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# Do "Good Fences Make Good Neighbors"?

## Evangelization, Proselytism, and Common Witness

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[[HTTP://www.aps.edu/ajps/99-1/99-1-c-robeck.htm](http://www.aps.edu/ajps/99-1/99-1-c-robeck.htm)]

A Text

*John answered, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us." But Jesus said to him, "Do not stop him; for whoever is not against you is for you" (Luke 9:49-50, NRSV).*

The year was 1914. Walls came crashing down as several European countries ignored their geographical boundaries and soldiers invaded their neighbors' lands. Hostilities were in full swing. It was the beginning of World War I. That same year, the American poet laureate, Robert Frost, wrote a poem titled "Mending Wall."<sup>1</sup> It tells the story of two neighbors who make an annual ritual of walking the fence along their common property line. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall," observed Frost, "That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it, and spills the upper boulders in the sun...." We've all seen it. You pile a bunch of rocks, one on top another, and the next time you pass that way, something has shifted. You can't figure out when it happened. No one will ever admit to moving these rocks. But there they lie, scattered "boulders in the sun."

Life is like that - well, kind of. The constant pull of gravity overcomes any inertia to climb. It has a tendency ultimately to bring mountains to their knees. It can fill valleys with their boulders. It levels things out. In southern California where I live, we see this phenomenon each winter when the rains come. Those who have built their homes too close to the edge watch tearfully, as this constant, nagging force drags their dreams relentlessly down the hillsides.

Frost's neighbor had an interesting philosophy regarding this annual wall mending ritual. "Good fences make good neighbors." Perhaps he saw something in that annual ritual that escapes us. Frost figured that his apple trees would never cross, uninvited into his neighbor's pine forest and eat its cones. He kidded his neighbor with this ridiculous picture. But his neighbor had not argued. He simply replied, "Good fences make good neighbors." So Frost went on, accompanying his neighbor along the wall. "Cows," thought Frost. You might need good fences to make sure that two herds of cattle were kept apart. But there were no cows on this property.

Then Frost freely admitted to his mischievous mind. He wanted to suggest to his neighbor that maybe elves were responsible for the holes in the walls and the boulders lying on the ground. But he couldn't bring himself to say it. His neighbor was much too serious for that. His neighbor kept repeating the age-old adage, passed on to him by his ancestors, "Good fences make good neighbors." So Frost tried to be that good neighbor. He helped to restore the wall. But he didn't do it without asking himself a very important question. "What am I walling in or walling out, and to whom am I like to give offense?"

The apostle John was like the neighbor in "Mending Wall." He liked his walls. They provided certainty to him. Some people belonged on one side. Others belonged on the other. They needed to be kept separated from one another. His theory was like that in a Sunday School chorus I sang as a kid.

*One door and only one, and yet its sides are two.  
I'm on the inside, on which side, are you?  
One door and only one, and yet its sides are two.  
I'm on the Lord's side, on which side, are you?*

## Taking Sides

John was clearly on the Lord's side. For him the answer was an easy one. He had come up against a man who was performing exorcisms. Indeed, he was even performing these exorcisms by appealing to the Name or authority of Jesus. But John didn't know him. There were many exorcists in John's day. They appealed to all kinds of names, from Beelzebul to Solomon. But John had run up against a stranger who was using Jesus' name. John had spent years with Jesus. He didn't know this man. And this man was appealing to a name that meant a great deal to John. He was using Jesus' name. How could this be? He had to put a stop to it. And so he had tried. "You have no right to use the name of Jesus," he must have told this stranger.

We don't know the identity of this stranger. But I have to laugh when I see the way the words have been recorded. "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we *tried* to stop him..." It looks as though John had done his usual thing. I wonder if he hadn't tried to call down lightning from heaven in order to put a stop to something he may have considered blasphemous. "We tried to stop him," he said. But it is the reason for making that attempt that I find most intriguing. Why did John try to stop this stranger from casting out demons in Jesus' name? He did it because the man "does not follow with us."

That is it exactly. If you don't follow with us, you are something else. If you don't follow us, you have no reason to appeal Jesus. I'm on the inside, and clearly, you are not. You belong on the other side of the wall. "Good fences make good neighbors." Unless I believe that you follow *with us*, you have no reason to be taken seriously. You have heard it all before.

Since the rise of the Pentecostal movement in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of our denominations have said this same thing about other Christian denominations. Our parents have passed on to us what their parents passed on to them. "You do not follow with us." In my own Pentecostal denomination, we have claimed since the year Robert Frost wrote his poem, that we preach the "full gospel." What that claim signals is that those who are not "with us" must be preaching something less. And just because their churches do not say it in the same way doesn't for a minute mean that they are any less exclusive. Our denominational labels and the names we have given to our traditions have helped to define us. They tell us what is important to us. Specific forms of church government quintessentially define Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians. Adventists preach the Second Coming. Baptists and Anabaptists find the key to their identity in their doctrine of baptism. Catholics look at the universality of the Church. Holiness churches talk about how to walk the "sanctified" walk before God. The Orthodox view themselves as giving right or proper glory to God. Pentecostals hark back to Acts 2. And so it goes. And because we hold these specific values as sacred, we often do not appreciate what the other holds at all.

At one level, Frost's neighbor is correct. And maybe John is correct as well. Good fences make good neighbors. If it is really an annual ritual for two neighbors to walk along a common wall and repair it *together*, to work on a common project *together*, then good fences can make good neighbors. But good fences don't always make good neighbors.

## **Some Walls Don't Make Good Neighbors**

We watched from the West as the Soviets constructed the Berlin wall. It didn't make us good neighbors. It raised our suspicions. It nourished our fears. It separated families and loved ones from one another, and it led to the deaths of hundreds who dared to challenge its defining intentions. Just one month before the wall came down, I traveled through the maze called "Checkpoint Charlie." On the one side, the East, it was a well-painted, and well-guarded, white wall. On the other, the West, it was marked with the epithets of those who thought very little of what it stood for. It was a scar in the middle of a city, covered with the graffiti of disrespect. It was a perversity upon the landscape that separated East from West. It was designed to keep some people *in*, and it was designed to keep other people out. Good fences do not necessarily make good neighbors.

In more recent years, and much closer to my home, we have watched as the American government has attempted to construct a fence along the Mexican-American border. We have used concrete, barbed wire, underground movement sensors, armed guards, and dogs. And we have done so in the name of forcing our neighbors to be *good neighbors*. It is designed to keep certain people *out*, but ultimately it can't help but keep other people in. We have watched as people in the United States have argued, even voted to make the fence stronger, thicker, and higher. We are now on the white side of the wall, the guarded side, the side that hopes this wall will keep us safe from their desire to walk "with us." And we have watched as our neighbors have ridiculed that wall. They have scaled its heights, and dug beneath it. They have slipped around it and tried to blast holes through it. It is viewed from the Mexican side with as much disdain as the West held for the

Berlin wall. Good fences do not necessarily make good neighbors. I suspect that in Asia, similar things could be said about the Great Wall of China, or in more recent times, about the "Bamboo Curtain," or even the notorious DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) that separates Korean families from their loved ones.

John thought that the stranger casting out demons in Jesus' name belonged on the other side of the wall. He was intent on mending any breach in the wall, and of making sure that it was a defining wall. He was on the inside. The stranger was on the outside. John thought that it should stay that way. But Jesus did not agree.

"Do not stop him," was the imperative that Jesus gave! "Leave him alone!" "You obviously don't understand the danger of building walls. You have fenced out a friend. Don't you know that whoever is not against you is for you? Don't you see that the wall that separates the two of you is not conducive to making good neighbors? He is not against you. He stands with you."

## **Some Walls Are Important**

Jesus was not arguing against walls. After all, it is he who said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven," not even those who have cast out demons in His Name. The kingdom of heaven is reserved only for "the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matt 7:21-23). There is an ultimate wall, but it did not stand where John thought it did. Jesus' message to John was that "the one who is not against you is for you." You belong on the same side of the wall. But His message also carries the opposite implication for those who would hear His words. "The one who is against you must be taken with all seriousness." Your job is to discern the difference. Some walls are good walls. They separate the friend from the enemy. Some are not good walls. They separate friend from friend. Don't build walls that fence friends out.

I find this passage to be very interesting. Each time I come to this text I see something I had not noticed before. Each time I read Jesus' words, I find myself coming under the same scrutiny as John, more often than I would like. You see, I am essentially a wall builder by nature. Some of my walls are too high. They separate me from those who would be "for me." Some of my walls may be too low. They are not adequate to keep me separated from the enemy. My job is to discern the difference.

I find this passage to be very interesting also because it comes in the middle of a larger conversation that Jesus is having with his disciples. They had been torturing themselves wondering who was the greatest. Jesus had read their thoughts and set a little child in their midst. "Whoever welcomes this child in my name," He said, "welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest." Jesus spoke of welcoming the child. John spoke of refusing the stranger. Jesus told them how to be great. John demonstrated just how little he could be. "Good fences make good neighbors," but only if they are properly placed. In his eagerness to preserve truth and purity, John had failed to see the truth he sought to preserve. He had become so exclusive that he had no place for including the stranger who stood *with him*.

As we near the turn of the century, society is being overwhelmed by many voices. Some argue that our walls are too high. Let us break them down. We should not have any fences. All we need to do is love one another. All we want is peace. Tolerance and pluralism are the calls of the world. I'm OK, You're OK. Can't we all just get along? Everyone can do what is right in his or her own eyes. In some ways it seems that we have lost all order, and chaos reigns.

On the other hand, some of our peers argue that the walls are not high enough. "Come out from them and be separate from them," they cry. Contact is equated with compromise. Those who hold to doctrinal positions that we do not fully appreciate or fully understand, those who celebrate histories or traditions into which we have not entered, those who do not vote the way we think that they should vote, and who do not hold to the same standards of political correctness that we believe they should embrace, are not to be trusted. They need to be "outed." They are extremists. They are dangerous. They are the radical left, or the religious right. In short, they are not "with us."

I find Jesus' word to John very instructive at this point. As we approach the end of this century, we find ourselves in the morass of change. It is difficult to know which way to proceed. We have grown up with the reality of denominations all our lives, yet the walls between us seem to be failing. Fewer and fewer of my students at Fuller Theological Seminary are members of the church of their birth. Increasingly students who come to Fuller have held membership in ever more denominations. Last week I read the application of a potential adjunct professor. Under the designation for denomination he had written "Ukrainian Baptist Anglo-Catholic Wesleyan." I couldn't help but wonder if he was as confused about who he was, as I was.

Things have changed, and in many places, those we once thought were in enemy camps, are no longer viewed as the enemy. We have come to discover one another as standing "with us." But there are still many people who claim the Name of Jesus that we view with suspicion. The Pope isn't born again, is he? Is it possible to be an Orthodox priest and a Christian? Is it possible to be a "liberal" Christian, or is that very juxtaposition of words an oxymoron? And what about the Fundamentalists? If we are on the inside, on which side are they? Have we struggled adequately with Frost's questions? "What am I walling in or walling out? To whom am I likely to give offense?"

Jesus' instruction is clear, but it is a hard word. "Do not stop them," he contends, "for whoever is not against you is for you." There are many people in the world that are against those that name the Name of Jesus. There are many people in the world who view the Christian faith as merely one among many, the source of judgment, and pain, and exclusion, and even the source of nearly every major war in recent history. They view Jesus, not as Messiah, but as a good man, maybe even a genuine prophet. They deny the exclusive claims of Jesus on human lives. They agitate to limit the Church and its work around the world. They legislate anti-proselytism laws, persecute our brothers and sisters, deprive people of religious freedom, and attempt to define our evangelization as a crime of intolerance and hate. These people *do not* stand "with us." It is our duty as followers of

Jesus to speak a clear word of hope to them. But we are also told to receive those who truly stand *with us*, and ultimately to celebrate our unity with them.

## **Pentecostal Ecumenical Experiences: Breaking Down the Walls**

In keeping with the teachings of Jesus, in recent years many Pentecostals around the world have been looking at the walls that have traditionally separated Pentecostals from the rest of the church world. Many are the stories that could be told about how, as they come to the wall, they are struck by the similarities they find in those they thought were their "enemies," and how ready their "enemies" are to hear what they have to say. To be sure, these things are not happening with equal vigor everywhere in the world, but they are happening in a surprising number of places with ever more frequency. These ecumenical encounters are important for they tap into the root of Pentecostalism that was, in its own peculiar way, envisioned by persons such as Charles F. Parham and William J. Seymour. It was a vision that the Pentecostal Movement would in some way bring unity once again to *all* the churches.

When the subject of Pentecostalism arises, it is not very often connected with the subject of ecumenism. Yet there has been a long history of ecumenical impulses throughout its history, and some of that has led to ecumenical participation at a range of levels: local, national, and international. Pentecostals have sought close ties with one another for years, but especially since the 1940s.<sup>[2](#)</sup> Their participation in various ecumenical groups, their participation in coalitions with Evangelicals, and their desire to fellowship with one another have been well documented in several places.<sup>[3](#)</sup>

## **Pentecostals and the WCC**

Through the years it has been some of the so-called "autochthonous" churches of Latin America that have had the most formal relationship with the organized Ecumenical movement. Some of these are churches that came into being in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They had no ties to missionary churches in Europe or North America. They developed with minimal outside influence. Some of them, however, were originally affiliated with an outside missionary sending denomination but for one or another reason separated from those outside their region.

All of the Pentecostal denominations outside the United States that hold membership in the World Council of Churches are from the autochthonous family of Pentecostals. Their entrance into the WCC, beginning in 1961, may be as much a way of exercising their independence, in spite of the advice and sometimes pressure brought to bear upon them by their Pentecostal peers, as it is their desire to participate in a formal move toward greater unity. In Latin America, for instance, it has clearly provided a way for Pentecostals to cast a vote against what they perceive to be a form of neo-colonialism by certain North American Pentecostal groups. Their testimony has been heard in a variety of settings through the years, and it is currently the subject of some debate.<sup>[4](#)</sup>

Among the denominations that have joined the WCC are the *Iglesia Pentecostal de Chili* and the *Misión Iglesia Pentecostal* in 1961, Manuel de Mello's *Igreja Evangélica Pentecostal "O Brasil para Cristo"* in 1969, the International Evangelical Church in 1972, Bishop Gabriel O. Vaccaro's *Iglesia de Dios* from Argentina in 1980, the *Missão Evangélica Pentecostal de Angola* in 1985, and the *Iglesia de Misiones Pentecostales Libres de Chile* in 1991. Only the International Evangelical Church, founded by former Church of God (Cleveland, TN) minister, Bishop John Meares, does not belong to the autochthonous family of churches.

Many of these churches from Latin America, as well as other Pentecostal churches from that region, participate in *la Consejo Latinoamericano de Iglesias* and/or in *la Comisión Evangélica Pentecostal Latinoamericana*. This Commission, frequently designated as *CEPLA*, was founded as a result of the entry of the two Chilean groups into the World Council of Churches in 1961, though it did not formalize itself until much later. Its primary role includes such tasks as undertaking study on the origins of their various member churches, working together on theological issues, raising consciousness regarding spirituality, supporting efforts toward greater unity between Latin American Pentecostal churches, and publishing work that is relevant to their situation. One of the first publications was *Pentecostalismo y Liberación: Una experiencia latinoamericana*, edited by Carmelo Alvarez, in 1992.<sup>5</sup>

Since the 1991 Assembly of the World Council of Churches, the WCC has been making a concerted effort to reach out to Pentecostals. Through the auspices of the office of Huibert van Beek, Director of the Office of Church and Ecumenical Relations, three major consultations have been held that have focused on the concerns of Pentecostals. The first of these occurred in Lima, Peru in 1994, and gathered some 31 participants and a number of observers to talk about issues unique to Latin Americans.<sup>6</sup> In 1996, nearly 30 participants, largely from the United States, but with several from Latin America, met in San Jose, Costa Rica. The concerns explored in this meeting were those that surface in the United States, and which have been exported to churches that have been brought into existence by many American missionaries. The encounter between Pentecostals from North American and Pentecostals from South America also provided for considerable discussion, since North American Pentecostals seldom hear directly from their grassroots counterparts elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

In December 1997, another consultation that included about 25 Pentecostals and a number of World Council of Churches leaders, including Dr. Konrad Raiser, General Secretary of the WCC, was held in Château de Bossey, Switzerland. In this meeting, substantial discussion included the exploration of the possible development of a "Joint Working Group," which might make possible greater communication between Pentecostals who do not wish to participate in the full life of the WCC, but nevertheless, may find some contact with the WCC to be beneficial.<sup>8</sup> The World Council of Churches will publish a full account of this consultation in early 1999.

## **Other Forms of Pentecostal Ecumenical Participation**



Pentecostals participate in a variety of evangelical groups such as the National Association of Evangelicals, in the United States. What is less known is that not long ago the President of the Liberian Council of Churches was a Pentecostal.<sup>9</sup> Frank Chikane, a Pentecostal minister from the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, was Director of the Institute of Contextual Theology that developed the famous *Kairos Document* during the days of apartheid in South Africa. He also served as General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches, even though his own denomination was not a member of that group.<sup>10</sup> More recently, the Korean Assemblies of God which includes, as its member church, Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, an Assembly of God congregation of over 800,000, made a controversial move by joining the Korean National Council of Churches.<sup>11</sup> The Finnish Pentecostal Movement holds Observer status with the Finnish Council of Churches and frequently sends observers to meetings of the Nordic Ecumenical Council. They have also participated in a two-year bilateral discussion with the Lutheran Church of Finland.<sup>12</sup>

The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America has invited Pentecostal participation in the work of its Faith and Order Commission since the early 1980s. Since at least 1984, there has never been a Faith and Order meeting held in the US in which one or more (generally two, but often as many as four) Pentecostals have not been present. In 1986, the NCCCUSA and the Society for Pentecostal Studies began a series of meetings that were designed to help Pentecostals and members of the National Council to get acquainted with one another. The first round of discussions extended from 1987 through 1992. A second round of discussions began in 1995. It is currently scheduled to continue through at least 1999. A book that includes the papers that were discussed during these two rounds of discussions will be published at the conclusion of the current round ending in 1999. Held either adjacent to meetings of the Commission on Faith and Order or meetings of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, these meetings allow for participants to enter into the life of the other community at minimal expense. Thus far, the meetings have been quite successful in educating both communities about the life and work of the other. <sup>13</sup>

On the international scene, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) asked that a Dialogue be opened in order to explore issues of common concern between the member churches of WARC and Pentecostals. Impetus for these discussions came from WARC member churches in the Korean context. An exploratory meeting was held in Mattersey, England in 1995, and the first meeting of the new WARC-Pentecostal Dialogue was held in Torre Pellice, Italy in 1996. At its initial meeting, the discussion focused on three issues related to spirituality: 1) the interpretation of Scripture, 2) justice, and 3) ecumenism.<sup>14</sup> Work on "The Role and Place of the Holy Spirit in the Church" was conducted in Chicago, Illinois, USA, in May 1997.<sup>15</sup>

From May 14-20, 1998, the meeting was held in Kappel-am-Albis, Switzerland, the site at which the Zürich Reformer, Ulrich Zwingli, was killed in a battle against neighboring Roman Catholics. The topic under discussion there was "The Holy Spirit and Mission in Eschatological Perspective." The Dialogue team met with Professor Walter Hollenweger, former Professor of Missions at the University of Birmingham and a world class scholar

on the nature of Pentecostalism, as well as with Ruedi Reich, President of the Cantonal Reformed Church of Zürich.<sup>16</sup> The meeting for May 14-21, 1999 is scheduled to convene in Seoul, Korea around the theme "Charism and Kingdom."

## Pentecostals and Catholics?

Ecumenical encounters between Pentecostals and Roman Catholics have been conducted in such places as Springfield, Missouri, where intermittent meetings continue between leaders of the Assemblies of God and the diocese of Cape Girardeau since the 1970s. Pentecostals have been involved from the beginning in an Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue sponsored by Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, a dialogue that has focused on issues related to ministry within the Hispanic community and ministry among youth and on college campuses.<sup>17</sup>

The annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies has proven to be a place in which ecumenical topics have been addressed with increasing interest. In 1996, for instance a Roman Catholic-Pentecostal conversation was initiated at which expectations were that there might be about 25 persons present. In the end, over 80 persons attended the meeting and the discussion proved to be highly appreciated by the SPS membership. Similar discussions were held in 1997 and again in 1998, coordinated by Church of God (Cleveland, TN) professor Dr. Cheryl Bridges-Johns and Loyola Professor Fr. John Haughey, S.J.

Many people are aware of the groundbreaking work that the Reverend Dave J. du Plessis undertook in participating in a variety of ecumenical encounters in the 1950s and following.<sup>18</sup> Most notable among these encounters has been the establishment of the International Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue. This meeting has been a continuing conversation since 1972. It has spawned several Ph.D. dissertations.<sup>19</sup> And its fourth major report, printed in this issue of the *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*, was released by the Vatican in July 1998. The topic of this discussion is "Evangelization, Proselytism, and Common Witness."

The late Dr. Jerry L. Sandidge, former secretary to the Pentecostal team, described this Dialogue as "A Study in Developing Ecumenism." Indeed, it is. When the Dialogue began, it was very difficult for David du Plessis to find Pentecostals who were willing to participate in anything with the Vatican. Thus, in the first round of discussion, from 1972-1976 he drew his team from among close friends, generally pastors in the Pentecostal Movement, as well as from members of historic churches who had come into the Charismatic Renewal. Arnold Bittlinger, a Lutheran, was one such person, as was the Presbyterian theologian J. Rodman Williams. Professor Howard Ervin, an American Baptist who was on the faculty of Oral Roberts University, was also part of that group. It was a time of getting acquainted. They explored a wide range of topics, too many to do them adequate justice. The interesting fact is that the Pentecostals and the Charismatics disagreed among themselves too often for the Roman Catholics to understand the Pentecostals. Some of the Pentecostals also felt badly represented. One example of their

disagreement grew out of the commitment to paedobaptism that the Charismatics tended to support.

After reviewing the process and the makeup of the teams, the Pentecostals reformulated their team. They drew other pastors, as well as a few scholars, and continued to present a number of papers each year. Toward the end of this second round, which ran from 1977-1982, the teams decided that one topic per year, with a paper presented on each side, would be adequate to allow for sustained discussion. When the topic of Mary emerged in the last year, it proved to be especially difficult. The papers were both excellent, but the headlines that appeared in the press did considerable damage to the dialogue. Indeed, Dr. Jerry L. Sandidge, at that time an Assemblies of God missionary in Belgium and the author of the Pentecostal paper on "Mary," lost his missionary appointment because of this fallout. There were some Pentecostals who, without ever asking what he had written, believed that he had crossed over the fence between Pentecostals and Roman Catholics. He would only later be vindicated, but by that time he was dying of cancer.

The third round of discussions, from 1985 through 1989, focused on the topic of "*Koinonia*." The subject actually grew out of the treatment of Mary. Mary, the Roman Catholic team argued, could only be understood within the context of the "Communion of Saints." Thus, the "Communion of Saints" past, present, and future, those who actually form the Church Universal, led ultimately to the discussion of "Perspectives on *Koinonia*." With the retirement of David du Plessis from the Chair of the Pentecostal team, his brother Justus du Plessis led these discussions. The report of this third round of discussions was published by the Society for Pentecostal Studies in its journal, *Pneuma*, together with the previous two reports.<sup>20</sup> It became a source of considerable interest among the membership of the Society, and the Society became a place from which new participants for the Dialogue could be drawn.

In August 1989, as the discussion on "*Koinonia*" came to a close, considerable debate emerged about the topic for the fourth round of discussions. It was Jerry Sandidge who proposed the topic "Evangelization, Proselytism, and Common Witness." Neither Fr. Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B., Co-chair for the Roman Catholic team nor I were very pleased with the idea. We thought that it was too volatile, and that the topic had the ability to destroy the Dialogue. We were, however, outvoted by the rest of the two teams after Jerry Sandidge made an impassioned plea for the topic.

In 1992, Justus du Plessis announced his retirement from the position as Pentecostal Co-chair. I was asked to take his place, and in an ironic twist, the two who had spoken against the topic were placed in charge of the ensuing discussion. We threw ourselves into the task, extended the discussion to eight years, and produced the document that is now before you.

The eight years over which these discussions were held were good years. They were also difficult years because of the deaths of two young men, Jerry L. Sandidge, Co-secretary for the Pentecostals, and Fr. Heinz-Albert Raem, Co-secretary for the Roman Catholics. They were difficult, too, because the issue of proselytism is a difficult issue. There were

sessions in which tears flowed freely, stories were told with passion and pathos, tables were pounded, words were critiqued, honed, and carefully defined. We even spent an entire day debating the meaning and implications of the word "persuade" as it was translated into languages other than English.

You have the result of this work. It will be up to you to take what you have before you and determine whether Roman Catholics and Pentecostals should continue to hold the same high walls between them. Yes, there are many questions still unanswered, but a start has been made at a critical point of intersection. Could it ever be that Catholics and Pentecostals might be able to see one another as allies instead of enemies? Could it be that they might find it possible to address their common pastoral problems? What is the nature of discipleship? What causes so many to lose interest in the church? Is it possible for us to hold Bible studies together, even cooperate together in evangelistic crusades? I hope that you will take the time to read through the entire document carefully and prayerfully.

Professor Walter Hollenweger may help us begin our prayer together. He is a theologian, an evangelist, a pastor, an ecumenist, a playwright, and sometime poet. He has written a number of what I call "animal" prayers, prayers in which he speaks as though he were one of them, and offers insights into how we might think new thoughts. Among these prayers is a prayer that I have found instructive even as I have read the Lukan passage with which I began this introduction. He calls it "The Prayer of the Ostrich."

*O God,  
Sometimes I feel like an ostrich,  
a bird with wings - yet he can only run  
a bird with wings - yet he has only the memory of flying.  
And so I run over the hot sand and spread my wings,  
Yet only a poor hop is the result.  
I am a Christian with the memory of the early Christians,  
when in one day the gospel emerged in a foreign culture,  
when in one day that which was considered essential, faded  
away,  
when in one day for the sake of a foreign officer's salvation,  
your servant crossed the frontiers of what he considered to  
be the  
limits of the Gospel,  
when in one day more of the Gospel was discovered than  
we could hope  
in a hundred years.  
Why must I be an ostrich, the laughing stock of the world?  
I did not make myself. You did not ask me whether I wanted  
to  
be an ostrich, nor whether I wanted to be at all, nor  
did my parents ask me.  
So, I am a bird and I cannot fly.*

*And yet I see other birds taking to the sky.  
So I bury my head in the sand, in the Bible, in the tradition,  
in scholarship.  
Today I pray just for one thing, one little thing.  
O God,  
Help me at least not to hinder the others from flying.  
Help me not to think that because we cannot fly, other birds  
shouldn't either.  
Help me to rejoice in the sight of those who fly higher than  
I can ever dream.[21](#)  
Amen.*

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## References

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<sup>3</sup> On this see the overview in Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "Taking Stock of Pentecostalism: The Personal Reflections of a Retiring Editor," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 15:1 (Spring, 1993), pp. 39-45; Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "The Assemblies of God and Ecumenical Cooperation: 1920-1965," in *Pentecostalism in Context: Essays in Honor of William W. Menzies*, eds. Wonsuk Ma and Robert Menzies, JPTSup. 11 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), pp. 107-150.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas Petersen, *Not by Might nor by Power: A Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern in Latin America* (Oxford: Regnum, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Carmelo Alvarez, *Pentecostalismo y Liberacion: Una experiencia latinoamericana* (San Jose, Costa Rica: Editorial DEI, 1992). "Pentecostalismo ye Teologia de la Liberacion" was also the topic chosen by *Pastoralia* Ano 7, Num. 15 (December 1985), a journal published by CELEP, the *Centro Evangelico Latinoamericano de Estudios Pastorales*.

<sup>6</sup> *Consulta con Las Iglesias Pentecostales: Lima, Peru, 14 al 19 de Noviembre de 1994* (Geneva: Office of Church and Ecumenical Relations, World Council of Churches, 1994). This volume is also available in English.

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<sup>8</sup> This proposal will be offered at the Eighth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Harare, Zimbabwe, December 1-15, 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Carol J. Fonke, "Churches Bring Relief to Devastated Liberia," *The Christian Century* 108:26 (September 18-25, 1991), pp. 853-59.

<sup>10</sup> Frank Chikane, *No Life of My Own: An Autobiography* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), and Bernard Spong with Cedric Mayson, *Come Celebrate! Twenty-five Years of the South African Council of Churches* (Johannesburg, South Africa: Communications Department of the South African Council of Churches, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> "Korea Assemblies of God join National Council of Churches," *ENI-Bulletin* 14 (July 24, 1996), p. 31, Bulletin 96-0398.

<sup>12</sup> *Dialogues with The Evangelical Free Church of Finland and the Finnish Pentecostal Movement* (Helsinki, Finland: Church Council for Foreign Affairs, Ecclesiastical Board, 1990), pp. 33-63.

<sup>13</sup> On these meetings see Ira Rifkin, "Pentecostal, mainline leaders confer," San Gabriel [CA] *Daily News* (October 25, 1986), p. 20; John Dart, "Pentecostal, Ecumenical Movements Have First Formal Contact," *Los Angeles Times* (October 25, 1986), pp. 4-5; Marjorie Chandler, "National Council of Churches Pioneers Dialogue with Pentecostals," National Council of the Churches of Christ *Feature Story* released October 30, 1986; "Church Cooperation Called For," Louisville, KY, *The Courier-Journal* (October 27, 1990), p/ A9.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Wilson, "Dialogue with Pentecostals," *WARC Update* 6:2 (June 1996), pp. 2-3; "Pentecostals and Reformed Dialogue Signals Major Breakthrough," *ENI Bulletin* 10 (28 May 1996), pp. 17-18, Bulletin-96-0283.

<sup>15</sup> H. S. Wilson, "Reformed and Pentecostals in Dialogue," *WARC Update* 7:2 & 3 (June-September 1997), p. 6

<sup>16</sup> "Beyond Silence: Pentecostal-Reformed Dialogue," *WARC Update* 8:2 (June 1998), p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Jane Estes, "Mahony Calls to Unity," Pasadena *Star-News* (November 3, 1988), pp. 1, 7; Hermine Lees, "Ecumenical Service to be Held at Cathedral," *The Tidings* (January 15, 1993), p. 4; Mike Nelson, "Ecumenical Service: 'Fruits of the Spirit' Lead to Unity," *The Tidings* (January 22, 1993), p. 4. The work of this Committee has been outlined in a brochure, "A Journey Just Begun: A Reflective Statement by the Los Angeles

Evangelical/Roman Catholic Committee," released in a bilingual format [English/Spanish]. November 21, 1989, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Decree on Ecumenism. On July 10, 1996, the Committee sponsored with Fuller Theological Seminary and Loyola Marymount University, a day-long conference titled "Where Can We Bear One Another's Burdens?" and featuring the Reverend Allan Figueroa Deck, S.J., and the Reverend Isaac Canales, an Assemblies of God minister as the keynote speakers.

<sup>18</sup> Two popular biographical accounts of this man's work are David J. du Plessis, *The Spirit Bade Me Go*, rev. ed., (Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1970), and David du Plessis (as told to Bob Slosser), *A Man Called Mr. Pentecost* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1977). The best analysis of his life and work remains Martin Robinson's "To the Ends of the Earth: The Pilgrimage of an Ecumenical Pentecostal, David J. Du Plessis (1905-1987)" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Birmingham, England, 1987). A book worth reading on the thought of Du Plessis is his own David du Plessis, *Simple and Profound* (Orleans, MA: Paraclete, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> On this Dialogue see the brief report issued under the title "The Pentecostal/Catholic Dialogue," *Information Service* No. 91 (1996/I-II), pp. 42-44. The reports of the first three quinquennia have been published together in *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 12:2 (fall, 1990). The Dialogue has been the subject of several doctoral dissertations that have since been published. They include Arnold Bittlinger, *Papst und Pfingstler: Der romisch katholisch-Pfingstliche Dialog und seine okumenische Relevanz*, SIHC 16 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1978); Jerry L. Sandidge, *Roman Catholic/Pentecostal Dialogue [1977-1982]: A Study in Developing Ecumenism*, 2 vols., SIHC 44 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1987); Paul D. Lee, *Pneumatological Ecclesiology in the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue: A Catholic Reading of the Third Quinquennium (1985-1989)* (Romane: Pontificia Studiorum Universitas A. S. Thoma Aq. In Urbe, 1994); and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Spiritus ubi vult spirat: Pneumatology in Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue (1972-1989)*, *Schriften der Luther-Agricola-Gesellschaft* 42 (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 1998), 509 pp. Not to be ignored are the Marquette University dissertation by Terrence Robert Crowe, which explores the relationships between the Roman Catholic Church and the Assemblies of God. It has been published under the title *Pentecostal Unity: Recurring Frustration and Enduring Hopes* (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1993), as well as the Fuller Theological Seminary dissertation by David Leon Cole, President of Eugene Bible College (Open Bible Standard Churches), "Pentecostal Koinonia: An Emerging Ecumenical Ecclesiology among Pentecostals" (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> See *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 12:2 (Fall, 1990). The reports have also been published in Kilian McDonnell, *Presence, Power, Praise*, 3 vols. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1980).

<sup>21</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), p. 400.

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