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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ACCC RESPONDS TO "PROPER CHURCH" COMMENT

On July 10 Pope Benedict XVI reasserted the historic Roman Catholic claim to theological supremacy, stating that all other churches were not true churches and their holy orders have "no value," in a paper prepared by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Vatican's doctrinal watchdog. The document states unequivocally that, in the Roman Catholic view, no other faith can be called a church "in the proper sense" of the word.

In an official statement approved by the pope, the Vatican said it was simply restating the position set out by the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in a 2000 document titled *Domine Jesus* because theologians continued to misunderstand it.

Apparently caught off guard by the quick and voluminous reaction, official Vatican spokesman Cardinal Walter Kasper later said that the declaration stopped short of declaring, " . . . that Protestant churches are not churches, but that they are not churches in the *proper sense*, that is they are not churches in the way the Catholic Church understands the word church."

The claim that the Roman Catholic church was the "one true church of Christ" drew instant and predictable response from world-wide religious groups. While most main-line denominational representatives attempted to explain the issue under the heading of world-wide ecumenical efforts, some religious leaders pointed out that the pope's statement remains consistent with historical Roman Catholic dogma.

"It comes as no surprise to church historians that a pope would reaffirm this longstanding tenet of Roman Catholicism," said Dr. John McKnight, president of the American Council of Christian Churches (ACCC). "Yet the National Council of Churches USA as well as the World Council of Churches tell us that the Pope did not really mean what he said, and that the Roman Catholic Church is indeed interested in ecumenical dialog," McKnight said.

Founded in 1941, the American Council of Christian Churches is a national organization headquartered in Bethlehem PA. The ACCC represents Christians and churches across America who hold that the Bible is the inerrant word of God and that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. Roman Catholic claims of exclusivity are the exact opposite of the

ACCC's position on what comprises the "proper church."

McKnight went on to put the current Vatican controversy into a Scriptural perspective, stating that the true church of Christ is not an institution but a spiritual union of people who believe in Jesus Christ alone as the Saviour of their souls and the Lord of their lives. "Any institution claiming to be the sole true Church demonstrates by that very claim that it is false," he said.

In its claim of ecclesiastical exclusivity, Roman Catholicism rejects the "spiritual union" view, one of the Protestant Reformation's foundational principles. The Vatican's official dogma teaches that the Roman Catholic church is the sole means of man's salvation, being the only access human beings have to Jesus Christ. Martin Luther strenuously rejected that dogma on the grounds that it links salvation to man, pointing out that Christ taught the opposite when He said, ". . . I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

The executive secretary of the ACCC, Ralph Colas, points to the history of the Roman Catholic church for perspective on the pope's "proper church" claim. "Rather than being the one true Church, the Roman Catholic system is the world's largest, oldest political party operating in the venue of international politics," Colas said. "Contemporary intrigues of the Vatican reveal that nothing has changed since the days of the Roman Empire: its foremost purpose is power."

Colas added his disappointment in what he called, "The same-old, same-old responses of organized religion, making up excuses for another preposterous Roman Catholic claim," referring to the current ecumenical movement of organizations such as *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*. ECT's stated mission is to do away with the "reforms" of the Reformation and eradicate the differences between Roman Catholicism and all other churches.

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