

American Council of Christian Churches
75th Annual Convention, October 18-20, 2016
Faith Baptist Church, Kittery, Maine
“Resolution on Recent Ecumenism of Roman Catholicism”

With the approach of the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation on October 31, 2017, the Roman Catholic hierarchy has launched what it considers a public relations offensive that appears to have the objective of minimizing any negative impact from the renewed comparison between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism. The Jesuit-trained Pope Francis has been leading the offensive in three areas that are the results of efforts to rebuild sympathy for Roman Catholicism as a more moderate influence than it was during the Reformation period.

A major part of the charm offensive was the canonization on September 4 of the late Mother Teresa, the nun whose 1997 death ended her career of relief of the extremely impoverished in Calcutta. Mother Teresa's devotion to the needs of the poor has earned her effusive praise in the world's press and media, while her ardent defense of the rights of the unborn always seems to vanish into the haze. According to reports from Cable News Network, Pope Francis said in the ceremony at St. Peter's Square in the Vatican, "after due deliberation and frequent prayer for divine assistance, and having sought the counsel of many of our brother bishops, we declare and define Blessed Teresa of Calcutta to be a saint, and we enroll her among the saints, decreeing that she is to be venerated as such by the whole church."¹

The Romanist concept of sainthood varies widely from that which authors of the New Testament affirm. There, in epistle after epistle, recipients receive the designation of *saints*, without any regard for papal pronouncements or miraculous works. The saints of the New Testament did not receive any veneration, either before or after their deaths, and never did the apostles instruct that the faithful should offer prayers to them or through them. In biblical terms, a person's status as a saint is fixed on the day of salvation by faith alone. A person who dies as a saint will never be anything else, and a person who dies without saving faith in Christ alone will never be a saint, the pronouncements, compromise, and confusion of false apostles and false brethren notwithstanding.

Another part of the charm offensive has been to continue the process of softening historic Roman Catholic hatred for Martin Luther, whom many Roman Catholics for centuries have regarded as little better than the archfiend himself. Publicly, Pope Francis has promoted the idea that the excommunicated Luther can be admired after all, and as some have been predicting for more than thirty years, he has been leading the drive that may end in Luther's canonization as a saint of the Roman Catholic Church. On October 13, the pope participated in an audience in the Vatican during which he gave attention to a small statue of Luther as though he were one of the Church's saints.² Furious Romanist opponents of the pope's action have complained that he has shown sympathy for one they regard as the arch-heretic.

Closely linked to the curious softening toward Luther is the concerted push to achieve agreements with Lutherans around the world on the meaning of terminology that Luther employed in breaking from Romanism nearly 500 years ago. During August of this year, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's Churchwide Assembly meeting in New Orleans adopted "The Declaration on the Way" by a vote of 931-9. Reflecting on the overwhelming vote, Presiding Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton said, "Though we have not yet arrived, we have claimed that we are, in fact, on the way to unity. ... This 'Declaration on the Way' helps us to realize more fully our unity in Christ with our Catholic partners, but it also serves to embolden our commitment to unity with all Christians."³ While Lutherans and Roman Catholic officials acknowledge that some differences still divide them, they have renewed their resolve to overcome those differences. Historically, such resolves have always

¹ <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/04/europe/mother-teresa-canonization>.

² <http://rorate-caeli.blogspot.com/2016/10/socci-scandal-in-vatican.html#more>.

³ <http://religionnews.com/2016/08/15/u-s-lutherans-approve-document-recognizing-agreement-with-the-catholic-church>.

meant that the Protestant side surrenders its insistence on its theological distinctives in the cause of achieving ecclesiastical fellowship.

Earlier in the year, Pope Francis, again to the dismay of some of the hierarchy's hardliners, announced that he would begin the Reformation's 500th anniversary year by traveling to Lund, Sweden, for a joint service with Lutherans there on October 31 of this year. The ecumenical prayer service will include both Pope Francis and leaders of the Lutheran World Federation. Roman Catholic Cardinal Kurt Koch, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said that Lutherans and Catholics will have the possibility to participate in what he called, "an ecumenical commemoration of the Reformation, not simply in a pragmatic way, but in the deep sense of faith in the crucified and resurrected Christ."⁴ Echoing his assessment was Bishop Anders Arborelius of the Catholic diocese of Stockholm, who argued that "history will be written when Pope Francis and the LWF leaders visit Lund and Malmö to encourage all of us to go further on the road towards Christian unity."

Such a charm offensive is the reflection of the fondest hopes of the Jesuits since their founding in the Catholic Counter-Reformation that there would be a way to reverse what the Roman Catholic Church has always considered the unfortunate separation by the followers of the Reformers. Sadly, evangelicals in America and elsewhere have also been associating with this offensive. Those who believe the Bible, however, know that the causes of the Reformation continue to exist because they are biblical responses to Roman Catholic departures from the truth of the Scriptures.

Therefore, the American Council of Christian Churches, at its 75th annual convention, October 18-20, 2016, at Faith Baptist Church, Kittery, Maine, summons faithful believers in the Lord Jesus Christ to defend the truth of the Gospel, and to oppose any attempt to suggest that anyone but God Himself has the authority to make anyone a saint, or that there can be any common ground between that which Martin Luther and the other Reformers came to understand and the unyielding insistence of the Roman Catholic Church's Magisterium that those who declare that justification is by faith alone are anathema. The 500th anniversary year of the Reformation's beginning should be a time for rejoicing in the revival of the preaching of the gospel and the clearing away of centuries of man-made traditions. "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4).



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⁴ <http://www.ncregister.com/blog/edward-pentin/reformation-commemoration-to-highlight-thanksgiving-repentance-common-witne>