

“On Becoming a Christian”: Some Thoughts on the International Roman Catholic – Pentecostal Dialogue

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The International Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue is one of the oldest ecumenical dialogues in which the Roman Catholic Church is engaged. It came into existence when, in 1970, the South African born Pentecostal minister, David du Plessis, inquired about the possibility of opening up some kind of discussion between Catholics and Pentecostals.¹ Cardinal Willebrands, then President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, authorized a series of preliminary conversations in 1970 and 1971 to explore this idea. In 1972 the first round of the International Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue began.²

¹ David du Plessis as told to Bob Slosser, *A Man Called Mr. Pentecost* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1977), 199-236; David du Plessis, *Simple and Profound* (Orleans, MA: Paraclete Press, 1986), 173-193.

² This round of discussions has been assessed in Arnold Bittlinger, *Papst und Pfingstler: Der römisch-katholisch-pfingstliche Dialog und seine ökumenische Relevanz* Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 16 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1978), 484 pp. The first three reports were published in *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 12:2 (fall, 1990), 85-142 and in William G. Rusch and Jeffrey Gros, Eds. *Deepening Communion: International Ecumenical Documents with Roman Catholic Participation* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1998), 367-422. All four reports have been published in German in Norbert Baumert and Gerhard Bially, Eds. *Pfingstler und Katholiken Im Dialog: Die vier Abschlussberichte einer Internationalen Kommission aus 25 Jahren* (Düsseldorf, Germany: Charisma 1999), 59-95, and in English in Jeffrey Gros, FSC, Harding Meyer, and William G. Rusch, *Growth in Agreement II:*

From the beginning, the Dialogue had official status with the Vatican's Secretariat, while David du Plessis, who had been defrocked by the General Council of the Assemblies of God in 1964 because of his ecumenical activities, was unable to solicit comparable institutional support from within the classical Pentecostal Movement. As a result, he turned to personal, Pentecostal friends and to his many Lutheran, Reformed, Anglican, and Orthodox contacts active in the larger charismatic world in order to complete his list of "Pentecostal" colleagues.³ He hoped that these additions would be sufficiently "Pentecostal" to make the points he wanted to make. He believed that the Pentecostal testimony regarding the person and work of the Holy Spirit was a valuable corrective to the Church's general ignorance of Pneumatology. He believed that the Pentecostal experience of the power of the Spirit might provide a practical corrective to what Pentecostals had traditionally viewed as a powerless Church. And he believed that the Roman Catholic Church might benefit from a formal exposure to

Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level 1982-1998, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company/ Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 2000), 713-779.

³ His "charismatic" friends included Arnold Bittlinger and Larry Christenson (Lutheran), Jean-Daniel Fisher and J. Rodman Williams (Reformed and Presbyterian), David Collins (Episcopal), Michael Harper (At that time an Anglican), and Athanasios Emmert (Orthodox).

Pentecostals in light of the emergence of charismatic renewal within the Roman Catholic Church.

This first round of discussions was a kind of “get acquainted” round. As many as ten topics were introduced during the week-long meeting.⁴ At best, they received only superficial treatment. This first round, however, did four things. (1) It set boundaries that would define subsequent discussions, limits that would govern the reception of its reports by the respective denominations. (2) It became clear to both sides that the Pentecostal team, as constructed, was not adequate. Its “Charismatic” members did not always represent Classical Pentecostal sentiments very well.⁵ Things would have to change if this Dialogue were to be successful. (3) It alerted the Classical Pentecostal community to the realization that Rome really wanted to talk with *them*. (4) It gave Du Plessis time. He needed that time to educate Classical Pentecostal leaders regarding this controversial and challenging opportunity. And he needed that time to find Pentecostals that he thought might take such a dialogue seriously.

The second round of discussions, which ran from 1977-1982, brought a radically reconstituted Pentecostal team. The result was a more mature report that clearly demonstrated Classical

Pentecostal participation. Yet the style of the Dialogue was such that it continued to address too many subjects inadequately.⁶ It was really the topic chosen in its next to last year of this round that opened the way toward more focused discussions in the future. In 1981, against the better judgment of Rome but at the insistence of the Pentecostals, the Dialogue looked at how these two traditions viewed Mary.

The subject would prove to be every bit as controversial as Rome had expected. It led to the discipline of Jerry L. Sandidge, an Assemblies of God missionary in Belgium, who authored the Pentecostal paper on the subject. Assemblies of God leaders forced him to choose between the revocation of his missionary appointment and breaking all fellowship with David du Plessis and the Dialogue. He chose to leave Belgium.

At the same time, the study of Mary was just as worthwhile as the Pentecostals had hoped. The Pentecostal participants in the Dialogue learned something of Roman Catholic doctrine and practice, and gained a greater appreciation of Mary in the process. This round of discussions also facilitated greater trust between the teams and it demonstrated more broadly, just how important the Dialogue was for dealing with differences.⁷

⁴ These topics included baptism in the Holy Spirit, Christian Initiation and the Gifts, Baptism, Scripture, Tradition and Developments, Charismatic Renewal in the Historic Churches, Public Worship, Public Worship and the Gifts, The Human Aspect, Discernment of Spirits, Prayer and Praise.

⁵ This became most evident when the discussion turned to baptism. Most of the Pentecostal team drawn from the historic denominations favored infant baptism, while all the Classical Pentecostals involved in the Dialogue rejected it.

⁶ This document addressed speaking in tongues, faith and experience, Scripture and Tradition, exegesis, biblical interpretation, faith and reason, healing in the Church, community, worship and communion, Tradition and traditions, perspectives on Mary, and ministry in the Church.

⁷ The paper presented by Jerry L. Sandidge may be found in his dissertation published in two volumes as, *Roman Catholic/Pentecostal Dialogue [1977-1982]: A Study in Developing Ecumenism* Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 44 (Frankfurt am Main, Germany:

The discussion on Mary was also important because it provided the basis for the third round of discussions (1985-1989) by raising questions about the nature of the *Communio sanctorum*, the communion of saints. This third round of discussions saw greater acceptance of the dialogue by the Classical Pentecostal community. Five Pentecostal denominations chose to grant official recognition to the dialogue, and began to appoint official participants to the discussion. This round developed further, the nature of the communion of saints by exploring the larger subject of ecclesiology through the lens of *koinonia*.⁸ The result was a report titled, “Perspectives on *Koinonia*.”⁹

Peter Lang, 1987), 2:289-351. His account of his rejection by Pentecostal leaders can be found in 1:332-341. Correspondence between the Assemblies of God and Jerry L. Sandidge may be studied at the David du Plessis Archive, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, 91182, USA.

⁸ See “Perspectives on *Koinonia*” §7. Cf. David Leon Cole, “*Pentecostal Koinonia: An Emerging Ecumenical Ecclesiology Among Pentecostals*,” unpublished PhD dissertation, Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary, School of Theology, 1998 analyzed this third round within the larger context of ecumenical discussions on *koinonia* from a Pentecostal perspective, while Paul D. Lee, *Pneumatological Ecclesiology in the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue: A Catholic Reading of the Third Quinquennium (1985–1989)* (Rome: Pontifica Studiorum Universitas A.S. Thoma Ag. in Urbe, 1994), 364 pp. assessed it from a Roman Catholic perspective. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Spiritus ubi vult spirat: Pneumatology in Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue (1972-1989)* (SLAG 42, Helsinki: Luther-Agricola-Society, 1998), 509 pp. analyzed the first three rounds of discussions.⁹ “Perspectives on *Koinonia*,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 12:2 (1990), 117-141. The report of the Third Quinquennium of the Dialogue between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity of the Roman Catholic Church and some

Roman Catholic insistence that baptism formed the basis for entry into the “*koinonia* of those saved by Christ” (Perspectives on *Koinonia*, 50), “the Church,” (Perspectives on *Koinonia*, 52), and therefore the basis for a “certain, though imperfect” unity between Pentecostals and Roman Catholics (*Decree on Ecumenism*, 3; Perspectives on *Koinonia*, 54-55), was eye-opening for the Pentecostals. That claim, however, gave rise to further reflection on the nature of baptism. The Pentecostals argued that while baptism is very important, a rite that should be followed in obedience to Jesus’ command (Matthew 28:19; Perspectives on *Koinonia*, 40-41), most Pentecostals hold that it is actually a prior personal confession of faith in Jesus Christ that gives baptism its true meaning (Perspectives on *Koinonia*, 42, 45).¹⁰

Differences in their respective understandings of baptism led to several further insights. The Pentecostal team argued that by making baptism the entry point into the Christian community, Roman Catholics had undoubtedly contributed to a phenomenon the Pentecostals identified as “nominal” Christianity. Given the Catholic understanding of baptism, they argued, it was possible for a person to be baptized and remain essentially or completely

Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders, 1989. This document was published in the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity’s *Information Service* N. 75 (1990/IV), pp. 179-191 and in Dutch, as “Perspectieven op *Koinonia*,” *Parakleet* 11/39 (Fall 1991):i-xii and as “Zicht op *Koinonia*,” *Kerkelijke Documentatie 1-2-1* 19/9 (1991):397-414.

¹⁰ This discussion emerges in “Evangelization, Proselytism, and Common Witness,” 69, as an example of why charges of proselytism have emerged between Catholic and Pentecostal communities.

unchurched (Perspectives on *Koinonia*, 59-60). “How could anyone claim that these people were genuine Christians?” they asked. There was no clear indication that these people had ever personally responded to God through faith in Jesus Christ. It seemed only that they had undergone a rite of baptism in which, especially as infants, they were not even willing participants. Splashing water on unbelieving babies certainly did nothing to make them believers. When the Pentecostals claimed to lead such “nominal Christians” to the Lord, they argued that they were merely “evangelizing” them, often for the first time. They weren’t really Christian, after all. These people might have been sacramentalized, but they had hardly been evangelized.

The Roman Catholics countered with theological and pastoral charges of their own. Who gave you the right to determine who is “nominal” and who is not? The Roman Catholic team had a different reading of Pentecostal actions. Those who had been baptized by the Roman Catholic Church had been made part of the Church through baptism. Thus, the actions of those Pentecostals who sought to “lead these people to the Lord” was nothing more than “proselytism.” They were stealing sheep by breaking into the sheepfold of the Catholic Church and sowing doubt and fear in the minds of their members even as they wooed them into their own sheepfolds.

Once these Pentecostals had “led these people to the Lord,” they had also led them into their own congregations where they were frequently required to be baptized once again as new converts. The Catholics argued that when Pentecostals took such an action, they showed that they did not recognize or

respect the prior baptism of their new “converts.” They did not recognize the authority of the Church in which they had been baptized. Some even wondered whether the Pentecostals recognized the Roman Catholic Church as a Christian body.

Such difficult questions simply had to be answered as quickly as possible. As a result, the fourth round of discussions (1990-1997) took up the issues of “Evangelization, Proselytism, and Common Witness.” Other questions raised by the third round of discussions would have to be shelved as the Dialogue took on this more pressing agenda. The teams attempted to define *together*, the terms “evangelization” and “proselytism.” Once they had agreed on various definitions or understandings of these terms, they explored a number of possible ways in which Roman Catholics and Pentecostals might actually engage in Christian witness together.¹¹

¹¹ “Evangelization, Proselytism and Common Witness,” The Report from the Fourth Phase of the International Dialogue 1990-1997 Between the Roman Catholic Church and Some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders, has been published in English in *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 21:1 (Spring, 1999), 11-51, has been published in English in The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity’s *Information Service* N. 97 (1998/I-II), 38-56; the *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 2:1 (January 1999), 105-151; and in *One In Christ* xxxv: 2 (1999), 158-190. It has appeared in French in *Service d’information* N. 97 (1998/I-II), 38-57; in Portuguese in *Diálogo Católico-Pentecostal: Evangelização, Proselitismo e Testemunho Comum* (São Paulo, Brazil: Paulinas, 1999), 77 pp.; and in Spanish in *Diálogo Ecueménico* n. 108 (1999), 103-152. This round of discussions is evaluated by Veli Matti Kärkkäinen, *Ad ultimum terrae: Evangelization, Proselytism and Common Witness in the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue (1990-1997)*, (SIHC 117, Frankfurt am Main, Peter Lang, 1999), 281 pp.

Because of the sensitive nature of this topic, the discussion on “Evangelization, Proselytism and Common Witness” was extended from five years to eight. Upon completion of this fourth report, the steering committee suggested that the teams return to some of the unexplored but related issues that had been raised in “Perspectives on *Koinonia*.” If the two sides could not agree on a single entry point into the Christian life, and if the Pentecostals were confused by Roman Catholic practice that led them to charge Catholics with nominal behavior that in turn led to charges of “proselytism” against Pentecostals, then it seemed that they should continue to explore how one entered the Christian life and became fully incorporated into the ongoing life of the Church. This has been the focus of the fifth round of discussions that began in 1998.¹²

Choosing the Subject of the Fifth Round of Discussions: 1998-2005

It was Fr. Kilian McDonnell, OSB, who had served as the Roman Catholic Co-chair of the Dialogue since its inception, that suggested that the Dialogue pursue the topic, “Conversion and Christian Initiation: Biblical and Patristic Perspectives.”¹³ He did this for several reasons. First, in 1991, he co-authored a book with Fr. George T. Montague titled, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence*

from the First Eight Centuries. From his Roman Catholic perspective, he understood the subjects of conversion, baptism in the Holy Spirit, and Christian initiation to be linked together. Second, at nearly 80 years of age, he believed that this round of discussions would be the last one in which he would be able to participate, and he wanted to see how the dialogue would assess the basic thesis of his book. Third, his book had cited not only the biblical evidence for Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit; it had also pursued the topic in the writings of the Church Fathers. Roman Catholics had frequently drawn attention to Patristic texts in every round of discussion, but Pentecostals had never done so. By introducing the subject, not only in biblical perspective, but also in Patristic perspective, he hoped to help Pentecostals and Catholics to appreciate more fully their common historical roots.

For a century, Pentecostals had been arguing that it was essential for Christians to experience what they call “Baptism in the Spirit,” because that experience brings with it an empowerment by the Holy Spirit to be used for effective ministry. Fr. McDonnell had written his book in response to the challenges raised by Pentecostals in earlier sessions of the Dialogue, and he thought that it might provide an opportunity for the Pentecostals as well as Roman Catholics to interact with his thesis that “baptism in the Holy Spirit is an integral part of becoming a Christian.” If this thesis were true, he argued, then baptism in the Holy Spirit should not be relegated to the realm of “private piety, but to public liturgy, to the official public worship of the church. And it is normative for all Christians.” “Religious experience” and the manifestation of the various

¹² For a brief overview of all rounds through 1998, see Juan Fernando Usma Gómez, “El Diálogo Internacional Católico-Pentecostal 1972-1998: Reseña Histórica, Presentación Final de la Cuarta Fase: Evangelización, Proselitismo y Testimonio Común, y Perspectivas,” *Medellín: teología y pastoral para América Latina* Vol. 24, no. 95 (September 1998), 449-470.

¹³ This was in keeping with some of the concerns raised in “Perspectives on *Koinonia*” (Cf. 48-49, 59-60).

“charisms” are merely consequences of this reality, he maintained.¹⁴ In other words, the emphasis upon “baptism in the Spirit” did not belong solely to the Pentecostal Movement or to the Charismatic Renewal. It belonged to the Church as a whole.

By situating the subject of “baptism in the Spirit,” as he did, within the context of the debate on “conversion-initiation,” he pointed to the validity of arguments set forth by the biblical theologian, James D. G. Dunn, and the systematic theologian, F. Dale Bruner, two decades earlier. Professor James D. G. Dunn had written his groundbreaking volume on *Baptism in the Spirit* in 1970, where he linked “baptism in the Spirit” to that of Christian initiation on biblical grounds.¹⁵ Professor Dale Bruner had published *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* that same year, in which he made the theological case for “baptism in the Spirit” as coming at the point of entry into the Christian life. There was no subsequent experience, no subsequent “baptism in the Spirit” toward which Christians had to look in order to obtain the fullness of the Godhead. They received the whole of the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, at the time of their conversion.¹⁶

By placing the subject of “baptism in the Spirit,” as he did, within the context

of this larger discussion on “conversion-initiation, McDonnell also supported classic Roman Catholic doctrine on the subject, which linked the coming of the Spirit to the newly baptized. At the same time, by underscoring “baptism in the Spirit” as a valid dimension of the Christian life that held charismatic aspects, he also seemed to agree with arguments made by Pentecostals and Charismatics that the Church needed to take more seriously the reality and the power inherent in “baptism in the Spirit.” Fr. McDonnell believed that he could argue all of these points if the Dialogue were to take his suggestion seriously.

After considerable discussion, the Steering Committee of the Dialogue agreed that the subject of “Baptism in the Spirit” could be studied under the rubric of “Conversion and Christian Initiation: Biblical and Patristic Perspectives.” This topic might provide a fruitful means of exploring how one becomes fully included in the ongoing life of the Church. Pentecostals are comfortable with conversion language, though they tend to think of conversion in punctiliar terms, as the critical time or the precise moment in which a person becomes a believing Christian. But they also speak of subsequent encounters with God such as “baptism in the Spirit,” of being continuously filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), and of re-dedicating or re-consecrating their lives to God. While most Catholics do not use the language of “baptism in the Spirit,” they tend to talk about conversion in terms of an ongoing process throughout the Christian life, or in terms of multiple “conversions” (Perspectives on *Koinonia*, 48).

As a result, the concepts of Christian Initiation, Conversion, and Baptism in

¹⁴ Kilian McDonnell and George T. Montague, *Christian Initiation and Baptism in the Holy Spirit: Evidence from the First Eight Centuries* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991, 2nd Revised Edition 1994), 11.

¹⁵ James D. G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit*, Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series, 15 (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson Inc., 1970 / Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1970), 248 pp.

¹⁶ Frederick Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970), 390 pp.

the Spirit all seemed to be promising points of departure for this discussion. Both sides argued that “faith” was critical for any successful conversion to occur. Both argued that religious experience was both legitimate and important in the development of Christian disciples, though the Catholics tended to argue for the inclusion of the idea of “Christian Experience *in Community*.” And together, the teams agreed that what they were interested in pursuing included how they understood the Christian formation of new believers.

To give the subject greater focus, five sub-themes were chosen. One of these sub-themes would be studied each year. They included: (1) Baptism in the Holy Spirit and Christian Initiation, (2) Faith and Christian Initiation, (3) Conversion and Christian Initiation, (4) Christian Experience in Community, and (5) Christian Formation and Discipleship. In each case, those who presented papers were to consider not only the relevant biblical material, but for the first time, both teams agreed that they would also consider relevant material from Patristic sources.

For the next few minutes, I would like to try to give you a feel for the discussion. The report begins with a very brief introduction that tells a bit of the history of the Dialogue. It moves quickly into a short discussion of why the teams have agreed to give special attention not only to the biblical texts, but also to Patristic insights in this round. Clearly, both Pentecostals and Roman Catholics acknowledge the Bible as inspired Word of God, though clearly with some very important differences, but we currently see the Fathers in very different ways. The Roman Catholic Church grants them an authority that Pentecostals do not. And it is here, even

in the introduction that the Dialogue sets the stage for later points of agreement and disagreement. By way of agreement, both teams spoke of a “privileged” role for the Fathers, but the meaning of the term “privileged” differed. Pentecostals granted them a “privileged” role in that they stand much closer chronologically than we do to Christ and the Apostles, and therefore, their insights and practices need to be taken seriously as testimonies of early Christian thought. For the Catholic team the “privileged” position of the Fathers grants their writings a special authority as part of the Tradition of the Church.

Pentecostals and Catholics agree that the Fathers faithfully transmitted the faith as well as their practice from their generation to the next. They were actively involved in the process of enculturation, translating what might be described as a practical biblical faith by developing the conceptual, philosophical and theological frameworks that made sense of that faith in the various cultures to which they brought the Gospel. The teams affirmed the efforts of the Fathers to make disciples, teach the nations, combat what they believed to be “erroneous interpretations of Scripture,” and develop precise theological language that ultimately was approved by the early Councils of the Church. But where Catholics saw a strong degree of direction for these processes being given by God in the decisions made and the words used, Pentecostals acknowledged more human factors at work.

Pentecostals contended that they read the Fathers in the same way that these Fathers read themselves during their own generation and not as later generations of Catholics have come to read them. In their reading, Pentecostals found a deep affinity with the Fathers, in part, because

of the genuine piety and spirituality one finds there. To the extent that the Patristic writings reinforce the teachings of Scripture, or shed light on the interpretation of Scripture, or speak to issues that confront us in our own time, Pentecostals were able to affirm their work. But they also argued that many of the decisions that the Fathers reached were much more pragmatic and contextual than they were normative and universal. Church leaders in the early centuries were no more or less inspired and no more or less pragmatic than they are today. As you can see, we were already in deep water in terms of the issue of authority, a subject which is yet to be addressed by the Dialogue.

Conversion and Christian Initiation: Biblical and Patristic Perspectives

From the beginning, both teams agreed that conversion is “essential to salvation in Christ, and that its ultimate purpose is a life of committed discipleship” [¶25]. The biggest difference between Catholics and Pentecostals on the subject of conversion, however, is whether conversion is an event, the typical Pentecostal position, or whether it is “a series of events or a process,” the normal Catholic position. According to Catholic teaching, conversion must be understood as lying within the context of the process of Christian initiation that includes the “proclamation of the Word, acceptance of the Gospel entailing conversion, profession of faith, Baptism itself, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and admission to Eucharistic communion” [¶26]¹⁷

¹⁷ Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1229. Catholics link the “special outpouring of the Holy Spirit” with the sacrament of Confirmation (catechism of the Catholic Church, #1302.

By way of contrast, Pentecostals understand conversion

to include a reorientation of a person’s pattern of attitudes, beliefs, and practices...(turning away from sin and turning to God), and...incorporation of the individual into a community....

Pentecostals do not generally express such concepts as conversion, its recognition by the church, sanctification, and Baptism in the Holy Spirit...together under the category of Christian Initiation. Most Pentecostals understand conversion to be distinct from Baptism in the Holy Spirit; also, for most Pentecostals a discussion of the beginning of the Christian life does not necessarily include water baptism as the *primary* basis for entry into the Christian life, although like Catholics, baptism is a rite that holds great importance for them. [¶27].

The teams studied the nature of conversion together, working their way through the New Testament and patristic material, but they were also greatly helped by reviewing the current understanding of conversion in the *Lex Orandi*, the current, normative experience of the Church. This was done through an extended discussion of the Roman Catholic “Rite of Christian

Initiation of Adults” [RCIA], a practice that has been retrieved as part of the liturgical renewal mandated by the Second Vatican Council and is in widespread usage in many Catholic congregations. The Pentecostals on the team were very pleased with this discussion and concluded that this rite holds considerable possibility for agreement, not only on the nature of baptism, but also for their understanding of conversion [¶49]. In fact, the Pentecostal team was so much in agreement on the benefits of the RCIA that they strongly encouraged the Catholics to adopt the RCIA “on a much wider scale” [¶52]. They viewed it as a much needed corrective to the weaknesses that they saw in the practice of infant baptism. They believed that it is much more likely for an adult who had submitted to the call to conversion and subsequent teaching in the RCIA [¶52] to remain a faithful Christian than it is for a person baptized as an infant and subjected to some form of child catechesis to do so.

The challenge that the Pentecostal team gave to the Catholics over the RCIA led to further discussion on whether the RCIA might, in fact, provide the necessary corrective to nominal practice among many Roman Catholics, as well as to the notion of a nominal form of cultural Catholicism. The Catholic team responded by linking the notion of conversion and the notion of a Christian or, more specifically, a Catholic culture. The Catholics admitted that “a superficially Catholic culture might include pastoral situations in which individuals with no discernible faith, virtually no connection to the Church, and no commitment to active practice, approach the Church requesting sacraments merely for extrinsic reasons”.

They went on to acknowledge that “the existence of such nominal practice both in previous centuries and the present day,” but they also made it clear that beside this nominal Catholicism there was an “ongoing genuine conversion and vital Catholic life” [¶55].

While the nominal behavior of many baptized and catechized Catholics and a reliance upon cultural Christianity may be more evident among Catholics than it is among Pentecostals, it is clear that the Pentecostal Movement is not immune from such things. As a result, both teams agreed that the Gospel has had a transformative role when it has come into contact with both pagan and secular societies over the centuries to such an extent that at times these societies have “embodied a profoundly Christian worldview.” But they went on to note that

In our current pluralistic, post-Christendom society, both sides continue to strive to establish a Christian culture within the larger society and thus to be instruments in God’s hands for the kingdom [¶55].

Given the long tradition practice of infant baptism, as well as its ongoing commitment to the legitimacy of this practice in the Catholic Church, the Catholic team made it clear that they recognize a clear link between baptism, faith, and conversion whether the subject is an infant or an adult. It went on to explain that the difference in the nature of that link. “In both cases,” they wrote, “there must be growth in faith and conversion, but baptism itself creates an adoptive relationship as a child of God.” The sacramental character of baptism

itself guarantees that even an infant begins to share in the divine life of the faithful. If Pentecostals thought that the RCIA would replace the practice of infant baptism they were mistaken. "Catholics would find it inconceivable to deny this grace to an infant," the Catholic team offered, for

through the priority of grace see a fundamental identity between infant and adult baptism. In both cases Christ is the door, even though the lives of individual Christians follow differing paths and are realized in diverse moments. The *Rite of the Baptism of Infants* also advises pastors to delay baptism in those cases where there is need for evangelization of the parents, and no reasonable expectation that an infant will be brought up in the practice of the faith without such evangelization. Thus, while Catholics view the RCIA as the fullest articulation of the process of initiation, they would not allow that affirmation to discount the importance of infant baptism [¶53].

In light of the RCIA, many contemporary examples of conversion frequently parallel those found in the New Testament. There, individuals embraced the Gospel, sometimes through direct proclamation, at other times through healing or deliverance, as

well as in other forms. Among both Pentecostals and Catholics such testimonies often include

elements of restoration to active participation in the Christian community, to the experience of family and a sense of belonging, regardless of social, gender or ethnic differences (cf. Gal. 3:28). Those who have been marginalized identify with the experience of being called and thus being known by God (cf. Eph. 1:3-14). This transition from alienation to belonging is associated with an awareness of the restoration of one's dignity. Hence, Catholics and Pentecostals tend to understand conversion and initiation, first of all, in terms of the kinds of testimonies reflected in the New Testament rather than in abstract concepts. For both groups conversion experiences are diverse, and all these experiences are something to be narrated or celebrated [¶56].

This discussion of the RCIA within Roman Catholic circles and the challenge that Pentecostals made regarding its wider adoption, even in spite of the longstanding Catholic commitment to the validity of infant baptism led to some rather remarkable conclusions that demonstrate how close

Pentecostals and Catholics are on the subject of conversion.

Catholics and Pentecostals generally agree that conversion involves both event and process, and recognize the need for ongoing formation. Both hold to a diversity of ways in which one is converted. Conversions may express varying characteristics, some more affectively oriented than others, some more cognitive, dramatic or volitional. Both recognize different levels of conversion, and conversion in stages (i.e. second and third conversions in the spiritual life for Catholics, or personal re-dedications for Pentecostals), as examples of the ongoing process. Manifestations of conversions are also recognized in their diversity. One may give evidence of conversion through either word or service, depending upon gifts and calling. Catholics and Pentecostals also recognize diversity in the ways evangelization takes place.

Catholics are evangelized for life-changing conversions in parish missions, through spiritual retreats and

exercises, and through liturgical rites such as renewal of baptismal vows. At the same time, Catholics see the retrieved RCIA as an example of the church's growth in its understanding of initiation, evangelization and mission. They see this as reflecting the pattern of Acts 2:37-39 by including in one rite the process of conversion (the catechumenate), baptism (regeneration), confirmation (the gift of the Holy Spirit) and eucharistic communion (Acts 2:42). Pentecostals, likewise, take the Great Commission (Mt. 28:19-20) seriously by calling people to a personal response to the Gospel, and incorporating them into the life of the community through opportunities for ongoing growth and discipleship. Thus Pentecostals and Catholics share in common a strong commitment to the proclamation of the Gospel, through various forms of witnessing and evangelism, including both missions and personal relationships.

Both Pentecostals and Catholics recognize conversion as the gift of God, although they may

not always agree about what constitutes a valid experience of conversion. They join together in calling for the genuine conversion of people to Jesus Christ [¶¶57-59].

**Faith and Christian Initiation:
Biblical and Patristic Perspectives**

The report on “Evangelization, Proselytism, and Common Witness” had made it clear that many Pentecostals viewed most Catholics as either not being Christian, or being only nominally so. They looked for the ability of Catholics to testify to a life-changing moment of conversion, and many of them had either never been trained to do so or they simply could not do so. Pentecostals also wondered how any person could claim to be a Christian, and then not participate regularly in the ongoing life of the Church. Many of the Catholics they cited seemed to attend their parish only intermittently, perhaps on Easter and Christmas, or for baptisms, weddings, and funerals – if at all. As they spoke together, however, both teams readily agreed “that becoming a Christian is not comprehensible apart from faith” [¶60] As a result, they turned to the study of faith in relationship to “Christian initiation” by looking first at the New Testament, and then again at the Patristic writings.

They found the New Testament to be a rich source of teaching on the subject. They studied Jesus’ call to saving faith in the synoptic Gospels and in John. They reviewed the Pauline epistles, citing faith as a gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9) and the need for confession with the mouth (Romans 10:8-10). What also emerged from this discussion was the

clear connection between faith and baptism, especially in the Book of Acts. When Peter had preached on that first Christian Pentecost, he had summoned his hearers to place their faith in Jesus Christ. When they asked him what they should do, he responded with the words, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38-39).”

Thus, the teams continued to explore, not only the place of faith in the “conversion-initiation” process, but also the place of baptism. Pentecostals argued that in the Acts of the Apostles,

becoming a Christian is described within the context of a Church fervently engaged in the apostolic mission of proclaiming the gospel to those who do not yet know Christ. Such a mission obviously could only be addressed to those old enough to understand the proclamation. [¶71]

While agreeing with this observation, the members of the Catholic team pointed to the so-called “household baptisms” as examples where it was possible, given the core family structure at that time, that infants had been baptized and that the believers had exercised their faith on behalf of the infants until such a time as they were able to exercise their own faith unto salvation. As they continued to strive together on various biblical texts, however, they were able to arrive at a number of shared conclusions. “The

teaching of the New Testament” they concluded,

and the several accounts in Acts of individuals or groups becoming Christians, clearly shows that faith plays a critical and necessary role in Christian initiation. Faith is a gift of God without which one cannot become a Christian. Likewise, faith and baptism are linked. All who would become Christians are called to a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins and a reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). At the same time, Pentecostals and Catholics need to explore further the different perspectives they bring to the precise nature of Christian initiation. [¶77]

The patristic materials seemed to bear out further the connections between faith and baptism. While the patristic witnesses tended to draw upon Scripture, they tended to focus on “those Scripture passages that later came to be interpreted as emphasizing the effectiveness of baptism” (¶91). The catechetical instructions that are found in these materials are filled with such examples (¶91). On the other hand, there were many Christian parents who made the decision in the early Church, not to baptize their children. One example of this was the case of St. Augustine. His mother, Monica, did not have him baptized because she “felt it better that

he receive baptism only after the ‘waves of temptation’, which she foresaw would assail her son in his youth, had passed” [¶129].¹⁸ “Becoming a Christian required a transformation of life, which meant also a serious effort to cooperate with God’s grace in such a way that one truly lived a good and holy life.” These observations resulted from the hope that

In this patristic understanding of the activity of the Holy Spirit as the basis of the saving power of baptism and the eucharist, Pentecostals and Catholics may discover a common resource for greater reflection about how Christ could use the rites which came to be called ‘sacraments’ as means for his powerful salvific action in the lives of people. In particular, the linkage between sacraments and the Spirit could allow both Pentecostals and Catholics to profess together that, through the reception of baptism, a significant action of God occurs in the life of the one who is baptized [¶91].

The Dialogue continued to explore the patristic materials on the timing of baptism in the early church, the development of the catechumenate, and the various stages of becoming a Christian, including the profession of Trinitarian faith and triple immersion

¹⁸ Augustine, *Confessions* I:11.

during baptism followed by the imposition of hands for the imparting of the Holy Spirit and culminating in the celebration of the Eucharist. One important observation was the increasingly clear role that the Christian community played in the preparation and initiation of new members. In the end, however, it was clear that the patristic material, while offering points of contact that Pentecostals and Catholics could both embrace, will not, “on its own, resolve all the differences about the place of faith in the series of events by which a person becomes a Christian” [¶95].

What the discussion has enabled the Dialogue to accomplish, then, is this:

Faith, which is the very heart of discipleship, is God’s gift. The individual must receive this gift and believe in order to become a Christian. At the same time, the faith of the individual is related in various ways to the community of believers. Much of the biblical and patristic evidence can be interpreted as suggesting that God uses the church as an instrument for proclaiming Christ and thereby inviting individuals to faith. Both the New Testament and the patristic writings show the believing community as assisting those who accept this proclamation with an open heart to understand more fully the message, to cooperate with God’s

grace of conversion and to begin to live the new life of Gospel discipleship. In both the New Testament and the Fathers, the believing community not only shares its faith with those becoming Christians but also celebrates with them the rites of baptism, the laying on of hands and the breaking of bread. One does not initiate oneself. Faith in Christ and belonging to the community that he founded and constituted as his Body go together. In that sense, while becoming a Christian clearly includes a personal dimension, there could never be a radically individualized Christianity comprised of believers who isolate themselves from one another. Furthermore, becoming a Christian requires both the ongoing response of the individual believer to the grace of God as well as his or her commitment to join with the whole community in sharing its faith with yet other persons by means of evangelical and missionary outreach. Reflecting upon biblical and patristic perspectives about the relation of faith to becoming a Christian could allow Pentecostals and Catholics to affirm

together that the church is a communion in faith whose nature is essentially missionary, impelling it to foster the profession of faith by each of its members and to invite into this communion of faith others who do not yet know the joy of believing in Jesus Christ. Our dialogue about the relation of faith to becoming a Christian has allowed us to see in new ways the essential nature of the Church as communion (cf. *Perspectives on Koinonia*) and mission (cf. *Evangelization, Proselytism and Common Witness* (§96)).

Christian Formation and Discipleship: Biblical and Patristic Perspectives

As the Dialogue turned its attention to the nature of “Christian Formation and Discipleship” we found much material on which we agreed. Discipleship has at its heart, the following of Jesus. Both Catholics and Pentecostals are concerned with Christian formation and they both have discipleship programs that begin with conversion and continue throughout the Christian life with the purpose of producing mature Christian believers. As you can see, “Discipleship and Christian Formation are related terms and are employed in both of our traditions. They are closely connected with faith, conversion and experience. Together they constitute the foundation of the Christian life....” We viewed *discipleship*, as a category of

relationship explicitly expressed in terms of a

personal relationship with Christ. *Christian formation*, [on the other hand], is intended to convey a dynamic process in the power of the Holy Spirit as it extends to the whole of our existence in Christ and therefore to the transformation of all dimensions of human life. Both take place in a communal context: in the church, both in congregational or parish life, in ecclesial or church-related movements, and in Christian family life [¶97].

Thus, the participants agreed that the process by which they investigated the biblical and patristic material was extremely helpful in coming to a common understanding of these phenomena. More importantly, they affirmed, first from the biblical texts, and then from the patristic texts, the different ways that Christians have demonstrated their discipleship through the centuries. The martyrdom to which many Christians have been subjected through centuries of persecution provides “a witness of faith and love at the cost of their lives. Christ was present to the martyrs in their witness to the point of death both as example and as the very strength of their perseverance. Therefore, they fulfilled in their martyrdom his exhortation to follow him by carrying the cross [¶113].”

An equally important means of following Christ has been through the missionary commitment that many Christians have made throughout the centuries. Our love for Christ nurtures not only a commitment to Him as Lord and Savior, but it also elicits from us the desire and commitment to make His love known to others. It is this that drives us to share the Gospel with others. The report, thus, draws from the experiences of such people as Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr, and Origen, all of whom wrote of the need to engage in missionary activity, whether through word or deed [¶114].

The Dialogue noted a third way of following Christ in the form of the ascetic and monastic life. While this may seem strange to some Pentecostals, it must be noted that many Pentecostals have committed their hearts and lives to things such as intercessory prayer for others, indeed, some have pursued this ministry as a fulltime vocation. Some may criticize the monastic or ascetic life as a flight from reality, or an attempt to manifest a perverted form of Christian perfectionism. Yet at the heart of Christian perfectionism lies the *imitatio Christi*, the imitation of Christ. I would view it, like Professor Roberta Bondi as having to do more with *shalom* – wholeness, and hence, with the fulfillment of discipleship, albeit one that may require a specific vocational charism. Roberta Bondi has noted that, “our wholeness as human beings depends upon living out the Great Commandment is the most fundamental of all early monastic convictions.” “The starting point of a life of prayer,” she continues, “is to know no matter how dimly, that we are created for and called to love: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your

strength, and all your mind, and you neighbor as yourself.’ Love is the final goal of the life of prayer, and loving and learning how to love are the daily work and pleasure of prayer.”¹⁹ Our wholeness comes in a life devoted to such things as solitude, asceticism, denial, contemplation, prayer, and ultimately love. It was, thus, the motivation to follow Christ that ultimately led to the expression of Christian discipleship and Christian formation seen in monasticism [¶115].

A fourth way of discipleship broadens the understanding of the imitation of Christ to include the whole of the human life. Thus, following Christ in daily life has been lifted up as another important means of being a Christian disciple. As the report notes, “In many cases, the prospect of in his footsteps had an eschatological perspective...; one follows him now in order to follow him through death into heavenly glory [¶116].”

The long tradition of the catechumenate also provided many important lessons to the Dialogue. In its survey of the practice of Christian Formation in the catechetical process, they noted that the process has contributed to the doctrinal, biblical, moral, sacramental, and spiritual emphases that many have found to be important in the development of mature Christians [¶¶126-132].

Through the centuries, Christian formation has stressed the suitability and fullness of the contents of the faith according to the rule of faith. “Christian formation consists of an ever deeper knowledge of the Scripture”, moving from the words to the spirit, “a

¹⁹ Roberta C. Bondi, *To Pray and to Love: Conversations on Prayer with the Early Church* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1991), 28

knowledge that is not intellectual in a detached sense, but leading to union with God". "Even with many differences of style and cultural background", catechesis has typically been "aimed at orienting and motivating the choices and enabling the practical behaviour" of Christians in everyday life. It has "sought to move the heart, not only the mind, and to lead to liturgy, to the sacraments, and to service in the ecclesial community and well as in the world." [¶123] In the period of formation immediately following baptism, the aim of which is to give the neophytes "a deeper understanding of the meaning of the celebrated mystery", the spiritual texts of the Fathers have helped Christians to have a better knowledge of God and of His saving deeds. They have also "assisted believers to enter more deeply into communion with him, to penetrate into the spiritual and mystical depth of the faith, to progress in what many Eastern Fathers referred to as "*deification*" in Christ through the Spirit [¶124]." Thus, through the centuries, the catechumenate has recognized the need for a gradual development of Christian formation by which neophytes have been moved into greater levels of Christian maturity, and it has done so in a variety of cultural and historical contexts not unlike our own. "The objectives of the catechumenate during the patristic period, which may still inform the life of the Church of today, may be summarized as follows: maturation of conversion and faith, a radical relationship with Jesus Christ, experience of the Spirit and immersion in the mystery of salvation, a closer bond with the Church and community experience, and responsible acceptance of Christian commitments and mission" [¶132].

Christian Experience in Community: Biblical and Patristic Perspectives

It is difficult for Pentecostals to talk about conversion apart from some discussion of their expectation that conversion is related to Christian experience. Similarly, the experience of the presence and power of the Spirit is an important part of their spirituality. For Catholics, the notion of experience is part of the larger tradition of contemplation, mystical experience, and active spiritualities. As a result, the Dialogue spent an entire year, and I might add, a very difficult year working on the nature of Christian experience. Their study led to an acknowledgment that there are

at least two dimensions of religious experience of encountering the Lord. One focuses on more explicitly religious affections (the manner in which one experiences the movement of the Spirit in one's desires, feelings, and heart). The other concerns the religious dimension of all experience, including various levels of human experience, joys and tragedies and even mundane affairs of daily life. Both of these dimensions may take the form either of event or process [¶139].

While I do not wish to dwell long on the subject of experience, I would like to summarize a few of the points where the Dialogue has made some progress in its

understanding of this subject. It is interesting to note, for instance, that both teams agreed that an authentic experience of God comes about “when the grace of the Holy Spirit touches the heart and mind, feelings and will of the individual in such a way that a person consciously encounters the Lord [¶140].” As a result, the teams concluded that when human beings receive God’s grace, they respond in faith, they are converted, and begin the process of discipleship. The faith that both traditions understand this response to have includes an “experiential dimension,” although “faith is not limited to experience [¶141].” As Kilian McDonnell has written, “Faith gives birth to experience; faith norms experience. But experience gives another dimension of actuality and firmness to faith. Experience is another way of knowing. What is given to experience is not taken away from faith, because experience exists only in faith.”²⁰

The Dialogue went on to make similar observations about the relationship between experience and conversion and between experience and discipleship. For example, when conversion is understood as the point at which changes take place in an individual and he or she turns away from sin and toward God, it “has a strong experiential quality [¶141]” It may be viewed either as an event or as a process, but in either case it still retains the quality of experience. Similarly, discipleship includes the daily process of experiencing Christ in one’s service to God and his or her neighbour, as well as the more eventful moments of Christ’s presence and power [¶141].

²⁰ Kilian McDonnell, OSB, “Spirit and Experience in Bernard of Clairvaux,” *Theological Studies* 58 (1997), 16.

If both teams were drawn together in their discussion of Discipleship and of Christian Formation, the role that experience drove them apart. You will note that rather than coming to terms together over the role of experience in becoming a Christian, the teams essentially wrote separate reports (Pentecostals ¶¶ 153-157 and Catholics ¶¶ 139-163). The same was true in our treatment of experience with respect to Christian Life in Community (Pentecostals ¶¶ 164-174 and Catholics ¶¶ 175-183). There were a number of places where had we stuck to the task we might have been able to reduce greatly the length of the separate reports. A careful reading of the Pentecostal paragraphs 165-167 compared to the Catholic paragraphs 177-179 should be sufficient to demonstrate what I mean. When Pentecostals say, for instance, that a transformation comes

when an individual approaches God as a result of the wooing or striving of the Holy Spirit described well in the gospel hymn, “Just as I Am without One Plea.” God takes people just as they are, in all their humanity and sinfulness, with all of their strengths and all of their weaknesses and begins to develop them step by step into the people they have been called to become [¶165]

and Catholics say,

The principle of grace perfecting nature is very

important in Catholic understanding. God takes us where we are with our own temperaments and talents and perfects them at a supernatural level by both healing the effects of sin in one's life and elevating one to participate in the divine life such that Christian virtue exceeds what is possible at the natural level alone – for example, not only to love one's friends but one's enemies as well [¶177],

are they not saying the same thing?

And when the Pentecostal team notes that

Pentecostals speak openly about the role that experience plays within their lives as Christians. They frequently speak of sensing the presence of the Lord, and of experiencing both personal and corporate encounters with God. They do not take these experiences lightly, but recognize the gracious character of all manifestations of the Divine – human encounter. At times these experiences may lead them to periods of profound reverence, or reflective silence, times when a “holy hush” might descend upon them as

God comes into their midst [¶166],

while the Catholic team claims that the

The rich experiential tone of the Christian life has always been evident in the spiritual traditions of the church. Experiences of spiritual consolation such as an awareness of God's presence that increases faith, hope and love are interpreted not as the assurance of salvation but as evidence that God is at work in one's life [¶178],

do they not have in mind the same thing?

While the Dialogue was ultimately able to reach certain convergences regarding the place of experience in the Christian life [¶¶ 184-191, I look at our inability to come to terms with one another at such points as constituting a personal failure in this round of discussions. The hard work of speaking with one voice instead of with two was simply not done, in part, because of the pain that was experienced by members of both teams in the original discussion of “experience”.

It was the fact that the Dialogue was devoted in this round to some discussion of Baptism in the Holy Spirit that first led the teams to see the need for some discussion of experience. Baptism in the Spirit, at least within Pentecostal thought, is the powerful experience of the Holy Spirit, a “Divine in-breaking” into the daily Christian life that gave rise to the classical Pentecostal churches that participate in this dialogue. From their perspective, it also gave rise to the larger Charismatic Renewal that has graced

Protestant, Orthodox, and especially Roman Catholic Christians throughout the world. As a result, the teams evaluated the place of experience in becoming a Christian, as well as the nature of experience in the developing Christian life, both within the individual and as part of the larger community life of the Church.

Baptism in the Holy Spirit and Christian Initiation

With this backdrop, the report moved on to the knotty problem of “Baptism in the Holy Spirit and Christian Initiation”. The study begins by providing a rationale for the discussion by pointing to the parallels between Pentecostal and Charismatic understandings of the subject. It moves on to explain that during the initial round of the Dialogue, the subject of “Baptism in the Spirit” was mentioned, but it was not the subject of definitive definition or extensive discussion.²¹ The current report summarizes what it can from the initial report and moves rapidly to a discussion of contemporary understandings in both Pentecostal and Roman Catholic arenas.

The report then moved to an analysis of the biblical material, surveying both Old Testament predictions of the Spirit being poured out upon God’s people (Ezekiel 36:26-27 and Joel 2:28-29) and various passages drawn from the Gospels and Acts. In light of Fr. McDonnell’s book, the report provides a brief survey of some of the Patristic discussion that the teams believed to be relevant. At the conclusion of these two surveys the question is asked whether these Patristic sources actually witness to what is called the “Baptism in the Holy Spirit,” or to something else, since the

phrase, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” is not to be found in these writers.

Pentecostals, of course, have long argued for the importance of “baptism in the Holy Spirit,” though with the exception of Oneness Pentecostals,²² they generally do not connect it closely to what we have labeled “Christian Initiation,” the act or process of “becoming a Christian.”²³ Kilian McDonnell argued that “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” is part of the “Conversion – Initiation” process that involves catechesis, baptism, the laying on of hands by the Bishop, and the bestowing of the Holy Spirit. It may or may not have “charismatic” dimensions. As a result, it must be understood as constitutive of the Christian life for the

²² Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. and Jerry L. Sandidge, “The Ecclesiology of *Koinonia* and Baptism: A Pentecostal Perspective,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 27:3 (summer, 1990), 504-534.

²³ The “accidence” of history takes into consideration the fact that most early Pentecostals did not come to faith through the Pentecostal Movement. Most of them were already Christians, having come from the rolls of the Wesleyan-Holiness Movement. This means that they came into early Pentecostalism with two claims already in place. They had confessed Jesus Christ to be their Lord and Savior and been baptized in water, and they claimed to have received a second work of grace that they identified as “sanctification.” When they became Pentecostals, they began with the historical reality that was their experiences of conversion-initiation and sanctification, to which they added their claims to an experience of power on the sanctified life. When they read the Bible in light of their experience, they pointed to the fact that the twelve had been followers of Jesus long before they received the “Promise of the Father” of Acts 1:8 and 2:4, and most of them argued that these disciples had also already been sanctified. Thus their discussion of the doctrine of “Baptism in the Spirit” was neatly separated from that of conversion in their minds, because it was neatly separated from that of conversion in their experience.

²¹ Final Report (1972-1976), §§11-15

whole Church. If this be true, he argued, then the Catholic Church must take seriously the Pentecostal claim that “Baptism in the Spirit” is important for all Christians, and the Catholic Church must find ways of bringing renewed attention to this reality for its people.

The German New Testament Scholar, Fr. Norbert Baumert, S.J. disagrees with McDonnell on this point. As a practicing member of the Charismatic Renewal and Baumert was a member of the Roman Catholic team that worked on “Evangelization, Proselytism, and Common Witness.” Unlike McDonnell, Baumert has argued that baptism in the Holy Spirit is a “charismatic experience of the Holy Spirit, i.e. something that the Spirit imparts to some or to many as he wills, and that is both in the kind of infilling with the Spirit and in the respective charisms.”²⁴ It is, therefore, *not constitutive* of the Christian life for the whole Church, but rather, it is granted only to those on whom God chooses to bestow it. In a sense, when placed alongside Pentecostal claims, this debate, internal to Roman Catholic circles is a rich one.

The internal Pentecostal discussion is equally rich. On the whole, Pentecostals tend to view the “Baptism in the Holy

Spirit” as a sovereign action of God that generally comes upon those who wait before God sometime *subsequent* to their conversion. For the most part, they do not view it as a sacramental act, nor as a part of any sacramental act. Some early Pentecostals such as William J. Seymour, pastor of the Azusa Street Mission in Los Angeles, believed and taught a sequential time difference between the moments of conversion, sanctification, and baptism in the Spirit.²⁵ Others, such as William H. Durham, Pastor of the North Avenue Mission in Chicago, believed that a Christian’s sanctification came at the time of conversion. When one is placed “in Christ,” he or she receives all that Christ has to offer by way of salvation and sanctification.²⁶ Both Seymour and Durham agreed, however, that baptism in the Spirit always follows conversion. This basic understanding has been codified in most statements of faith adopted by Pentecostal churches worldwide.²⁷

By placing the subject of “baptism in the Spirit” at the beginning of the nine year discussion, some Pentecostals were concerned that the notion of subsequence would be compromised from the outset. But, it must be asked, what pastor would complain if someone received all three things at one time? They would not.

²⁴ For a recent summary of Baumert’s position see, Norbert Baumert, “‘Charism’ and ‘Spirit Baptism’: Presentation of an Analysis,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 12:2 (2004), 147-179. Baumert covers this position more fully in Norbert Baumert, *Endzeitfieber? Hutige Prophetien und biblische Texte im ökumenischen Dialog*, CE-Praxishilfen Series Band 3 (Munsterschwarzach, Germany: Vier-Turme Verlag, 1997), 174 pp.; and in Norbert Baumert, *Charisma – Taufe – Geisttaufe: Entflechtung einer semantischen Verwirrung* (Würzburg, Germany: Echter, 2001) Band 1, 399 pp and *Charisma – Taufe – Geisttaufe: Normativität und persönliche Berufung* (Würzburg, Germany: Echter, 2001) Band 2, 399 pp.

²⁵ “The Apostolic Faith Movement,” *The Apostolic Faith* [Los Angeles] 1:1 (September 1906), 2.1; “Questions Answered,” *The Apostolic Faith* [Los Angeles, CA] 1.11 (October-January 1908), 2.2.

²⁶ William H. Durham, “The Finished Work of Calvary,” *Pentecostal Testimony* 2:1 (c. December 1911), 1.

²⁷ See for example, *Minutes of the Twenty-Ninth General Council of the Assemblies of God Convened at Portland, Oregon August 23-29, 1961* (Springfield, MO: Office of the General Secretary, 1961), 22.

They would rejoice! Given this fact, the notion of “subsequence” either becomes moot or it becomes the focus of casuistic explanation. Those committed to the notion of “subsequence” will argue that at least a millisecond must have elapsed between each corresponding event. The rest will argue that if a person receives more than one of these experiences at the same time, the notion of “subsequence” has lost its usefulness. The introduction of such things as “milliseconds” amounts to special pleading. The fact that conversion, sanctification, and baptism in the Spirit might occur in a single moment at the beginning of the Christian life, makes it possible for Pentecostals to entertain them as part of what constitutes “conversion-initiation.” This becomes, therefore, a very

interesting place for further mutual exploration.

Concluding Remarks

I know that this has been a great deal of information to absorb in such a short time, but I hope that it gives you a bit of insight into the status of the International Roman Catholic-Pentecostal discussion. I am optimistic that we have been laying a strong foundation on which another generation of ecumenists will be able to build. We continue to covet your prayers in this process, and I look forward to the day when we will be able to view one another through very different eyes as a result of our work together.

This public lecture was given by prof. dr. Cecil Mel Robeck on November 30th, 2007 in the Free University in Amsterdam in The Netherlands, during the conference *Hoe word je christen?* (Becoming a Christian), organised by the extraordinary chair Theology of the Charismatic Renewal and the extraordinary chair Pentecostalism.

Responses were in Dutch and are published on www.stucom.nl: Prof. dr. Patrick Lens o.p.: 0206, Dr. B. Plaisier: 0208, Drs. Huib Zegwaart: 0207.

The report **ON BECOMING A CHRISTIAN: INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE AND THE PATRISTIC WRITINGS** With Some Contemporary Reflections. Report of the Fifth Phase of the International Dialogue Between Some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders and the Catholic Church (1998-2006) is nr. 0203uk on www.stucom.nl

The report **PERSPECTIVES ON KOINONIA** 1985-1989, is 0192uk on www.stucom.nl [Dutch translations: *Parakleet* 11/39 (Fall 1991) and *Kerkelijke Documentatie* 19/9 (1991).] An overview of international Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue reports: www.stucom.nl 0010

On the **Global Christian Forum**, mentioned by Cecil M. Robeck in his lecture (*and also mentioned in par.20 of the dialogue report*): see 0201uk en 0202uk on www.stucom.nl.

It was recommended by Cecil M. Robeck to study ON BECOMING A CHRISTIAN together with the previous report: **EVANGELIZATION, PROSELYTISM AND COMMON WITNESS**, The Report from the Fourth Phase of the International Dialogue 1990 - 1997 Between the Roman Catholic Church and some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders, 0002uk on www.stucom.nl (and a selection of crucial quotes on 0004uk).

This is document 0205uk on www.stucom.nl. (Dutch translation: 0205)