

## **‘The Manhattan Declaration’ Why faithful Christians SHOULD NOT sign it.**

In many parts of the world today God’s people are truly horrified by much of the God-defying legislation that has been enacted by their governments in areas such as abortion, gay rights, same-sex partnerships, the total re-defining of marriage and civil liberties. In conscience, this poses many problems about whether or not in these situations Christians should take a government-defying stand “to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). In such cases Christians often feel a real sense of helplessness or impotence when it comes to opposing these vile laws and to declaring publicly God’s views on these subjects in a meaningful way.

In such a situation, on 20th November 2009, a document called ‘**The Manhattan Declaration**’ was published as a kind of ‘Christian warning shot across the bows’ of governments around the world. It was signed by many leading figures from across the professing ‘Christian’ world and an invitation has been extended to those in sympathy with its stated views to add their signature to the document. As I write this article somewhere in excess of 405,000 signatures has so far been added. The question that faithful Christians have to now consider is – should I sign this document? On the opening page of the web site the following statement is made –

**‘We are Orthodox, Catholic, and evangelical Christians who have united at this hour to reaffirm fundamental truths about justice and the common good, and to call upon our fellow citizens, believers and non-believers alike, to join us in defending them’.**

Then in the actual declaration itself we read this –

**‘We are Christians who have joined together across historic lines of ecclesial differences to affirm our right—and, more importantly, to embrace our obligation—to speak and act in defense of these truths. We pledge to each other, and to our fellow believers, that no power on earth, be it cultural or political, will intimidate us into silence or acquiescence. It is our duty to proclaim the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in its fullness, both in season and out of season. May God help us not to fail in that duty’.**

**It is clear that all those who initially signed this declaration have publicly affirmed that they view each other as fellow ‘Christians’, separated only by ‘ecclesial differences’ and united in a combined effort ‘to proclaim the Gospel of OUR Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in its fullness’.**

This means that those who claim to be ‘evangelical Christians’ fully and publicly recognise the signatories who are either ‘Orthodox’ or ‘(Roman) Catholic’ as being their fellow ‘Christians’. **The ‘evangelical Christians’ claim merely to have crossed ‘lines of ecclesial differences’** [differences only in church structure and government] in uniting with the ‘Orthodox’ and ‘(Roman) Catholic’ signatories **but the reality is that they have also crossed ‘lines of soteriological differences’** [differences in the understanding of the doctrine of salvation]. The ‘evangelical Christians’ by the reference to **‘our duty to proclaim’** have fully and publicly indicated that they affirm that the ‘Orthodox’ and ‘(Roman) Catholic’ signatories dutifully ‘proclaim the gospel of OUR Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’. What then are faithful Christians to make of this declaration and the call to sign it?

**Faithful Christians will I hope recognise this document for what it truly is – another attempt to ecumenically ‘fuse together’ Evangelicals and Roman Catholics plus Orthodox and present them unitedly to the world as fellow ‘Christians’.**

For this reason and this reason alone no faithful Christian should sign this declaration as to do so would represent a sell-out of the true Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and a capitulation to those who are the enemies of the true Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. **Amongst the signatories on the ‘evangelical’ side are many of those who endorsed the infamous 1994 ‘Evangelicals and Catholics Together’ document – people like Charles Colson and J I Packer. Others** who on this occasion have also signed, but whose ecumenical credentials I have referred to in previous articles, **include Ravi Zacharias, James Dobson, Timothy George, Richard Land and Richard Mouw**, so no real surprises there.

**However, some people may be surprised to see also the name of Josh McDowell and I was personally extremely disappointed to see the name of Dr Al Mohler.**

On the blog site of the American VCY Crosstalk radio programme I penned the following entry

‘I am grateful to wearymom2 for drawing attention to this article by **Dr Mohler**, someone I have had great respect for in times past. **Sadly, on this occasion I believe he is wrong to have signed this** – he wrote ‘I cannot and do not sign documents such as Evangelicals and Catholics Together that attempt to establish common ground on vast theological terrain. I could not sign a statement that purports, for example, to bridge the divide between Roman Catholics and evangelicals on the doctrine of justification’ – **the reality is that this Manhattan document is just as damaging to the cause of Christ as was the ECT document [look how many ECT signers are in on this one – Colson, Packer etc] that Dr Mohler refused to sign because this Manhattan document states ‘We are Christians who have joined together across historic lines of ecclesial differences’ – in putting his signature to this document Dr Mohler has affirmed Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy as being valid expressions of true Christianity and of course because of their ‘systems of sacramental salvation’ they most assuredly are not. The sentiments expressed in this document are commendable but I appeal to Dr Mohler to withdraw his signature as he has obviously unintentionally ‘set his seal’ upon false gospels that are ‘anathema’ to God.’**

**Am I alone** in calling upon faithful Christians NOT TO Sign this declaration? **Thankfully not.** I want to conclude by quoting some fellow, faithful Christians who, like myself, have expressed their biblical opposition to God’s people signing this declaration.

Back in 2001 my guest here in Northern Ireland was former Roman Catholic, **Mike Gendron**, who is the director of Proclaiming the Gospel and on the same VCY Crosstalk radio blog site mentioned earlier Mike wrote the following –

‘The Manhattan Declaration is clearly another attempt to bring ecumenical unity to all of professing Christianity and blur the lines that separate apostates from true Christians. Many of the signers of the Evangelicals and Catholics Together Accord have given their name to this accord as well. Purposefully, the Gospel is never defined or explained in the Manhattan Declaration. This is because of the contradictory and opposing views on the issue of justification and salvation that are held by the signatories.

The implication throughout the document is that Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestant Evangelicals share a common faith. This blatantly ignores the fact that there can never be unity between true Christianity and apostate Christianity, between believers and unbelievers or between light and darkness (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

Whereas it is good to unite as co-belligerents with a united voice to fight moral and political issues, **any accord that attempts to overlook, dismiss, nullify or compromise the Gospel is antithetical to the command for all Christians to earnestly contend for the faith.** We can never deny the profound importance of protecting the life of every baby and the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman. We must earnestly contend against those who seek to destroy both.

However, **we must remember that this is a spiritual battle which can only be won through fervent prayer and the proclamation of the one and only true Gospel, a Gospel that is denied by every Catholic priest when he offers the Eucharistic Christ upon his altar for the forgiveness of sins.**

Charles Spurgeon said “To pursue union at the expense of truth is treason to the Lord Jesus”. Since we have been sanctified by the truth, let us remain separate for God’s glory and purpose. Let us pray, proclaim and contend earnestly for the faith.

**Dr James White** of **Alpha and Omega Ministries** wrote

‘there are a number of troubling things that I cannot get past in examining this document and considering its implications. **When I see some of the leading ecumenists in the forefront of the documents’ production, I am made uneasy, and for good reason.** Great damage has been done to the cause of Christ by those who have sought to promote the Kingdom by compromising the gospel, the only power given to the church that can change hearts, and hence change societies. By relegating the gospel to a matter of opinion and difference, but not something that defines the Christian faith, these ecumenists have left their followers with a cause without power, a quest without a solution. And though their open-mindedness fits better with our current post-modern culture, from a biblical perspective, they have truly betrayed the apostolic example... **If we are going to give a consistent, clear answer to our culture, we dare not find our power in a false unity that overshadows the gospel and cripples our witness.**’

**Dr John MacArthur** wrote

‘Here are the main reasons I am not signing the Manhattan Declaration, even though a few men whom I love and respect have already affixed their names to it... **the document falls far short of identifying the one true and ultimate remedy for all of humanity’s moral ills: the gospel... It assumes from the start that all signatories are fellow Christians... the implicit assumption (from the start of the document until its final paragraph) is that Roman Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant Evangelicals and others all share a common faith in and a common commitment to the gospel’s essential claims...** The Declaration therefore constitutes a formal avowal of brotherhood between Evangelical signatories and purveyors of different gospels... it ought to be clear to all that the agenda behind the recent flurry of proclamations and moral pronouncements we’ve seen promoting ecumenical co-belligerence is the viewpoint Charles Colson has been championing for more than two decades... In short, **support for the Manhattan Declaration** would not only contradict the stance I have taken since long before the original ‘Evangelicals and Catholics Together’ document was issued; it **would also tacitly relegate the very essence of gospel truth to the level of a secondary issue.** That is the wrong way – perhaps the very worst way – for evangelicals to address the moral and political crises of our time. **Anything that silences, sidelines, or relegates the gospel to secondary status is antithetical to the principles we affirm when we call ourselves evangelicals’.**

Former Roman Catholic, **Rob Zins**, director of A Christian Witness to Roman Catholicism wrote in response to the declaration

‘The text of the declaration, along with the title, gives us no reason to doubt that the authors consider themselves to be Christians writing from a distinctively Christian point of view... The result has been a watering down of true Christianity, and the putting forward of a sub-Christian philosophical ideology in its place. This new “Christianity” has room for just about everything that is remotely associated with God’s Word or His Gospel... **It is clear enough that those writing this document consider one another to be Christians albeit each having ecclesial differences with the other... It appears undeniable that the assumption of the designers and signers is that Roman Catholics are to be considered Christians.** There is no caveat, or asterisk, or explanatory footnote, or endnote that attempts to quell this obvious conclusion...

We find in this latest attempt at ecumenism that the designers and signers of the Manhattan Declaration are in cahoots all over again. **The deepest most fundamental divide between the Roman Catholic religion and Christianity is now called an “ecclesial difference.” ... But just how do we relegate such things as baptismal regeneration, purgatory, papal infallibility, indulgences, incremental justification, merit based salvation, transubstantiation, and sacramental salvation to mere “ecclesial differences”?**

Rome denies the heart of Christianity by disavowing justification by faith alone. Rome neutralizes the authority of Christianity by rejecting Sola Scriptura. So, how can these essential doctrines, by which we define Christianity, be safely designated as “ecclesial differences”? We say they cannot be...

The danger of the Declaration is that it does in fact “mark out a definition of Christianity.” **By nonchalantly including Roman Catholics as Christians the document re-invents Christianity and obliterates the well-defined boundaries of Christian doctrine upon which all of true Christianity depends.** For this reason it should not be tolerated within Christian circles and **those who signed it, if Christian, should repent of their act...** Does it matter if some well-known and trusted Evangelical Christians sign such a document as this? We think it does matter... Because of the hefty number of “trusted” Evangelicals who have signed the Manhattan Declaration, it will take time and equal exertion to undo what has been done. May this critique be a small step in the right direction.'

Last of all I want to quote the following questions posed by **Dan Phillips** on the evangelical **Pyromaniacs** blog on

<http://teampyro.blogspot.co.uk/2009/11/nineteen-questions-for-signers-of.html>

as they merit much consideration, not only by those who have signed, but also by others who may be considering signing –

1. **Is the Bible your sole, sufficient, ultimate source and authority for faith and practice?**

**2. Do you believe that the Biblical Gospel is the good news that lost, sinful man can be reconciled to God by grace alone, through faith alone, in and because of Christ's person and work alone, to the glory of God alone, as seen with final authority in Scripture alone?**

**3. Do you see — note well my wording — Scriptural warrant for applying the word “Christian” to anyone other than one who is yoked as a student to the words of Christ and His apostles (Acts 11:26), who affirms the Gospel as described in #2 above (Acts 26:28), and who has been spiritually regenerated by grace alone through faith alone (1 Peter 4:16; cf. 1:3-5)?**

**4. Do you see — again, note well my wording — Scriptural warrant for applying the word “Christian” to anyone who would distort and oppose that Gospel, either personally or by aligning himself directly as a supporter (let alone promoter) of such institutional distortion and opposition**

**5. Do you believe that “distortion” of that Gospel is a damning heresy, such as falls under the thundering apostolic condemnation of Galatians 1:6-9?**

**6. Do you believe that Roman Catholicism's official formulation of the gospel is such a damning heresy?**

**7. Can a church be a Christian church if it has the Gospel wrong?**

**8. What do you believe the Reformation was about?**

**9. Do you believe the Reformation was vital and necessary, or a mistake?**

**10. Do you agree with the document you signed, that the Popes of the 16th and 17th centuries were Christians (remembering ##1-6, above)?**

**11. As to the central themes of the Reformation, has anything fundamental changed today, so that the Reformation is no longer relevant?**

**12. Do you believe that persuading people to assent to a vaguely-Biblical opinion about homosexuality, marriage, or abortion is more critical than clearly presenting the Gospel, as described in #2 above?**

**13. Do you admit that “The Manhattan Declaration” identifies as Christians men and women who are members of – indeed, leaders within – sects which (A) formally and officially oppose the Gospel as described in #2, above; and which (B) make a great deal of the fact that all adherents of those institutions must walk in lockstep conformity with their formal and official positions?**

**14. If your son or daughter were to tell you that he or she wants to join the Orthodox or Roman Catholic church, “Because anyway, you said they were Christians just like you are, except for ‘ecclesial difference’ – how would you respond?**

**15. Can your fellow-signatories rely on the “Gospel” that their sects officially proclaim – which “Gospel” contradicts the Gospel as defined in #2 above – and still go to Heaven?**

**16. Which is more important and more critical in our day: to define marriage, life, and civil liberty; or to define the Gospel?**

**17. How can it be helpful to join hands in defining the former, with those who cannot define the latter?**

**18. Can any civic gains that this document achieves for the issues of abortion or marriage offset the spiritual damage it causes in blurring the line between a true, Biblical, saving Gospel, and a false, un-Biblical, damning distortion?**

**19. If you have answered all of the preceding questions, can you explain why you would not ask that your name be removed from “The Manhattan Declaration,” which over and over again identifies both you and adherents of Gospel-distorting sects as alike Christians, which says that you and they alike “are compelled by our Christian faith,” and which repeatedly suggest that you and they alike proclaim “the Gospel”?**

**Dan Phillips concluded by saying – ‘The co-signatories made a public statement by endorsing this document. What I would (by these 19 questions) ask of those who have signed, I would (also) press all the more urgently on anyone tempted to sign’.**

Cecil Andrews – ‘Take Heed’ Ministries – 2nd December 2009