

48th International Ecumenical Seminar, July 2-9, 2014, Strasbourg, France
"Non-denominational and Trans-confessional Movements"

Pentecostalism and Ecumenism of the Spirit

By Jean-Daniel Plüss Ph.D.

Captatio

I have had the privilege to give occasional lectures on Pentecostalism at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey. Usually I go there well ahead of scheduled time which allows me to mingle with the student body for breakfast or lunch. Once I joined a table without introducing myself and heard a student ask another one, "Who will be speaking to us this afternoon?" The reply was, "A Pentecostal is coming." Then someone else remarked, "Ahh, Pentecostalism is messy." I decided to stay anonymous until I would enter the class room.

The same year, I was invited to a party. We got into a conversation and I explained that I was a theologian and that I was particularly interested in ecumenism. Then the person I was speaking to replied, "Ahh, ecumenism. That is like a cocktail, there is a little bit of everything in it, but nothing is for real."

So now I knew, I could not win either way. There would always be others that would beg to differ with my identity as a Christian. And there would be those who thought little about my attempts to work towards some kind of understanding, common purpose and unity. But the questions that arose from these encounters keep echoing in my mind. If Pentecostalism is indeed at times messy, what are the circumstances of such an assessment and what could be done about it? And with regard to ecumenism, is ecumenism nothing but a tiresome art of compromise, where your particular identity as Christian is continually undermined? Or is it possible that ecumenism, identity and integrity are words that can coexist? Are there alternative avenues for living ecumenically than producing statements of common understanding and the occasional worship service with an ecumenical liturgy?

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to reflect on Pentecostalism within Christianity's larger ecclesial landscape. We live in a time where we witness to a rapid proliferation of churches; especially independent ones. The ecumenical quest towards unity seems daunting if not outright foolish if we consider trends that push towards diversity and division, denominationalism

and post-denominationalism. And if we dare to speak about an ecumenical vision, what would the role of Pentecostalism be in such a vision?

Although it is customary to argue primarily theologically in gatherings such as ours, I propose that we start looking at a few philosophical considerations and then move on to historical developments in order to end up looking at some issues with regard to Pentecostalism that may be of substance to ecumenical endeavors and pose some challenges that would be relevant for all churches.

Philosophical Considerations

Looking at a situation differently may sometimes yield wider understanding of an issue at stake. As theologians we sometimes suffer from a *déformation professionnelle* and do not see the need to go beyond our dogmatic or exegetical convictions. This may be a problem with regard to ecumenical work, because we may not appreciate the value of other points of view. “But”, someone may interject, “*why do you speak about other points of view? We have a clear biblical mandate to Christian unity!*” Yes indeed this is the case and we refer to biblical passages like in John 17 “*that they may all be one*”, 1 Corinthians 12 “*For just as the body is one and has many members*” or Ephesians 4 “*one Lord, one faith, one baptism*”. So when I suggest that we look at different points of view, I do not mean “other” points of view that are necessarily in conflict with each other,¹ but rather different ways in appropriating similar convictions.²

Furthermore, I will have to beg the historians in our midst to be allowed to simplify matters a bit, as I suggest breaking down the ecclesial history of Christianity into basically three different eras. The first one would be the ontological era.

The Ontological Era

We see Christianity that has established itself in the Roman and the Byzantine Empire respectively. Both expressions of the Christian faith are centered on a notion of the Church as being a given just as the position, power and rule by the emperor was a given. This was

¹“Other” in the Greek sense of *heteros*.

²“Other” in the Greek sense of *allos*.

especially the case when the emperor was a Christian one. Theologically, efforts were made to cement unity in belief by the deliberations of the ecumenical councils. Any kind of diversity was considered a threat to the Church. Ecclesiologically speaking, unity was expressed by a solid structure and a hierarchical model of governance. For 1500 years the episcopal model was the only feasible one, because it was understood that God had ordained it so. The church just had to be that way. That is why I refer to this ecclesial situation as the ontological one. Both, Roman and Hellenistic thought supported this vision of the Church. And so did the fact that although one may have lived in a particular area of Europe, one still was part of the same empire. People were part of the “One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church”.

Furthermore, the ontological nature of the church was reinforced by its sacramental life. In order to be part of the church one had to partake in the sacramental rites. Ideally, one could partake in these signs of God’s favor only once because they were of such fundamental significance. Baptism, confirmation, matrimony, consecration to the priesthood, extreme unction were all considered unique moments of grace. Even confession was for some time considered a unique preparatory rite before baptism and did not have per se a repetitive intentionality.³ Last but not least, the Eucharist, although taken regularly, was based on the fact that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world once for all. Congruent with this ontological understanding, the conviction developed that the Church was Christ’s sacrament to the world.⁴ Or to speak in Orthodox language, it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that the mysteries which are shared by the church equip the people of faith to be the perpetual extension of the saving ministry of Christ to the world.⁵

In other words, the ontological era of Christianity had the life of the Church wrapped up in a nice coherent package.

The Epistemological Era

³ So among 4th century Christians where penance (metanoia) was part of the rite of initiation. Ambrose, for instance, taught that true penance could not be repeated just as baptism was a onetime event (*On Penance*, Book 2, chapter 10, paragraph 5). Similarly, Origen in the 3rd century AD.

⁴ See for instance *Lumen Gentium*, the dogmatic constitution on the church by Pope Paul VI promulgated in 1964.

⁵ Alciviadis C. Calivas, *The Sacramental Life of the Church*, <http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith7106> accessed June 11, 2014.

With the rise of the Renaissance and the dawn of the Reformation new forces came to play. Although certain traditional values were maintained, some protagonists contended that it was no longer sufficient to belong to the Church as an institution. It became more important than ever to know the right things about the Christian faith. As the churches of the Reformation developed in contrast to the Roman Catholic Church and because of an ensuing political fragmentation, they quickly became confessional in nature. We can say that this type of Christianity was very much epistemological in nature. One had to understand why and what one believed. It did not matter whether you were part of the Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Westphalia or the Church of Saxony. What mattered was the confessional nature of your faith. The political/territorial reality of the Reformation was exemplified in the statement "*cuius regio, eius religio*",⁶ which meant that Christianity had de facto become a trans-national reality.

Another example of the epistemological turn can be noticed during the Reformation in Zurich. Huldreich Zwingli, as a true humanist, made a democratic vote the instrument of how the church would deliberate on issues and develop as an institution. After all, if the Holy Spirit was given to the believers due to the covenant relationship established by baptism, then the city council which was constituted of Christian citizens, would be discerning the way of being church. The Zurich disputations from 1523 to 1525 are an illustration of this situation.⁷ And the execution of the first Anabaptists remains as a painful reminder of the sometimes questionable value of such majority votes.

At the same time there was a development of presbyterian and congregational types of church governance next to the episcopal one. The more radical churches of the Reformation insisted on congregational church government whereas for instance the Lutheran and Anglican churches basically maintained an episcopal set up. The developments of the Reformation lead to an increase of denominations partly because of political reasons, partly because of the now important epistemological dimension. If adhering to the right confession was the criteria for faith, then new churches were inevitably to be created. One strong example is the birth of independent Baptist churches in the 17th century.

⁶Coined at the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 expressing the territorial influence of which expression of Christian faith was to be accepted.

⁷J.D. Plüss, *Die Rezeption der oberdeutsch-schweizerischen Reformation in der Pfingstbewegung – Verwegener Versuch einer Deutung* in *Die Rezeption der Wittenberger und der oberdeutsch-schweizerischen Reformation in den Freikirchen*, Jahrbuch des Vereins für Freikirchenforschung 20, 2011, 203-216.

One could count the major churches of the first 1000 years of Christianity by the fingers of one hand: there was Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy the Oriental Orthodoxy and the Assyrian Church. After the Reformation it took only one generation for that number to rise to about 150. And mainly because of missionary endeavors and the radical reformers, the number of churches and denominations had increased to 1500 by the end of the 19th century.⁸ I would argue that the rise of an epistemologically argued ecclesiology allowed for an alternative view of the church, which paved the way to denominationalism and a trans-national understanding of Christianity.

Although the age of enlightenment would continue to reinforce the epistemological argument, there eventually came the dawn of new era in Christianity, which I would call the phenomenological one.

The Phenomenological Era

Of course, there has always been a tendency toward personal spirituality in Christianity. Hesychasm, mysticism and pietism are just a few common examples. It seems however, that the Enlightenment not only elevated reason, it also brought a new focus on the subject. Western Christianity would be challenged by a new dimension of religious life. One 18th century example is the Wesleyan Quadrilateral,⁹ a theological reflection based on four sources: Scripture, tradition, reason and experience. John Wesley as a synthetic thinker combined the standards of the past with the values of the present by bringing them into dialogue with each other. This combination of knowledge, that found a continuation in the 19th century Holiness movement, had a profound impact in the appreciation of faith and practice. Consequently, this would also find its expression in the view of what the church was all about.

A phenomenological era began where subject and object would relate; the individual and the given. Truth was more than ontologically postulated, it was more than confessionally accepted, it could also be experienced. Experience began to be validated as a source of authority. So for instance, Wesley testified about his experience of receiving assurance of

⁸ Currently the number of Christian denominations in the world is estimated at 41'000. So for instance in: <http://christianity.about.com/od/denominations/p/christiantoday.htm> accessed June 11, 2014. For more detailed figures confer with the Study of Global Christianity (CSGC) at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and David Barrett ed. *World Christian Encyclopedia*.

⁹ John Wesley spoke about the four sources, but the term "quadrilateral" was coined later by Albert C. Outler.

salvation. Another example is the 19th Holiness hymn “Blessed assurance Jesus is mine” by Fanny J. Crosby. During that time an arminianization of American Protestantism took place.¹⁰ Of course, it is by God’s grace that we are saved, but prevenient grace invites us to personally accept Jesus as our savior. Sacraments and ordinances remained fundamental rites of the church, but their value could be questioned if there was no personal response to these signs of grace.

From an ecclesial point of view the church is more than a formal and visible structure, the reality of the Body of Christ goes beyond communion based on a confessed truth. The church as *ekklesia* is a reality in Christ, who calls his people into fellowship (*koinonia*). That is a social and very personal reality. From a phenomenological point of view, truth related to being and history together. In the past propositions were made, now stories could be told. I would argue that this phenomenological dimension ushered in a new era to Christianity. The Church of Jesus Christ is no longer identified with an empire, it is more than a group of trans-national institutions, in fact, the Church becomes a trans-cultural reality. This new appreciation that the subject and the object relate to one another brings a new dimension to the church. It is not just an institution that has a voice; the believer too can make a claim. This is the context in which Pentecostalism will come into play.

Historical developments

The Holiness movement was Methodist in its origins and it focused as the name would suggest on the sanctification of the individual. There was the expectancy that if the Kingdom of God could reveal itself in a fresh way, then the believers had to be ready for this demonstration of God’s grace and prepare for it. For all practical reasons, an experience subsequent to regeneration was called for. A “second work of grace,” effectuated by the Spirit, was considered necessary for the believer in order to be sanctified from voluntary sin and prepared for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Ministers from many Protestant denominations were attracted to this teaching because they were searching for answers and longing for a fresh power from above that would invigorate their churches. Especially missionaries were open to the possibility of a new Pentecost. Popular Presbyterian and

¹⁰David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Orbis Books, New York, 1991,p. 351.

congregational authors like William Boradman, Dwight L. Moody and Reuben A. Torrey popularized through their preaching and literature a sense that God could restore his church to be dynamic, in the name of Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit, like in the days of the first apostles.¹¹ This sense of restorationism could be found among many churches.¹² Their adherents were hoping for a new outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Reuben Torrey, the Superintendent of Moody Bible Institute and later Dean of Biola University, began his book *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit* with the following words, “It was a great turning point in my ministry, when, after much thought and study and meditation, I became satisfied that the Baptism with the Holy Spirit was an experience for to-day and for me, and set myself about obtaining it.”¹³

These few lines illustrate the phenomenological shift nicely, and that from a Congregationalist who had studied theology at Yale Divinity School and the universities in Leipzig and Erlangen.

A few years later there were the reports at the beginning of the 20th century that God had visited the people of Wales in the United Kingdom by means of a great revival. Could that be an answer to the prayers of so many? There was a sense of awakening and an air of great expectation. It was in this context that the Pentecostal movement was born.

In order to come back to the ecclesiological endeavor that we have set to pursue, we might ask the question, who were the early Pentecostal leaders? Where did they come from? What did they bring into the nascent movement? And what does that have to say about the ecumenical relevance of Pentecostalism today? For the sense of clarity and brevity, I will only focus on the European context.

Thomas Ball Barratt, a Norwegian Methodist who had been born in England was the first to bring news of the Azusa Street revival to Europe. After an unsuccessful fundraising trip in the United States, he had stayed at the home of A.B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, who happened to have a copy of “The Apostolic Faith”, the magazine that reported on the Pentecostal revival in Los Angeles. After some correspondence with the

¹¹ William Broadman published the popular book *The Higher Christian Life* in 1858, D.L. Moody was preaching about an endowment with power.

¹² Restorationism or primitivism has been a recurrent theme in church history, e.g. Anabaptists, Waldensians, Adventists, Campbellite churches and groups like Jehova’s Witnesses.

¹³ Reuben A. Torrey, *The Baptism with the Holy Spirit*, New York, Fleming H. Revell, 1895, p. 5.

people at the Azusa Street church, Barratt experienced a personal unction of the Holy Spirit. And a bit later he began to pray, speaking in tongues. After his return to Oslo, Barratt shared his experience with his congregation on Christmas 1906.

Soon afterwards, Alexander Boddy, Anglican vicar of All Saints in Monkwearmouth in Sunderland, England, heard about T.B. Barratt's Pentecostal revival meetings and invited him to his parish where he and his wife subsequently experienced a baptism in the Holy Spirit. Just as news about the revival in Wales had spread quickly, so did the news about the Pentecostal movement.

In Amsterdam, Gerrit Polman, an officer of the Salvation Army, made the same experience and started a Pentecostal church in Amsterdam and became the key leader of this new movement in the Netherlands.

Meanwhile in Germany, Jonathan Paul a Lutheran pastor who had been influenced by pietism and the Holiness movement also experienced a Spirit-Baptism in 1907 and became a leader among a growing number of Pentecostals in that country.

In Sweden it was a Baptist minister, Lewi Pethrus, who began to teach about the Baptism in the Spirit and the Pentecostal revival until he was expelled from the Swedish Baptist Union in 1913. After that he would influence Pentecostalism in Scandinavia for 60 years.

These five examples show that the early Pentecostal leaders came from a variety of Christian churches before they identified as Pentecostals. And the list could be continued by pointing to early leaders in Switzerland and France who were, Anglican, Methodist, Reformed and Lutheran.¹⁴

The question arises, how was it possible that pastors with such diverse ecclesial upbringings and varying theological convictions could find each other promoting the same cause? Why could Anglicans and Lutherans with episcopal and sacramental views share in fellowship with Salvationists, Baptists and Reformed leaders who held very different views of the church and the nature of baptism and the Lord's Supper? Is this an indication that Pentecostalism can

¹⁴In Switzerland from the first three pastors of the Pentecostal church in Zurich two were Anglican (C.E.D. de Labillière, Anton Reuss) and one was Methodist (Richard P. Ruff). In France many early leaders were Reformed ministers such as the influential Louis Dallière. The first Pentecostal minister in Alsace was Paul Siefer, a Lutheran pastor.

indeed be messy? Or is the ecumenical attitude among early Pentecostals an expression likened to a cocktail, there is a little bit of everything in it, but nothing is for real?

Given the fact that Pentecostalism grew within the last 100 years to an omnipresent global movement and given the fact that the Charismatic renewal grew within the last 50 years to important force within some historic churches, we have to seriously assess what their claims are and what the Holy Spirit may have to say to the churches. For this reason, after Vatican II, Cardinal Bea initiated the idea to hold a Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue. It began in 1972 and is still running, thus being the longest ongoing formal ecclesial dialogue of all.¹⁵ Differences among Presbyterian churches in Korea were one reason why the Reformed-Pentecostal dialogue was initiated in 1995. Representatives of the World Communion of Reformed Churches and classical Pentecostals will meet again in November 2014 starting a third round of conversations. The pentecostalization of the Lutheran Mekane Yesus church in Ethiopia and the tensions between Pentecostals and Lutherans in Brazil were the reason why talks between the two groups began in the Institute for Ecumenical Research here in Strasbourg in 2004. And asked why the Baptist World Alliance wished to enter into a dialogue with Pentecostals, its General Secretary Neville Callam replied, "We need to talk together, because we need to bring the Holy Spirit back into our theology."¹⁶

Reflecting on the ecumenical role of Pentecostalism in the Global South is of the essence. This is easily evident in Africa. For instance, if we look at Ghana or Zimbabwe; there is no major church that does not practice deliverance ministries, whether it is Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, evangelical or, of course, an African Initiated Church.¹⁷ In all these churches there is a concrete sense that God can free and empower people in the name of Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit. If it is true that *"The greatest cultural and ecclesial challenge we have to confront is the loss of a palpable sense that God's life makes all the difference in the world to our social and political decisions"* as Ephraim Radner claims¹⁸, then we certainly must ask if Pentecostalism has any role to play in the

¹⁵ With the exception of the relations the Roman Catholic Church has been nurturing with the Orthodox Churches.

¹⁶ From a conversation between Cecil M. Robeck and Neville Callam prior to an exploratory gathering between the two groups in Birmingham, Alabama, in December 2011.

¹⁷ See for instance the educational DVDs produced by the sociologist James Ault entitled *African Christianity Rising*, James Ault Productions, Northampton, Mass, 2013.

¹⁸ Ephraim Radner, *Primacy of Witness. A symposium on the Future of First Things*, August 2013, <http://www.firstthings.com/article/2013/08/primacy-of-witness> accessed June 12, 2014.

recovery of this sense of God's tangible presence in our lives and if this role can be an ecumenical one.

For the remainder of this paper I would like to invite you to look at two apparently contradictory ecclesial phenomena that relate to Pentecostalism. The first is the problem of proselytism and the second is whether a sense of unity is possible, in spite the proliferation of Pentecostal and independent charismatic denominations and churches. I invite you to see both topics in the light of the philosophical development that I have sketched at the beginning of this presentation, the ontological/sacramental understanding of the church, the epistemological/confessional view of the church and the phenomenological/experiential appreciation of faith.

Proselytism

Here indeed we enter one of the messiest issues with Pentecostalism. *"Those reckless Pentecostals that steal our sheep!"* Now, I would be the last to say that there are no reckless Pentecostals, just as there are reckless Christians in other churches. If one belongs to a church that is steeped in an ontological/sacramental tradition then it is hard to understand why there should be any legitimacy for Christians of other traditions to intervene and stomp on one's ecclesial territory. With regard to confessional churches, one can always argue that another church or tradition does not represent the right theological position. That is an easy, but often graceless way of excluding one's neighbor. You can bully the other into doctrinal submission. For instance, cessationists argued that Pentecostals were wrong because they did not understand that the dispensation of charismatic gifts and miracles had ended once the biblical canon had been established. Consequently the attempts by Pentecostals at gathering disciples was considered to be sectarian and quite frequently it was judged to be downright heretical.

The fact that proselytism is a threat to Christian unity has long been recognized by Christians, including Pentecostals. As part of the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue the issues of witness, evangelism and proselytism were discussed for many years and an

elaborate document was produced¹⁹ that built the foundation for a later statement on the same topic by the World Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the World Evangelical Alliance.²⁰ These documents provide a very helpful code of conduct. But I do not want to go into them at this point. My purpose today is different. I am addressing issues that are not primarily theological.

My argument would be that in the light of the phenomenological shift in our religious understanding we must reconsider the question of proselytism, and look at it in different ways. The ecclesial arguments from an ontological point of view will continue to stand. The confessional logic is still undefeated. The ethical criteria for Christian witness are undisputed. These positions and statements help clarifying the notions of mission and evangelism, but they do little for people who have completely different ways of evaluating their commitment to a particular church? What if proselytism is no longer a theological or moral issue for many religious people? What if changing church is comparable to the decision to change the brand of your car, next time you buy one?

A recent visit to Africa helped me to realize that many believers were transferring their spiritual home from one church to another, simply because of their personal preferences: the pastor was more approachable, the worship was more confident, the minister was more gifted, the power of God was more present, the church was bigger, child care was better. And all of that happens across the different denominational lines. A woman that grew up Catholic had a chronic illness. The doctors could not help. She asked the priest to pray for her. He did, but apparently it did not help. In her desperation she went to a healing service at a Methodist church. There she did experience healing from her condition. Who can blame her for having changed her allegiances? Moreover, she probably remained very Catholic in her spirituality.

Similarly, migrant churches in our large European cities face steep competition amongst themselves. If the pastor cannot minister to his congregation successfully and to their

¹⁹Report on the fourth phase of the Roman Catholic Pentecostal Dialogue 1990 – 1997, “*Evangelization, Proselytism and Common Witness*” for instance in: <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj4/rcpent97.html>, accessed June 21, 2014.

²⁰*Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World*, 2011. See for instance: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world>, accessed June 21, 2014.

satisfaction, then he loses his flock. This reminds me of the Reformation, where in some regions Protestant preachers drew the larger crowds than their Catholic counterparts.

Furthermore, in the West, the charismatization of many evangelical churches has made the basic Christian message indistinguishable among different churches. The same songs are sung, worship is expanded, the message is Christ-centered and the pastors are more open to the work of the Holy Spirit than a couple of decades ago. Small groups meet at homes and special services with prayer for healing are organized. Pentecostal churches suffer from proselytism or transfer to new independent churches just as much as historic churches do.

What we are witnessing is that proselytism today has social, psychological and even economic reasons. To illustrate a social reason, there is the Anglican Nigerian working as a taxi driver in Zurich. When he goes to the Anglican Church he meets many white British and North American expats; successful business people working in multinational corporations. In that church he does not feel at home. A colleague invites him to a Pentecostal church where he finds many country men and women from the same culture and social strata. There he quickly finds a new spiritual home.

From a psychological point of view, the motive could be that a young person may feel that another church speaks to his or her needs more directly. Many evangelical churches have experienced youth drain because of new independent churches that focus specifically on the needs of young people.²¹

When I speak of an economic motive I am not referring to prosperity gospel teaching. Many classical Pentecostal denominations have clearly spoken against promising material gain based on sacrificial giving or speaking about material wealth as a sign of true faith. As a matter of fact, the Assemblies of God in the United States of America did so publically more than 30 years ago.²² No, an economic motive may come from the way a church is being managed in the sense of *oikonomia*. A Christian may simply feel that another church is more confident, attractive to upwardly mobile people, presenting itself as entrepreneurial and comfortable with an urban life style; in step with the 21st century.

²¹Hillsong Churches worldwide or the International Christian Fellowship in Europe are examples of attracting young Christians to their church services.

²²Assemblies of God position paper on "Positive Confession" in 1980. See: http://ag.org/top/Beliefs/position_papers/pp_downloads/pp_4183_confession.pdf, accessed June 21, 2014.

Of course, these examples do not imply that the churches people transferred to are more faithful to the Gospel. Nor would I claim that the theological reasons brought forward why proselytism is problematic are irrelevant. All I am suggesting is that there is a wider picture to consider and that church transfer is a problem in all our churches. So the mess we are in has probably a lot to do with how we make people feel at home in the House of God. Certainly, Pentecostalism has many shortcomings, but its pastors have one thing in common, they believe that God cares and touches his people in tangible. They believe in giving their congregations a place to live and feel at home.

Unity as Fellowship

Let us now come to the cocktail. Can diversity blend together in unity? Some of you may be surprised to hear that a founding myth of Pentecostalism is unity. The experience of the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles was a demonstration that the Holy Spirit was bringing together people from different churches, with different ethnic and educational backgrounds. People were baptized in the Spirit and began to see visions regardless of gender or rank. At a time when racial segregation was strong,²³ it was courageous to have Afro-Americans, Russians and Chinese pray together with Whites and Latinos. But as the famous quote of Frank Bartleman underscores, "The color line was washed away in the blood."²⁴ If indeed it was the Holy Spirit that baptized those believers in God's love, as a result unity was its only possible outcome. Across race, rank and gender, they had all been gifted by God.

In 1914, shortly after the second General Council of the newly founded Assemblies of God, Eudorus N. Bell wrote in an article on the purposes of the General Council saying, *"Every now and then people ask us if we do not disfellowship other children of God over mere doctrines, theories, works of grace, etc. No, beloved, we recognize and fellowship every clean, sweet, teachable child of God on the earth, it matters not what his name is. If you have the blood of Jesus on your soul, you are our brother. We are opposed to all factions, all*

²³The US American Jim Crow laws on racial discrimination were in effect and lynching of black people by the mob were still common at the outset of the 20th century.

²⁴Frank Bartleman, *How Pentecost came to Los Angeles*, F. Bartleman, Los Angeles, 1925, p.54. And the editor of "The Friend of Russia" argued, *"God's people can never get together on human creeds and disciplines. They are too narrow and changeable. We have a foundation that is broad enough to hold all. Christ himself is this foundation. In Christ, all God's people are one, irrespective of race, color, social standing, or creed."* p. 161.

disobedience to God and contrary divisions, strife about words to no profit and to all sectarianism everywhere.” A little bit later he adds, “We stand for liberty in the Holy Ghost, but not anarchy and fanaticism. We stand for freedom from formalism and unscriptural ties; but do not stand for license to tear down God’s work which other faithful men have built up. We honor the ties of love and fellowship in the Holy Ghost. We stand for building up instead of breaking up.”²⁵

The same experiences of unity in the Spirit were made in Europe. After the first Sunderland Conference, Alexander Boddy wrote in the June 1908 issue of the periodical *Confidence*, “There was a unity which nothing but the Holy Spirit could give. We were Anglicans, Methodists, Friends, Salvationists, Congregationalists, Mission Members, etc., but ‘denomination’ was forgotten. All one in Christ Jesus was true.”²⁶ Similarly, Anton Reuss and Richard Ruff, pastors of the Pentecostal gathering in Zurich made a public declaration in 1913 that they were not interested in creating a new denomination but that they wanted to share this divine blessing from above and simply do the work of the Lord to the lost, stating that God had his people in every denomination.²⁷

So what I see is that the early Pentecostal gatherings were a little bit of everything and the one factor that made these meetings real to them was a common experience of God’s presence through the Spirit. They had their different theological emphases and ecclesiological views, but in fact they experienced ecumenism in the Holy Spirit.

In 1939 a first truly European Pentecostal conference took place in Stockholm. Leaders from the different nations on the continent came together. Besides celebrating, worshipping, studying the Bible and preaching, they also had long discussions about issues that were of

²⁵ E. N. Bell, “The General Council Purposes,” *Christian Evangel*, December 19, 1914, 1 quoted by William J. Molenaar in *Christian Unity: A Founding Principle of the Assemblies of God*, forthcoming.

²⁶ *Confidence*, June 1908, p. 9.

²⁷ „Der Herr machte es uns jedoch von Anfang an klar, dass es nicht nach seinem Sinne wäre, wenn wir um der neuen Segnung willen die Zahl der schon bestehenden organisierten Kirchengemeinschaften wieder um eine neue vermehren würden. Sondern, wir sollten in unseren Versammlungen einfach die uns neu offenbarten Wahrheiten verkündigen und so allen Kindern Gottes aus den verschiedenen Denominationen, und der Welt, Gelegenheit bieten, zur Prüfung und zur Annahme der Wahrheiten, sowie zur Weiterverbreitung derselben in ihren Kreisen. Es war uns auch klar, dass unser Dienst im Besonderen den Verlorenen gehöre, die wir sollten zum hellen Licht des Evangeliums zu bringen suchen. Deshalb suchten wir auch nicht die gläubigen Kreise zu stören und in irgend einer Weise herrschenden Einfluss zu gewinnen, sondern, der Herr wies uns die Linie in klarer Weise, wir sollten in der Einigkeit des Geistes mit dem ganzen Leibe Christi bleiben, der Seine Glieder in allen Denominationen hat... Declaration by Richard P. Ruff and Anton Reuss in *Die Verheissung des Vaters*, November 1913, p.1+2.

common concern. One such an issue centered on the question which forms of unity Pentecostals should strive to. Basically there were two opinions. The some participants favored some sort of organization, the others felt that the Spirit of God needed no organization and the individual churches should remain independent.

The onset of World War II interrupted these discussions, but they were again picked up at the first Pentecostal World Conference that was held in Zurich in 1947. The American Assemblies of God, British, Swiss and some East European Pentecostals thought that organizing as an international body had definite advantages. The coordination of missionary activities, educational programs, humanitarian aid and representation in the face of hostile governments were benefits mentioned. On the other side were the Scandinavian Pentecostals with their baptistic understanding of the church that were skeptical of any form of organization. They feared it would stifle the work of the Holy Spirit. In the end it was decided that the spirit of unity among Pentecostals would best be expressed as a fellowship; a cooperation among brothers and sisters without imposing structures.

As a result, the Pentecostal World Fellowship has never taken a stance on a particular issue on behalf of the worldwide movement of classical Pentecostals. To this day, it has not officially delegated individuals to represent or speak on behalf of the Pentecostal World Fellowship. In 1970 Thomas Zimmerman, then General Superintendent of the United States Assemblies of God, was asked why the Pentecostal World Conference did not make official statements on matters of global concern. He answered that the different leaders had various opinions and that it was not wise to speak into a particular situation without having been asked by those affected to do so.²⁸

The move to remain a fellowship instead of forming a worldwide organization or denomination may have been a wise choice. It seems to me that there is a general tendency among Christian bodies today to move away from too much structure and organization.

²⁸ „Meines Erachtens ist die Weltpfingstkonferenz nicht die Plattform, von der wir zu diesen Problemen Erklärungen abzugeben haben. Wir, die wir hier in leitenden Stellungen sind, haben sehr entschiedene Vorstellungen in diesen Fragen. Aber es ist nicht unsere Aufgabe, dort Stellung zu nehmen, wo es andere Gruppen mit einbezieht, die uns keinen Auftrag zu einer Stellungnahme gegeben haben.“ *Wort und Geist*, January 1971, p. 16.

Points in case are (post-) denominational churches banding together as networks.²⁹ Even the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church has recently indicated that it wants to move towards decentralization. When Pope Francis addressed the Charismatic Renewal Convention in Rome on June 3, 2014, he spoke of the danger of excessive organization. “Yes, you need organization”, he said, “but do not lose the grace of letting God be God!” Then he went on and quoted from the Apostolic Exhortation *EvangeliiGaudium* (280) where it reads, “However, there is no greater freedom than that of letting oneself be carried by the Spirit, refusing to calculate and to control everything, and to allow Him to illuminate you, lead you, guide you, and push you where He wishes. He knows well what the need is in every age and moment. This calls to be mysteriously fruitful.”³⁰ What Pope Francis is calling for is more than spiritual ecumenism; it is Ecumenism of the Spirit. As we have seen, this is a notion Pentecostals would very much feel at home with, because it is restorationist at heart and respects the primacy of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

In concluding, what can be said about Pentecostals in the Ecumenical movement? As the philosophical approach has illustrated, Pentecostals identify very much with the phenomenological way of speaking about faith which makes this stream of Christianity, due to its inter-cultural openness, “a religion made to travel.”³¹ From a global perspective, it is not a primary concern of Pentecostals to transpose cultural values. Rather, the Holy Spirit should have God’s way in a particular context and speak into the lives of people wherever they are.

At the same time it is important to remember that early Pentecostal leaders were well educated and came from a variety of Christian churches. Hence, the sacramental stream and the confessional influence are still very much alive in Pentecostalism. Some churches have bishops or focus on apostolic leadership, others are governed by a parish council and are

²⁹Cf. for instance: http://www.faithandleadership.com/blog/07-07-2014/cultivating-denominational-network?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=headline&utm_campaign=FL_blogpost#.U8VwffQxyDk.facebook, accessed July 16, 2014.

³⁰Published on the website of *Zenit*, June 4, 2014 (cf. www.zenit.org).

³¹ For more on the trans-cultural nature of Pentecostalism see: *The Globalization of Pentecostalism. A Religion Made to Travel*, Regnum Books, 1999.

proudly independent. Some Pentecostals refer to Baptism and the Lord's Supper as sacraments, whereas others call them ordinances. But both groups celebrate these rites with a strong sense of God's presence. This attitude opens doors between Pentecostal and historic churches with a sacramental tradition. Furthermore, Pentecostals in general uphold a high view of Scripture and emphasize that we are saved by grace alone, which makes them akin to the churches of the Reformation. Because this multi-faceted situation is generally accepted among Pentecostals, it makes them suited for ecumenical dialogue.

The excursion about proselytism showed that there are challenges which need to be addressed globally and with a sense of realism. We need both, a theoretical and a practical approach. A new ecumenical hermeneutic may be called for. Instead of position papers being read, stories can be told that illustrated the context of faith in a fitting way. Such a hermeneutical approach would also invite the churches from the Global South to participate, because they too feel more at home in a phenomenological appreciation of faith. Therefore, having Pentecostals in ecumenical discussions may yield a new vantage point to old issues.

Finally, it is my conviction that the quest for unity is changing. The ecumenical movement in the 20th century focused much on theological and ecclesial statements, on common action and a number of church mergers. That was good. Then began a period where spiritual ecumenism began to find an expression. The emphasis was to participate in each other's spiritual activities. The different churches were encouraged to share their God given gifts. And these gifts have to be discovered and received. Now I believe we can also welcome an ecumenism of the Spirit. An ecumenism of the Spirit would put the classical priorities of ecumenical work upside down. Instead of focusing on theology and doctrine, church structures, ministry and sacraments, it would start with the confession of the present Lordship of Jesus Christ and a receptiveness to the work of the Holy Spirit.³² The initiatives of the Global Christian Forum is an example of such ecumenism, where stories of faith are being shared from all Christian traditions and from all parts of the world, where a conscious effort is being made to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. It is an ecumenism that transcends issues of self-identity in the interest of the wholesome life of others. It is

³²Peter Hocken, *What Challenges do Pentecostals pose to Catholics?*, p. 11, paper read at the joint conference of the European Pentecostal Theological Association, the European Pentecostal Charismatic Research Association and the CheminNeuf Community on the theme "Pentecostalism: an Ecumenical Challenge", KlosterBethanien, St. Niklausen, Switzerland, June 26 – 29, 2014. See also: Luis Orella and Bernardo Campos eds. *Ecumenismodel Espiritu*, Lima, Peru, Foro Pentecostal Latinoamericano, 2012.

anecumenism that demonstrates love for one's own church as well as love for other Christian traditions, because God's Spirit is presented in the Bible as a Spirit of solidarity.³³

It would be an ecumenism that would borrow its identity from our understanding of the Trinity. It would be a perichoreic ecumenism in which both the *sensus fidei* and the *sensus fidelium* continually interact and receive their strength in the people's fellowship with God,³⁴ a God who is present in love and grace, a God who suffers with humanity and creation, a God who through the Spirit is guiding people with resurrection-power, wisdom and joy in full communion with God's being and God's creation.

³³ Matthias Wenk, *Missio Spiritu – Why Pentecostals have an Ecumenical Responsibility*. Paper presented at the same conference "Pentecostalism, an Ecumenical Challenge".

³⁴ Dale M. Coulter, *On Thinking with the Church. Evangelicals, Francis, and Tradition in First Things*, May 27, 2014.