

American Council of Christian Churches
77th Annual Convention, October 23-25, 2018
Bible Presbyterian Church of Collingswood, NJ
Resolution on the Doctrine of Co-belligerence

In 1970 Francis Schaeffer (d. 1984), the director of L'Abri Fellowship in Huémoz, Switzerland, authored a book on ecclesiology titled, *The Church at the End of the 20th Century*. The second chapter of the book discusses "The International Student Revolution" of that era and insightfully warns believers about a rising "New Left." Schaeffer predicted that the New Left would come to dominate American politics until a conservative "Establishment elite" reacted to take back power. Schaeffer warned that the church would be tempted at that point to align herself willingly with this conservative political right, compromising the true essence of her distinctive gospel mission. To avoid these compromises, Schaeffer counselled that believers should stop short of becoming political "allies" of either the New Left or the Establishment elite. Instead, they should be merely "co-belligerents" when necessary.ⁱ

Subsequently, Schaeffer's doctrine of political co-belligerence with governmental authorities acquired an ecclesiastical application. He now said, "An ally is a person who is a born-again Christian with whom I can go a long way down the road . . . A co-belligerent is a person who may not have any sufficient basis for taking the right position but takes the right position on a single issue. And I can join with him without any danger as long as I realize that he is not an ally and all we're talking about is a single issue."ⁱⁱ

This distinction between *ally* and *co-belligerent* and Schaeffer's caution about "a single issue" became increasingly difficult for Schaeffer and his followers to sustain, however. Especially after the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973 (*Roe v. Wade*), Schaeffer would fight this new blight on American society in a way that made political co-belligerents difficult to distinguish from religious allies. His doctrine became the theological cornerstone for Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority movement, which rallied Catholics, Jews, Mormons, and Evangelicals together in a common moral cause. In addition, the single-issue parameter quickly devolved into multiple-issue dialogue in this religiopolitical context.

Al Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and an adherent of the doctrine of co-belligerence, illustrated how impractical the doctrine's single-issue parameter can become. In his article published in the July/August 2003 edition of *Touchstone Journal*, titled "Standing Together, Standing Apart: Cultural Co-Belligerence Without Theological Compromise," Dr. Mohler counselled: "Given the cultural disaster we face, and what is at stake, it simply makes sense for men and women who share basic worldview concerns to gather strength from each other, join hands and hearts, and enter the cultural fray. On this point, all but the most extreme separatists among us would agree." He concluded, "With all this in mind, and with the cultural challenges now before us, Evangelicals, Roman Catholics, and the Orthodox should stand without embarrassment as co-belligerents in the culture war."ⁱⁱⁱ

But after stating this conclusion, Dr. Mohler listed three specific targets of "cultural co-belligerence," which focus on multiple theological issues that these religious groups are to address together: (1) "at the philosophical level," the "transcendent reality of truth"; (2) "at the theological level," many theological causes including the Trinity, the nature of the Bible, and the value of religious tradition; and (3) "in the cultural arena," the sanctity of human life, the objectivity of moral principles, and marriage, among other things. Here Schaeffer's one-issue ideal for co-belligerence has degenerated under the same label into multiple-issue compromise in the service of ecumenical dialogue.

Just like the fine line between single-issue and multiple-issues has proven impossible to maintain in practice, Schaeffer's distinction between *ally* and *co-belligerent* has been equally unsustainable. Schaeffer's son, Frank, described the way these distinctions became blurred in the Moral Majority's quest for greater political influence through religious alliances. In a 2009 address given at UCLA's Hammer Forum, titled, "Church and State: The Role of Spirituality in Politics," Frank Schaeffer recounted the compromise that became a normal part of his experience with his father's co-belligerence.

He said, "Well, some of those people turned out to be the hated and feared Roman Catholics that I had grown up my whole life thinking were the whore of Babylon. But now, apparently, they were not so much the whore of Babylon, but just the slightly fallen woman of Babylon perhaps. And then later they were good people because they agreed with us, and I remember meeting with Archbishop Fulton Sheen in New York . . . and kneeling with him at a red-velvet altar that he kept in a private chamber in his private apartment on Park Avenue. I thought, 'That's odd, you know when I was a child I got in trouble with my parents for imitating Catholics by making the sign of the cross behind my parents' back as we went into Catholic churches just to annoy them. Now I'm kneeling with Fulton Sheen, and he's promising me support from not only the Roman Catholic Church, but also the Knights of Columbus and a whole cast of characters, and he's telling me that Francis Schaeffer is a respected evangelical leader.'"^{iv}

Therefore, the American Council of Christian Churches at its 77th annual convention, October 23-25, 2018, at the Bible Presbyterian Church of Collingswood, NJ, resolves to warn our churches about the dangers of the doctrine of co-belligerence. As those living under our constitutional republic, we recognize the importance of every citizen's civil duty in a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, which the Lord has ordained for us. We will encourage people in our churches to be faithful to this duty. But our greater duty is our calling to be faithful church members, who are jealous for the doctrinal and associational purity of our churches (2 Cor. 11:2-3). The political concerns of the ACCC have been a well-documented part of our 77-year history. We desire righteousness in our land, but the ecumenical compromise, which the doctrine of co-belligerence requires, ultimately undermines that righteousness by erasing fundamental doctrinal distinctives between believers and unbelievers. By God's grace we determine to continue to have no part in that compromise.



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¹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the 20th Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1970), 36-37.

² Quoted in Colin Duriez, *Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 192.

³ The article's content was originally an address Dr. Mohler gave on November 10, 2001 to the conference, "Christian Unity and the Divisions We Must Sustain: A Gathering of Traditional Christians II," hosted by the University of St. Mary of the Lake, a school administered by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago. The article is also available for download at <http://equip.sbts.edu/publications/journals/journal-of-theology/sbjt-54-winter-2001/standing-together-standing-apart-cultural-co-belligerence-without-theological-compromise/>.

⁴ <https://hammer.ucla.edu/programs-events/2009/11/church-and-state-the-role-of-spirituality-in-politics>; the excerpt quoted here begins at 14:00. Frank Schaeffer no longer professes the evangelical faith of his father.