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14 Pentecostalism and Ecumenism

WOLFGANG VONDEY

Pentecostalism is an ecumenical melting pot. Unlike the many existing churches and denominations that originated in deliberate response to splits and separations resulting from doctrinal and practical differences, pentecostal communities worldwide did not organize or institutionalize in conscious reaction to particular ecclesiastical patterns. Instead, global Pentecostalism has emerged in both continuity and discontinuity with various existing doctrines, practices, rituals, disciplines, spiritualities, and organizational forms, and the resulting character of pentecostal groups does not readily form a homogeneous ecumenical picture. This chapter elaborates on the relationship of Pentecostalism and ecumenism, beginning with early pentecostal hopes and understandings of Christian unity in North America, charting the frustration of such hopes, and explicating the revival of pentecostal participation in international ecumenical affairs since the latter half of the twentieth century. An exploration of the various ways that Pentecostals have approached interdenominational cooperation and ecumenical conversations precedes a survey of the current status of ecumenical encounters: from national discussions, to regional bodies, international discussions, participation in the World Council of Churches, and newer forms of ecumenical initiatives. This survey is complemented by a theological assessment of pentecostal approaches to the nature, purpose, and unity of the Christian churches. In conclusion, the chapter proposes that Pentecostals can and should continue to invest themselves wholeheartedly in the ecumenical enterprise, what they might receive in such participation, and what they might have to offer to the ecumenical movement in the twenty-first century.

EARLY PENTECOSTAL HOPES AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

The ecumenical origins of the men and women who formed the newly established pentecostal groups in North America at the beginning of the

twentieth century nourished an atmosphere of both hope and skepticism. Although it can be said "Pentecostalism started in most places as an ecumenical renewal movement in the mainline churches,"¹ the dynamics and conscious efforts toward renewal among pentecostal pioneers were characterized initially by a fundamental ecumenical optimism that was followed by confrontation and confusion.² The emerging pentecostal groups, which had not yet defined themselves in the existing ecclesiastical landscape, were denied the experience to develop their understanding of Christian unity in a mutually inclusive ecumenical setting.

Influential in charting the original optimism among Pentecostals was the diversity of churches, fellowships, and individuals confessing a similar experience of the Holy Spirit. This encounter was captured immediately by a theological imagery that was both restorationist and ecumenical. Labels such as Pentecostal, Apostolic Faith, or Latter Rain, commonly used among the groups, expressed not only the importance of continuity with Christian history but also the eschatological anticipation of a forthcoming universal ecumenical restoration of all of God's people.³ The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was seen as the specific evidence of God's desire to bring unity to the churches and to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. Mission and unity were inextricably linked among early Pentecostals who pointed back to the day of Pentecost only to point forward to the full realization of the kingdom of God.

Reflecting this ecumenical hope, Richard G. Spurling named one of the earliest pentecostal groups "Christian Union" in accordance with the vision to remain in fellowship with and to bring unity to all Christians.⁴ In his influential writings on the Latter Rain, pentecostal leader David Wesley Myland proclaimed the entire goal of Pentecost as the oneness and unity of Christians brought about by God's Spirit:⁵ William J. Seymour, pastor and leader of the Azusa Street Mission and Revival in Los Angeles, explained in his influential paper, the *Apostolic Faith*, that the pentecostal movement stands not only "for the restoration of the faith" but also for "Christian Unity everywhere."⁶ Charles Fox Parham, a pillar of the early pentecostal movement, found himself confronted with a prophetic declaration that to live as a pentecostal was to live as "an apostle of unity."⁷ Frank Bartleman, another important figure in the early years, declared unambiguously, "There can be no divisions in a true Pentecost. To formulate a separate body is but to advertise our failure as a people of God."⁸

Similar voices can be added from pentecostal leaders outside of North America. Thomas B. Barratt, who brought the pentecostal

message to several Scandinavian countries, envisioned Pentecostalism as the "Very Revival Christ had in His mind when He prayed that *all His disciples might be one*."⁹ Gerrit R. Polman, the founder of the Dutch pentecostal movement, concluded in a similar vein, "The purpose of the pentecostal revival is not to build up a church, but to build up all churches."¹⁰ The force of these ecumenical convictions cannot be separated from the revivals that occurred in broad ecumenical contexts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe. Ecumenical contacts were encouraged by such well-known figures as the Anglican pentecostal leader in Great Britain Alexander A. B. Boddy, the Lutheran pentecostal leader in Germany Jonathan A. A. B. Paul, the French Reformed pastor Louis Dallière, the Belgian protestant writer Henri T. de Worm, and many other Pentecostals who saw themselves at the same time as ecumenical figures.¹¹ In Europe, and later with particular force in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, positive ecumenical attitudes were frequently the result of the influence of foreign missionaries and were often synonymous with the international and interdenominational origins of the participants themselves. Ecumenical Pentecostalism emerged as a melting pot of existing doctrinal traditions, liturgical practices, national and local ecclesiastical cultures, organizational structures, and spiritualities.

Theologically, the ecumenical impulse among early Pentecostals reflected a particular ecclesiological ethos.¹² The pentecostal groups hesitated to apply the title "church" or "denomination" to the movement. Pentecostals criticized the "formalism," "institutionalism," "ritualism," "ecclesiasticism," and "denominationalism" of existing "human organizations."¹³ The heart of their ecumenical criticism was leveled at the existence of the "many different religious organizations each enclosed by its own particular sectarian fence."¹⁴ The origins of pentecostal ecclesiology were deeply rooted in an ecumenical reading of history that informed both a deep-seated restorationist mind-set and vehement eschatological expectation. The dismissal of existing ecclesiastical patterns resulted from the conviction that the church was fundamentally an eschatological, not doctrinal, community and that the common trend toward denominational separation contradicted the eschatological vision of the gospel. Pentecostalism was seen as a movement in the church and among the churches, not a new church. More precisely, Pentecostals understood themselves as a movement in the process of *becoming* church. A particular community, denomination, or even the pentecostal movement as a whole was considered transitory and expected to be surpassed by the continued outpouring of the

Holy Spirit and the resulting restoration of Christianity. From an early pentecostal perspective, these expectations were synonymous with an understanding of the future direction of ecumenical unity.

THE FRUSTRATION OF AN ECUMENICAL MIND-SET AMONG PENTECOSTALS

The widespread ecumenical optimism among Pentecostals should not be mistaken for a naive or unadulterated attitude toward Christian unity. Apart from its ecumenical origins, Pentecostalism could not have emerged in as forceful a manner as it did on a global scale during the twentieth century. Nonetheless, the ecumenical impulses among pentecostal pioneers were often ambivalent, embracing the goal of Christian unity but questioning the means with which Pentecostals were to participate in ecumenical endeavors.¹⁵ This ambivalence resulted from a number of internal and external factors that contributed to the shaping of the pentecostal movement in its early days. Four elements stand out with particular clarity.

Restorationist criticism. The primitivist or restorationist impulse among Pentecostals emerged as an emphasis on the need for a return to the practices of the apostolic community and was based on a critical attitude toward established churches and contemporary Christian practices.¹⁶ Often associated with an emphasis on spiritual freedom, empowerment, and sanctification, Pentecostals lamented the fact that the established traditions stifled spiritual growth, de-emphasized the work of the Holy Spirit, and polluted the original forms of Christian fellowship. After all, it was for these reasons that a restoration of the apostolic faith was seen as necessary. And while the established churches were certainly seen as participating in the fulfillment of God's restoration of the world, they were also the primary contestants from which Pentecostals distinguished themselves. The perfectionist parentage and eschatological orientation of early pentecostal thought informed a critical stance toward any doctrine, practice, or community that seemed to promote spiritual ambiguity.¹⁷ In light of the perceived urgency of the Lord's judgment, Pentecostals often drew a sharp line between the church and the world and included in the latter any community that did not distinguish itself sharply from the former. The result was a world view fostered by the demands of a Biblicalist piety, the rigor of an unbridled apocalypticism, and the ardor of unprecedented manifestations of spiritual experiences that often prohibited rather than promoted efforts in Christian unity.

Persecution and rejection. Relatively quickly, Pentecostals found themselves at odds with the established traditions. Separation was often experienced among Pentecostals in the harsh reality of persecution and violent attacks at the hands of the established churches. The overwhelming targets were the practices and experiences that presented the most immediately accessible and tangible manifestations of the pentecostal revivals.

Within a short time... the Pentecostal revival became the object of scurrilous attacks. It was denounced as "anti-Christian," as "sensual and devilish," and as "the last vomit of Satan." Its adherents were taunted and derided from the pulpit as well as in the religious and secular press. Some leaders were actually subjected to violence. Those ministers and missionaries from the old-line denominations who embraced the doctrine of the Holy Spirit baptism were removed from their pulpits or dismissed by their mission boards.¹⁸

The revivals among Pentecostals were seen as immoral, childish, deluded, frivolous, insane, and even demonic.¹⁹ Few critics actually sought to substantiate their judgments with concrete evidence. However, exceptions typically pointed to the controversial physical manifestations that accompanied the revivals and that earned Pentecostals the pejorative nickname "holy rollers."²⁰ This label was often indiscriminately used to describe the unorthodox practices of jumping, jerking, falling, rolling on the floor, and above all, the pentecostal commitment to Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues. In return, the more Pentecostals felt ostracized by the established traditions, the more their ecumenical hopes were frustrated. Restorationist criticism was fueled, new prejudices emerged, and the young pentecostal movement in North America soon entered a phase of ecumenical exclusivism.²¹ The theological debate centered on the pentecostal challenge to the dominant cessationist principle, which rendered the pentecostal emphasis on the practice of spiritual gifts obsolete with the end of the apostolic age.²² Coupled with a neglect to distinguish between the moderate, mainline Pentecostals and the more extreme manifestations of the movement, the World Christian Fundamentals Association cut its ties with the pentecostal movement in 1928 and contributed to an isolation of Pentecostals from ecumenical fellowship.²³ Most of these reactions were the result of rejecting pentecostal practices, spirituality, and worship; doctrinal divisions only confirmed rather than initiated the widening ecumenical separation.

Internal divisions. Pentecostal groups were plagued by internal debates, fractures, and divisions. The growing movement divided over

disagreements on doctrine, personalities, church politics, and praxis.²⁴ Among the most detrimental issues ranked William H. Durham's teaching of the "finished work of Calvary," which rejected the idea of sanctification as a second crisis separate from salvation dominant among many Pentecostals, as well as divisions resulting from the controversy between Oneness and Trinitarian Pentecostals, and racial issues eventually dividing the Azusa Street leadership at a later point in the quarrel with Charles Parham.²⁵ By the second decade of the twentieth century, the movement had become a composition of several branches of pentecostal bodies that looked with suspicion at the inconsistencies, failures, and counterfeits that characterized some parts of the movement.²⁶ In the effort to provide order and coherence among those who called themselves Pentecostals, the theological concerns of the early movement were soon overshadowed by the structural demands of the rapidly expanding pentecostal communities. Distinctions of emphasis, formation of denominations and churches, and the establishment of organizational structures made concentrated ecumenical efforts among Pentecostals almost impossible.

Organizational demands and institutionalization. The unprecedented growth of the pentecostal movement, its manifold diversity, internal divisions, and isolation from the established traditions hastened the need to increase and improve organizational structures. In response, Pentecostals abandoned their initial rejection of traditional ecclesiastical patterns and organizational forms and adopted the label "church" or "assembly," thus entering the scene of American denominationalism.²⁷ The adoption of traditional ecclesiological classifications inevitably led to confrontation with others who adopted the same designations and nourished an ecclesiology of competition.²⁸ Although many Pentecostals remained adamant that the movement was not antagonistic but ecumenical in principle, the understanding of pentecostal ecclesiality had to be altered to allow for the existence of multiple "churches." This decision further consolidated internal divisions and the exclusivist attitude toward many non-pentecostal communities. Closer alignment with denominations and institutions critical of the ecumenical movement, such as the National Association of Evangelicals, led many Pentecostals to forsake the ecumenical conversations in which they had participated during the first half of the twentieth century.²⁹ During the middle of the twentieth century, the pentecostal movement reverted to a form of "spiritual" ecumenism, and its self-understanding as an active ecumenical contributor became ecclesiastically invisible. Pentecostal leaders abstained from formal ecumenical conversations with the

emerging ecumenical movement, pastors and missionaries withdrew from ecumenical cooperation, congregational and institutional structures hardened, and the ecumenical fervor of the pentecostal pioneers was virtually eliminated.

ORGANIZED STEPS TOWARD INTERDENOMINATIONAL COOPERATION AND ECUMENICAL RELATIONS

Organized contributions to ecumenical conversations developed slowly after World War I. With the rise of the ecumenical movement since 1910, pentecostal denominations were sporadically involved in organized dialogue; some joined the Foreign Missions Conference of North America and the International Missionary Council and sent delegates to the annual conferences of these organizations, which contributed to the later formation of the National Council of Churches, United States, and the World Council of Churches (WCC).³⁰ However, the dominant frustration of the ecumenical mind-set among Pentecostals channeled the attention primarily toward the improvement of worldwide cooperation among themselves. In 1921, an International Pentecostal Convention was launched in Amsterdam, and before World War II plans were made for a world conference among Pentecostals. After the war, institutional relationships resulted initially from collaboration with churches and mission agencies engaged in relief efforts.³¹ Ecumenical conversations developed gradually through cooperation with churches in neighboring countries. National fellowships were formed in North America, Central and South America, Great Britain, Germany, India, Africa, and Taiwan.³² These national organizations contributed to the cooperation necessary to form and sustain an international fellowship among the different pentecostal groups, their diverse sociocultural backgrounds, practices, and theological emphases.

The first Pentecostal World Conference was organized in Zürich in 1947, followed by a second conference in Paris in 1949. Subsequent conferences were held every three years and significantly expanded the network among Pentecostals worldwide. An important result of the increasing worldwide conversation among Pentecostals was the formation of the Pentecostal World Fellowship, a global cooperative body as found in many other Christian groups, although without legislative authority over any national entity. Not all pentecostal groups attend the meetings, and the policies of large national pentecostal denominations in North America and Europe remain more influential factors in international cooperation.³³ Nonetheless, the pioneering efforts

in international cooperation among Pentecostals carry a number of important implications. Most significant among these is the emergence of two central ecumenical figures, the British Pentecostal Donald Gee (1891–1966) and the South African Pentecostal David J. du Plessis (1905–87), who became one of the leading forces in the renewal of ecumenical commitment among Pentecostals worldwide.

Together, Gee and du Plessis organized the first worldwide conferences among Pentecostals and actively supported their organization; Du Plessis served as general secretary of the Pentecostal World Conference during the first decade, and Gee worked as editor of *Pentecost*, the chief periodical published by the Pentecostal World Fellowship.³⁴ These efforts gradually rebuilt interest in ecumenical conversations among Pentecostals. In addition, these and other representatives of the changing face of twentieth century Pentecostalism helped interpret the movement to those outside of the movement.³⁵ At the same time, Du Plessis's understanding of the ecumenical nature of Pentecostalism was at odds with the leadership of his own pentecostal denomination, and he was defrocked as a minister in 1962 until he was reinstated in 1980. During this period, he was able to expand significantly the trajectory of his ecumenical relations with the Roman Catholic Church, the WCC, and the charismatic movement.³⁶ Eventually, these conversations led to the first official ecumenical dialogue in which Pentecostals participated: it was between the Roman Catholic Church and Pentecostals, a pioneering event that became the model for subsequent ecumenical conversations between Pentecostals and other traditions.

Another important factor contributing to the increase of organized ecumenical conversations during the middle of the twentieth century was the transition in leadership among many pentecostal groups. The new generation of Pentecostals felt restricted by the anti-intellectual attitude, exclusivist mind-set, and lack of dialogue still dominant among many classical Pentecostals and fostered greater interest in establishing relations beyond local, and even national, boundaries. Some pentecostal groups in Latin America, in particular, developed a strong ecumenical vision and commitment. Eventually, a phase of ecumenical solidarity was initiated with the founding of national councils and organizations that promote interdenominational cooperation. These commitments became particularly visible when the first pentecostal churches, the Pentecostal Church of Chile and the Pentecostal Mission Church of Chile, joined the WCC in 1961.³⁷ This example was followed by several other churches in Latin America, Africa, and the United States.³⁸ Concerns about the visible exclusion of most pentecostal churches

from official membership in the WCC has led to the formation of a Joint Consultative Group in 2000, a dedicated theological discussion between the WCC and Pentecostals that meets annually and has opened the doors for pentecostal contributions in various ecumenical programs and activities, particularly the work on unity, mission, evangelism, and spirituality and the commissions on Faith and Order and World Mission and Evangelism.³⁹

A third influence contributing to a change in ecumenical attitude among Pentecostals is the development of pentecostal scholarship and the nurturing of successors to their ecumenical pioneers. The anti-intellectual attitude of many classical pentecostal groups did not equip them well to participate in ecumenical conversations and prejudiced them against what was perceived as an intellectual ecumenism with little practical impact. In response, the global expansion of the pentecostal movement and pioneering efforts in organized worldwide cooperation also increased conversations about an ecumenical pentecostal scholarship. The pioneering efforts of Walter J. Hollenweger brought widespread attention not only to Pentecostalism as an object of ecumenical interest but also to pentecostal scholarship as an ecumenical dialogue partner. Discussions at the ninth Pentecostal World Conference in 1970 led to the formation of the Society for Pentecostal Studies in the United States – a forum of scholars, teachers, ministers, and laypersons that opened up new opportunities to engage in various international ecumenical activities and to give greater visibility to pentecostal participation to both Pentecostals and non-pentecostal participants.⁴⁰ Du Plessis was active also in this venue, accompanied by Jerry L. Sandidge, and later Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., who became the successor of du Plessis in international pentecostal dialogues and has shaped the ecumenical character of the society as its president and editor of *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*. In many regards, pentecostal scholarship has gained greater ecumenical recognition. In the 1980s, the society approved for its members to accept invitations from the commission of Faith and Order of the National Council of Churches.⁴¹ Since then, the membership of the society has gradually expanded visibly beyond a purely pentecostal constituency, preconference sessions began to host informal conversations with Roman Catholics, and in 2001 an interest group in ecumenical studies was established that continues to serve as an organized ecumenical think tank among Pentecostals.⁴² Similar societies, research networks, and publications have been established in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and Oceania. A large constituency of international pentecostal scholars participated in a widely attended

ecumenical gathering in Brighton, England, in 1991.⁴³ The conference confronted the accepted stereotypes of Pentecostalism as both anti-intellectual and anti-ecumenical.

Nevertheless, the most significant factor in the current turn among Pentecostals toward visible participation in ecumenism is the worldwide expansion and transition of Pentecostalism into various forms that often differ sharply from the confines of the classical pentecostal denominations at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴⁴ The diversification, institutionalization, and upward mobility of the pentecostal movement has also diversified and consolidated pentecostal participation in ecumenical endeavors. Membership in newly formed national councils, commissions, and fellowships worldwide contributes to reconciliation and organization among pentecostal churches, which in turn establishes a broader basis for ecumenical conversations with other traditions. The rise of pentecostal spirituality and practices in the established churches in the form of the charismatic movement further opened Pentecostalism to worldwide ecumenical recognition.⁴⁵ Some of these engagements are the result of the ecumenical fervor in the Catholic charismatic movement.⁴⁶ Others stem from the gradual shift in the center of attention from dominant Anglo-European concerns to global issues, which include in a large measure the presence of Pentecostals worldwide. Ecumenism among Pentecostals today must be characterized very much as a diversified global and international affair.

A SURVEY OF CURRENT ECUMENICAL ENCOUNTERS

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Pentecostals are participating in a variety of forms in ecumenical affairs, often on the grassroots level but also in regional, national, and international contexts. In many places across the Global South, Pentecostalism continues to represent a particular challenge to the older historic churches.⁴⁷ Ecumenical conversations in these countries depend as much on the sociocultural engagement of pastors and ministers as on participation in existing national forums and organizations.⁴⁸ In the Western world, conciliar institutional dialogue is the more dominant form of ecumenical relations, and Pentecostalism has entered into several official conversations with the Roman Catholic Church, the WCC, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), the Baptist World Alliance (BWA), and other Protestant bodies.

The strong ecumenical commitment among Latin American pentecostal churches since the 1960s contributed significantly to the formation

of the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) in 1982 and the all-Latin American Pentecostal Encounters (EPLA) since 1988 that eventually led to the founding of the Latin American Evangelical Pentecostal Commission (CEPLA) in 1990. Pentecostals are active in the Evangelical Union of Latin America (UNELAM), the Evangelical Christian Aid (ACE), the Evangelical Service for Ecumenical Development (SEPADE), and other ecumenical organizations, often connected with social, economic, and political emergencies in different countries. CEPLA has organized or facilitated pentecostal meetings at the national level in Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Venezuela, and elsewhere regionally. Transnational meetings of several Latin American Pentecostal consultations have also been convened by the WCC and in cooperation with CLAI in Brazil, Cuba, Peru, and Venezuela.⁴⁹ Pentecostal ecumenicity in these organized national efforts depends heavily on pentecostal base communities.⁵⁰ The work of these groups has found little support from large pentecostal churches and therefore does not represent all Pentecostalism in Latin America.

Ecumenical consultations and conversations including Pentecostals have taken place on a regional level in various parts of the world, but national discussions and organization have undergone a number of transitions especially in North America and Europe. The racially and doctrinally exclusive Pentecostal Fellowship of North America formed in 1948 was replaced in 1994 by pentecostal/charismatic Churches of North America, which includes African American Pentecostals.⁵¹ Pentecostals have led in the formation of Christian Churches Together in the United States in 2001, a unique crossover organization formed to bridge the divisions between churches historically associated with the National Council of Churches and communities not so aligned.⁵² The European Council of Churches received the first pentecostal church into its membership in 1984, and the Pentecostal European Fellowship was founded in 1987. The rise of the charismatic movement in the established churches has further contributed to a number of national dialogues involving pentecostal churches in Germany, Belgium, France, and the Netherlands.⁵³ African American Pentecostals and black churches in Britain and elsewhere in Europe have taken up the ecumenical challenges, although often not through the established conciliar channels.⁵⁴ In contrast, Africa and particularly Asia, although increasingly the host of international ecumenical dialogues, are still lacking national and transnational fellowships among Pentecostals, and an indigenous pentecostal identity emerges only slowly among the many pentecostal mission churches.⁵⁵

The most significant long-term commitment is doubtlessly the international Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue that emerged from the initiative of David du Plessis in 1972. The renewal of the Roman Catholic Church since Vatican II, coupled with its strong institutional support for ecumenical dialogue, the rise of the charismatic movement, and the development of Pentecostalism in the Latin American Catholic and the Hispanic communities in North America, further substantiated concrete efforts on both sides. The results of these conversations address a large number of topics.⁵⁶ The first round of discussions (1972–76) explored mutual concerns such as Spirit baptism and spiritual gifts, Christian initiation, and worship.⁵⁷ The second phase (1977–82), featuring a radically restructured pentecostal team, discussed questions of Scripture and tradition, faith and reason, speaking in tongues, divine healing, and the role of Mary. The third round (1985–89) produced the widely acclaimed document, *Perspectives on Koinonia*, including questions on the church, the sacraments, and the communion of saints. During the fourth quinquennium (1990–97), the dialogue tackled the difficult questions of evangelization, proselytism, and opportunities for common witness. The most recent phase (1998–2006) resulted in the massive document, *On Becoming a Christian*, focusing on conversion, faith and Christian initiation, Christian formation and discipleship, Spirit baptism and experience in Christian life and community.⁵⁸ The continuing dialogue has turned to some of the particular concerns among Latin American bishops and addresses the spiritual significance, pastoral implications, and discernment of spiritual gifts in the church. These conversations have significantly strengthened the ties between Pentecostals and the Roman Catholic Church, although they have also been met with significant criticism and skepticism on both sides.⁵⁹ Most significantly, the conversation has helped Pentecostals understand their own identity, consolidating the renewed ecumenical commitment among many Pentecostals, and has led to dialogue with other Protestant bodies.

Similarly influential and controversial has been the increasing involvement of pentecostal groups in the WCC. The Nairobi Assembly in 1975 made the charismatic renewal a central focus, and the Consultation on the Significance of the Charismatic Renewal for the Churches in 1980 brought pentecostal concerns to the center floor of discussion. Significant collaboration increased following the Assembly in Canberra, in 1991, with special attention given to the relationship of Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement.⁶⁰ Since the 1980s, Pentecostals have been fully integrated in the work of the Commission

on Faith and Order and participate in national and international meetings and conferences.⁶¹ The Faith and Order document, *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (2006), marks the first major ecumenical consensus statement with significant contributions from the pentecostal community.⁶² The Joint Consultative Group with Pentecostals was confirmed at the latest Assembly of the WCC and focuses for the study period 2007–13 in particular on the marks of the church. Today, Pentecostals participate in more than forty national councils of churches.⁶³ The interaction between the rather diverse constituencies representing Pentecostals and the membership of the WCC present various intricate challenges to both sides.

Consistent efforts to strengthen ecumenical ties with other traditions have also led to official dialogue between Pentecostals and the WCRC (formerly the World Alliance of Reformed Churches). The first round of discussions (1996–2000) focused on mature theological themes such as the relationship between the Word and the Holy Spirit as well as the church and the world.⁶⁴ The meetings have continued in a second round and currently discuss issues related to experience in Christian faith and life with particular focus on worship, discipleship, community, and justice.

Conversations with the LWF have led since 2005 to official discussions on the question, “How do we encounter Christ?” This dialogue is concerned less with explorations of traditional doctrinal themes, which often force Pentecostals to speak a different theological language, than with allowing space for a genuine expression of faith from pentecostal voices. The focus on concerns with Christian experience has allowed for genuine explorations of an encounter with Christ in worship, proclamation, sacraments, and spiritual gifts.⁶⁵

At this stage, with the exception of the international Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue, ecumenical conversations with pentecostal participation serve primarily as mutual introductions. This is particularly important in the initial stages of informal conversations and opportunities not yet fully developed, such as meetings between Pentecostals and the Synodal Committee for Inter-Orthodox and Inter-Christian Affairs of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople established in 2010 and potential conversations with the Mennonite World Conference and the Salvation Army. Dialogues with pentecostal participation typically include attending worship services of each tradition and reflection on those visits. While formal conversations and institutional dialogue continue to develop, much of the ecumenical atmosphere also draws attention to personal and informal meetings

that are often perceived as less invasive and more genuine to the status quo of the participating traditions.

The most recent among those initiatives is the Global Christian Forum originating in 1998 and rapidly gathering representatives from all Christian traditions, including Pentecostals. Unlike traditional, formally organized dialogue, these conversations began by sharing the testimonies of each person's journey of faith and focus on establishing relationships.⁶⁶ The immediate intentions are not to forge doctrinal agreement or organizational unity but more modestly to contribute to mutual understanding, to overcome existing stereotypes, to encourage communication, and to foster ecumenical fellowship. Agendas for discussion arise from the group, and extended time is given for personal encounters and fostering relationships. Pentecostal participation in the conversations and in the steering committee has formed a new kind of ecumenical environment that responds not only to the limitations of traditional bilateral dialogues and the lack of informal opportunities for broader ecumenical gatherings but also to the dramatic shift of the churches worldwide toward the East and the Global South. The informal environment and testimonial conversations are more consistent with pentecostal forms of self-expression and promise to engage a greater pentecostal constituency in the future.

THE FUTURE OF PENTECOSTAL PARTICIPATION IN ECUMENISM

The changes in ecumenical attitudes among Pentecostals and the transition to new forms of ecumenical conversations reflect the massive changes that continue to take place in the pentecostal movement. Contemporary Pentecostalism is undergoing a transformational renewal on a global level that has taken the movement to the boundaries of its own identity by shifting focus away from issues relating to the major emphases of classical Pentecostalism and toward a global theological agenda that is of broad ecumenical significance.⁶⁷ The ecumenical character of Pentecostalism can be described as a manifestation of dominant, global theological developments that continue to shape Christian thought and praxis worldwide. Rather than debating topics that are of importance primarily within classical pentecostal circles, often emphasized by the framework of salvation, healing, Spirit baptism, sanctification, and the coming kingdom, contemporary forms of an ecumenically oriented pentecostal movement are characterized by a complex, multilayered, and globally diverse theological agenda.⁶⁸ In this sense, the transformation

of Pentecostalism into a global movement demands not only a renewed understanding of what it means to be pentecostal but also a renewed understanding of global Christianity.

Despite the growth and diversification of Pentecostalism in ecumenical circles, ambiguity, uncertainty, and opposition to ecumenical relations prevail in many parts of the movement. The vast majority of Pentecostals worldwide do not participate in conciliar forms of ecumenism. The reasons range from fear and resentment, often coupled with a move away from the churches to which many Pentecostals once belonged and an exclusivist ecclesiology, to the influence of dominant anti-ecumenical attitudes in umbrella organizations, divisions on major issues within pentecostal circles, lack of training and familiarity with successful patterns of ecumenism, a widespread skepticism toward institutional forms of religion and ignorance toward ecumenical affairs, and a loss of orientation in ecumenical conversations dominated by theological patterns often foreign to Pentecostals. The optimism that characterized the movement at the beginning of the twentieth century has made room for a form of ecumenical pragmatism – a transitional phase on the way to more genuine pentecostal forms of engagement that include the development of organizational ecumenical structures and institutional support as well as a raised awareness and reception of ecumenical conversations at the grassroots level.⁶⁹ The future of ecumenical dialogue with Pentecostals undoubtedly moves beyond Anglo-European dominance to broader international participation and personal, multiracial, and communal structures that address the local, pastoral, sociocultural, and political concerns of a broad pentecostal constituency.

Investment in ecumenical dialogue is important for both Pentecostals and the ecumenical churches. For Pentecostals, a wholehearted investment in the process can contribute significantly to a more complete understanding of what it means to be pentecostal in a global context. The origins and the current transition of the movement show that the understanding of Pentecostalism's global distinctiveness is synonymous with the movement's ecumenical identity. A renewed investment in ecumenical conversations can help overcome the glaringly undeveloped ecumenical ecclesiology among Pentecostals.⁷⁰ This includes surmounting the estrangement of Pentecostals from the creedal traditions and dominant formulations of doctrine in the established churches.⁷¹ Ecumenical conversations also promise greater familiarity with the broad potential of a sacramental approach to reality despite often being seen as inimical to a pentecostal world view.⁷² Finally, the

ecumenical dialogue can help sharpen the pneumatological focus that has characterized the twentieth century of the ecumenical movement, and that is central to pentecostal thought and praxis. This could also present a starting point for a more comprehensive integration of pentecostal thought and praxis in the global theological agenda.

In turn, the massive transition of global Pentecostalism since the twentieth century also reflects the changes experienced during that time in the ecumenical movement. Pentecostalism is in many regards a manifestation of a broader ecumenical crisis that includes the structures, organization, comprehensiveness, and reception of ecumenical conversations. Pentecostal participation and leadership can produce new and fruitful forms of ecumenical dialogue that are able to bring clarity to definitions and procedures more akin to the diverse group of churches and fellowships in the global renewal movement. The worldwide representation of Pentecostalism, particularly in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, can restore the balance of international conversations and bring a renewed understanding of Christian unity that includes both the center and the margins of the global theological landscape.

Pentecostalism and ecumenism in the twenty-first century are two mutually interdependent endeavors. The organizational and structural weaknesses experienced in both the pentecostal and the ecumenical movement can only be alleviated by reciprocal international support.⁷³ The future of ecumenical conversations with Pentecostals does not lie in a numerical growth of the number of bilateral dialogues, although this is desirable. More important is the transformation of the existing status quo, including the provision of new and unprecedented opportunities, structures, and procedures for initiating ecumenical encounters and sustaining ecumenical relationships among churches and communities that do not always possess a solid footing in the historical traditions of Christendom. Pentecostalism brings to these relationships a sense of unity that embraces not only the established churches but also a vision for the currently emerging and not yet fully established groups and fellowships worldwide. What holds these communities together are various forms of understanding what it means to be pentecostal. These voices are as significant to the formulation of a pentecostal self-understanding as to the future of ecumenism. Individually they represent the confusing diversity and nuances of the global puzzle of the visually divided churches. Together they exhibit the colors and flavors of Christian faith and spirituality in the diverse contexts that form the contemporary Christian world.

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