

Engaging Roman Catholicism

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FOCL Talk 1: Why Evangelicals Need to Engage Roman Catholicism

Do the debates of the Reformation still matter for evangelicals today? How should evangelicals understand Roman Catholicism, and why is it important for evangelicals to continue to engage the Roman Catholic Church from a biblical perspective? This opening session highlights the relevance and urgency for evangelicals to both better understand and more winsomely engage the Roman Catholic Church, including its theology and practices.

I. The Sociological Motivation: The Two Main Christian Constituencies

- A. The Evangelical and Roman Catholic trajectories of growth
- B. The global diffusion of both constituencies
- C. The growing popularity of recent popes

II. The Historical Reason: 500 Years Later

- A. The Reformation then and now
- B. Is the Reformation over?

III. Common (Evangelical) Misconceptions about Roman Catholicism

- A. Is a spiritual renewal occurring?
- B. Is there a common creedal basis?

- C. Can we deal with individual Catholics only, and not with the institution?

IV. The Gospel Issue

- A. A Galatians 1:6-9 issue or a Philippians 1:15-18 issue?

- B. The Catholic Gospel and the Evangel

FOCL Talk 2: Roman Catholicism: A Worldview and a System

Roman Catholicism is a complex reality. A global view of Catholicism must take into account its doctrine, culture, and its institutions. It is a religious worldview which has been promoted throughout history by the ecclesiastical institution whose center is in Rome. Although there is considerable diversity in its forms of expression, Catholicism is a basically unitary reality with discernible underlying tenets. Any analysis which does not take into account the fact that Catholicism is a system will fall prey to a superficial and fragmented understanding of the phenomenon. This lecture will compare and contrast systemic vs. atomistic approaches to Roman Catholicism and demonstrate the need for an evangelical assessment to grasp the basic contours of this worldview and its system.

I. “Atomistic” vs “Systemic” Approaches to Roman Catholicism

- A. Looking at Roman Catholicism as a bunch of pieces

- B. Looking at Roman Catholicism as an integrated, dynamic system

II. The “Roman” Element of Roman Catholicism

- A. Rome is a political entity

- B. Rome is a centralized entity

- C. Rome is a purpose-driven entity

III. The “Catholic” Element of Roman Catholicism

- A. Catholicity means embracing religion beyond Biblical standards

- B. Catholicity means expanding the borders beyond Biblical purity

- C. Catholicity means uniting the world beyond Biblical principles

IV. Making Sense of the Whole

- A. Many Catholicisms, yet one Roman Catholicism

- B. Grasping the Catholic project and responding to it

FOCL Talk 3: The Second Vatican Council and Beyond

The Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965, also known as ‘Vatican II’, is widely regarded as one of the most significant events of the twentieth century. Beside the immense influence exerted on Catholic theology and life, the Council has brought *aggiornamento* to the Roman Church. *Aggiornamento*, or a bringing up to date, does not denote reformation in the evangelical sense but neither is it a merely political and linguistic device aimed at concealing an unchanging reality. It is instead the Catholic way of responding to the need for some form of renewal without altering the fundamental structure inherited from the past. This lecture will examine the historical significance of Vatican II and its theological outcomes that continue to shape Roman Catholic identity today.

I. The Unsettled Legacy of Vatican I

- A. The clash with the modern world

- B. The absolutist claims of the papacy

- C. The preparation of the New Catholicism (the Ecumenical Movement, the New Theology, and John XXIII)

II. The Re-Launching of the Catholicity of the Roman Church

- A. A “pastoral” council

- B. The style of the council

- C. The Catholic embrace of modernity

III. The Main Texts of Vatican II

- A. Lumen Gentium: on the Nature of the Church
- B. Dei Verbum: on Divine Revelation
- C. Gaudium et Spes: on the Church and the World
- D. Unitatis Redintegratio: Principles of Catholic Unity

IV. The Unsettling “Spirit” of the Vatican II

- A. Discontinuity vs continuity
- B. *Aggiornamento*
- C. Beyond the wars on Vatican II: the theological vision of Pope Francis

FOCL Talk 4: Why is Unity so Attractive? Understanding and Evaluating the Ecumenical Movement

Unity has become a catchword in present-day Christianity. Everybody talks about unity and wants to promote unity. What is meant by it? There are several accounts and many projects of unity. Among the various options, two of them seem to be the most influential ones outside of the evangelical world. One has to do with the 1982 Lima document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. It expounds the mainstream view of unity that can be found in important circles of the World Council of Churches. The other is the Vatican II decree on ecumenism *Unitatis reditengratio* (1964) which sets forth the vision for unity of the Roman Catholic Church. What are their theological foundations and how can be they assessed biblically? What are the implications for the unity of the church and of humankind? Are there better options that are more biblically grounded?

I. Three Visions of Unity

- A. The Ecumenical view (WCC)
- B. The Roman Catholic view
- C. The Evangelical view

II. The Ecumenical Unity

- A. Different models and phases of unity in the 20th century
- B. The 1982 Lima Document: *Baptism, Eucharist, Ministry*
- C. United in baptism?

III. The Roman Catholic Unity

- A. Unity of doctrine, sacraments, and order
- B. Imperfect and perfect unity (Vatican II)
- C. Unity as a polyhedron (Pope Francis)
- D. Convergences between the Ecumenical and the Roman Catholic views

IV. The Evangelical Unity

- A. Unity of believers
- B. Spiritual unity is primary, institutions are secondary
- C. Mission as a mark of unity

V. Conclusion: Between an Unwarranted Ecumenism and a Dangerous Sectarianism

FOCL Talk 5: Communicating about the Gospel with Roman Catholics

What are the greatest sources of the Roman Catholic misunderstanding regarding the Gospel? What are most important biblical concepts with which to dialogue with Roman Catholics? This session will bring together what participants have already learned about Roman Catholicism to reflect on effective methods of engaging Roman Catholics in meaningful and impactful evangelism.

I. Don't Assume or Rely on Common Language

- A. Same words, different meanings

- B. Let the Bible define your language

II. Be Prepared to Wrestle with the Exclusive Nature of the Gospel

- A. Grace alone

- B. Scripture alone

- C. Christ alone

III. Be Prepared to Show the Personal Element of the Christian Faith

- A. Beyond religion, the Gospel is for life

- B. Beyond tradition, the Gospel is for the whole person

- C. Beyond the clergy/laity divide, the Gospel is for all

FOCL Talk 6: Why the Reformation is not over!

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 over -- that the primary theological disagreements that led to the rupture in Western Christianity in the sixteenth century have been resolved. Is it true? What should we make of the issues raised in the 16th century? What is their on-going significance?

I. Why Some Argue that the Reformation is Over

- A. Challenges for Christians worldwide

- B. Divisions are over

II. Is the Reformation Over?

- A. From Trent to Vatican II

- B. Justification by faith alone and the JDDJ

III. Looking Ahead

- A. Distinguishing between RC people and RC as institution

- B. Co-belligerence?

- C. Unity as defined by the gospel