

‘Evangelical Mission in Cooperation with Catholics:

A study of Evangelical missiological tensions’

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the cooperative missiological approach, involving Evangelical cooperation with Catholics, exemplified in the two case studies of Evangelical missionaries David Bjork (in France) and Bruce Clewett (in Austria). Bjork and Clewett’s approach is compared with the rejection of such cooperation by the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) in their 1986 document, ‘An Evangelical Perspective of Roman Catholicism’. It examines the WEA 1986 document in the context of the wider, post-Vatican II global ecumenical dialogues between the Vatican and other world, Christian communions. It also examines the WEA document and the approach of Bjork and Clewett through the lens of four theologians – three Evangelicals and one Catholic – interviewed at length: Dr Henri Blocher (France), Dean Timothy George (USA), Revd Dr David Hilborn (UK) and Msgr Peter Hocken (UK). There is a focus in the thesis on the WEA 1986 document’s three threshold objections to cooperation: that cooperative mission with Catholics ignores history, rejects theology and betrays the foundational principle of justification by faith. While noting that Evangelicalism is split in its reactions to these issues, as indicated by the arguments put forward by Bjork and Clewett, this thesis suggests that signs of commonality are to be found in all three areas. The thesis proposes that a newer, more cooperative missional strategy might be more effective amongst certain Catholic populations and that such a strategy would also remain faithful to some key Evangelical distinctives. The study engages not only with the narrower question of Evangelical mission strategy amongst Catholics but also with two broader and contemporary missiological issues: the question of whether an ‘emerging ecumenical paradigm’ is arising and the perplexing question of what are the ‘constants in context’ in a changing world. In the model proposed by the case studies, a new, progressive stance is taken with Catholics but on ‘conservative’ grounds.