>5</sup>

Schirmacher and Johnson (this time as a co-author) wrote a response to the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement with the article [“Let the Reformation Continue!”](#)<sup>6</sup> Again, this article makes strong accusations against not just us, but also against the hundreds of Evangelical leaders who either helped craft or signed the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement:

*The statement seems to assume that the Pope purposely deceives us or even lies to us and the public without providing clear evidence. We are afraid this could violate the ninth commandment by bearing false witness against our neighbor (in this case the Pope and other Catholic leaders).<sup>7</sup>*

This is a serious charge. As we will see shortly, this accusation is also false, but it cannot be ignored as the first article was. The hundreds of leaders and scholars who signed the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement will be tarred by this accusation, and so we believe we must respond.

The present article is a response to both Schirmmacher’s first article and Schirmmacher and Johnson’s second article.<sup>8</sup> We have to acknowledge that this article has been painful to write. It is not pleasant to publically critique two brothers in Christ. Both Schirmmacher and Johnson have knowledge of Roman Catholicism and extensive experience working with Roman Catholic leaders, and we would have welcomed a critical response that advanced the discussion. However, because their articles contain a number of inaccuracies, distortions, and unfair accusations, we need to respond in a candid and straightforward way.

Our hope is that this article may serve a wider audience. Because the topic of the relationship between Evangelicalism and Roman Catholicism is crucially important, especially given that this year is the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation, our anticipation is that this article may be useful to clarify why the Reformation is not over and what both Roman Catholics and Evangelicals actually believe.

We will first make a few comments about both articles’ general method of argumentation and then evaluate the central argument of the Schirmmacher-Johnson article.

### **Articles’ Method**

There are multiple problems with both articles’ basic method. We will only mention two here:

#### ***1) Inaccurate and Misleading Statements***

There were a number of inaccurate statements in both articles, and we do not have space to respond to all of them.<sup>9</sup> However, we will briefly respond to Schirmmacher's accusation and Schirmmacher-Johnson's accusation mentioned above.

Schirmmacher writes that the authors of "What Do You Think About Pope Francis?" are "*painting a very negative picture of the Pope's character,*" "*impugn both the Pope's motives and his character,*" and "*seem to suggest that Pope Francis is an expert at deluding people.*"<sup>10</sup>

What does the article "What Do You Think About Pope Francis?" actually say about Pope Francis?

The article explains that the Pope is "*one of the most liked leaders in today's world*" and his message is "*inclusive and nonjudgmental.*" Personally, Francis is "*sincere, kind, and loving,*" "*charming*" and "*relationally warm.*" He is described as "*magnetic*" and able to "*winsomely communicate,*" with an enormous capacity for "*empathetic listening*" and "*profound political gifts.*" He is described as having an "*extraordinary openness and warmth toward evangelicals.*"<sup>11</sup>

The article does explain that Francis is a Jesuit (he is), who is also a "*gifted and canny politician*" (he is), and that some have described him as a "*chess player*" (they have).<sup>12</sup> At one point, Schirmmacher accuses the authors of falsely describing Francis as a chess player, and yet in the same article he asserts that "*you have to be [a chess player] if you have to deal with the Curia!*," in effect disagreeing with himself.<sup>13</sup>

Schirmmacher seems offended by the article's description of Francis' extraordinary communication and political gifts as comparable to one of the greatest public communicators of the day, former U.S. President Barack Obama. But both Francis and Obama have an amazing ability to listen to and empathize with others and communicate effectively, and the article seeks to help readers to understand Francis by using Obama's extraordinary gifts as a point of comparison.

Schirmmacher's description of the article as "*a very negative picture of the Pope's character*" which "*impugn[s] both the Pope's motives and his character*" is clearly incorrect.<sup>14</sup>

In short, the article “What Do You Think About Pope Francis?” portrays Francis as a sincere, kind, and extraordinarily gifted Jesuit from South America who is also a canny political leader and the most ecumenical Pope yet -- who is relationally reaching out to Evangelicals (and others). It encourages Evangelicals to do their homework regarding how to understand Francis and his role as the Pope of the Catholic Church as he is (according to Catholic sources) seeking to establish a new relationship between Catholicism and Evangelicalism.

Schirmacher-Johnson’s article continues the pattern of inaccurate statements and impugns the character of the over 200 signers of the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement. We quoted their comment before, but it bears repeating:

*The statement seems to assume that the Pope purposely deceives us or even lies to us and the public without providing clear evidence. We are afraid this could violate the ninth commandment by bearing false witness against our neighbor (in this case the Pope and other Catholic leaders).<sup>15</sup>*

There are only two references to Pope Francis in the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement. The first explains one of the reasons why some claim that the Reformation is over:

*The challenges for Christians worldwide (e.g., secularism and Islam) are so daunting that Protestants and Catholics can no longer afford to remain divided. A unified witness (with perhaps the Pope as the leading spokesman?) would greatly benefit global Christianity.<sup>16</sup>*

The second describes the Roman Catholic theology of indulgences:

*Moreover, the Roman Catholic Church’s view is revealed by its continued use of indulgences (i.e., the remission of the temporal punishment for sin allotted by the Church on special occasions). It was the theology of indulgences that triggered the Reformation, but this system has been invoked most recently by Pope Francis in the 2015-2016 Year of Mercy.<sup>17</sup>*

It is likely that Schirmmacher and Johnson’s accusation is referring only to a short section of the Statement that they quote immediately beforehand, in which the Pope is never mentioned:

*The fact that millions of Catholics have become Evangelicals in recent years has not gone unnoticed by Roman Catholic leaders. They are seeking to respond strategically to this loss of their faithful by adopting traditional Evangelical language (e.g. conversion, gospel, mission, and mercy) and establishing ecumenical dialogues with churches they once condemned.*<sup>18</sup>

If they mean this paragraph when they use the term “the statement,” they seem to believe that this passage is asserting that because Catholic leaders in recent years have been strategically using Evangelical language and seeking to establish ecumenical dialogue, the Pope is exercising intentional deception by misrepresenting Catholic beliefs. However, that is clearly not what this quote states or implies. At no point does the Statement assert that Pope Francis is dishonest. So again we have a false accusation with no evidence.

The fact that Schirmmacher and Johnson make such an untrue allegation is disconcerting, and should encourage a careful reader to question any of their assertions. A similar problem exists in how both articles distort the most basic descriptions.

## **2) Distortions not Descriptions**

A key element of good scholarship is an ability to describe another writer’s argument fairly and honestly.

At the beginning of the article “Let the Reformation Continue!”, Schirmmacher-Johnson summarize their main point in extra-large bold font: ***“We respectfully believe that the statement ‘Is the Reformation Over? A Statement of Evangelical Convictions’ is not a sufficient description of our present theological situation.”***<sup>19</sup> The remainder of the article then seeks to unpack why the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement is not a *“sufficient description of our present theological situation.”*<sup>20</sup>

But this was not the point of the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement. There is an extensive list of topics one should address in attempting to provide *“a sufficient description of our*

*present theological situation.*”<sup>21</sup> To list only a few issues from an Evangelical perspective, one would need to include the health and wealth gospel, Islam, Evangelicalism’s discipleship crisis, new perspective movement, higher critical approaches to the Bible, theological education, etc. However, the goal of the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement was only to provide a 2-page summary of Evangelical convictions regarding Roman Catholicism on the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation.

Imagine walking into a typical Italian restaurant and asking for sushi. They don’t serve sushi. Why would you ask for something they don’t have? This is similar to what Schirmmacher and Johnson have done with their article. They inaccurately describe the goal of the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement and then say it has not achieved the false goal they have foisted on it. This fundamental distortion is embedded in (and garbles) their entire article.

There are a number of distortions and false characterizations in how Schirmmacher and Johnson formulate the issues and questions in their articles. The rest of this article seeks to clarify and evaluate just a few of these distortions.

### **Schirmmacher-Johnson’s argument**

We will limit our critical evaluation of Schirmmacher-Johnson’s article to two main issues: “Is the Reformation Over?” and “How are we saved? - Justification by Faith Alone.”

#### ***1) Is the Reformation Over?***

Schirmmacher-Johnson propose seven statements that they believe the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement affirms or assumes. The rest of their article then seeks to show why each of these statements is false.

The first of their summary statements is the following:

*A major international discussion is underway in which some serious theologians say that the Reformation is over.*<sup>22</sup>

Schirmmacher-Johnson explain part of their reasoning for why they believe this is not true:

*We know of no major leader in the Catholic Church, the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), or the World Council of Churches (WCC) who believes this.*

Their framing of the issue is a classic red herring, which distracts attention from the real issue. What was the actual wording of the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement?

*After centuries of controversies and strained relationships between Evangelicals and Catholics, the ecumenical friendliness of recent times has created ripe conditions for some leaders in both camps to claim that the Reformation is all but over – that the primary theological disagreements that led to the rupture in Western Christianity in the sixteenth century have been resolved.<sup>23</sup>*

Several issues should be clarified at this point:

1) After centuries of persecution and vilification of Evangelical churches as cults and sects (which Francis has recently apologized for), the Roman Catholic Church has largely changed its aggressive tone and behavior.

It is likely that Schirmacher-Johnson would acknowledge this point.

2) There is a growing ecumenical friendliness over the last half century, particularly as a result of the Second Vatican Council.

Again Schirmacher-Johnson would likely agree and have described the recent shift toward ecumenical affability.

3) The “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement explains that some Evangelical and Catholic leaders “*claim that the Reformation is all but over.*”<sup>24</sup>

This is where the problem begins. Schirmacher-Johnson assert that they do “*not know exactly what the statement that ‘the Reformation is over’ means.*”<sup>25</sup>

However, immediately after the Statement notes that “*some leaders in both camps*” have claimed “*that the Reformation is all but over*” it provides a definition: “*that the primary theological disagreements that led to the rupture in Western Christianity in the sixteenth century have been resolved.*”<sup>26</sup> The Statement clearly explains exactly what it means by the phrase “*the Reformation is over.*”

We are left with Schirmacher-Johnson’s distortion of the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement’s thesis. Schirmacher-Johnson deny that “*A major international discussion is underway in which some serious theologians say that the Reformation is over.*”<sup>27</sup> At one point Schirmacher-Johnson imply that “*major leaders*” from some of their favorite institutions should be involved for it to constitute a “*major international discussion.*”<sup>28</sup>

Observe their false summary of the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement’s claim. The Statement asserts that the friendly ecumenical conditions have led “*some leaders in both camps to claim that the Reformation is all but over.*”<sup>29</sup> Schirmacher-Johnson inflate the statement from “*some leaders*” to a “*major international discussion is underway*” by some “*serious theologians.*”<sup>30</sup>

Not only have Schirmacher-Johnson distorted what the Statement says, they are also inaccurate in their assumption that “serious theologians” are the primary ecumenical conversation partners. Many of the leaders who have been significant in this discussion, and are briefly mentioned below, are historians, bishops, pastors, editors, writers and even Pope Francis himself. Most of the leaders who are actually engaging in this ecumenical process are not ivory tower academic theologians. Think just of Francis. Before becoming Pope, Francis never published a book of theology, and few would describe him as a philosopher and theologian as his two predecessors certainly were. But wouldn’t the Pope be considered a major leader?

But it is still important to evaluate if the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement’s assertion is accurate. Are “*some leaders in both camps*” claiming that “*the Reformation is all but over*”? This is an empirical question with an empirical answer.

“Is the Reformation over?” is not a novel question, as Schirmacher-Johnson assert. Since the publication of the book [Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of](#)

[Contemporary Roman Catholicism](#) by Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom in 2005, the question has been debated and has generated a lot of interest. Although Noll and Nystrom acknowledge that certain issues still divide Evangelicals and Catholics, they conclude, “If it is true . . . that *iustificatio articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae* (justification is the article on which the church stands or falls), then the Reformation is over.”<sup>31</sup>

Richard Neuhaus, the founder and long-time editor of the influential journal *First Things*, was a persistent advocate for the idea that the Reformation is (or should be) over. Neuhaus converted to the Catholic Church from Lutheranism, and like most zealous new converts, was very interested in trying to help his fellow Protestants find the path home to Rome. During his time as the editor of *First Things*, the majority of relevant articles and editorials reflected his strategy to identify and remove roadblocks to a closer relationship between Catholics and Evangelicals.

Neuhaus himself was also the co-founder and dominant leader of the Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT) project, which issued a series of statements seeking to articulate areas of common conviction between Evangelicals and Catholics. Twenty years ago, Evangelicals and Catholics together addressed the question of justification in the statement, “The Gift of Salvation.” ECT participant and Evangelical leader Timothy George was effusive in his praise of “The Gift of Salvation”: “*We rejoice that our Roman Catholic interlocutors have been able to agree with us that the doctrine of justification set forth in this document agrees with what the Reformers meant by justification by faith alone (sola fide).*”<sup>32</sup>

Neuhaus summarized the issue:

*The 16th century Reformation claim was that the doctrine of justification is the article by which the Church stands or falls. The Joint Declaration between the Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican, plus the statement by Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT), “The Gift of Salvation,” claim that church-dividing differences on justification have been resolved. If so, the title of the book by evangelicals Mark Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, Is the Reformation Over?, naturally follows.*<sup>33</sup>

Neuhaus wrote this in the leading English-language journal on religion in public life 12 years ago. Recently, Presbyterian Peter Leithart has also advocated the idea that the Reformation is over in both a series of articles and his book, [The End of Protestantism](#).

On a more global scale, the 2013 document “[From Conflict to Communion. Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017](#)”, signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church in preparation for the 2017 Reformation anniversary, indicates the goal of an ecumenical trajectory for the two church bodies. “From Conflict to Communion” is a summary statement that envisions overcoming the theological and ecclesiastical disagreements originating from the Reformation. While acknowledging the reality of existing points of difference between Catholics and Lutherans, the document agrees with the definition offered by the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement that the “*primary theological disagreements that led to the rupture in Western Christianity in the sixteenth century have been resolved*”<sup>34</sup> For example we can see this emphasis on the idea that the primary theological disagreements of the 16<sup>th</sup> century have been resolved in paragraphs 1, 2, 25, and 239 of “From Conflict to Communion.”<sup>35</sup>

There has also been a massive change in Pope Francis’ own attitudes and beliefs about the Reformation over the last three decades. In 1985, Francis published a lecture on the history of the Jesuit order in which he depicted Martin Luther as a “heretic,” John Calvin as a “heretic” and “schismatic” who brought about “Calvinist squalor” in society, and Protestantism as the source of the evils of the modern world including nihilism, relativism, and general cultural decay.<sup>36</sup>

But now Pope Francis explains Luther’s work in a positive way, celebrates the Reformation, and, as Schirmacher and Johnson admit, has said that “‘Luther’s Protest’ is over”.<sup>37</sup> According to Schirmacher and Johnson, at the Lund ceremony, an important ecumenical gathering which celebrated the Reformation, both Catholics and Evangelicals prayed together, “*Thanks be to you, O God, for the many guiding theological and spiritual insights that we have all received through the Reformation.*”<sup>38</sup>

Admirably, some Catholics are open and honest about this change in understanding. *Catholic Herald* published a fascinating article in July 2015 entitled, “[The Pope’s Great Evangelical Gamble](#),” to explain what the Pope is doing.

*Somewhere in Pope Francis's office is a document that could alter the course of Christian history. It declares an end to hostilities between Catholics and Evangelicals and says the two traditions are now 'united in mission because we are declaring the same Gospel'. The Holy Father is thinking of signing the text in 2017, the 500th anniversary of the Reformation, alongside Evangelical leaders representing roughly one in four Christians in the world today.*

*Francis is convinced that the Reformation is already over. He believes it ended in 1999, the year the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation issued a joint declaration on justification, the doctrine at the heart of Luther's protest.<sup>39</sup>*

The article explains the history of the relationship between Francis and Anglican Bishop Tony Palmer, which began when Francis was still in Buenos Aires. Francis became Palmer's "spiritual father" and discouraged him from converting to Catholicism so he could be a more effective "bridge-builder" between Evangelicals and Catholics. Once he became Pope, Francis called Palmer to Rome and appointed him as an official "Apostolic Representative for Christian Unity." In this Vatican role, Palmer wasn't hesitant to confront Evangelicals about holding on to their Protestant identity: *"It's like saying you're racist even though you're living in a country that no longer has an Apartheid system in place."<sup>40</sup> It is worth repeating to note that Pope Francis' appointed "Apostolic Representative for Christian Unity" compared the Reformation to the South African Apartheid and Protestants to racists in his efforts to shame Evangelicals to return to Rome.*

Pope Francis sent Palmer to represent him at a conference of Evangelical leaders. Palmer challenged the audience: *"Brothers and sisters, Luther's protest is over. Is yours?"<sup>41</sup> Palmer then showed the conference of Evangelical leaders a video he recorded on his iPhone of Pope Francis' personal greeting to them: *"Let's give each other a spiritual hug and let God complete the work that He has begun. And this is a miracle, the miracle of unity has begun."<sup>42</sup>**

It should be obvious by now that some Evangelical and Catholic leaders are describing the Reformation as "all but over." This is exactly what the Statement claims.

Let us be clear. This does not mean Francis is operating in bad faith or was dishonest. Francis appears to genuinely believe that the 1999 statement has bridged the divide between Catholics and Evangelicals, that the 500-year separation between Evangelicals and Catholics can be healed now, and that *“the miracle of unity has begun.”*<sup>43</sup>

But Schirrmacher-Johnson cannot say that some Evangelical and Catholic leaders are not claiming that *“the Reformation is all but over.”* Both Evangelical and particularly Catholic leaders -- including the Pope’s official “Apostolic Representative for Christian Unity” -- have been arguing that Luther’s protest is over and Evangelicals should no longer identify as Protestants.

We have established – as the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement asserts – that *“some leaders in both camps have claimed that the Reformation is all but over – that the primary theological disagreements that led to the rupture in Western Christianity in the sixteenth century have been resolved.”*<sup>44</sup> We next need to briefly summarize why the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement argues that the Reformation is not over. The Statement gives three reasons why profound differences remain between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics:

- 1) Evangelicals are convinced the Bible is the supreme authority,
- 2) Evangelicals disagree with the Roman Catholic theological method, and
- 3) Evangelicals believe that justification through faith alone is still a profound division between the two groups.

We will summarize the first two points briefly here, and the third on justification through faith alone will be addressed in the next section of this paper.

The “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement explains that the Protestant Reformation was a call to *“recover the authority of the Bible over the church”* and clarified that Roman Catholics believe *“the Bible is only one source of authority, but it does not stand alone, nor is it the highest source.”*<sup>45</sup>

This is important, because from a Catholic perspective, as the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement clarifies, *“tradition precedes the Bible, is bigger than the Bible, and is not revealed through Scripture alone but through the ongoing teaching of the Church and its current agenda, whatever that may be.”*<sup>46</sup> Within the Catholic worldview, an idea that may have little to no biblical justification can emerge from the piety and practice of the Catholic Church and over centuries grow in importance and popularity. Like a missile with no self-corrective mechanism, a false idea can be launched and gain growing acceptance over centuries of history if there is no authoritative Bible to correct it. The “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement explained it this way:

*The Roman Catholic theological method is powerfully illustrated by Rome’s promulgation of three dogmas (i.e., binding beliefs) with no biblical support whatsoever. They are the 1854 dogma of Mary’s immaculate conception, the 1870 dogma of papal infallibility, and the 1950 dogma of Mary’s bodily assumption.*

*These dogmas do not represent biblical teaching, and in fact clearly contradict it. Within the Catholic system, this does not matter because it does not rely on the authority of Scripture alone. It may take two millennia to formulate a new dogma, but because Scripture does not have the final say, the Catholic Church can eventually embrace such novelties.*<sup>47</sup>

These novel dogmas, which from a Roman Catholic perspective are mandatory for every Christian to believe, are shocking to Evangelicals because they are not found in the Bible. However, Catholics hold to the dogma that Mary was preserved from sin with the same conviction as the belief that Jesus was fully God and fully man. There is no biblical justification for this innovative idea, but this does not really matter from the Catholic perspective because Catholic theology comes also from the tradition and experience of the church.

What is the result? The Statement explains, *“Because Scripture does not have the final say, Catholic doctrine and practice remains open-ended, and therefore confused at its very core.”*<sup>48</sup> If these Catholic dogmas can be created with no connection to the Bible more than 1800 years later, what new non-biblical doctrine is going to be proclaimed in the next decade, the next century, or the one after that?

As should be clear from this brief survey, the Reformation is not over, and in fact the doctrinal divide between Protestants and Catholics has actually gotten wider over the last 500 years.

So how can leaders today honestly believe that the Reformation is over? Their argument hinges on the “1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” (JDDJ) signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church’s Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Schirmacher and Johnson explain that this is just what Pope Francis believes:

*What the Pope actually said was that “Luther’s protest” was over and, by this, he clearly meant what he stated elsewhere, that, that he fully supports the definition of justification that was agreed upon between the Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican in 1999.<sup>49</sup>*

The following section of the paper will briefly evaluate the JDDJ within the larger context of Evangelical conviction that we are justified by faith alone.

## **2) *How are we saved? – Justification by Faith Alone***

Evangelical statements of faith have consistently taught that individuals are saved by faith alone and not by works. The [Statement of Faith](#) of the World Evangelical Alliance, an organization to which both Schirmacher and Johnson belong, affirms, “*The Salvation of lost and sinful man through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith apart from works, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit.*”<sup>50</sup> “*By faith apart from works*” is a reference to justification by faith alone. Salvation can be accounted for with other biblical metaphors or models; however, justification by faith alone is essential to define what the Evangelical faith is.

This important point is well made in the important Lausanne “Cape Town Commitment,” where we find an affirmation of justification by faith alone in the context of a richer exposition of the biblical account of salvation:

*Solely through trusting in Christ alone, we are united with Christ through the Holy Spirit and are counted righteous in Christ before God. Being justified by faith we have peace with God and no longer face condemnation. We receive the forgiveness of our sins. We are born again into a living hope by sharing Christ's risen life. We are adopted as fellow heirs with Christ. We become citizens of God's covenant people, members of God's family and the place of God's dwelling. So by trusting in Christ, we have full assurance of salvation and eternal life, for our salvation ultimately depends, not on ourselves, but on the work of Christ and the promise of God. 'Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.' How we love the gospel's promise!<sup>51</sup>*

Justification by faith alone lies at the core of the historic Evangelical faith. Justification by faith alone, not by works, is a clear marker of Evangelical identity.

Two leading Evangelical theologians, Calvinist J.I. Packer and Wesleyan Thomas Oden, co-authored and edited *One Faith*, which summarizes 50 years of Evangelical statements of faith. They confront the idea that Evangelicals don't have a common theology:

*The widespread image of evangelicals is one of people who cannot be expected to agree, either with each other or with the rest of the church on earth; people who are famous, indeed notorious, for fighting and splitting, for dissenting and separating. But in fact, evangelicals worldwide are today unified on all the basics, and their consensus is due in large part to their embrace of some of the documents that we cite.<sup>52</sup>*

Packer and Oden have a separate chapter of their book on justification by faith which lists a selection of Evangelical statements of faith, all of which affirm justification by faith alone as central to the Gospel of good news that Evangelicals take their very name from.<sup>53</sup>

This is why over 200 Evangelical leaders and scholars signed the "Is the Reformation Over?" Statement. Many of these scholars and leaders have been involved in ministering to Catholics, writing about Roman Catholicism, and participating in various Evangelical and Catholic discussions for decades. Yet, as we noted above, Schirrmacher and Johnson accuse

them all of potentially violating the ninth commandment by bearing false witness.

Schirmacher and Johnson further claim that those who signed the Statement have not “*paid close attention to what is actually happening in the many meetings between Evangelical and Catholic leaders at the global, regional, national, or local level.*” Schirmacher and Johnson make the astounding claim that the hundreds of signers of the Statement have been “*viewing this process from afar, they have made presumptions about what is happening that are not consistent with reality.*”

Who are the signers of the Statement who have been so described and accused? We will briefly mention only a few of the signatories and their background to explain why they have signed the Statement.

David Wells, author of a series of books evaluating the theology of the Evangelical church, is one of Evangelicalism’s most influential theologians.<sup>54</sup> He also wrote one of the most significant Evangelical evaluations of Vatican II and was asked by John Stott to participate in the informal Lausanne conversations between Evangelicals and Catholics in 1977, 1982, and 1984. He summarized the profound differences between the Evangelical and Catholic understanding of the Gospel that were clarified in these meetings:

*The differences start with the Gospel itself. Evangelicals see Christ doing in his death what he did not do in his life. He ‘became sin’ for us (2 Cor. 5:21) and ‘a curse’ for us (Gal 3:13), thus propitiating the wrath of God by absorbing our punishment in himself and thus turning God’s wrath away from its rightful objects. Christ’s death was, in this way, substitutionary. Thus the Gospel is a message of deliverance from sin, punishment, and death. It is so because of Christ’s death and hence it is by grace alone. Believing this Gospel and entrusting ourselves to the Christ of this Gospel results in pardon, renewal, and the Spirit’s indwelling.*

*Catholics, on the other hand, see Christ’s death as the continuation of his life in the sense that it was his final act of obedience. It was offered to the Father in love. In this sense, he did not do in his death what he had not done in his life. This thought of obedience then lays the conceptual foundation for our doing what Christ did. In consequence, we can enter into the sacrifice of Christ and offer ourselves to the Father in and with him.<sup>55</sup>*

When Wells agreed to sign the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement, he explained: *“It represents exactly what I think and have said publicly. I would be glad to add my name to that of the other signatories.”*

In the same email, Wells also wrote about his experience in the Lausanne Evangelical and Catholic dialogue:

*Subsequently the outcome to the discussions was published as The Evangelical/Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission 1977-84: A Report. What is said in this report is very consistent with what is said in your statement. I think there might be value in showing that what you are saying is not a stand-alone thing.*

John Woodbridge is one of the most respected Evangelical historians, having taught at Hautes Etudes, Sorbonne; Northwestern University; and trained a generation of Evangelical historians at Trinity International University. Woodbridge was also a participant in and signer of a number of “Evangelical and Catholic Together” statements. Though Woodbridge was a regular participant in the most influential informal Evangelical and Catholic discussion, he signed the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement and called it a *“very significant document”* as it helpfully clarified the profound differences between Evangelicals and Catholics.<sup>56</sup>

Scott Manetsch is a Professor of Church History at Trinity Evangelical Divinity Seminary and a leading historian of John Calvin, one of the most significant leaders of the Reformation. Manetsch has recently published what is considered one of the best studies of Calvin’s pastoral work. He has also written a review of Noll and Nystrom’s influential book *Is the Reformation Over?*, in which he explains how Calvin confronted and refuted Catholic attempts to gloss over the many important differences between the Protestant and Catholic theological understandings, similar to what is happening in Catholic and Evangelical dialogue today. Manetsch summarized Calvin’s position:

*In Calvin’s mind, there was no room for compromise... In order he treats justification by faith, confession of guilt and penance, the nature of the true Church, the authority of Scripture, papal primacy, the Catholic sacraments, intercession of the saints, fasting, celibacy, and ceremonies. On all these points, Calvin is clear: any doctrinal accommodation is impious, indeed sacrilegious. Certainly Christian unity and the*

*peace of the Churches is desirable. But Protestants must reject all “terms of peace which mingle the figments of men with the pure truth of God.”<sup>57</sup>*

Many of the leaders who signed the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement are pastors and leaders of Christian organizations from across the globe. For example, Augustus Nicodemus Gomes Lopes is Vice President of the Presbyterian Church of Brazil. Tim Keller is founder of the influential New York City Redeemer Church and the global City to City church planting movement. Daniel Bianchi is the Director Eastern Connection in Argentina and the Regional Deputy for Latin America for the Lausanne Movement. Richard Sempala is the founder of The Africa Life Youth Foundation in Uganda and Lindsay Brown was the long-time International Director of the Lausanne Movement, one of the two main global Evangelical bodies.

Many of the signers have been on the pastoral front lines for decades in different regions of the world, explaining to Catholics the grace-filled message of the biblical gospel that everyone can have access to salvation by grace alone through faith alone, as the Reformers in the past and Evangelicals today believe. These pastoral leaders have seen firsthand thousands of Roman Catholics repent, put their faith in Christ, and be born again. Almost 20 percent of Latin Americans who formerly were Roman Catholic have understood the biblical Gospel and put their faith in Christ alone and become Evangelicals. One wonders if this is part of the reason why Catholics are trying so hard to obscure the historic differences between Catholics and Evangelicals.<sup>58</sup>

Yet we need to take Schirmmacher and Johnson at their word. They honestly believe that something important has changed. Schirmmacher argues that Pope Francis *“fully supports the definition of justification that was agreed upon between the Lutheran World Federation and the Vatican in 1999.”<sup>59</sup>* Thus the 1999 Joint Declaration is central to any discussion of whether the Reformation is over. Schirmmacher underlines this issue: *“my point here is simply that any discussion of whether Pope Francis believes that the Reformation is over needs to focus very directly and specifically on the content of the 1999 definition of justification.”<sup>60</sup>*

Schirmmacher explains that Francis has advocated justification by faith as the crucial bridge between Catholics and Evangelicals since he became Pope.

*Just shortly after his election I heard for the first time from Pope Francis that the common view of justification as salvation by grace and faith alone should be the center of our shared commonalities and that on this basis further steps would have to be taken.*<sup>61</sup>

To understand the 1999 Joint Declaration we need a little historical context. The “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement summarizes the issues this way:

*On the doctrine of salvation, many are under the impression that there is a growing convergence regarding justification by faith and that tensions between Catholics and Evangelicals have eased considerably since the sixteenth century. At the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the Roman Catholic Church reacted strongly against the Protestant Reformation by declaring “anathema” (cursed) those who upheld justification by faith alone, as well as affirmed the teaching that salvation is a process of cooperating with infused grace rather than an act grounded in grace alone by faith alone.*<sup>62</sup>

Until recently, there has never been a serious claim that the 500-year Reformation divide has been mended. Only in recent years have some leaders from significant Christian bodies proposed that this division has been healed. As noted above, the most influential official discussion has been between the Roman Catholic Pontifical Council for Promoting Christianity Unity and the Lutheran World Federation. The ecumenical world was excited when these groups released their Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification (JDDJ) in 1999. As the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement explains, “*Some argue that the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification signed by the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation in 1999 has bridged the divide.*”<sup>63</sup> In fact, that was the very claim of the Joint Declaration itself, which explained that the Lutherans and Catholics were “*now able to articulate a common understanding of our justification by God’s grace through faith in Christ.*”<sup>64</sup>

It is here that understandings begin to differ. We will attempt to summarize both the positive and then critical evaluations of the JDDJ.

Schirmmacher and Johnson believe that the JDDJ does not conflict with Evangelical convictions. In short, Pope Francis is not alone in his conviction that the JDDJ has summarized a biblical position that both sides can affirm. Schirmmacher writes that he believes the JDDJ is an accurate summary of biblical teaching: *“the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation, after years of intense work, had agreed on a short definition of the doctrine of justification, which summarizes the NT view, especially Paul’s.”*<sup>65</sup> In a separate article Schirmmacher makes this same point in a different way, explaining, *“my opinion is that that 1999 definition is a decent one and could be signed by Evangelicals”*.<sup>66</sup>

Schirmmacher and Johnson’s intense reaction to the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement’s critical evaluation of the JDDJ can now be understood. Schirmmacher and Johnson believe that the JDDJ has departed from the Council of Trent’s clear condemnations of historic Protestant beliefs and that the Catholic leaders who signed the JDDJ believe in salvation by faith alone. They explain,

*Nothing from Trent is part of what Lutherans and Catholics agreed on. After reading the text numerous times with precisely this question in view, we believe that the JDDJ does not affirm the Council of Trent’s doctrine on justification. Perhaps not all Roman Catholic leaders affirm justification by faith alone, but it appears to us that the official Roman Catholic representatives who signed the JDDJ honestly affirmed justification by faith alone*<sup>67</sup>.

There are certainly parts of JDDJ, such as the paragraph 9, which use some of the biblical language of salvation including the Protestant sounding phrase, *“‘justification’ of sinful human beings by God’s grace through faith (Rom 3:23-25), which came into particular prominence in the Reformation period.”*<sup>68</sup> This sort of language allows an ecumenically-eager reader to conclude that we have a different Roman Catholic Church that now agrees with the Protestant Reformers that we are saved by faith alone.

In sharp contrast, mainstream Evangelicals understand the Joint Declaration as an attempt by Catholics to use some biblical language but to integrate this within a Catholic framework. We quoted above a portion of paragraph 9 in the JDDJ that sounds like it affirms the Protestant / Evangelical conviction of justification by faith alone. But paragraph 11

articulates a traditional Catholic understanding of justification that provides the framework for interpreting the preceding paragraph.

*Justification is the forgiveness of sins (cf Rom 3:23-25; Acts 13:39; Lk 18: 14), liberation from the dominating power of sin and death (Rom 5:12-21) and from the curse of the law (Gal 3:10-14)... It occurs in the reception of the Holy Spirit in baptism and incorporation into the one body (Rom 8:1f, 9f; I Cor 12:12f).<sup>69</sup>*

As Michael Reeves explains about this passage.

*Quite clearly, justification is here said to include the process of inner transformation, and not include the imputation of Christ's righteousness... Any theology that makes the believer's inner transformation a constituent part (instead of a consequence) of justification is at odds with the material principle of the Reformation (justification by faith alone).<sup>70</sup>*

Reeves and other mainstream Evangelical critics all believe that the Roman Catholic and Evangelical understanding of justification cannot be integrated together.<sup>71</sup> You cannot have a round square. You cannot have a married bachelor. And you cannot have justification be simultaneously both a divine declarative act and an internal process of sanctifying transformation. The biblical language in JDDJ is interpreted within the historic consistent Catholic teaching of Trent. In short, the statement conflates elements of sanctification (the process of growing in holiness) within the categories of justification and embeds all of them in a sacramental framework so that it fits within the Catholic teaching of baptismal regeneration and access to grace by means of sacraments.

The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod provided one of the most substantial early critiques of the JDDJ in 1999. They concluded,

*Although change has taken place in the Roman Catholic Church since Vatican II, JDDJ shows how very little headway has been made toward a genuine resolution of the differences between Lutherans and Roman Catholics on justification. This statement is not a "breakthrough."*

*JDDJ does not settle the major disagreement between Lutheran theology and Roman Catholic theology on justification. Lutherans teach that justification is essentially a declaration of “not guilty” and “righteous” pronounced by God on a sinner because of Christ and His work. Roman Catholics teach that justification involves an internal process in which a believer is transformed and “made” more and more righteous. The non-settlement of this issue forms the chief defect of JDDJ.*<sup>72</sup>

Lutheran Rev. Paul T. McCain, who participated in formulating the Missouri Synod’s critical evaluation of JDDJ, described it more bluntly this way:

*Ten years after it appeared, we still continue to hear that the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification was a “breakthrough” between the Roman Catholic Church and the Lutheran Church. The media loves to perpetuate this myth. In fact, the Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification is a fraud. It was a sell-out by revisionist Lutherans to Rome.*<sup>73</sup>

The title of McCain’s article [“A Betrayal of the Gospel”](#) says it all, as he describes the liberal Lutherans who signed the Declaration as “*fundamentally dishonest*” because they compromised on basic Lutheran convictions. McCain does not blame Catholics for this fraud. “*Rome is not to be faulted in any of this. The Papacy maintained the historic position of the Roman Church, and did not change it.*” He puts the blame squarely on the Lutherans whose liberal church has slowly moved away from biblical teaching throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century: “*Mainline liberal Lutherans, however, compromised the key doctrine of the Scriptures and the very heart of the Lutheran Confessions.*”<sup>74</sup>

Reformed theologian [Michael Horton](#) of Westminster Seminary California concluded that “*calling bad news [i.e. Joint Declaration] good news is destructive of the prospects for genuine long-term ecclesiastical reconciliation.*”<sup>75</sup> Professor [Michael Reeves](#), President of Union School of Theology in the UK, writes, “*for all attempts to find wording that fits both Roman Catholic and evangelical views of justification, there remains a material and momentous difference between them.*”<sup>76</sup>

The “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement summarized why the JDDJ does not teach the historic Evangelical perspective:

*While the document is at times friendly towards a more biblical understanding of justification, it explicitly affirms the Council of Trent's view of justification. All of its condemnations of historic Protestant/Evangelical convictions still stand; they just do not apply to those who affirm the blurred position of the Joint Declaration.*

*As was the case with Trent, in the Joint Declaration, justification is a process enacted by a sacrament of the Church (baptism); it is not received by faith alone. It is a journey that requires contribution from the faithful and an ongoing participation in the sacramental system. There is no sense of the righteousness of God being imputed by Christ to the believer, and thus there can be no assurance of salvation.<sup>77</sup>*

Where Evangelicalism (affirming Reformation convictions) views justification as a divine declarative act whereby God pronounces the sinner righteous in Christ, Rome still sees justification as an ongoing, transformative, and cooperative process.<sup>78</sup> The JDDJ uses a more nuanced language in its attempt to accommodate the Lutheran position. The more dynamic categories of Rome can find room for some of the forensic language of the Reformation, but the reverse is not possible. The gulf is still there.

In the face of this consistent mainstream Evangelical perspective that the Joint Declaration does not teach what historic Protestants have always believed, why are Schirrmacher-Johnson so enthusiastic in their endorsement of Joint Declaration? They honestly believe and assert that the Joint Declaration “*does not affirm the doctrine of the Council of Trent*”.<sup>79</sup> The problem is that they are simply wrong, and this time we should listen to the authoritative voice of the Vatican to underline their mistake.<sup>80</sup> At the time of the JDDJ's announcement, Vatican leaders quickly clarified that the Declaration had not denied or departed from the Council of Trent, which remains binding dogma for the Roman Catholic Church. Cardinal Cassidy, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christianity Unity and the individual leading Rome's involvement in the Joint Declaration, made this point clearly at a press conference that was held when the JDDJ was signed:

*Asked whether there was anything in the official common statement contrary to the Council of Trent, Cardinal Cassidy said: 'Absolutely not, otherwise how could we do*

*it? We cannot do something contrary to an ecumenical council. There's nothing there that the Council of Trent condemns.*'<sup>81</sup>

So we see clearly that from the Catholic perspective, the Council of Trent's pronouncements have not changed. What does Trent affirm?

*Canon IX: If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, meaning that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to obtain the grace of justification . . . let him be anathema [condemned].*

*Canon XII: If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence [trust] in divine mercy, which remits sins for Christ's sake, or that it is this confidence [trust] alone that justifies us, let him be anathema [condemned].*

*Canon XIV: If anyone says that man is absolved from his sins and justified because he firmly believes that he is absolved and justified . . . and that by this faith alone absolution and justification are effected, let him be anathema [condemned].*<sup>82</sup>

Trent's clear and unmistakable teaching is that salvation by faith alone is a heresy that should be condemned.

We also see this same clear message in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (1992)*, which articulates the Catholic doctrine of justification formulated at the Council of Trent. In the 18 years since the JDDJ, we have not seen a new Catholic Catechism published that updates the Catholic doctrinal position. This is because their position is still consistent with the authoritative Council of Trent: "*We cannot do something contrary to an ecumenical council.*" Catholics have found a way to pacify liberal Lutherans and absorb some of the biblical language into their teaching and language through the JDDJ, but their position and commitment to Trent has not changed.

We see this same affirmation of Trent in the official Vatican response to the JDDJ written by Pope Benedict before he was chosen as Pope. This official Vatican document criticizes some of the elements of the JDDJ and argues that Trent's condemnations still stand. As Paul T. McCain explains,

*The Vatican's response clearly affirms Rome's historic position that justification is a process involving both God's grace and the good works of human beings, in other words, the classic Roman position that salvation is not by grace through faith alone, but by grace plus human merit and good works.*<sup>83</sup>

Thus, the Roman Catholic system of sacramental distribution of grace through physical objects has not changed. As the "Is the Reformation Over?" Statement explains,

*The Roman Catholic Church's view is revealed by its continued use of indulgences (i.e., the remission of the temporal punishment for sin allotted by the Church on special occasions). It was the theology of indulgences that triggered the Reformation, but this system has been invoked most recently by Pope Francis in the 2015-2016 Year of Mercy.*

*This shows that the Roman Catholic Church's basic view of salvation, which is dependent on the mediation of the Church, the distribution of grace by means of its sacraments, the intercession of the saints, and purgatory, is still firmly in place, even after the Joint Declaration<sup>84</sup>.*

The tone of the Joint Declaration is certainly different than that of Trent, but the theological content of the Council of Trent has neither been superseded nor bypassed.

We see one last problem in current Catholic approach to justification. The same Pope who said at the ecumenical ceremony in Lund that "*the doctrine of justification expresses the essence of human existence before God,*" thus seeming to be in accord with what Evangelicals might want to say on the doctrine, wrote very different things in a more authoritative statement. In his widely acclaimed 2013 Exhortation [\*The Joy of the Gospel\*](#), the programmatic document of his pontificate, Francis writes that "*Non-Christians, by God's gracious initiative, when they are faithful to their own consciences, can live justified by the grace of God.*"<sup>85</sup>

Pope Francis also argued for the importance of atheist's own conscience in an interview in the Italian newspaper *La Repubblica* (September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013):

*You ask me if the God of Christians forgives one who doesn't believe and doesn't seek the faith ... the question for one who doesn't believe in God lies in obeying one's conscience.*<sup>86</sup>

What is the Pope saying in his Apostolic Exhortation? He is using the language of justification to speak about non-Christians and argue that if they are faithful to their consciences they can be justified.

This is totally contrary to even the minimum core definition of justification given by the Bible and historically affirmed by Evangelicals. Here we are confronted with completely different theological categories that make it possible for the Pope to use the language of “justification” when he deals with Protestants and the same language of “justification” when he speaks about non-Christians. Do Schirmacher and Johnson not see a problem here in their vigorous endorsement of the Pope and the Joint Declaration? Isn't their understanding of Francis a cherry-picking exercise that is not fair to what Francis is openly and publicly saying and what the Catholic Church has openly and publically taught?

One last word of caution should be given. Why have Evangelical theologians like Schirmacher and Johnson failed to be discerning and affirmed the faulty position advocated by the Joint Declaration? We find part of the answer in Schirmacher's description of the impact of his relationships with Catholics on what he now believes and teaches. Schirmacher and Johnson are deeply involved in what has been termed as “spiritual ecumenism.”<sup>87</sup> Cardinal Walter Kasper has described “Spiritual ecumenism” as the process by which participants in ecumenical joint-actions build closer relationships and engage in common prayer, which can result in a softening of theological evaluations. While Schirmacher began as a strong critic of Roman Catholic theology he has come to a very different conclusion recently. What brought about this change? Schirmacher honestly explains,

*I was also changed through the joining of 'spiritual experience and friendship'. Theology followed later: strange for a professor of Systematic Theology. But still it's the truth.*<sup>88</sup>

Schirmacher's change took place in the context of "spiritual ecumenism" and was only later thought through in terms of theological faithfulness and consistency.

It is worrying to have the World Evangelical Alliance Associate Secretary General for Theological Concerns saying that he changed his mind not out of theological convictions based on the Scripture, but following "*spiritual experience and friendship*" by being involved in ecumenical meetings and initiatives. Instead of being guided by the Bible, he allowed religious experience to take the lead.

## **Conclusion**

Roman Catholic theology may use the same language as Evangelical theology, yet mean very different things. Anyone who is engaged in dialogue with Rome must be aware of this point and work hard to understand what Rome is saying in its own terms. From what we have reviewed, the divide between Evangelicals and Catholics is not solved by the 1999 Joint Declaration between World Lutheran Federation and the Vatican. The profound differences between Evangelicals and Catholics have not been removed, and the Reformation is therefore not over. In fact, because the Catholic Church has continued to affirm new official church dogma that are not grounded in Scripture (Mary's immaculate conception, papal infallibility, and Mary's bodily assumption), the divide between Catholics and Evangelicals has gotten wider.

The "Is the Reformation Over?" Statement is a positive affirmation of the two main tenets of the Reformation. The 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary is a welcomed opportunity to celebrate the biblical gospel by upholding these two pillars of the Christian faith: that the Bible is the authoritative source of truth and that we are justified by faith alone. The Statement reaffirms that on these two issues the Reformers were simply recovering the biblical gospel, and therefore so should we.

We encourage readers to evaluate what the ["Is the Reformation Over?" Statement](#) actually says and to consider signing it. The criticism offered by Schirmacher-Johnson, though flawed and with many inaccuracies and caricatures, can at least provide an opportunity for more people to examine what the Statement asserts. Even though hundreds of Evangelical leaders have already signed from many parts of the world, revisiting the conversation gives

many more a chance to think about the ongoing relevance of the Reformation and the profound differences between Evangelical biblical convictions and Catholic dogma on fundamental issues related to the core of the gospel. Let the Reformation continue... yes, but let it continue in the gospel terms of Scripture alone and Faith alone!

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<sup>1</sup> De Chirico, L., & Pritchard, G. A. (2015, September 24). What Do You Think About Pope Francis? Retrieved from <http://reformandainitiative.org/what-do-you-think-about-pope-francis/>.

<sup>2</sup> Schirmmacher, T. (2015, October 27). Why We, As Evangelical Reformed Christians, Seek to Dialogue with Pope Francis. Retrieved from <http://wrfnet.org/articles/2015/10/wrf-member-thomas-schirmmacher-suggests-reasons-why-evangelicals-should-engage-pope#.WMxY0DvythE>

<sup>3</sup> An indication of this emotional tenor can be seen in Schirmmacher's use of exclamation points (3 times), underlining (9 times), and bolding (2 times), italics (5 times), and all capital letters (3 times). Grammatical errors include misspellings of "retheoric" (paragraph 4, line 4), "Petecostals" and "entert" (par. 9, line 6), "no" instead of on (par. 11, line 3), "France's charm and kindness" (par. 16, line 2), "opporyunity" (par. 21, line 4), "definuition" (par. 23, line 13), "ge" (par. 30, line 3). Other grammatical errors include "respecting each others opinions..." (par. 2, line 2, missing apostrophe), "Pope Francis does seem to worry..." (par. 10, line 2, should be does not), "explicitly see it Pope Francis' strategy..." (par. 13, line 1, "it" is unnecessary), "The fact that people have contact me" (par. 13, line 4, instead of contacted), "confused'" (par. 24, line 6, extra apostrophe), and "in order to to get together" (par. 29, line 1, "to" repeated). It is also curious to observe the number of self-referential pronouns (I, me, my, we, us, our) used in the article (a total of 136 times in the 3502-word article, or every 26<sup>th</sup> word), even though the original article makes no reference to Schirmmacher.

<sup>4</sup> Schirmmacher, Why We, as Evangelical Reformed Christians, Seek to Dialogue with Pope Francis.

<sup>5</sup> Is the Reformation Over? A Statement of Evangelical Convictions Retrieved from <http://isthereformationover.com/>.

<sup>6</sup> Schirmmacher, T. and Johnson, T. (2016, December 16). Let the Reformation Continue! Retrieved from <http://wrfnet.org/sites/default/files/Let%20the%20Reformation%20Continue!.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Schirmmacher and Johnson, Let the Reformation Continue!

<sup>8</sup> From this point forward, we will refer to the first article, "Why We, As Evangelical Reformed Christians, Seek to Dialogue with Pope Francis" as "Schirmmacher's article" and the second article, "Let the Reformation Continue!" as the "Schirmmacher-Johnson's article" or "Schirmmacher and Johnson's article".

<sup>9</sup> There are many inaccurate comments in these two articles, and it would take a much longer article to describe, analyze and evaluate all of them. We will simply list below some of these remarks and make a brief observation. 1) Schirmmacher asserts that "*Leonardo De Chirico and Greg Pritchard criticize those evangelical leaders who visit the Pope.*" We did not criticize all Evangelical leaders who visit the Pope. We criticized those who don't do their homework regarding what Roman Catholicism actually teaches and gave specific examples. 2) Schirmmacher states that "*the authors... are convinced that Reformed evangelicals who visit with him (the Pope) are naïve and ignorant of the Pope's real goals and of Catholic theology.*" We never used the phrase "*Reformed evangelicals*" or talked about Reformed Evangelicals. 3) Schirmmacher writes that we "*have moved a bit too quickly to a final judgment about Pope Francis's motives.*" We tried to describe Pope Francis honestly and fairly and never stated that we know or have come to a "*final judgment about Pope Francis's motives.*" 4) Schirmmacher states, "*The Pope apologizes for something different nearly every month. Is this all to win Evangelicals?*" We never said or implied this. In fact, we noted that he has apologized to non-Evangelical groups and that he also seeks to reach out to others including Muslims, liberals, homosexuals, atheists, etc. 5) Schirmmacher and Johnson state that the signers of the "Is the Reformation Over?" Statement have not been involved in dialogues with Roman Catholics but "*Viewing this process from afar, they have made presumptions about what is happening that are not consistent with reality.*" The signers of the Statement have a wide and rich history of official and informal dialogue with Roman Catholics. For example, one signer attended all three of John Stott's Lausanne discussions with Roman Catholics and noted that they started in 1977, not in 1983 as Schirmmacher claims. 6) Schirmmacher-Johnson write that "*Bishop Tony Palmer has stated privately several years ago that Luther's protest is finished.*" As noted in this article, Tony Palmer has made very public arguments that "Luther's protest is over." 7) Schirmmacher-Johnson assert that parts of the "Is the Reformation Over?" Statement "*imply that the Evangelical world is theologically in good health.*" The Statement neither

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states nor implies this. 8) Schirmmacher-Johnson argue that the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement’s “actual content does not do justice to the authority of the Bible, as it does not argue on the basis of the exegesis but only on the basis of history.” Schirmmacher-Johnson are once again foisting a false goal on the statement. We would repeat what we argue in this article, that the purpose of the Statement is to provide a two-page summary of Evangelical convictions on the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. But we find it curious that this expectation of exegesis in a theological article is written in a theological piece that is almost three times as long as the Statement and yet never once quotes Scripture or does exegesis.

<sup>10</sup> Schirmmacher, “Why We, as Evangelical Reformed Christians, Seek to Dialogue with Pope Francis”

<sup>11</sup> De Chirico and Pritchard. “What Do You Think About Pope Francis?”

<sup>12</sup> De Chirico and Pritchard. “What Do You Think About Pope Francis?” For one example of Francis as a chess player, see Grimm, W. (2014, Nov 18): “Is Pope Francis moving towards checkmate? Recent developments suggest the Pontiff might well be a formidable chess player.” Retrieved from [www.ucanews.com](http://www.ucanews.com) <http://www.ucanews.com/news/is-pope-francis-moving-toward-checkmate/72414>.

<sup>13</sup> Schirmmacher, Why We, as Evangelical Reformed Christians, Seek to Dialogue with Pope Francis Pope Francis is being a consistent when he communicates to whatever group he is interacting with (including Evangelicals) those honest beliefs that he holds is common with them. See Francis’s masterful communication to Muslim leaders, Egypt’s political leaders and the Coptic Church leaders in his recent brief trip to Egypt. “In Cairo, Francis Takes On ‘Demagogic’ Populism and Violence Masked as Piety”, Jason Horowitz and Declan Walsh, New York Times, April 28, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/28/world/middleeast/pope-francis-egypt.html>

<sup>14</sup> Schirmmacher, Why We, as Evangelical Reformed Christians, Seek to Dialogue with Pope Francis

<sup>15</sup> Schirmmacher and Johnson, Let the Reformation Continue!

<sup>16</sup> “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement

<sup>17</sup> “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement

<sup>18</sup> “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement

<sup>19</sup> Schirmmacher and Johnson, Let the Reformation Continue!

<sup>20</sup> Schirmmacher and Johnson, Let the Reformation Continue!

<sup>21</sup> Schirmmacher and Johnson, Let the Reformation Continue!

<sup>22</sup> Schirmmacher and Johnson, Let the Reformation Continue!

<sup>23</sup> “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement

<sup>24</sup> “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement

<sup>25</sup> Schirmmacher and Johnson, Let the Reformation Continue!

<sup>26</sup> “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement

<sup>27</sup> Schirmmacher and Johnson, Let the Reformation Continue!

<sup>28</sup> Schirmmacher and Johnson, Let the Reformation Continue!

<sup>29</sup> “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement

<sup>30</sup> “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement; Schirmmacher and Johnson, Let the Reformation Continue!

<sup>31</sup> Noll, M. and Nystrom, C. (2005). *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism*. Grand Rapids: Baker, p. 232. See Scott Manetsch’s review of the Noll and Nystrom book in his essay “*Is the Reformation Over? John Calvin, Roman Catholicism, and Contemporary Ecumenical Conversations*.” Themelios 36.2 (2011): 185–202. See his assessment of the primary theological convictions that need to be addressed as part of answering this question “Is the Reformation over?” and in particular his use of a close examination of John Calvin as a primary Reformer who clarified the many issues dividing Catholics and Protestants.

<sup>32</sup> George, T. (1997 December) Evangelicals and Catholics Together: A New Initiative. *Christianity Today*, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup> Neuhaus, R. J. (2005, December 26). “The 16th century...” *First Things*. Retrieved from <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2005/12/rjn-theth-century>.

<sup>34</sup> “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement

<sup>35</sup> From Conflict to Communion. Retrieved from [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/lutheran-fed-docs/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_2013\\_dal-conflitto-alla-comunione\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/lutheran-fed-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_2013_dal-conflitto-alla-comunione_en.html).

<sup>36</sup> Referenced in De Chirico, Leonardo. (2014, June 23). 83. What Francis Really Thinks of the Reformation (and of Calvin in Particular). *Vatican Files*. Retrieved from <http://vaticanfiles.org/2014/06/83-what-francis-really-thinks-of-the-reformation-and-of-calvin-in-particular/>.

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- <sup>37</sup> Schirmmacher and Johnson, "Let the Reformation Continue!"
- <sup>38</sup> Schirmmacher and Johnson, "Let the Reformation Continue!"
- <sup>39</sup> Coppen, Luke. (2015, July 23). <"The Pope's great Evangelical gamble." *Catholic Herald*. Retrieved from <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/issues/july-24th-2015/the-popes-great-evangelical-gamble/>.
- <sup>40</sup> Coppen, "The Pope's great Evangelical gamble."
- <sup>41</sup> The Protest is Over... No More Protestant Church. (2014, February 26). <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxup\\_QnfSHg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxup_QnfSHg)>, minute 4:11.
- <sup>42</sup> "2014 SWBC – Trip to the Vatican" video. (2014, July 2). *Kenneth Copeland Ministries*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zihTk2YAOj4>. Pope Francis' message is translated from Italian at 37:10 in the video.
- <sup>43</sup> "2014 SWBC – Trip to the Vatican" video. (2014, July 2). *Kenneth Copeland Ministries*. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zihTk2YAOj4>. Pope Francis' message is translated from Italian at 37:10 in the video.
- <sup>44</sup> "Is the Reformation Over?" Statement
- <sup>45</sup> "Is the Reformation Over?" Statement
- <sup>46</sup> "Is the Reformation Over?" Statement
- <sup>47</sup> "Is the Reformation Over?" Statement
- <sup>48</sup> "Is the Reformation Over?" Statement
- <sup>49</sup> Schirmmacher and Johnson, Let the Reformation Continue!
- <sup>50</sup> "Who We Are." (2001, June 27). World Evangelical Alliance. Retrieved from <http://www.worldea.org/whoweare/statementoffaith>.
- <sup>51</sup> The Cape Town Commitment. (2011). Retrieved from <https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment#p1-8>. The original text also includes endnote 37 to the following: "Romans 4; Philippians 3:1-11; Romans 5:1-2; 8:1-4; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:13-14; 1 Peter 1:3; Galatians 3:26 – 4:7; Ephesians 2:19-22; John 20:30-31; 1 John 5:12-13; Romans 8:31-39."
- <sup>52</sup> Packer, J.I. and Oden, T. (2004, April 13). *One Faith*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press.
- <sup>53</sup> Packer and Oden (2004, April 13) *One Faith*, p. 82-87.
- <sup>54</sup> Wells has authored the books *Christian Faith and Practice in the Modern World: Theology from an Evangelical Point of View* (1988); *No Place for Truth: or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (1994), *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (1995), *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral vision* (1999), *The Courage to Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (2008), *God in the Whirlwind: How the Holy-love of God Reorients Our World* (2014), among others.
- <sup>55</sup> Wells, D. F. (2014). The Holy Spirit and the Gospel. *The Lausanne Movement: A Range of Perspectives*. Oxford: Regnum Books. In the original quotation, Wells cites the following in endnote 305: Basil Meeking and John Stott (eds), *The Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission 1977-1984: A Report* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), p. 43. Retrieved from <https://www.lausanne.org/content/the-holy-spirit-and-the-gospel>.
- <sup>56</sup> John Woodbridge has authored *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (1982) and co-authored *The Evangelicals: What they believe, who they are, where they are changing* (1975) among others. He has also co-edited *Scripture and Truth* (1983) and *Hermeneutics, Authority, & Canon* (1986), two influential volumes that have shaped Evangelicals' understanding on the doctrine of Scripture.
- <sup>57</sup> Manetsch, S. (2012). *Calvin's Company of Pastors: Pastoral Care and the Emerging Reformed Church, 1536-1609*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. See Scott Manetsch's review in *Is the Reformation Over? John Calvin, Roman Catholicism, and Contemporary Ecumenical Conversations*. Themelios 36.2 (2011): 185–202.
- <sup>58</sup> One of the authors of this article, Leonardo De Chirico, also has extensive experience with Roman Catholics. He has been involved in dialogue with Roman Catholics both at the academic and the popular levels for many years. He has taken part in international and official dialogues with the Vatican, publicly and repeatedly discussed theological topics with leading Catholic scholars as well as being part of joint efforts for the welfare of society and for the persecuted Christians in collaboration with Catholic agencies.
- <sup>59</sup> Schirmmacher, Why We, as Evangelical Reformed Christians, Seek to Dialogue with Pope Francis
- <sup>60</sup> Schirmmacher, Why We, as Evangelical Reformed Christians, Seek to Dialogue with Pope Francis
- <sup>61</sup> Schirmmacher, Thomas. (2016, November 4). FEATURE: When a Pope Understands Luther. Zenit. Retrieved from <https://zenit.org/articles/feature-when-a-pope-really-understands-luther/>.
- <sup>62</sup> "Is the Reformation Over?" Statement
- <sup>63</sup> "Is the Reformation Over?" Statement
- <sup>64</sup> Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. para. 5

- <sup>65</sup> Schirrmacher, When a Pope Understands Luther.
- <sup>66</sup> Schirrmacher, Why We, as Evangelical Reformed Christians, Seek to Dialogue with Pope Francis
- <sup>67</sup> Schirrmacher and Johnson, “Let the Reformation Continue!”
- <sup>68</sup> Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. par. 9
- <sup>69</sup> Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. par. 11
- <sup>70</sup> Reeves, M. The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification: A Curtain on the Reformation? Reformanda Initiative. Retrieved from <http://reformandainitiative.org/the-joint-declaration-on-the-doctrine-of-justification-a-curtain-on-the-reformation/>.
- <sup>71</sup> See Gregg Allison’s popular article, “Has Rome Really Changed Its Tune? - The Catholic Church – 500 Years Later,” retrieved from <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/has-rome-really-changed-its-tune> and Garry J. Williams’ more academic summary of the areas that separate Catholics and Evangelicals, “The Five Solas of the Reformation: Then and Now,” in *Unio Cum Christo*. (2017, April) pp 13 – 34.
- <sup>72</sup> The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. (1999). “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification in Confessional Lutheran Perspective.” The Commission on Theology and Church Relations, points 13 and 4.
- <sup>73</sup> McCain, Paul T. (2010, March 12). A Betrayal of the Gospel: The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. *First Things*. Retrieved from <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2010/03/a-betrayal-of-the-gospel-the-joint-declaration-on-the-doctrine-of-justification>.
- <sup>74</sup> McCain. “A Betrayal of the Gospel.” Another Lutheran evaluation of JDDJ is Lutheran Pastor Mark D. Menecher’s “Ten Years After JDDJ The Ecumenical Pelagianism Continues.” Retrieved from <http://www.ccmverax.org/documents/LOGIAXVIII-3Menacher.pdf> One of the most significant criticisms of the JDDJ when it was released was more than 150 German University Professors who signed a statement to publically reject the JDDJ as inconsistent with historic Lutheranism. See the brief description of the JDDJ in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* 2003, Vol. 3, pp. 72-73.
- <sup>75</sup> *World* (December 25, 1999) 20.
- <sup>76</sup> Reeves, “The Joint Declaration.”
- <sup>77</sup> “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement
- <sup>78</sup> An Evangelical evaluation of the section on justification of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (§§ 1987-2005) is given by G.A. Allison (2014) *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice. An Evangelical Assessment* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, pp. 431-447.
- <sup>79</sup> Schirrmacher and Johnson, Let the Reformation Continue!
- <sup>80</sup> The following paragraphs closely follow Paul McCain’s well-articulated argument in “A Betrayal of the Gospel” *First Things*. 12 March 2010. Retrieved from <https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2010/03/a-betrayal-of-the-gospel-the-joint-declaration-on-the-doctrine-of-justification>.
- <sup>81</sup> McCain. “A Betrayal of the Gospel” who quotes the Brown, S. (1999, November 1). Lutheran-Catholic declaration a ‘fine way of dialogue’, says Cassidy. *Ecumenical News Bulletin*, Number 20, 36.
- <sup>82</sup> Schroeder, H. J. (1941). *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*. London: Herder Book Co. See McCain’s different translation of the same Canons in A Betrayal of the Gospel.
- <sup>83</sup> McCain. A Betrayal of the Gospel.
- <sup>84</sup> “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement
- <sup>85</sup> “Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World,” point 254. Retrieved from [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html). This section of the Exhortation deals with ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue in the context of mission. According to Pope Francis, non-Catholic Christians are already united in baptism (244), Jews don’t need to convert (247), and with believing Muslims, the way is “dialogue” because “together with us they adore the one and merciful God” (252, a quotation of *Lumen Gentium* 16). Other non-Christians are also “justified by the grace of God” and are associated to “the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ” (254). The gospel appears not to be a message of salvation from God’s judgment but instead is a vehicle to access a fuller measure of a salvation that is already given to all mankind.
- <sup>86</sup> Pope Francisco writes to La Repubblica: ‘An open dialogue with non-believers.’ (2013, September 11). *La Repubblica*. Retrieved from [http://www.repubblica.it/cultura/2013/09/11/news/the\\_pope\\_s\\_letter-66336961/](http://www.repubblica.it/cultura/2013/09/11/news/the_pope_s_letter-66336961/).
- <sup>87</sup> W. Kasper. (2006). *A Handbook of Spiritual Ecumenism*, Hyde Park: New City Press. For a recent example see <http://www.worldea.org/news/4758/the-world-evangelical-alliance-introduces-its-new-leadership-structure-to-global-denominations-in-ome>

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<sup>88</sup> “Global Christian Forum News”, 2016 edition, p. 5. Retrieved from <http://www.globalchristianforum.org/docs/GCFNews-2016-02-EN.pdf>

In order to cooperate on issues of common concern (e.g. religious freedom, the protection of the family) one does not need to endorse the view that Evangelicals and Catholics share a “common mission” and need to soften their theological assessments of each other for the sake of political correctness or pragmatic interest. In Francis Schaeffer’s terms, “co-belligerence” with people of all kinds of persuasion is possible and indeed necessary on single issues or areas of common concern without requiring making an “alliance” based on theological agreement. The single endnote of the “Is the Reformation Over?” Statement explains that the historically consistent Evangelical position has been to acknowledge that Roman Catholics and Evangelicals have different understandings of the Gospel and therefore logically cannot be united in mission together.

These fundamental convictions are expressed in official papers by the two global Evangelical organizations, the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Lausanne Movement. After addressing such topics as Mariology, authority in the church, the papacy and infallibility, justification by faith, sacraments and the Eucharist, and the mission of the church; the World Evangelical Fellowship’s summary comment was, “Cooperation in mission between Evangelicals and Catholics is seriously impeded because of “unsurmountable” obstacles.”(World Evangelical Fellowship, *Evangelical Perspective on Roman Catholicism* (1986) in Paul G. Schrotenboer (ed.), *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1987) p. 93) We see this view mirrored in the 1980 “Lausanne Occasional Paper on Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among Roman Catholics” and a comment by the primary author of the Lausanne Covenant John Stott:

We are ready to co-operate with them (Roman Catholics, Orthodox or Liberal protestants) in good works of Christian compassion and social justice. It is when we are invited to evangelise with them that we find ourselves in a painful dilemma for common witness necessitates common faith, and co-operation in evangelism depends on agreement over the content of the gospel.

(Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization. “Lausanne Occasional Paper 10 on Christian Witness to Nominal Christians among Roman Catholics” (Pattaya, Thailand, 1980); John Stott, *Make the Truth Known: Maintaining the Evangelical Faith Today* (Leicester, UK: UCCF Booklets, 1983) p. 3-4.).