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*Creative Imagination and
Ecumenism*

*in Light of Global Demographic
Changes*

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Introduction

I have often wondered what Jesus meant, when in Matthew 18:2-4, He set a child in the midst of His disciples and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:2-4 NRSV).

“Unless you change and become like children...” What does that mean?

The context that led to this teaching is quite familiar to all of us. The disciples wanted to hear from Jesus, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Like most adults, the disciples were concerned about getting ahead, about making a name for themselves, about climbing the social or political ladder of success. In Mark 10:44-45, James and John tried to grab the top spots, and the text tells us that the rest of the disciples became indignant over the move. Jesus told them that while the world might engage in such activities, He expected His disciples to live according to a different standard. “Serve! Don’t Lord it over the others,” he told them. In Matthew 20:20-23, we find the mother of James and John, interceding with Jesus that the top honors in His kingdom go to her sons. I don’t think this was some abstract, theoretical question. It was personal. It was about prestige, position, and power.

In this pericope, Jesus' response was to set an unnamed child in the middle of the group. The child clearly trusted Jesus and was not intimidated by Him. She was completely dependent upon Jesus, and by doing what He asked of her, she modeled the kind of behavior he expected from His disciples. Jesus then turned to His disciples and offered them a simple exhortation. "You need to change! You need to become like this child!"

Children tend not to think in terms of greatness. They are not self-sufficient like adults, who can learn the secrets of success, practice their moves, and climb over others to get what they want. Children live at a much more basic level. They are largely dependent upon others to meet their daily needs. They lack not only physical maturity but also the mental and psychological maturity to make such moves. They possess no rank. They hold no title. They are not very effective in putting on airs. Unlike adults, they can do little to intimidate others. They don't know what posturing is. They possess an innocence and naiveté that is lost on most adults. Perhaps that is why they are so trusting. That naiveté also allows them to be imaginative. Unlike adults, nothing is impossible in the mind of a child.

Children are at home with imagination. They invent imaginary friends. They engage in imaginary activities. They speak imaginary languages. They occupy and explore imaginary worlds with castles, and dragons, and superheroes. In fact there is nothing – there is NOTHING – they cannot do within their imaginations. They can fly. They can "leap tall buildings with a single bound!" They can breathe under water. They can walk through walls. They can become kings and queens, even in countries where such positions do not exist. They have no problem holding conversations with animals. They can slay dragons. If they can imagine it, they can do it.

Now set beside that picture the actions of most adults. While children are content to play in those imaginary worlds of their creation, rare is the adult who embraces imagination. Adults do everything in their power to force children out of their imaginary worlds and into our “real” world. There is an inevitable tug-of-war as children try to get us to join in their imaginary world while we persist in putting limits on their imaginations, getting them to join our world. But Jesus says to us, “If you want to be great in the Kingdom of heaven, you need to change!” “Become like children!” While we need to remember all of these childlike traits and more, I want to focus briefly on the need for childlike imagination as we face our current ecumenical challenges.

When was the last time that you laid back on the grass on a warm and breezy summer afternoon, looked up at the clouds, and turned your imagination loose on what you saw there? When was the last time you looked up at the stars in the sky, and imagined the pictures or shapes that the ancients saw in the constellations? When was the last time you settled down, took a deep breath, and allowed your mind simply to wander, to imagine a different reality? If you are like most adults, you may not even be able to remember the last time that you engaged your imagination in such a way. But imagination is important; it opens up new possibilities.

Return with me for just a moment to the afternoon of August 18, 1963. As he stood in front of the Lincoln Memorial, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. captured our imaginations through the repetition of four carefully chosen words. “I have a dream.” With the innocence of a child, but also with the wisdom of a sage, Dr. King drew us into his imaginary world. “I have a dream,” he teased, and with the rhythm of these four words repeated over and over again, he beckoned us to enter that dream. He stirred us with the echo of his articulation, and then he invited all of us to join him in his imaginary world, into his dream – you and me. He invited us to participate with him in that imaginary world by calling us to “Let freedom ring!”

His tools were nothing more than simple words. But he wove those words into powerful images, potent symbols of *what could be*. We were captivated by the descriptions that emerged, and we were tempted to imagine them as our own. “I have a dream,” he offered, that “my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” “I have a dream that...one day little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.”¹ “I have a dream,” he offered. Notice the role that children played in his dream. Like Jesus, Dr. King set them in *our* midst – his own four children, and an unnamed and unnumbered group of little black boys and black girls and little white boys and white girls holding hands and recognizing one another as brothers and sisters.

What takes place in this imaginary world of children is important to Dr. King, just as it is to Jesus. It is a world marked by humility, mutual dependence, generosity, love, and forgiveness toward one another, traits that come much more easily to children than to adults, who constantly search for underlying motives and personal advantages. While Dr. King’s speech did not put an immediate end to racial injustice in this country, it did point us to a series of achievable goals. After 50 years, these same powerful images still have the ability to compel us forward, challenging us to new levels of commitment to one another.

Without imagination, such dreams do not exist. Without dreams, there are no goals. Without goals, there are no accomplishments. Without imagination, Henry Ford would never have built his Model T, and *we might still be riding horses or walking* to meetings such as this. Without imagination, Thomas Edison would never have invented the electric light bulb and *tonight we might be burning candles or trimming lanterns*. Without imagination, Alexander Graham Bell

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., “I Have a Dream,” in James Melvin Washington, Ed., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1986), 219.

would never have invented the telephone and *we might still be hearing news, weeks or even months after it happens*. We need imagination – creative imagination.

Creative Imagination and the Birth of the Modern Ecumenical Movement

The World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh, Scotland in 1910, came at what might be described as the highpoint of the Protestant liberal theological tradition with all of its optimism and its imagination. The conference organizers had debated whether the conference should be billed as an ecumenical conference, or whether it should be billed as a missionary conference. While the latter theme prevailed, conference organizers did include an ecumenical component in the conference. They established a sophisticated course of study and interaction and a number of “Commissions” to which they assigned specific tasks as they worked toward the Conference. Commission VIII was asked to look at the ecumenical situation under the title “Cooperation and the Promotion of Unity”.² It has been noted more than once that Commission VIII of the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh gave impetus to the ecumenical quest that ultimately led to the founding of the World Council of Churches in 1948.³

Commission VIII collected information on the status of conversations and projects from a variety of denominations, missionary sending agencies, conferences and associations, missionary established churches, and missionaries, which fostered visible unity. In the end, the most notable contribution of Commission VIII may have been its resolution to establish a multi-national and multi-denominational Continuation Committee of the World Missionary Conference with power

² Report of Commission VIII: *Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity* with Supplement: Presentation and Discussion of the Report in the Conference on 21st June 1910 (Edinburgh, Scotland: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier / New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1910), 243 pp.

³ Kenneth Scott Latourette, “Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Conference,” in Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, Eds. *A History of the Ecumenical Movement: 1517-1948* 2 Vols; Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1953, 1967, 1986), I:353-362; C. Howard Hopkins, *John R. Mott: 1865-1955: A Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 342-382, 684-696..

to follow up on unresolved issues.⁴ Thus, it is easy to see why Lesslie Newbigin would observe that

It was among missionaries that the denominational barriers were first overleaped, and it was the great world missionary conference of 1910 that created the modern movement for Christian unity. The unity of Christ's people, for which He prays, is a unity "that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou lovest me." It is a unity for the sake of the world, the world which God made and loves and for which He sent His Son.⁵

If we look carefully at the 1910 World Missionary Conference, however, we see some obvious omissions. It was almost entirely a European and North American Protestant and Anglican conference. While Western missionaries working in Asia and Africa were invited, those working in Latin America and Russia where the two ancient churches, Catholic and Orthodox dominated were not given a place on the Conference agenda.⁶ The ambivalence over whether or to what extent Catholics and the Orthodox were even Christians in the minds of many Protestants at that time, and the arguments presented by others, especially the Anglicans that they were Christians, meant that Catholics and the Orthodox became neither conversation partners nor were they allowed to be subjects of much discussion at the Conference. The consequences of the 11th century East/West Orthodox/Catholic schism and especially of the 16th century European rupture between Protestant/Anglican and Catholic churches, served as a formidable boundary for the Conference.

As imaginative as the 1910 World Missionary Conference might have been, it was unwilling to take on the theological challenges posed by the existence of the ancient churches (Catholic

⁴ For a useful summary of the week and the debate surrounding this resolution see W. H. T. Gairdner, *"Edinburgh 1910": An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, 1910), 178.

⁵ Lesslie Newbigin, *Is Christ Divided? A Plea for Christian Unity in a Revolutionary Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1961), 22.

⁶ It had been agreed beforehand that missions to and among Roman Catholics would be excluded because the focus of the conference was to be on missions to "non-Christians" and "non-Christian countries." See, Latourette, "Ecumenical Bearings of the Missionary Movement and the International Missionary Conference," in Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, Eds. *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, I:396.

and Orthodox) or posed by their Reformation counterparts (Lutheran, Reformed, Anabaptist, and Anglican). While Conference participants were quite aware that major changes were coming to the world, the 1910 Conference came too early for them to understand the full ramifications that would emerge with the First and Second World Wars, with the mid-century end of historic colonialism, or with the emergence of globalization toward the end of the 20th century. It was also too early for them to take seriously the next great ecclesial challenges – the emergence of what would become the worldwide Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, the rise of the African Independent Churches to say nothing of the thousands of independent congregations we find everywhere in the world today (North and South America, Asia, Africa, Australia and the Pacific, and even Europe), the enormous growth of the Church outside of Europe and North America, the challenges of mass migration, and the resurgence of Islam. While several small congregations, that would ultimately identify with the Pentecostal Movement had emerged in different parts of the world shortly before and after the beginning of the 20th century, Pentecostals commissioned their first missionaries only in the summer of 1906, just four years before the great World Missionary Council convened in Edinburgh. As a result, I have noted elsewhere that

Edinburgh proved...to be a moment marked by the finitude of human imagination. Those who convened it did not envision the Church in 2010 as looking anything like it does today. They assumed, perhaps rather naively, that they held all the seeds of the answer to Jesus' prayer in their hands.⁷

I suspect that all imagination is naïve. No manifestations of imagination have all the facts. Maybe that is what makes it so refreshing. Facts pose limitations. Dr. King pointed us toward a future, yet he did not paint the entire future. He did not spell out the legislation that would be

⁷ Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "Cooperation and the Promotion of Unity: A Pentecostal Perspective," David A. Kerr and Kenneth Ross, Eds., *Edinburgh 2010: Mission Then and Now* (Oxford, England: Regnum Press/Pasadena, CA: William Carey/Bangalore, India: SATHRI, 2009), 298.

needed, list the judicial renderings that would be necessary, or name all the changes that would have to take place in the hearts of individuals in order to bring about a world that conformed to his dream. Dr. King did, however, give us the broad strokes of his imagined world. It was a rough sketch of where we should go. He gave strong hints as to what some of its tools would need to be – such things as freedom, love, humility, and so forth. Undoubtedly, he hoped that it would be fulfilled sooner rather than later, but change was necessary and change would prove to be both painful and time consuming. Often we make change more painful and time consuming than it needs to be.

If I can draw a parallel between the form that Dr. King's vision took, and the form of Christian unity imagined by participants in the 1910 World Missionary Conference, it can be said that like King, the Conference pointed the participating churches in a general direction for the future. Change might be difficult and painful. Change would certainly take time. The Conference did not provide all the answers. But it did give hints about directions that the churches might go. Change was coming and the Church around the world needed to think more seriously than it had, about the nature and substance of its unity.

It would be wrong to suggest that the vision for the unity of the Church was present only among the Protestants and Anglicans who met at Edinburgh in 1910, or only among the churches that they represented. While the Orthodox were not officially present in Edinburgh, they were certainly watching. The First World War put an end to almost all interchurch cooperation, especially in Europe, until 1918. In January 1920, the Ecumenical Patriarchate issued a very engaging and promising encyclical titled, "Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere". It opened with the Petrine version of the New Commandment, "Love one another earnestly from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22) and it proceeded to note that the doctrine of the Orthodox churches did not

preclude rapprochement between the Orthodox Church and other Christians. Furthermore, it made clear that the Orthodox were interested in pursuing such rapprochement. It made the case for the healing of divisions and suggested some possible ways forward, including the formation of a “league (fellowship) between the churches.” It concluded by inviting the other churches to respond to the Patriarchate regarding what they thought of the proposal.⁸

This proposal that the Orthodox extended in 1920 was very imaginative especially since it came from one of the two churches consciously excluded from the 1910 Conference. It went well beyond the stated vision of the 1910 World Missionary Conference. It reached back in time and invited discussion that went beyond either the Protestant Reformation of the 16th Century or the East-West schism of the 11th century. Like the speech given by Dr. King, it was an honest document. It did not sugar coat the past or smooth over the present. It acknowledged the failures and the sins of Christians, and it painted *a future that could be had* if the churches would join in a fellowship such as the Patriarchate imagined at that time.

It anguished over the lack of respect given by supposedly Christian people, “Christian nations”, to such basic virtues as justice and charity during the First World War. It lamented the growing decline since the war, in the moral state of modern culture that was indicated even then by the increase in alcoholism, rampant materialism, the rise in sexual promiscuity and pornography especially pandered by “the arts”, the unbridled pursuit of wealth, and the contempt being demonstrated toward the “higher ideals”. Instead of the Church leading the way in demonstrating love, it noted, it was secular political leaders who were living out the New Commandment by establishing their League of Nations. As a result, the encyclical called the churches to take their rightful place in the present world, beginning with the establishment of a

⁸ Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, Eds. *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications / Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 12-14.

“league” of churches.⁹ It painted a picture of some of the problems that could be addressed, among them a uniform calendar shared by the whole Church, the development of closer personal relationships, the exchange of letters on certain feast days, cooperative ventures in theological education, the questions of mixed marriage, historical memory and doctrinal difference to name a few, and it pointed to a future that could be had if the churches would only join in the fellowship that the Patriarchate imagined at that time.

This encyclical did not fall on deaf ears. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s Protestant and Anglican leaders, especially in Europe, agreed with the suggestion and slow but steady progress was made, especially among those who were working in the Faith and Order Movement stemming from the 1910 Missionary Conference and those working in the Life and Work Movement. In 1938, a group of 48 church leaders from around the world formed a Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches. Shortly thereafter, they obtained property in Geneva, built bridges between church leaders, and looked forward to the day when the Council would hold its first Assembly. The rise of Hitler and the outbreak of hostilities in Europe once again made it impossible for the Committee to meet regularly during the war years, but immediately following the war, they returned to work.¹⁰ When in 1948 the World Council of Churches formally came into being with its first Assembly, many of the Orthodox churches joined the Council as founding members. By 1961, virtually all Orthodox churches, including those in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union had also joined the World Council of Churches.

Discussions were also beginning to emerge, sometimes painfully, within the Catholic Church during this same period. It does not appear that anyone was really prepared for what happened in

⁹ Kinnamon and Cope, Eds. *The Ecumenical Movement*, 13.

¹⁰ Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill, Eds. *A History of the Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948* (London: SPCK, 1953, 2nd Edition, 1967), 703-719.

in 1958. With the passing of Pope Pius XII, Cardinal Angelo Roncalli was unpredictably elected Pope John XXIII. While he was expected to be little more than a short term place-holder by many, he shocked the Roman Catholic world when in September 1959 he prayed for a “new Pentecost,” symbolically opening the windows of the Vatican, and calling forth the fresh wind of the Holy Spirit to move in its midst.¹¹ The Second Vatican Council would soon follow, in 1962, though not without its own set of difficulties. It would run through 1965, complete with its call for changes in the way that things were done in the Catholic Church, not the least of which was a new ecumenical openness.¹² In a sense, by the end of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, most of the modern ecumenical partners were in place. The work could now, really move forward.

Imagining the Church through a Longer Lens

All of us have come to faith and been reared during a period in which denominationalism has been the normative expression of the Christian faith. We have forgotten that for a thousand years there was essentially only one Church, and for another 500 years, only eastern and western manifestations of that Church. Catholics and the Orthodox may think of themselves as “Church” and others as “ecclesial communities” or even as “sects”. Others may think of themselves as “Church” regardless of what Catholics or the Orthodox think of them. We are not all in agreement on how that term is to be used. For the remainder of this address, I will use the term “Church” to represent the whole People of God, regardless of denomination, who are in some

¹¹ Pope John XXIII, *Journal of a Soul*, translated by Dorothy White (New York, NY: McGraw – Hill Book Company, 1964), 391.

¹² Having set forth their understanding of the Church in *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen gentium)*, the Bishops went on to declare that ‘The restoration of unity among all Christians is one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council...The sacred Council...now, moved by a desire for the restoration of unity among all the followers of Christ, it wishes to set before all Catholics guidelines, helps and methods, by which they too can respond to the grace of this divine call.’ *The Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis redintegratio)*, 1, Austin Flannery, O.P., Ed, The Vatican Collection, *Vatican Council II* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1975, 1986, 1992, revised 1996), 2:452-53.

way or another bound by the Holy Spirit to one another through Christ, in a spiritual unity. My sense is that all ecumenism must begin with spiritual ecumenism and much else has to do with the ways that we may choose to relate to one another that transcend or make visible that spiritual unity which already exists. I am also going to assume that whether we like it or not, all of our “churches” regardless of what we call them, function as denominations.

Denominationalism really came with the Reformation. Here in the United States we seem to have specialized in forming new denominations and our missionaries have served as denominational advocates around the world. The strong emphases upon independence and individualism, the challenges that immigration brought to us from our beginning, challenges based upon different languages and cultures and practices, as well as the various theological traditions present throughout Europe as these immigrants came to American soil, gave birth to hundreds of denominations, large and small. And now, we consider our separate existence to be normal. But it is not. As Lesslie Newbigen noted a half century ago,

The disunity of the Church is a denial of the promise and a contradiction of the purpose for which the Church is sent into the world. How can the church give to the world the message that Jesus is able to draw all men to Himself, while it continues to say, “Nevertheless, Jesus is not able to draw us who bear His name together”? How will the world believe a message which we do not appear to believe ourselves? The divisions of the Church are a public denial of the sufficiency of the atonement.¹³

In the spring of 2007, Fuller Theological Seminary interviewed an intriguing potential faculty member. Sadly, he chose to take a position elsewhere. At one point in the conversation, a faculty member asked him what he saw when he looked to the future of the Church. He surprised everyone when he made the sweeping suggestion that in 300 years, (Who thinks of the Church 300 years into the future?) there would likely be only two major religions left in the world. They would be Christianity and Islam. I think he surprised everyone with his long term

¹³ Lesslie, Newbigen, *Is Christ Divided?*, 9.

speculation. And yet, what he said makes sense, since both Christianity and Islam are both growing at an extraordinary pace in Asia and Africa, and one need only to look at Europe or even to North America to see the inroads that Islam has made on both continents in recent years. For many Western Europeans and North Americans, his prediction that Christianity would be the one of two major religions remaining in 300 years may have been somewhat surprising given current trends that show people leaving the Church in large numbers in North America and Western Europe. Once one sets foot outside North America and Western Europe, however, the picture changes dramatically as one is confronted by what can only be described as the explosive growth of the Church. But the other foot had not yet fallen. This candidate went on to say that he believed that the only denomination or church left on the planet would be the Catholic Church!

My initial response was to wonder, “How can this be?” Such a thought clearly fell outside the limits of *my* imagination. But as I have thought about his scenario further, I have come to believe that he may be more right than wrong, that his imagined world might just be the direction that we will move. I would like you to think about this with me for our remaining time. In light of the apparent thawing of relationships between Rome, Constantinople, and even Moscow in recent years, that is, between the Catholic and Orthodox churches, I could imagine that within the next 300 years the Catholic and Orthodox churches, East and West, could conceivably settle their longstanding differences.¹⁴ Yes, there are issues relating to the papacy, to infallibility, to the use of power, to claims of authority, to questions of honor and collegiality, and to differences

¹⁴ One need only look at the reports of the various international and national dialogues that have gone on between the Catholic Church and Orthodox Church, both Eastern and Oriental, to see a pattern of rapprochement as it has developed in recent years. Most of these reports may be found in the various volumes of *Growth in Agreement* published collaboratively by the World Council of Churches and Eerdmans. Cf. Ronald G. Roberson, CSP, “The Joint Theological Commission for Theological Dialogue between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church,” and Ronald G. Roberson, “Oriental Orthodox-Catholic International Dialogue,” in John A. Radano, Ed. *Celebrating a Century of Ecumenism: Exploring the Achievements of International Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 249-263 and 304-313.

in dogma that will need a great deal of hard work before such a thing could transpire, but who in 1910 would have imagined that the Orthodox and Catholic Churches would have come as far as they had by 2013? May I suggest rather naively that if the invitation to discuss the nature of the papacy that His Holiness John Paul II set forth in *Ut Unum Sint*, especially in ¶ 96 is still a possibility and if the Orthodox and other Church leaders are willing to engage in what he called a “patient and fraternal dialogue on the subject” we might all be surprised at what the Spirit of God might accomplish and how fast the Holy Spirit might accomplish it.¹⁵ When a restored relationship might happen and how that might look is not yet clear, but what is clear is a slowly blooming rapprochement between these two “denominations” that could conceivably lead to a reuniting of these great and ancient bodies into one within the next 300 years. While you may judge my imagination as naïve, I do believe the words spoken by Jesus that “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26).

The imagined world of one “denomination” (I recognize that this choice of words is difficult, but I am thinking here in terms of function, not ontology) representing the Christian faith in the world of 2313 raises some other significant questions for us, however. If a re-united Catholic-Orthodox Church were to rise from the ashes of the Church’s schismatic but historic past to represent all Christians, it would also require the end of the second great series of schisms brought about with the separation from the Catholic Church by Anglican and Protestant churches stemming from the period of the Reformation. Quite honestly, at first I did not see them closing down so easily. These churches are not likely simply to roll over and die. They will fight to

¹⁵ *Ut Unum Sint* ¶ 96 says, “This is an immense task, which we cannot refuse and which I cannot carry out by myself. Could not the real but imperfect communion existing between us persuade Church leaders and their theologians to engage with me in a patient and fraternal dialogue on this subject, a dialogue in which, leaving useless controversies behind, we could listen to one another, keeping before us only the will of Christ for His Church and allowing ourselves to be deeply moved by His plea “that they may all be one...so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (*Jn* 17:21).

maintain what life and power they have. Besides, as Pope John Paul II also noted in *Ut Unum Sint* this time in ¶ 79, there are still a number of “areas in need of fuller study before a true consensus of faith can be achieved,”¹⁶ and that is certainly true when we consider the plethora of Anglican and Protestant denominations that were given birth at the time of the Reformation and since. When I look at the demographics of churches in the United States, however, it appears possible that the end of historic Protestantism may already be in the offing. This does not mean that the issues raised by Pope John Paul II may go unresolved, and we are very thankful for the progress that has been made in recent years on issues that have divided Catholics and Protestants in the past, especially with the publication of the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification,”¹⁷ but the changes in demographics that those churches stemming from the time of the Reformation in Europe are experiencing, the historic mainstream Protestant churches in the United States, are both extensive and deeply troubling. Virtually all of these denominations are currently shrinking in North America and Europe, some of them quite dramatically.

Between 1972 and 2012 in the United States, for instance, and by their own accounting, the American Baptist Convention has declined by 12%, the Lutheran groups (American Lutheran Church and the Lutheran Church in America) now represented by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America lost 25% of their membership, the United Methodists dropped some

¹⁶ *Ut Unum Sint* ¶ 79 begins, “It is already possible to identify the areas in need of fuller study before a true consensus of faith can be achieved: 1) the relationship between Sacred Scripture, as the highest authority in matters of faith, and Sacred Tradition, as indispensable to the interpretation of the Word of God; 2) the Eucharist, as the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ, an offering of praise to the Father, a sacrificial memorial and Real Presence of Christ and the sanctifying outpouring of the Holy Spirit; 3) Ordination, as a Sacrament, of the threefold ministry of the episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate; 4) the Magisterium of the Church, entrusted to the Pope and the bishops in communion with him, understood as a responsibility and an authority exercised in the Name of Christ for teaching and safeguarding the faith; 5) the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Icon of the Church, the spiritual Mother who intercedes for Christ’s disciples and for all humanity.”

¹⁷ “The Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” may be found in Jeffrey Gros, FSC, Harding Meyer, and William G. Rusch, Eds, *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1998* (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications / Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 566-582. Negotiated originally in a dialogue between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Lutheran World Federation, this document has now been accepted by other world bodies such as the Methodist World Council and the Disciples of Christ.

3,000,000 members or 28%, the [PCUS and PCUSA], now the Presbyterian Church - USA dropped 34%, the Episcopal Church fell by 41%, the United Churches of Christ lost over 46%, and the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) have plunged 56%. One must wonder about the reasons for such declines in their membership.

If things continue along the trajectory of the past 40 years, it is clear that whatever social and ecclesial influence these historic Anglican and Protestant churches may have exercised in this country in the past, will soon be lost. It is even conceivable, if the current trajectory holds, that in the United States, these denominations could disappear completely in fewer than 300 years, except perhaps as historical oddities like the Shakers or the Catholic Apostolic Church of Edward Irving. It is little wonder that the National Council of Churches in which all of these groups have membership continues to struggle. At the same time, many manifestations of these same denominations throughout the developing world are fast becoming evangelicalized and/or charismaticized, looking little like their American counterparts and leading to new questions regarding the future of such denominations around the world. How much will they look like their European and North American forebears in the future?

As I pondered these numbers, that left me with questions of what might become of Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Charismatics. They are not without their problems. Some of them feel betrayed by the very bodies that gave them birth. Others have given life to very independent ways of thinking and doing what they call "Church". Some of them think less of themselves as being "Church" than as "fellowships" within a worldwide Movement. One thing they currently share, however, is vitality. They continue to grow even when others appear to be in decline.

During the same period for which I described the decline in the Anglican and Protestant mainline in the US, reported statistics from the three largest Pentecostal groups in the US suggest that the Church of God in Christ expanded by over 1274% to over 6 million members, the Assemblies of God increased by 184% to over 3 million, and the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) gained 394%. The Southern Baptist Convention, an evangelical group, grew by 39%.¹⁸ At the same time as so much of American Protestantism has declined, the Roman Catholic Church in the United States grew by 20 million members (30%).¹⁹

As strange as it may seem today, the Assemblies of God, which is not yet a century old, has 355,000 more members than the Presbyterian Church–USA, nearly 1.1 million more members in the United States than does the Episcopal Church, 1.7 million more members than the American Baptist Convention, nearly 2 million more members than the United Church of Christ, and nearly 2.4 million more members than the Disciples of Christ, which have been among the traditional ecumenical heavyweights in this country.

The Assemblies of God, just one Pentecostal denomination with 3 million constitutive members in the United States, has a global constitutive membership of 65 million, making it 81% the size of either the worldwide Anglican Communion or the World Communion of Reformed Churches, and 89% the size of the entire Lutheran World Federation.²⁰ I suspect that we would be more troubled if we were to compare the actual attendance figures with all of these traditions in any given week of the year. Evangelical and Pentecostal congregations often have more in attendance than their membership figures suggest, while historic Protestantism as well as

¹⁸ These figures are self-reported by the denominations in question in the *Yearbook of American Churches* and the *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches* published by the National Council of Churches in 1972 and 2012.

¹⁹ These figures are self-reported by the denominations in question in the *Yearbook of American Churches* and the *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches* published by the National Council of Churches in 1972 and 2012.

²⁰ Figures on relative size are based upon information drawn from the following websites, accessed on January 25, 2013. www.anglicancommunion.org/index.cfm reports “around 80 million members”. www.wcrc.ch reports “a combined membership of 80 million people”. www.lutheranworld.org/lwf_Documents/LWF-statistics-2009.pdf reported 73,758,126 members in 2009, the latest year such figures seem to be available.

Catholic and Orthodox congregations are often much smaller than their membership might suggest. Such figures as I have just set forth, however, are a major blind spot both within historic ecumenical imagination, *and I might add*, also within the Pentecostal imagination

With such figures in mind, I asked this candidate, “How can you dismiss Evangelicals so easily, to say nothing of the half-billion or so Pentecostal/Charismatic types that David Barrett and Todd Johnson, who describes them as Renewalists, so frequently lift up and which on the whole seem to be growing at a record pace?”²¹ His response was equally challenging. If the Church is to have a future at all, he noted, then *it must* and eventually *it will be reformed and revitalized*. Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Charismatics will find their home in a renewed and revitalized Catholic Church that will look quite different from the one currently headquartered in Rome.

And then I thought about it again. The International Catholic – Pentecostal Dialogue is among the oldest and most continuous dialogues that the Catholic Church has undertaken.²² As a Pentecostal historical theologian, I realize that the Roman Catholic Church is the only “denomination” to have welcomed the Charismatic renewal in such a way that it could be said to be fully at home. While not all bishops have embraced the renewal equally, the renewal has been blessed by a number of popes,²³ given an office in Rome,²⁴ and is taken seriously. Many

²¹ The most recent figures from Barrett can be found in his “Global Table 5: Status of global mission, presence and activities, AD 1800-2025,” in David B. Barrett, “Missiometrics 2007: Creating Your Own Analysis of Global Data,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 31:1 (January 2007), 32, in which he claims that the total number of Christians in the world today is 2,195,529,000, the largest church is the Roman Catholic Church, with 1,142,968,000 members and Pentecostal/Charismatics number 602,792,000. As early as 1994, Gary B. McGee, “Pentecostal Missiology: Moving Beyond Triumphalism to Face the Facts,” *Pneuma: The Journal of The Society for Pentecostal Studies* 16 (1994), 276, raised questions about whether the process of naming so many groups under the rubric of Pentecostalism was not the result of a flawed research methodology. To date, Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 10-14, provides the best analysis of how to interpret Barrett’s numbers.

²² Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., “The Achievements of the Pentecostal-Catholic International Dialogue, in John A. Radano, Ed. *Celebrating a Century of Ecumenism: Exploring the Achievements of International Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 163-194.

²³ Edward D. O’Connor, C.S.C., *Pope Paul and the Spirit: Charisms and Church Renewal in the Teaching of Paul VI* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1978), 31-44; Kilian McDonnell, Ed., *Open the Windows: The Popes and*

historic Protestant denominations, especially in Europe and North America, tended to marginalize the renewal when it came to their churches, and even today, the renewal in mainstream Protestantism, parts of Anglicanism, and the Orthodox churches has not been well accepted. In addition, unlike many Protestant churches, Rome did not succumb to much of the rationalism that the Enlightenment brought to Protestantism. Neither Rome nor Constantinople for that matter, ever ruled out the miraculous.

Today the Vatican claims that 120,000,000 Catholics worldwide have experienced Charismatic Renewal, that is, 1 in every 10 Catholics on earth. Another way of showing how dramatic the shift has been is to state it the way the *Communauté du Chemin Neuf*, advertised it recently. *Chemin Neuf* is a “Roman Catholic Community with an ecumenical vocation, which grew out of a prayer group in Lyon, France, in 1973.” In its brochure advertising a conference on Baptism in the Spirit, March 7-10, 2013 that will take place in St. Niklausen, Switzerland, it claims, and I quote here, “Today one Christian out of three has experienced the ‘Baptism in the Holy Spirit’”. They go on to claim that “Baptism in the Holy Spirit, as a personal adhesion to Christ and a renewal of spiritual life, with the gifts of the Holy Spirit connected to it, leads to a missionary commitment towards evangelization.”²⁵ Clearly, that community has taken the Pentecostal community seriously, but I must tell you that such a claim sounds very much like something a classical Pentecostal might issue. Here, it is a Catholic community that is making the point that change is happening almost all around us, and much of it is taking place out of the public eye and in near silence.

Imagining the Future through a Broader View of the Church

Charismatic Renewal South Bend, IN: Greenlawn Press, 1989. See also the brochure of the Renewal at: http://iccrs.org/images/uploads/files/Pamphlet%20Towards%20CCR%20Golden%20Jubilee_En.pdf.

²⁴ The website for the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services Office is www.iccrs.org/.

²⁵ La communauté du Chemin Neuf en collaboration avec l’ICCRS, “Baptême dans l’Esprit Saint: Colloque Œcuménique International, 7-10 Mars 2013”, inside front cover.

When I began to look at our ecumenical history, I noted that the church leaders of 1910 did not have an adequate global view of reality. They isolated much of their work to parts of Asia, parts of Africa, and to the testimony of European and American missionaries. The Catholic and Orthodox worlds were essentially bracketed and set aside. With very few exceptions, they did not hear from Christian leaders indigenous to the missions where they worked. As a result, they lacked much of the imagination needed for all that was coming over the next century. It would be churlish to assume that we are any different, and yet, because of the many technological advances in communication since 1910, we have much more exposure than they did to a global view of the Church and the ecumenical challenges that face us today.

The work done by missionaries throughout the centuries, especially by Catholics and to a lesser extent, the Orthodox, and over the past 250 years by Anglican and Protestant missionaries has, in my opinion, borne much good fruit. The Church today is truly a global Church. Christianity is truly, a world religion. This fact is difficult for us to appreciate in North America or even in Western Europe where numbers seem to be declining, especially if we do not travel the globe or we are insulated from the rest of the Church around world where the story is quite different.

I want to remind us that times have changed, the world around us has changed, and the Church has changed as well. I can already guess that many of you do not like the changes that you see, and you may like them even less if and when you take a global view of the Church. That comes largely because the area in which the Church currently shows its most vitality is not among most of the traditionally ecumenical churches. It may be found among Christians who are Evangelical but especially, Pentecostal.²⁶ If they do reside in traditionally ecumenical bodies

²⁶ I make a clear distinction between Evangelicals and Pentecostals. While in some ways these groups are related, in other ways, they are quite different. Evangelicals tend toward a more Reformed and sometimes quite rationalistic

such as the Lutheran or Anglican Churches, they typically take a more conservative Evangelical line than do their European or North American counterparts, and often they are openly Charismatic.

As we begin the second decade of the 21st Century, we find that we are in a time of great global transition.²⁷ This is a period of enormous numbers of uprooted peoples, refugees, and migrants – people on the move. It is a time of shifting boundaries, with people moving beyond these boundaries, sometimes risking everything they have to do so. These mass movements have several sources that have provided their impetus, many of them ancient ones: war, genocide, and/or ethnic cleansing, drought and famine, economic promise, the expulsion of minorities or forced relocations, and either the violation of or the hope for expanded human rights. And with these people movements, go their religious commitments and their convictions. We are watching, then, a realignment of faiths as much as we are watching a migration of people, especially as countries take in these refugees. In November 2011, the World Council of Churches pointed out that currently “Around 214 million people in the world are on the move, seeking livelihood and security outside their home countries.”²⁸ Issues of immigration now fall more accurately under the category of what can only be described as “multi-directional migration”. Globalization and global changes have sent people scattering, or made it possible for people to scatter in all directions.

theology, while Pentecostals tend toward a more Wesleyan and generally more experiential theology. These are generalizations, of course, but the differences in theology, culture, and history lead many Evangelicals to reject or at least marginalize Pentecostals and their theology, especially Pentecostal understandings of Pneumatology. Edward L. Cleary, “Introduction: Pentecostals, Prominence, and Politics,” in Edward L. Cleary and Hannah W. Stewart-Gambino, *Power, Politics, and Pentecostals in Latin America* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 8, has noted that Evangelicals have often marginalized Pentecostals as “unreliable”, “theologically naïve”, and “heterodox.”

²⁷ See, for instance, Jehu J. Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008.

²⁸ Information from *News* a release for November 30, 2011 from media@wcc-coe.org.

In North America, we continue to see the immigration of large numbers of people. Very recently it has been reported that Asians now outnumber Hispanics in the new immigrants coming to American borders.²⁹ Yet we have watched the continued decline among historic Protestant and Episcopal denominations within the USA. We have observed the transition from the dominance of Western and Northern Europeans in American Christianity to the growing dominance of minority membership, especially from Latin America. And we have witnessed the transition of a nation historically marked by a more or less Protestant and Reformed heritage that is increasingly being marked by the growth of Catholicism and Pentecostalism in various forms, the growing presence of other world religions, the development of migrant congregations, and the growing presence of independent and emerging congregations, in addition to those who claim no faith tradition.³⁰

On the international level, we have seen Christianity's center of gravity shift from the North and West to the South and East.³¹ Many have fretted over the new Christian reality represented by the growth and expansion of Pentecostalism and especially various forms of Neo-Pentecostalism, the rise of Neo-Pentecostalism,³² of independent House Churches in China,³³ the emergence of African Instituted Churches, and the increasing Pentecostalization or Charismaticization of the Church as a whole. We have been concerned about the mounting

²⁹ Kirk Semple, "In a Shift, Biggest Wave of Immigrants Is Now Asian," *The New York Times* (June 18, 2012), http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/19/us/asians-surpass-hispanics-as-biggest-immigrant-wave.html?_r=0, accessed January 26, 2013

³⁰ "Nones on the Rise," The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, (October 12, 2012), website accessed January 26, 2013. <http://www.pewforum.org/unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx>.

³¹ Moonuag Lee, "The Future of Christianity," in Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth M. Ross, Eds. *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 105.

³² André Droogers, "Globalisation and Pentecostal Success," in André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani, Eds, *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 46-47; Leonido Silveira Campos, *Teatro, Temple e Mercado: Organizaçã e Marketing de um Empreendimento Neopentecostal* (Petrópolis, Brasil: Vozes / São Paulo: Simpósio Editora e Universidade Metodista de São Paulo, 1997).

³³ Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 81-88.

exodus of Christians from the Middle East and North Africa and the increased radicalization of Islam in this region of the world.³⁴ And in some cases, we have been troubled by the fact that churches from the East (e.g. Korea) and South (e.g. Ghana and Nigeria) are fast becoming the newest missionary-sending churches around the world.

One of the more exciting, and yet, challenging changes taking place around the world is the appearance of new immigrant churches that have formed and continue to form in the more “developed” nations. In many cases, these churches are different from those that existed there before. The largest number of these churches are the newer Pentecostal churches from Africa and Latin America, and African Instituted Churches many of which are also Pentecostal. In many cases, these churches are independent and they are thriving.³⁵

In the region of the Rhineland and Westphalia, a relatively small part of northwestern Germany where the Reformed tradition has been dominant for centuries, the emergence of congregations formed by Russians and by Africans has been extraordinary. The United Evangelical Mission, an agency that seeks to understand and help these churches has recently reported that its data base contains information on 393 migrant churches in the area, nearly 57% of which may be classified as “Pentecostal or Charismatic” Of the 393 congregations, 320 are African in origin.³⁶

³⁴ Suha Rassam, *Christianity in Iraq* Leominster, England: Gracewing, 2005), 184; William Dalrymple, “The Final Place of Refuge for Christians in the Middle East Is under Threat,” *The Guardian Unlimited* (September 2, 2006); “Bethlehem’s Outlook Bleak Says Mayor,” (December 15, 2006) ZENIT 06121507. This bulletin was accessed at infoenglish@zenit.org on December 15, 2006.

³⁵ Cornelis van der Kooi, “The Challenge of Non-Western Migrant Churches: Some Reflections on Theological Issues and Practical Strategies in an Unexpected Situation,” in André Droogers, Cornelis van der Laan, and Wout van Laar, Eds, *Pluralism, Dialogue and Healing in Migrant Pentecostalism* (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2006), 115-124.

³⁶ Claudia Währisch-Oblau, “‘We Shall be Fruitful in this Land’: Pentecostal and Charismatic New Mission Churches in Europe,” in André Droogers, Cornelis van der Laan, and Wout van Laar, Eds, *Fruitful in this Land: Pluralism, Dialogue and Healing in Migrant Pentecostalism* (Zoetermeer, Netherlands: Boekencentrum, 2006), 34.

Recent studies originating in the Netherlands³⁷ and in Germany,³⁸ point to the enormous growth of migrant churches throughout Europe both in number and in size. In a survey of 258 such congregations in Germany ranging from home and storefront to megachurches, 61% were Pentecostal/Charismatic congregations. Fully two-thirds of the 258 congregations surveyed, originated in Africa or were comprised of African immigrants, and of these African related congregations 86% were identified as Pentecostal/Charismatic. All of the congregations having their origins in Latin America or ministering to Latin American immigrants were identified as Pentecostal/Charismatic.³⁹

These congregations have not only added to the already impressive diversity of churches, they also provide a number of important contributions both to the immigrant and to the host culture. Whether their members are genuine immigrants, temporary migrant laborers, or refugees – political or otherwise – these churches provide a reservoir of strength to those who have made them their spiritual home. A common language, common culture, and a new community that in many ways functions as an extended family, help to provide a safe haven and a sense of continuity with the past for those who would otherwise find themselves completely marginalized by the host society.⁴⁰

At the same time these congregations also function as bridges of transition to the future. This can be said of all migrant churches, of course, but in the case of Pentecostal churches, there is the

³⁷ André Droogers, Cornelis van der Laan, and Wout van Laar, Eds. *Fruitful in the Land*, 173 pp.

³⁸ Michael Bergunder and Jörg Haustein, Eds., *Migration und Identität: Pfingstlich-charismatische Migrationsgemeinden in Deutschland* Beiheft der Zeitschrift für Mission Nr. 8, Frankfurt am Main, Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2006, and Claudia Währisch-Oblau, “Migrants with a Mission: Pastoral Self-Understanding, Biographical Narratives, and the Conceptualization and Practice of Evangelism among Pentecostal/Charismatic Pastors in Western Germany,” unpublished PhD dissertation, Hamburg, Germany: university of Hamburg, 2007.

³⁹ Claudia Währisch-Oblau, “Die Spezifik pentekostal-charismatischer Migrationsgemeinden in Deutschland und ihr Verhältnis zu den ‘etablierten’ Kirchen,” in Michael Bergunder and Jörg Haustein, Eds., *Migration und Identität: Pfingstlich-charismatische Migrationsgemeinden in Deutschland* Beiheft der Zeitschrift für Mission Nr.8 (Frankfurt am Main, Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2006), 13.

⁴⁰ André Droogers, “A Prospective Epilogue – The Power of the Spirit and the Spirit of Power,” in André Droogers, Cornelis van der Laan, and Wout van Laar, Eds. *Fruitful in this Land: Pluralism, Dialogue and Healing in Migrant Pentecostalism* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2006), 161.

added dimension of power of which so many migrants speak – not merely the power shared by the community that enables them to survive, but spiritual power that is rooted deeply in a worldview that allows the migrant to view his or her situation in the cosmic terms that are familiar to worshippers in their original homelands. It is little wonder that they tend to talk a great deal about “spiritual warfare” and related themes.⁴¹

It may surprise you to hear that one such congregation, Pastor Sunday Adelaja’s Embassy of the Blessed Kingdom of God for All Nations, a Pentecostal congregation in Kiev, Ukraine, now boasting a membership of 25,000, with 600 satellite congregations around the world, makes it the largest congregation in all of Europe – East or West.⁴² Adelaja is a Nigerian immigrant whose services include the latest technologies and music, and what one *Wall Street Journal* reporter described as “Ukrainian girls in red uniforms dancing and shaking pompoms on a smoky stage.”⁴³ His sermons call for repentance and change not only for individuals but also for society, and many of his followers are converts saved from the street where they formerly lived as alcoholics, drug addicts, and prostitutes. Whatever one may think of this type of worship service, it must also be noted that the congregation has developed an extensive evangelistic program and outreach ministries. These programs feed roughly 2000 people a day, while another arm of the church provides food, clothing, housing, and education for about 2000 former street children. It also provides extensive counseling services as well as self-help and re-education programs for those in need.

The Embassy of the Kingdom of God for All Nations also gained national attention because of its public involvement in the so-called “Orange Revolution” that brought a measure of

⁴¹ André Droogers, “A Prospective Epilogue – The Power of the Spirit and the Spirit of Power,” 166.

⁴² Valerie G Lowe, “The Unlikely Ambassador,” *Charisma* 33:3 (October 2007), 38-43.

⁴³ Alan Cullison, “God Has Sent a Black Man to Bring Religion Back to Russia and the Soviet Union,” *The Wall Street Journal* (July 21, 2006), A1

political change to the Ukraine, and as a result it has been able to attract people from the full range of society, from the very poor, drug and alcohol addicts, a number of members of the Ukrainian Parliament as well as the mayor of Kiev.

The spread of newer types of religion is only one form of change that is currently taking place. Many people are changing their religious allegiances. On Sunday, April 20, 2008, the *New York Times* featured an article titled “A Populist Shift Confronts the Catholic Church.” Undoubtedly it was timed to be released on the last day of Pope Benedict’s visit to the United States. In an eye-catching subtitle, it claimed that “An estimated 1.3 million Latino Catholics have joined Pentecostal congregations since immigrating to the United States, presenting a growing challenge to Roman Catholicism.”⁴⁴ While this is not news, the basic information has long been accessible, the numbers are significant.

It is difficult to keep up with all aspects of a Movement that even a decade ago reportedly opened up five churches a week in greater Rio de Janeiro,⁴⁵ a Movement in which migrant churches are burgeoning throughout Europe and North America, often outstripping the indigenous population in church attendance⁴⁶ while at the same time transforming the nature of what it means to be Pentecostal in their adopted land,⁴⁷ a Movement that is both entrepreneurial

⁴⁴ Fernanda Santos, ‘A Populist Shift Confronts the Catholic Church,’ *The New York Times* April 20, 2008) New York Region. This article was accessed at the following website, April 21, 2008. <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/20/nyregion/20pentecostals.html?ex=1209355200&en=813c7ad4ea957869&ei=5070&emc=eta1>.

⁴⁵ Richard Shaull and Waldo Cesar, *Pentecostalism and the Future of the Christian Churches: Promises, Limitations, Challenges* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 4.

⁴⁶ Claudia Währisch-Oblau, *The Missionary Self-Perception of Pentecostal/Charismatic Church Leaders from the Global South in Europe* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2009), 5-6; André Droogers, Cornelis van der Laan, Wout van Laar, Eds. *Fruitful in This Land: Pluralism, Dialogue and Healing in Migrant Pentecostalism* Zoetermeer, The Netherlands: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2006; Michael Bergunder and Jörg Haustein, Eds. *Migration und Identität: Pfingstlich-charismatische Migrationsgemeinden in Deutschland* Beiheft der Zeitschrift für Mission, No. 8, Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Verlag Otto Lembeck, 2006.

⁴⁷ Michael Wilkinson, “What’s ‘Global’ about Global Pentecostalism?” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 17 (2008), 107-108.

and overwhelmingly polycephalous in its organization and structures,⁴⁸ a Movement whose most significant commodity, even in the churches that proclaim the prosperity gospel, may simply be received by the faithful as *hope*, rather than the *materialism* so often displayed in mass media appeals and criticized by so many,⁴⁹ a Movement that may have many millions of adherents in a land such as China, where it is difficult at best to obtain reliable figures, a Movement that works undercover to evangelize Muslims throughout a range of Middle Eastern and North African countries where Islam is the dominant force, a Movement that may slowly be emerging as a political force to be reckoned with in many countries of the world, as it awakens to its potential power in that arena.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Gotthard Oblau, "Pentecostal by Default? Contemporary Christianity in China," in Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang, Eds. *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia* Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies Series 3 (Oxford, England: Regnum Books International, 2005), 416.

⁴⁹ The idea of hope stands at the heart of the Pentecostal message. That is what Pentecostals preach. While Pentecostal prosperity preachers are rightly criticized when abusing their flocks by making outlandish claims, making the quest for material things appear to be consistent with the Bible, and living lavish lifestyles, I have yet to see any treatment of prosperity preachers that assesses their role as dispensers of hope to people who often come from hopeless situations. See, for instance, Paulo Romeiro, *SuperCrentes: O Evangelho Segundo Kenneth Hagin, Valnice Milhomens e os Profetas da Prosperidade* (São Paulo, Brazil: Mundo Cristão, 1993, Sixth Edition, 1996; Leonildo Silveira Campos, *Teatro, Templo e Mercado: Organização e Marketing de um Empreendimento Neopentecostal* Petropolis, Brazil: Vozes / São Paulo, Brazil: Simpósio Editoria e Universidad Metodista de São Paulo, 1999; Simon Coleman, *The Globalization of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000; Andrew Perriman, Ed. *Faith, Health and Prosperity: A Report on 'Word of Faith' and 'Positive Confession' Theologies by The Evangelical Alliance (UK) Commission on Unity and Truth among Evangelicals* Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2003; Milmon F. Harrison, *Righteous Riches: The Word of Faith Movement in Contemporary African American Religion* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005; Stephanie Y. Mitchem, *Name It and Claim It? Prosperity Preaching in the Black Church* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2007; and Jonathan L. Walton, *Watch This! The Ethics and Aesthetics of Black Televangelism*, New York, NY: New York University Press, 2009.

⁵⁰ So far, the verdict is mixed. Pentecostals have not been effective or well received in the political arena in places like Guatemala (Rios Montt) or the United States of America (Pat Robertson, John Watt, John Ashcroft, and Sarah Palin). They seem to be more effective in Brazil. Edward L. Cleary and Hannah W. Stewart-Gambino, Eds. *Power, Politics, and Pentecostals in Latin America* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1997; Corten, André Corten and André Mary, Eds. *Imaginaires politiques et pentecôtismes: Afrique / Amérique latine*, Paris, France: Éditions KARTHALA, 2000, each contain several articles on Pentecostal political engagement. There are many other articles and a few books on the subject as well. Cf. Timothy J. Steigenga, *The Politics of the Spirit: The Political Implications of Pentecostalized Religion in Costa Rica and Guatemala* Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002. Javier Orozco, "Los Pentecostales durante los diez años de gobierno sandinista," in Tomás Gutiérrez S. Ed. *Protestantismo y Política en América Latina y el Caribe: Entre la Sociedad Civil y el Estado* (Lima, Peru: CEHILA, 1996), 223-234; Calvin L. Smith, "Revolutionaries and Revivalists: Pentecostal Eschatology, Politics and the Nicaraguan Revolution," *Pneuma: the Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 30 (1008), 55-82; Paul Freston, "Brother Votes for Brother: The New Politics of Protestantism in Brazil," in Virginia Garrard-Burnett and David Stoll, Eds. *Rethinking Protestantism in Latin America* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1993), 66-110;

As I look at Pentecostalism around the world, a number of issues attract my attention. It is not the Movement's diversity alone that contributes to my interest nor is it necessarily the phenomenal growth rate that we have witnessed in this Movement in recent years, though both of these points are worthy of further reflection. It is that Pentecostalism has much to offer to its participants that seem not to be always obvious or readily available in other Christian traditions. It is that Pentecostalism seems to be more at home in the developing world than it is in the developed world. It is that the contextual differences that are possible within Pentecostalism seem to have fewer limits than might be the case in many other traditions. It is the nature of Pentecostalism as a religion developed "from below" rather than a reasoned and often idealized religion developed "from above", to include more flexibility.

It seems to show up in the tension that exists between charisma and institution. In many traditions, this tension seems to have been resolved almost entirely in favor of institutions, leaving little for the average layperson to do except be a spectator. But what is most interesting to me is a fact that unlike most other theological traditions and denominational families, Pentecostalism has found ways to permeate virtually all parts of the Christian family. Indeed, the Catholic journalist John Allen has suggested that the trend toward Pentecostalization is one of the most significant trends contributing to the revitalization of the Catholic Church now, and in the future.⁵¹

As I look across the global ecclesial landscape another phenomenon comes to mind. The Communist States marked by the boundaries of the former Soviet Union and the Peoples'

Roberto José Schuler, *Pfingstbewegungen in Brasilien: Sozio-politische Implikationen der neuen Pluralität* Theologische Dissertationen, Band 23 (São Leopoldo: Sinodal, 2004), 188 pp.; Frans Kamsteeg, "Pentecostalism and Political Awakening in Pinochet's Chile and Beyond," in Christian Smith and Joshua Prokopy, Ed, *Latin American Religion in Motion* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 187-204., to name a few

⁵¹ John Allen, *The Future Church: How Ten Trends Are Revolutionizing the Church* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2009), 375-413.

Republic China may provide one manifestation of that phenomenon. In the West, we saw the Communist takeover of these lands as a terrible thing. We viewed it not only as an economic challenge; it was also seen as a spiritual challenge. Those in control of the Communist Party espoused the end of religion and sought to replace it with atheism. As a result, they persecuted all religions, in a sense, attempting to scrape the ground clean of all religious influence.

But what if God were the One who was actually behind the Communist takeover of these nations? After all, Daniel 2:21 tells us that it is the Lord who “deposes kings and sets up kings”. What if God was the One who saw the scraping of the ground to be a necessary and a positive factor in the history of humanity in this region of the world? What do we see now where the land was “cleared”? We see an Orthodox Church that is stronger, more spiritual, and more vital than ever, and we hear a call for the evangelization of the Russian citizens.⁵² We see the establishment of thousands of house churches throughout China, new understandings of the nature of Church, and even a government that describes the official church as “post-denominational.” In a sense, the breakdown of the Christendom of the past such as that described by Philip Jenkins, may well be a good thing.⁵³

A second aspect that may be related to the first, though in a different way, is the changes we are currently seeing in the decline of the number of people who claim to be committed to any single religious institution, the decline in traditional church membership, and the growth of what are sometimes labeled as emerging forms of Christianity. As I have looked over the literature regarding these newer forms of Christianity, I have come to the conclusion that they probably do not have a major contribution to make to any contemporary ecumenical *institution*. On the other

⁵² The need for evangelization was expressed by leaders within the Russian Orthodox Church in two difference conferences that I attended in 2011 (Moscow) and 2012 (Istanbul). As many as 80% of those baptized within the Russian Orthodox Church are in need of personal evangelization.

⁵³ Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* Oxford University Press, 2002.

hand, these people and churches may be involved in some important ground-scraping that may fit well into our ecumenical future. The characteristics of these groups often include (1) their interest in cooperating with God in places where they see God at work, (2) their willingness to put up with a certain amount of messiness in the process of emerging, (3) their desire to move beyond the current situation that defines the Church in terms of competing camps (e.g. liberal and conservative; Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, denominations, etc.), and (4) their desire to experience genuine community with other Christians.⁵⁴

I don't posit a new Christendom to replace the older one, but it seems clear to me that something new is in the process of emerging. It will not look like what we see in our past. It will include new and vital ways of being Church. And it will include a greater place for the realities of "life in the Spirit" to which Pentecostals have borne witness for a century, even as the Church struggles with its various forms to keep from fracturing further.

In his three volume series on *Christian Community in History*, the Jesuit theologian, Roger Haight noted that globalization has taught us two things. The first is that Christianity is only one among a number of ancient and vital world religions. The second is that

The distance between Christianity and other world religions makes the quarrels among Christian churches appear parochial and relatively unimportant. On the logic of a *common identity won by contrast with the others*, globalization is enabling the Christian churches to appreciate with new eyes the enormous common ground that unites them. The heat of differences among the churches can be turned down as all Christians take up the dialogue with other faiths.⁵⁵

The Ecumenical Movement has taught us these same lessons.

⁵⁴ Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures*, 91; Tony Jones, *The New Christians: Dispatches from the Emergent Frontier*, 81 notes, "Emergents find the biblical call to community more compelling than the democratic call to individual rights. The challenge lies in being faithful to both ideals."

⁵⁵ Roger D. Haight, *Christian Community in History: Historical Ecclesiology* (London, England / New York, NY: Continuum, 2004), I:1.

In 1953, Bishop Newbigin wrote his important book, *The Household of God*, in which he outlined what he called the three streams of Christianity. The first stream being the Catholic (and I believe he would include the Orthodox here) stream. The second was the Protestant stream while the third was the Pentecostal stream.⁵⁶ He pointed out that all three streams were essential to a comprehensive ecclesiology. Each stream had a contribution to make, but apart from the contributions of the other two streams, each was incomplete. According to Newbigin's argument, Catholics might provide structure through their emphasis upon apostolic succession. Protestants might be viewed as proclaiming the reformed or orthodox "message" of the Church. The third stream, he contended would provide the Church with "the conviction that the Christian life is a matter of the experienced power and presence of the Holy Spirit today",⁵⁷ without which the rest of the "Church [would be] a mere shell, having the form of a Church but not the life."⁵⁸

Newbigin maintained that the Church needs all three streams, cooperating in such a way as to *be one*, for in the end, "the Church is, in the most exact sense, a *koinonia*, a sharing in the Holy Spirit."⁵⁹ The presence of Pentecostalism as an equal partner in the Church removes all three aspects of the Church – Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal – from the clutches of their individual sin, whereby each claims to be or acts as though it were the whole Church, without giving due consideration to the other parts. Furthermore, he pointed out, "When the risen Lord bestowed the apostolic commission upon the Church and empowered it to continue His mission,

⁵⁶ One could wish that he had also included Orthodoxy as a fourth stream or that he had made clear its relationship to one of the other streams.

⁵⁷ Lesslie, Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 87.

⁵⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God* (London, England: SCM Press Ltd., 1953), 87. This is a clear reference to 2 Timothy 3:5.

⁵⁹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 90. This position is similar to that expressed by Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, trans. Harold Knight (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1953), 10-11.

the very heart of His act lay in the bestowal of the Holy Spirit....It is as anointed with His Holy Spirit that they are bearers of His commission, and in no other way.”⁶⁰

As I have participated in the Ecumenical Movement over the past thirty years, I have observed a mounting sense of despair, an increasing weariness with much of the ecumenical project, in both the National and the World Councils of Churches, and a definite shift in the resources and commitments of their constituent members. Let us face it. Ecumenical work is very difficult work. It calls for incredible levels of openness and patience. It calls for constant commitment to the ecumenical vision. And those of us who work in this field recognize the energy it takes to imagine the future, explain and sustain the vision, and to exercise the patience necessary to see it through, in order to make the work effective.

Yet budgets have been cut. Staff has been laid off. Projects have been curtailed. There has been a general and significant downsizing of what have been known historically as the primary centers, some might say the privileged shapers of the Ecumenical Movement in the United States and Europe. Gone are the 1950s and 1960s when the National and World Councils of Churches seemed to have enormous energy and substantial finances to complete its tasks. Gone are the 1960s, when the decisions of the bishops in the Second Vatican Council generated great hope for the future. Since those heady days, of course, a lot of fruitful ecumenical work has been completed and many issues that divided the Church in earlier days have been resolved. But there remain some very problematic, difficult, and intransigent issues that seem not to submit to any kind of resolution, given the lines that our churches have chosen to draw in the sand. We need to continue to ask ourselves why that is and imagine new ways to further the quest for unity. In the meantime other difficult and challenging issues dividing our churches have emerged. These issues have led to further schism, often accompanied by arrogant actions, condescending

⁶⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Household of God*, 95.

charges, and vitriolic counter charges that stem from the pain that we have chosen to inflict upon ourselves and upon one another. We need to ask ourselves about our priorities. If we are really so interested in the unity for which Christ prayed, then why do we inflict such things on one another and fail to imagine the way forward to the healing of our divisions together?

While the growing number of people who now identify themselves as not affiliated with any specific religious institution, even if they consider themselves to be “spiritual”, may seem alarming, it should not come as a surprise. Our institutional claims, pronouncements, and actions have let many people down. Many of our own people do not understand us. Many of our own people do not any longer know what to believe. Many of our own people no longer view it as important to submit themselves to the teachings of the Church in light of our many hypocrisies. Many of the reasons for the growing disillusionment with religious institutions are of our own making. Consider the public pronouncements and subsequent squabbles on everything from the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, the subsequent battles over the relationship between faith and science, the role that women should or should not play among the People of God, the steady stream of issues labeled part of the “culture wars” that have to do with the right to life in everything between conception to death, and the vicious battles that we have waged regarding a range of issues related to sexual morality. Consider, too, the sexual escapades of highly visible televangelists from the 1980s to the present, the embezzlement of church funds and other financial scandals in several major denominations since the 1990s, charges of sexual abuse and pedophilia against members of the clergy in recent years, the building of personal kingdoms by preachers who instead should be stewards of the mites of the many “widows,” and we begin to see what is at stake. There is enough sin within the Church to shame us all.

You might expect that a Pentecostal would bring up the idea that the very things that the Orthodox Patriarchate viewed as serious challenges to the life and vitality of the Church that it saw in post-World War I Europe have been brought inside the Church nearly a century later, and perhaps succumbing to the temptation to be like God, we have looked at them and called many of them, “Good”. You might also expect a Pentecostal to suggest that if the vision of Christian unity is ever to become more of a reality than it already is, we must begin with repentance for the sin and failures that we have brought upon the Church. And that means becoming as little children who come to our heavenly Father with an attitude of humility and dependence and ask for forgiveness.

What I find so difficult as I continue to work in ecumenical circles is that there seems still to be too much emphasis upon *me* and *my identity*, rather than upon *us* and *our identity* as Christians, *together*. We still stand as divided Christians before the world. We seem to work in a world in which the opinions of some Christians are valued more highly than the opinions of other Christians, leaving many Christians undervalued and without a voice. If I may return to the observations that I made at the beginning of this address, most adults, like the disciples are concerned about getting ahead, about making a name for themselves, and about climbing the social or political ladder. They are concerned with things like prestige and position, with protecting their territory and their power. Children tend not to think in such terms. They are not self-sufficient like adults, who can learn the secrets of success, practice their moves, and climb over others to get what they want. Children live at a much more basic level. They are dependent upon others to meet their daily needs. They lack not only physical maturity but also the mental and psychological maturity to make such moves. They possess no rank. They hold no title. They are not very effective in putting on airs. Unlike adults, they can do little to intimidate others.

They don't know what posturing is. They possess an innocence and naiveté that is lost on most adults. Perhaps that is why they are so trusting. That naiveté also allows them to be imaginative. Unlike adults, NOTHING is impossible in the mind of a child.

In 1925, John R Mott was still attempting to motivate the global missionary movement to think more broadly.

If we can forget that we are Americans, Canadians, British, Chinese, Dutch, French, Germans, Indians, Japanese, Scandinavians, or that we are Baptists, Congregationalists, Disciples, Episcopalians, Friends, Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans; in the work of making Christ known to people in Asia, Africa, Latin America, or Europe, or of North America, we have gone a great way toward proving to unbelievers who are moved by facts, that the religion of Jesus Christ is the great solvent of the racial and national alienations of the world, and, therefore, is the mightiest force operating among men. The present is the time of times to present this apologetic.⁶¹

As I think once again of that candidate who has forced me to think about the Church 300 years into the future, I have no doubt that the Church will look much different than it does today. If it is to survive, it must. The decline in the Anglican and Protestant mainline, and the rise of Evangelicals, and particularly Pentecostals and Charismatics especially from the southern and eastern hemispheres will mean that those currently in positions of power within the Ecumenical Movement may well be moved to the sidelines as new players enter the ecumenical arena. When that takes place, the entire playing field will change. In light of what I have said, and I do not say this with any sense of triumphalism, it appears to me that the ecumenical activities of the Church that will most effectively lead to the Church of 2313 will be quite different. Rules of ecumenical engagement, topics for discussion, even conclusions from past agreements might change. Results might become more countercultural, even more conservative in theological reflection. Those who participate may strive for a greater degree of consistency, even shalom,

⁶¹ John R. Mott, "New Forces Released by Cooperation," in Fennell P. Turner and Frank Knight Sanders, Eds. *The Foreign Missions Convention at Washington 1925* (New York, NY: Foreign Missions Conference of North America / New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1925), 218.

between the holiness of the Church and the holiness of life found among its members. They may well reflect a greater dependence upon the work of the Holy Spirit, and may be more vital than those who have led us to this place.

Of course, none of us will be here to verify what I imagine. At the very least, though, I have been left to imagine the future in different ways than I had thought about it before I was first challenged to think of the Church as it might look in 300 years. I would like to encourage you to begin thinking about the nature of the Church in 300 years as well. Use your imagination. Be as creative as you can. When you run out of imagination, go to the One “who by the power at work within us, is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or even imagine” and I am sure that He will stretch your imagination to fit more fully with His. Ask yourself, if this were to be the future path down which we Christians will walk together, what contribution do I want to make toward such a Church? And then get to work.