

# PENTECOSTAL COLLABORATION

## A PRAGMATIC NECESSITY OR A SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE?

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### Abstract

Collaborative structures between Pentecostal churches and denominations were initiated soon after the national and denominational entities were established. This tentative phase of collaboration did not generate permanent organizational structures. However, it indicated a desire for cooperation, which in turn paved way for the contemporary manifold networking among Pentecostals. This collaboration is now taking place both within continents as well as globally. The aim of this article is to evaluate whether this development towards more permanent and organized collaboration has been a result of practical or theological needs. An additional theme of discussion is the collaboration between Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, which is demonstrated, for example, by the Empowered21 organization. This collaboration has a strong missiological dimension—the shared sense of urgency to finish the task given by Jesus to his disciples, to reach the whole world for Christ. This article elaborates the potentiality of this collaboration and it aims to provide constructive proposals for future development. This elaboration is constructed within a contextual framework, which is an important methodological aspect to be considered within the theme. Therefore, the perspectives used in this article are interdisciplinary. It utilizes historical sources together with personal experience, various theological considerations, and cultural anthropology. In the contemporary world, the collaboration between the Pentecostal-Charismatic churches and missions is important and needed for the fulfillment of the Great Commission, not only from a practical point of view but also to pursue a theology of unity.

## Introduction

From the dawn of humankind, people have understood the power and synergy of collaboration. In ancient times, they united together in building a tower reaching up to the sky. Now, Paris, New York, Toronto, Kuala Lumpur, Shanghai, and Dubai have left the tower of Babel in their shadows. Globalization has enabled more and more effective partnerships and agreements in international trade. Though turmoil exists on the global stage, in many ways, the need for collaboration today has not disappeared.

### **A Historical Synopsis of Pentecostal Collaboration**

Churches and missions have cooperated together as well. Large international organizations such as the World Council of Churches (WCC) have been formed, preceded by the International Mission Council, which paved the way for the establishment of the WCC. Not all Christians were in favor of the WCC, so then the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA, later, Fellowship) was formed. In addition, evangelical Christians interested in world missions and evangelism became united under the Lausanne covenant and movement that was inspired especially by Billy Graham.

Besides the global networks, churches have their own national and local structures. The older churches have a long history of providing unity in their structures, but newer churches and denominations, especially from the time of the Reformation and after, have developed their forms of unity and cooperation in various ways, emphasizing New Testament elements. Some have adopted the episcopal structure, while others, the Presbyterian or congregational model, and some combining these last-mentioned patterns.

Some Pentecostal denominations had their structure in place before becoming Pentecostal, like the International Pentecostal Holiness Church, the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee), and the Church of God in Christ. Their holiness backgrounds provided them a framework for unity and collaborative activities. The Assemblies of God (AG), though having origins and tracing its history back to various evangelical movements, had to create its own structure at its founding in 1914.<sup>1</sup> The same occurred with the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel in 1923.<sup>2</sup> In Europe, Pentecostals of the Nordic countries formed their Presbyterian-Congregational structure by inheriting some features from the Baptists through the Swedish Pentecostal pioneer Lewi Pethrus, who was expelled from that denomination. Later, contacts with the AG in the US through immigrant connections influenced the development of structures in many other countries, along with the model from the Nordic countries by the influence

of Thomas Barratt and Lewi Pethrus. The strong missionary work from Nordic countries brought the influence of their structure to different parts of the world.<sup>3</sup>

The urgency of missionary work not only was the motivator for cooperative structures in forming the AG in 1914, but it also influenced the development of European Pentecostals. The significant feature, however, is that the structure usually was limited to a single denomination. Structures binding the various Pentecostals together were rare at the beginning of the movement. This then resulted in Pentecostalism having several faces in the same target country of missionary work, which often created confusion in the minds of the indigenous people.

The heritage of the Azusa Street revival was radical in the point of view of unity and collaboration. Pastor Seymour's vision was of a shared experience and communal cooperation between various Christian groups.<sup>4</sup> He crossed ethnic and gender boundaries. The leadership group was racially mixed and included both women and men.<sup>5</sup> That, however, did not become a generally followed norm in the long-term development of Pentecostalism.

Opposite to the spirit of Azusa Street, the development of global Pentecostalism has been characterized by fragmentation. There seems to be over 11,000 Pentecostal denominations in the world.<sup>6</sup> That picture, however, is a little bit misleading because one has to realize that classical Pentecostals are well-structured today. Gina A. Bellofatto and Todd M. Johnson estimate the number of Pentecostals will be 115 million by 2020.<sup>7</sup> Most of these belong to two umbrella organizations: the Pentecostal World Fellowship (PWF) and the World Assemblies of God Fellowship (WAGF), the former having over sixty million members and the latter over sixty-eight million members. In spite of some overlapping, the total number is still not very far from the figure Bellofatto and Johnson have given.

Although the early attempts for Pentecostal global unity and cooperation did not bring much in concrete results, they did show the desire for connection among the believers of the new movements in various countries. The International Pentecostal Conference was held in Amsterdam after World War I in 1921. At that time, the attention of the many new Pentecostal churches was mainly on the national and local level.<sup>8</sup> The influential early Pentecostal leader in Great Britain, Donald Gee, had a vision for Pentecostal European cooperation. An opportunity to take a step in building that unity was offered by the Swedish Pentecostal movement, and Gee's vision came to fulfillment in Stockholm in 1939. When World War II was over, global collaboration moved forward. The first Pentecostal World Conference took place in Zürich, Switzerland, in 1947.<sup>9</sup> Since then, it has been held continuously, the last one (the twenty-fifth) being held in Calgary, Canada, in 2019. The conference organization

became the basis for the PWF in 2004. The mission of the PWF was defined in 2011 by formulating its seven objectives:

1. To promote and encourage regional and continental alliances among Spirit-filled networks;
2. To promote and connect Spirit-filled leaders—shapers of communities and nations;
3. To speak to governments and nations when and where social justice and religious rights are compromised and/or violated for the sake of the gospel;
4. To foster world missions and support humanitarian efforts and where possible to provide relief aid;
5. To serve as a cooperative fellowship for Pentecostal theological institutions to promote the development of education and leadership training;
6. To change the global contour of Christianity by emphasizing coordinated worldwide prayer;
7. To organize a triennial celebration (Pentecostal World Conference) that will gather the global Spirit-filled family to advance the mission and purposes of the Pentecostal fellowship.<sup>10</sup>

The other global Pentecostal umbrella organization, the WAGF, also has a strong emphasis on world evangelization. It is a fruit of the global action initiated in 1988 that was named the “Decade of Harvest.” The instrumental figure for this initiative was J. Philip Hogan, the executive director of the Division of Foreign Missions, USA. One year later, the organization for the Decade of Harvest developed its structure. It then became the basis for the WAGF. The name was finalized to its present form in 1993. The basic tasks are very similar to the PWF, and its practical actions have been very focused on missions and evangelization.<sup>11</sup>

The forming process of the WAGF revealed differing views among Pentecostals in regards to the need for structure. Some had a desire for a strong organization while others preferred a loose coalition for collaboration. The latter opinion won, however, but at the same time, emphasized effectiveness.<sup>12</sup>

Besides these global organizations, continental Pentecostal organizations have also been established. In Europe, the same kind of debate that concerned the WAGF establishment took place. The Nordic countries especially were afraid of any strong hierarchical organization. In other parts of Europe, many Pentecostals were in favor of a more centralized structure, although not in the strictest form. Because of this dichotomy, Europe initially had two different structures for Pentecostal unity: the

European Pentecostal Fellowship (EPF) and the Pentecostal European Conference (PEC). EPF started in 1966 and PEC in 1969. The last-mentioned was started by the initiative of the Swede, Lewi Pethrus. He, and especially the Nordic countries' Pentecostals, emphasized the independence of the local churches. The feeling was so strong that they struggled with the organization being in any way above or besides the local church.<sup>13</sup>

The two European organizations merged in 1987 by establishing the Pentecostal European Fellowship (PEF). The desire for unity was stronger than the ecclesiological differences. When PEF was registered in Belgium in 2005, huge steps had been taken from the time of the dichotomy in European Pentecostalism. Still, during that time, many Nordic-background workers emphasized the total independence of the local church.<sup>14</sup> The thinking in recent years, at least in Finland, has changed much towards a collaborative direction between the local and national church.

An interesting detail in historical development is the International Pentecostal Council, which was established in Europe in 1912. Members consisted of Europeans, but Americans were invited to participate in the meetings as guests.<sup>15</sup> That is perhaps a curiosity, but in any case, it shows the early interest in Pentecostal cooperation. Another early attempt for collaboration was the Pentecostal Missionary Union of Great Britain and Ireland from 1909–1925. The Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (PFNA) was born in 1948.<sup>16</sup> Because it consisted of only white Pentecostal groups, it voted to disband in 1994, making room for the multiracial organization, Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches of North America (PCCNA).<sup>17</sup> In recent years, the Pentecostal mission directors in North America have started a platform for common reflection and collaboration.

Pentecostal collaboration in missionary work has been increasing since the 1990s. The Pentecostal European Mission (PEM) was established in Finland in 1991. It is the world missions branch of PEF. From the start, it provided fellowship, coordination, cooperation, and implementation in missions. Fellowship takes place in the annual consultations where the mission leaders and other key people in mission meet with each other. Coordination means knowing each other and where and how each member operates. Cooperation means practical actions together, for example, humanitarian actions in catastrophic events. Implementation deals with matters that are lacking or difficult to create by individual member organizations, such as mission training or special collaboration in reaching unreached people groups.

PEM created a strategy in 2010 with goals to be reached by 2020. It included increasing the number of missionaries and intercessors, and touching unreached people groups in the mission program. It also emphasized the importance of reaching everyone

in Europe with the gospel. It is already now clear that PEM exceeded the goal concerning unreached people groups (over 280 being reached instead of 200, which was the goal). However, the goal of an increased number of missionaries, long- or short-term, seems not to be reached. Older sending churches have decreasing numbers, although new senders are increasing their numbers. The number of intercessors is not so easy to identify. The starting point was to have at least ten intercessors per missionary.

PEM works in close cooperation with PEF. Their common goal is to reach every European with the gospel. The implementation towards this goal takes place as a common effort under the name Impact. The first one took place in Brussels in 2006.<sup>18</sup> In these big city actions, the various Pentecostal groups or churches in the city work together. Through the years, in many cases, this has been the first-ever joint action between the various Pentecostal denominations. Often collaboration has continued on after the Impact event.

Similar to PEM, Pentecostal Asia Mission (PAM) was started in 1994. It was born to meet the need of providing a forum for Asian Pentecostal leaders, mission organizations, and missionaries from other continents working in Asia. Because Asia is a huge continent, the continental gatherings generally take place every third year, but in between are regional events like the East Asia, South East Asia, and South Asia consultations.

The youngest Pentecostal collaborating organization exists now in Africa. After coming together at Nairobi in 2016, African Pentecostal leaders gathered in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in 2018. There they decided to form the Africa Pentecostal Mission Fellowship (APMF). Like PEM and PAM it invites all types of classical Pentecostals to gather under its wings. The next consultation will take place at Kampala, Uganda, in May 2020.

In Latin America, the AG churches have formed a strong mission coordination organization, Misiones en Conjunto (MEC). It has been a powerful instrument in helping new Pentecostal sending organizations (mission departments of the national churches) to emerge. However, a broader forum for all the various Pentecostal organizations for world missions is still lacking although the need and goal of establishing that has been identified.

Besides continental cooperation, several country or regionally focused cooperative projects are taking place. Dick Brogden, a front-line figure in Pentecostal missions, describes multifaceted international mission teams as a many-sided diamond. According to his experience, this kind of endeavor offers advantages and disadvantages, but multifaceted teams can better empower strengths.<sup>19</sup> In my view, generally speaking, this kind of collaboration has been practiced too little in Pentecostal missions.

My observation is that Pentecostal collaboration and unity is practiced much more than many have recognized. Although it can be improved and developed greatly, it is not as absent as many seem to think. The next question is this: What is the basis for cooperation? Is it only a pragmatic matter or is it inspired by biblical theology? As one aspect of my doctoral dissertation, I asked the Finnish Pentecostal missionaries and the pastors of our partnering churches in Latin America, Africa, and Asia to give their reason for cooperation. It was a spiritual principle for seventy percent of the missionaries, but for the national pastors, it was only forty-four percent.<sup>20</sup> For some reason, the last mentioned could not see that it was so much a biblical principle as did the missionaries. Why this was is an interesting question. This would require more research. Are there cultural factors leading in that direction or has teaching been lacking in some aspects and been concentrated too much on pragmatic issues?

Vinoth Ramachandra talks about managerial missiology, which he sees being based on capitalism. That can lead easily to an overly-pragmatic approach to missions.<sup>21</sup> The famous Latin American missiologist, Samuel Escobar, shares the same concern. He sees this trend emphasizing management of mission practice, and identifies the roots of this approach in the Church Growth School and the AD2000 and Beyond Movement. The same criticism is targeted also to the 10/40 window and people group concepts.<sup>22</sup> I agree that there is a danger in becoming too pragmatic and forgetting the *Missio Dei* aspect, but I cannot agree fully with the critics. The urgency of the spreading of the gospel and as quickly as possible is very biblical (Rom 9:1–4; 2 Thess 3:1; 2 Pet 3:12). The ethnic groups are in the center of Jesus' plan (Matt 24:14; Rev 5:9; 7:9). It is in every case good for our Pentecostal missiology to strengthen our roots in theology, and to avoid extreme pragmatism that ignores a solid biblical foundation. What can we then understand as central pillars for a sound Pentecostal mission theology? I will view it from the perspective of unity and cooperation.

## **Pentecostal Mission Theology Concerning Unity and Collaboration**

The roots of unity are found in the first chapter of the Bible. The Hebrew word *Elohim* is a plural, and we can see the triune God at work. God creates by his Word, which John connects in his gospel with *Logos*. *Elohim* creates by his Word, which became flesh in Jesus, and the Spirit moves. The divine Trinity is an inspiring model for all efforts of unity. The full common understanding, harmony, and seamless working together brings forth all beauty and the astonishing fine tuning that is contained in the whole universe.

The same harmony and collaboration is evident in the plan of salvation. After the fall of human beings, God started his rescue operation, *Missio Dei*. Its goal was to restore the broken connection between God and human beings: “to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ” (Eph 1:10). Through his atonement, Jesus rebuilt the connection between God and human beings.

The cross has two dimensions: vertical, which represents the connection between God and human beings, and horizontal, the connection between people. Jesus summarized these in the Great Commandment, loving God and loving your neighbor. The cross is the starting point for both of them. The vertical is the basis for the horizontal. Only by experiencing God’s love toward themselves are people able to accept and love themselves. This does not lead to individualism but to accepting the other as an equal, reconciled and loved by God. The basis for unity is in the atonement. It is the only effective medicine for racism and cultural superiority. The only basis for perfect equality is the atonement.

The atonement has three dimensions. First, it deals with everyone personally. God so loved the world “that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). For too many, the atonement remains at this level. However, it also has a global dimension. “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). This fact brings us to world missions, which has a geographical scope: Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. We are dealing with the reasons for the existence of the church. We need to know these theological roots. The church is first of all the witness of Christ on this earth. Pentecostal power is for missions (Acts 1:8). In some churches, evangelism and missions are only lines in the budget, and the reasons for the existence of the church are never taken into consideration.

The atonement connects believers also to eternal glory. Visible things are earthly but invisible things are eternal. “So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal” (2 Cor 4:18). The concept of the transcendent does not easily fit the contemporary worldview of the Western world. The risk of losing an understanding of heaven and thus becoming materialistic is very much a reality. The supernatural and transcendent is a uniting bond between believers, part of the theology of unity. As a test, I must ask, how often we do sing about heaven nowadays?

Unity is mentioned about 400 times in the Bible. It is not a secondary question. Jesus highlights it in his prayer in John 17: “that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21). Unity is connected to the credibility of our

witness. The more fragmented Pentecostalism is, the weaker is our testimony. All aspects that make our unity stronger will fortify our testimony in this world.

The opening of Albania to Christianity offers a practical example of this. Albania had officially made a decision to be an atheistic country, and attempts to evangelize were not successful because of heavy governmental control. As evangelical mission directors, after hearing about the change in the country, we united together. We wanted to avoid the mistake of the past, having several different mission organizations competing and overlapping in their activities. We established the Albanian Encouragement Project (AEP) as a common face before the authorities in 1991. Over sixty organizations became members. Although various denominations were later registered individually, AEP still exists as the common representative of different missions.

One of the strongest metaphors concerning unity is Jesus' speech about the vine (John 15:1–8). The life in the vine is our Lord himself, the elixir keeping the tree flourishing and producing fruit. We as his disciples have a role as well. Paul writes to the Ephesians: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3). The creator of unity is the Spirit, not us, but we can help in keeping the influence of the Spirit. We can make the Spirit sad, even quench him, but we also can be the influence in keeping his impact fresh. We can make him happy by offering him space in our activities and personal lives.

The Holy Spirit creates unity. That was evident on the day of Pentecost when people from different countries and cultures experienced his impact. In the incident of the building of Babel (Gen 11:1–9), the different languages separated people from each other. On the day of Pentecost, people from various countries were united to hear God's great message in different languages. Babel separated, Pentecost united. "Koinonia" broke the linguistic, nationalistic, and social borders. The same thing took place in the Azusa revival at the beginning of the last century.

Unity was not just left to the level of speech or to a feeling of belonging together. It led to mutual care of each other, of social justice. The voluntary giving for the common good was a spiritual attitude, found later also in the gathering of aid organized by Paul for the suffering believers in Jerusalem and Judea (Acts 11:29–30; Rom 15:25–27). Paul called it "koinonia" (Rom 15:26). That was an expression of unity and collaboration. Koinonia and deaconry was not only a matter inside the local church but it was an expression of mutual love between the churches in different countries.

The theology of unity is visible in many ways in Paul's activities. Among the strongest of his expressions is to equate the church to the body of Christ, which he uses in several contexts. He shows the Ephesians that the offices of apostles, prophets,

evangelists, pastors, and teachers are meant for building the body of Christ (Eph 4:11). These special giftings were serving both the individual local churches as well as the wider body of Christ. Every local church needs an apostolic understanding about the unreached both near and far away. The prophetic gift helps God's perspective to be seen. The evangelist transmits the zeal for soul-winning to the believers. The gift of pastoring is a necessity for every local church, and sound teaching keeps the church on the right and solid way.

Paul underlines the spiritual gifts, different services given by God through individuals and different workings being for the common good (1 Cor 12:4–7). Only a few are called to be apostles but in principle, all could prophesy. This kind of common priesthood has been a strength in Pentecostalism. The spiritual gifts and various workings (*energmaton*) can take place through any and every believer. This kind of common priesthood creates a unique unity that is not based only on ordained workers. God can work through any believer with his spiritual gifts and *energmaton*. The last-mentioned seems to cover all possible ways the Spirit may work by affecting “to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Phil 2:13). This kind of practicing of common priesthood creates a special kind of unity, based not only on the position of those who have been ordained and blessed for a special leadership position. The Lord can give *energmaton* through whomever he chooses to use.

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul develops the theme of unity to an astonishingly high level by making a parallelism between Christ and the church as a marriage (Ephesians 5). Through the Lord's Supper, this deep unity is realized in a concrete way. Paul speaks about participation in the body and blood of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 10:16) by again using the Greek word *koinonia*, unity. We need to understand that both in a vertical way, as unity with Christ, and also as horizontal, being united with other believers as a local church, national church, international Pentecostal family, global evangelical community, and as a universal unity with all Christians everywhere.

To Paul, *koinonia* also meant unity in evangelism and world missions. He writes about that to the Philippians: “I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now” (Phil 1:4–5). The Greek word for partnership here is *koinonia*. That *koinonia* was realized, for example, by giving financial support to Paul (Phil 4:15–16). Paul is transparent about financial matters and twice confirms receiving money from the Philippians when he left Macedonia and went to Thessalonica.

The operative collaboration becomes very clear in Acts 20:4. Paul has on his team two missionaries from Thessalonica (Aristarchus and Secundus), one from Berea (Sopater), one from Derbe (Gaius), one from Lystra (Timothy), and two from Asia (Tychicus and Trophimus). Of these, Aristarchus followed Paul to Rome. Timothy was

his closest co-worker to the end of his life. Tychicus and Trophimus are mentioned by Paul later again connected to his activities.

In Paul's teams, we can see the embryo of mission sodality.<sup>23</sup> Not all decisions were made by the sending church (Antioch), although it was instrumental in the sending process. Expertise was needed to enable good implementation, and that was provided by Paul's team. They knew the circumstances, culture, and other challenges.

Paul created unity by his letters both on the theological and practical level. He systematically built unity between the local churches he established. That was not only on the basis of the letters themselves, but he would send the letters with his trusted messengers who, by their presence, strengthened the ties between the churches and also with the apostle. The messengers became heralds and symbols of the unity. The doctrinal statement of the Jerusalem council, which defined the relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers, was sent by the trusted representatives, Silas and Judas Barsabbas, from the Jewish "headquarters" to Antioch, the original Gentile ministry hub.

The deep desire of Jesus Christ was to see his followers in unity. He prayed for that in John 17: "so that they may be brought to complete unity" (v. 23). The Greek word *teteleiōmenoi* means that we are perfectly made one (*eis hen*). That, of course, does not allow us to limit our unity only to the Pentecostal family, but asks how we can promote the goal of Jesus with a broader perspective. What then are the practical ways we can implement joint actions? I will come to that later.

Mark L. Williams, who has worked as overseer of the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee, bases his theology of collaboration on two metaphors used by Paul: God's field and God's building. We are there as workers who belong to God. We are working together, we are co-workers, and we are God's fellow-workers. We are partners who belong to God. Paul's language expresses close-knit fellowship and interdependence. Paul uses compound nouns to express this Christian togetherness, terms like "fellow citizens," "fellow heirs," "fellow laborers," "fellow prisoners," "fellow servants," and "fellow soldiers."<sup>24</sup>

Pentecostals significantly emphasize the role of the local church in all Christian activities, and in that way, Pentecostals belong to the congregational wing of evangelicals. There is usually some kind of networking or uniting organization for the local churches. Quite often local churches strongly emphasize the independence of every individual church. At the same time, some common matters are dealt with by the national church structure. But especially in the Nordic countries, the role of the Pentecostal national church has been minimized in order to protect the independence of the local church. That has, however, led to an understanding that the only structure

highlighted in the New Testament is the local church.<sup>25</sup> That view ignores the wide and strong collaboration we can see through the writings of Paul.

Melvin Hodges was a great influencer in Pentecostal ecclesiology and missiology. He followed Roland Allen and also the initiators of the three-self church concept, American Rufus Anderson and British Henry Venn. Self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating churches, for the congregational Anderson were local churches, and for the episcopal Venn, also national churches. The principle of interdependence was important for the latter. That was important also for Melvin Hodges. He has a special chapter in his classic book *The Indigenous Church* entitled “The National Organization.” In it he reasons for the need of this connecting structure by referring to Paul’s way of addressing his letter to the church in Corinth. It is not only to one local church but “together with all his holy people throughout Achaia” (2 Cor 1:2).<sup>26</sup>

In other ways, Paul also models the importance of the working together with different local churches, which we can understand as an example for denominational collaboration. He sent letters through which he built doctrinal unity. He provided messengers to keep the various churches informed and reminded them about mutual fellowship. He emphasized permanent partnership in prayer. He trained new workers on his teams, providing coaching and mentorship. His teams were international, consisting of members from different churches in various regions of the Roman Empire (Acts 20:4). To Paul, networking in missions was key in spreading the gospel to new areas, and therefore he challenged different churches to partnership in order to reach these areas. The church of Rome was in his mind as he planned to go to Spain to preach the gospel there (Rom 15:23–24).

German missiologist Gustav Warneck identifies a danger in the three-self formula. It can promote mere independence at the cost of unity and collaboration.<sup>27</sup> This is a real pitfall that we can see in the history of the Nordic countries’ mission history. The biblical three-self formula practiced by Paul also included collaboration of the churches, in that way avoiding the danger of self-satisfaction and limitation to the local level.

William A. Smalley considers the three-self formula a Western concept based on Western ideas of individualism and power.<sup>28</sup> It is an interesting question as to how much it is actually the case because we find the same concepts in Paul’s ministry. At least this formula does not promote the use of foreign decision makers, foreign money, or foreign manpower in promoting the spread of the gospel. The decisive aspect is whether the formula is used as a real value affecting decision making or more as a slogan just to give the impression that local people are involved in the programs. That does not necessarily include them as real owners of the process. The Apostle Paul’s principle is still valid: “Not that we lord it over your faith” (2 Cor 1:24). He was not the owner of

nor overruling the Corinthians, but as he says: “we work with you for your joy” (1:24). He worked together honoring the ownership of the local people.

Paul Hiebert added a fourth self to the formula: self-theologizing. His concern was to provide for new indigenous churches the right to read and interpret the Scriptures from their own cultural context.<sup>29</sup> This is sometimes misunderstood by supposing it as an alternative to make new hermeneutics even to the classical basic doctrines. In fact, it is only opening the way for contextualization from the indigenous starting point. Westerners are not necessarily the best experts to make contextualization in matters that include local cultural dimensions. We can see this also in Paul’s way of handling these matters. He writes to the Corinthians concerning the practice of head coverings: “Judge for yourselves” (1 Cor 11:13). Even by giving them elements for decision making, he leaves the final word to them. In this matter, including cultural dimensions, Paul was not dictating to them, but appealing to their own assessment.

Australian Alan Tippet has developed a six-self formula. He pays attention to more organic features like self-image, self-function, self-determination, and self-giving. The other two are close to self-supporting and self-propagation. The danger when becoming self-supporting is that one can also become selfish, interested only in one’s own financial situation. Tippet rightly pays attention to this danger by reminding us about the very nature of the Christian lifestyle. It is giving, just as God gave the best he had.<sup>30</sup>

Charles Kraft emphasizes the dynamic equivalence that we need for practicing the life modeled in the New Testament and for being mindful that Christ is still alive.<sup>31</sup> That leads us also to Pentecostal self-understanding, which means relying fully on the work of the Holy Spirit: “Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit” (Zech 4:6). The church and its mission should not be self-empowered but Spirit-empowered. This enables the church and its missions to be self-governed, self-supported, and self-propagated. To be a real “self-church” means to be an unselfish church. It depends fully on the leadership and work of the Holy Spirit, and that is the real secret of the Pentecostal growth story.

## **Goals for Unity and Collaboration for Pentecostal World Missions**

According to the statistics of Patrick Johnstone, there are about 751,000 Pentecostal local churches in the world.<sup>32</sup> PWF has over sixty million members and WAGF over sixty-eight million. There is some overlapping in the figures. Roughly half of the PWF members are AG churches. We can talk quite safely about one hundred million Pentecostals altogether in those two umbrella organizations. The WAGF also has accurate statistics about the number of missionaries. The PWF has started to gather

such information. Brad Walz, the chairman of the missions commission of the WAGF, by placing the current number of missionaries at 11,000, states a goal of 35,000, which means ten churches supporting one missionary.<sup>33</sup> We can also pose the question: What if all 751,000 local Pentecostal churches would send one missionary each? Then the evangelization of the world would be finished quite soon.

Not all of these Pentecostal churches are members of PWF and/or WAGF. A major challenge is to invite all Pentecostals to practice John 17:23, to strive for the perfect oneness of which Jesus spoke. PWF and WAGF have taken steps to strengthen their collaboration. Last year they formed a joint commission for religious liberty, the Pentecostal Commission on Religious Liberty (PCRL). The mission commissions of both organizations have increased their cooperation by organizing joint meetings and even its first global mission Congress (Madrid 2018). That development is promising for the future.

Even classical Pentecostals are not all under the umbrellas of PWF and WAGF. A large number of churches in Africa and Asia that were started by missionaries from other continents have never been connected to the global Pentecostal networks. They have millions of believers as members. As an example, the Nordic countries' background Pentecostals in East and Central Africa number more than twenty million but only one church is a member of the PWF.

WAGF has brought a new category to its member status called "affiliated partners." This offers a way to be connected to the WAGF if the "mother" denomination is a member of the WAGF. That means that many African, Asian, and Latin American churches started by WAGF members can join in the WAGF activities, not as official members (if they are not ready for that), but as "affiliated partners."

More challenging is the connection with the larger Pentecostal-Charismatic family. The largest network of that category is the Empowered21 (E21) movement. It is not a church organization but a facilitator for reaching all people with the gospel by 2033. E21 conferences in different parts of the world are gathering thousands of Pentecostal-Charismatic leaders together and inspiring them to finish the task Jesus mandated. The question is whether all of them have proper structures in their world missions activities. Can the classical Pentecostals with their structures offer something to these churches that are lacking ways to send and support? A large part of the Pentecostals-Charismatics that are lacking in mission structures are the independent churches. To what extent can John 17 theology inspire those churches to find ways of building collaboration with those Pentecostals who have experience in practicing missions?

What would the future picture of Pentecostal-Charismatic missions look like? A development that already is in existence is the growth among the new senders outside of

the Western world. The practical results of that development depend much on the way the new senders are practicing their missions. The continent with the smallest percentage of evangelical believers is Europe. At the beginning of this decade, the evangelicals in Europe were just 2.5% of the population, in Asia 3.5%, in Latin America 16.7%, in Africa 17.2%, in the Pacific 17.8%, and in North America 26.8%.<sup>34</sup> If we want to follow Paul's principle to preach Christ where he is not yet known, it means to concentrate efforts especially into Europe and Asia.

When missionaries come from other continents to Europe and Asia, the missions and missionaries have the same challenges faced by Western missionaries when they started working in other continents: whether to start their own work or to find a partner among the existing churches and missions. Often, the African Pentecostals are establishing their own churches in Europe without paying attention to the existing Pentecostals. John 17 theology is then nowhere seen. A dialogue is needed, and that has already been noted in the new organization, APMF. On the other hand, the European churches need to develop a structure enabling the involvement of African, Asian, and Latin American missionaries in their national structures.

Another important way of looking at the challenges in world missions is dealing with the unreached people groups. From all people groups (over 17,000 all together) still over 7,000 are unreached.<sup>35</sup> The greatest number of them are found in India and its neighboring countries, but there are also quite a number in North Africa and on the belt from South Sahara to the Horn of Africa. There are many also still in South East Asia.<sup>36</sup>

Alan R. Johnson has dealt widely and deeply with the questions of the unreached and of frontier missions in his book *Apostolic Function in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Missions*. He calls for a renewed understanding of the role of apostolic ministry that is needed if we want to finish the task Jesus gave us. Johnson urges us to go where the church does not exist.<sup>37</sup> He sees, as a key, apostolic teams working in the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>38</sup> He emphasizes also the need of teams with a multiplicity of giftings.<sup>39</sup> I personally believe that we need to develop international teams where the leveraging of cultural differences maximizes the potential of the group. The relational gifts of Africans can be connected to the analytical mindset of task-oriented Westerners. The final result may exceed what could be reached by a more monocultural way of working. If this takes place under the context of the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we may experience the same results as Paul's missionary teams. We need to be Spirit-driven.

Uchechuckwu Ama, a Nigerian mission director, is concerned about the developing Pentecostal missions becoming too self-centered. The three-self churches may become selfish churches. He urges a move from a self-driven to a Spirit-driven

praxis.<sup>40</sup> Of course that does not lead to abandoning the three-self formula, for it can certainly be practiced in a Spirit-driven way. Ama, in any case, is observing the pitfall of becoming too managerial or mechanistic in missions.

Dick Brogden points to several important aspects in partnership, starting with prayer. In 2011, he suggested Friday as a special day of prayer for unreached people.<sup>41</sup> That initiative has been widely put into practice. He also sees the bigger possibility for an ecumenical partnership including Catholic, Protestant/Evangelical, and Pentecostal.<sup>42</sup> This has taken place in the Global Christian Forum where Catholics, the WCC, the WEA, and the PWF are coming together, not as church organizations, but as a forum for discussing actual common matters, while at the same time, getting to know each other better. It has also resulted in some fruit like the gathering in Tirana, Albania, dealing with “Discrimination, Persecution, and Martyrdom.” Christians are the most persecuted religion today. A historical turning point took place in Tirana when the churches asked mutual forgiveness because of persecution and discrimination against each other.<sup>43</sup>

How much are Pentecostals ready to practice a broad ecumenism? It seems not to be a problem to join hands in Bible translation and distribution of the Scriptures. We can even agree with many that Europeans are in need of knowing Jesus as their personal Savior. There is still, however, some reluctance toward the idea of the one church ecumenism. Cecil Robeck’s comment a long time ago still seems to be valid: “To note all of this, however, is not to say that Pentecostals have rejected ecumenism, only that they have rejected one particular form of instrument of ecumenism. If ecumenism is something viewed as something ‘spiritual’, something created by the Holy Spirit, a genuine unity or *koinonia* in the Spirit, a fellowship of all those who are ‘blood bought Christians’, then Pentecostals have embraced rather than rejected ecumenism.”<sup>44</sup>

The growth of Pentecostalism has made other Christians interested. Brogden gives warnings when we become excited about the interest of others wanting to work with us Pentecostals. We must not give up our Pentecostal praxis nor must we be so proud that we refuse to partner with others. He encourages the benefit international missionary teams receive, having seen the result in practice through the Live Dead teams. Not denying challenges in this kind of partnership, he however encourages us to find the strengths in this formula of working. “The time has come for collaborative and prayerful teams who are able to reproduce themselves.”<sup>45</sup>

An important area for international partnering is, according to Brogden, the “Way-maker” role of missionaries in creative-access areas. These people usually are not officially known as missionaries. They are tentmakers or “business as mission” people who know the context and open the way for others like them or for international teams.

Brogden warns that we cannot make a mistake by counting the tentmakers as less than missionaries nor giving them less training.<sup>46</sup>

Besides training, Brogden stresses partnership in leadership and sacrifice. The former should be free from paternalism, based on relationships that are fluid, multi-lateral, and fraternal. Concerning sacrifice, both faith and realism are needed. He refers to the methods of the early church including mystery and pain, joy and suffering, because Jesus is worth everything. “Grain of wheat must not only be willing, but happy, to fall into the ground and die. Happy because otherwise they remain alone, but dying they produce much fruit.”<sup>47</sup>

## **Cultural Challenges for Developing Partnerships**

Working together requires a common understanding of worldview. That is the deepest level of our innermost self and being and directs our decision making. Paul Hiebert states that worldview consists of three levels. The surface level deals with the pattern of behavior, cultural products, and signs and rituals. The middle level under it includes the beliefs, and the deepest level consists of worldview themes.<sup>48</sup> Unfortunately, the worldview does not change immediately when a person becomes a follower of Christ. He/she is still at least partly affected by the former world view. Only a long-term discipling process brings changes.

We can see that dramatically displayed in the massacre of Rwanda in the 1990s. In that time, Rwanda was a quite strong, formally Christian country. However, 800,000 people were killed. Why? The worldview of the African tribes included a superiority of their own tribe. In the worst way, the other tribe is not human. They are like animals. That was literally realized, for when killing each other, the people were shouting, “Kill those cockroaches!” The Christian worldview had not yet changed their attitudes in spite of the fact they might have known how to sing in the church. We can more easily learn behavioral practices than experience a renewal of our minds, which is encouraged by Paul in writing to the Romans (Rom 12:1–2).

There are differences in cultural matters, for example, concerning individualism-collectivism, individualistic-egalitarian, time- and event-orientation, dichotomistic-holistic thinking, crisis or non-crisis orientation, task- or person-orientation, status or achievement focus, and concealment of vulnerability or willingness to expose vulnerability.<sup>49</sup> Any of these different cultural views can, if not given sensitive attention, endanger the possibilities for long-term collaboration. In many cultures, especially in Asia, losing face is a shame, and that kind of vulnerability is avoided to the utmost. It represents the concealment of vulnerability, and the co-worker from the other culture

needs to be aware of this possible difference to avoid risking the demise of collaboration. In spite of globalization, old cultural features have not disappeared, although they might not be easily visible.

Even the Apostle Paul was aware of cultural challenges by writing to the Corinthians: “you have understood us in part, you will come to understand fully” (2 Cor 1:14). Paul represented Jewish culture, although, while raised in Tarsus, he had also learned Hellenistic culture. In Corinth, there were still barriers to overcome. The Hellenistic world was large, and surely many special features were included in the culture of the local context. Paul, however, believed that it was possible to grow in cultural understanding.

## Conclusion

Is collaboration in world missions for Pentecostals a pragmatic or theological matter? Pentecostals are known as hands-on people who want to see things happening, people changing, growing in faith, practicing their faith, loving their neighbors, showing compassion toward the suffering, establishing churches that grow, and seeing sick people healed. They believe that God’s kingdom takes place already on earth even though not yet in its final fulfillment.

There is, however, increasing theological reflection behind all this. Pentecostals want to see everything based on the Bible. That is why they have developed a theology of collaboration and unity. From the very beginning, they have been open to an ecumenical approach, but they want to keep their theology clear concerning on which basis they are ready to take actions together, recognizing at the same time that the kingdom of God is broader than their denominations.

Collaboration can become much more effective among Pentecostals themselves and between Pentecostals and other Christians. That needs to be built on the basis of God’s word and on the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The movement needs to be Spirit-driven, not selfishness-driven. Pentecostal collaboration is not aiming to build a tower to heaven. It helps people to see that there is a stairway built higher than the tower in Babel (Gen 28:12). The top is really reaching heaven. Through that stairway, which starts from the cross, heaven and earth are connected (John 1:51; Eph 1:10). There Jesus accomplished what Paul writes: “to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.” That stairway does not fall short to anyone willing to use it. The challenge to us is whether we will show everyone the way to it.

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