

A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

ON THE NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE PENTECOSTAL
CHARISMATIC CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICAN AND THE
UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

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Introduction

“My family has just gotten bigger.” That was a closing sentiment of one of the Pentecostal participants after the first gathering of theologians representing the Pentecostal Charismatic Churches of North America (PCCNA) and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). Although many associate ecumenical dialogues with their academic components, i.e., deeply delving into the distinctions and convergences in our respective understandings of the Christian tradition, successful dialogues also leave room for the active presence of the Holy Spirit to touch hearts. “There is no ecumenism worthy of the name,” says the document on ecumenism from the Second Vatican Council, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, “without interior conversion” (i.e., a change of heart).¹ Hearts were surely touched during our interactions as the participants came to appreciate each other’s unique journeys of faith as brothers and sisters in Christ, and I am most grateful for that gift.

The theme for the 2023 Society for Pentecostal Studies conference is “In Our Own Tongues: Amplifying Pentecostalism’s Minoritized Voices,” taken from the voices of those who heard Peter’s inaugural Pentecost address described in Acts 2. The question participants have been called to consider is, “Why not reimagine and rethink our Pentecostal/Charismatic faith, theology and practice from the purview of the periphery?” I believe the Spirit who unites is actively at work in that question, and it is the same question that Pope Francis has called Catholics around the world also to consider in light of their own living of the Christian tradition. Pope Francis writes in his encyclical on human fraternity, *Fratelli Tutti*:

Love also impels us towards universal communion. No one can mature or find fulfilment by withdrawing from others. By its very nature, love calls for growth in

¹ Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*, *Vatican Council II: Volume 1—The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, gen. ed. Austin Flannery, OP (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1998), 7.

openness and the ability to accept others as part of a continuing adventure that makes every periphery converge in a greater sense of mutual belonging. As Jesus told us: “You are all brothers” (Mt 23:8).²

Pentecostals and Catholics have made a commitment to understand the perspectives of those we may have ignored in the past for the sake of “convergence into a greater sense of mutual belonging.” The line of demarcation between Pentecostal and Catholic Christians in our pasts undoubtedly caused us to ignore each other. The new exchange between the PCCNA and the USCCB is another substantive step toward eschewing past refusals to speak with each other. It is a new commitment for Catholics and Pentecostals to reach across the aisle in recognition of the gifts of the Spirit they could offer each other. This motivation coincides with the wisdom of the increasingly popular movement in dialogue known as “receptive ecumenism,”³ a model that highlights the exchange of gifts between communities as opposed to the differentiated consensus model that compares doctrines. I believe it is a method that could be particularly helpful in dialogue with Pentecostals who place such a strong emphasis on pneumatology and the gifts of the Spirit.

This Dialogue’s Place among Many

Dialogue between Catholics and Pentecostals has been taking place for decades—in fact, the first ecumenical engagements Classical Pentecostals had were with Catholics beginning with dialogues organized between some Classical Pentecostal Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in Rome in 1972. Eventually the net of Pentecostal ecumenical relationships would widen to include the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, and on the national level full Pentecostal membership in an organization known as “CCT USA”—Christian Churches Together. CCT is the only ecumenical conciliar organization in the United States in which both the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and Pentecostals enjoy full membership.⁴ This is due in large part to

² Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, October 3, 2020, 95, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html.

³ A good introduction to the method of receptive ecumenism can be found in Paul Murray’s article, “Introducing Receptive Ecumenism,” in *The Ecumenist: A Journal of Theology, Culture and Society* 51:2 (Spring 2014), 1.

⁴ This is such a unique reality that, despite it being a national development, it was acknowledged by an international dialogue between some Classical Pentecostal Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity in its document “On Becoming a Christian: Insights from Scripture and Patristic Writings with Some Contemporary Reflection” in ¶ 20. It is available at <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/pentecostali/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/testo-del-documento-in-inglese1.html>.

the conscious effort by those who wrote CCT's by-laws to ensure that none of the members ever has to compromise any aspect of their identities. Although CCT is one context in which American Pentecostals and Catholics already engage with each other, this new dialogue is the first attempt for scholars representing the USCCB and the PCCNA to enter into bilateral theological dialogue. Such a dialogue will, as Pope Francis puts it, give us the time to develop a deeper sense of fraternity and thus space for listening to and understanding one another.

The American context is one that offers unique opportunities for growth in mutual enrichment, attributable to both the origins of the Pentecostal movement in the United States⁵ and a physical distance from the neuralgic circumstances for Catholics related to the mass exodus of Catholics from the Catholic Church to Pentecostal congregations in Central and South America.⁶ These factors, in addition to the development of the Christian Unity Commission of the Pentecostal Charismatic Churches of North America in 2015,⁷ made this an auspicious time for Catholics and Pentecostals to create a national ecumenical dialogue here in the United States.

An Exchange of Gifts: Prayer, Sacraments, and Liturgy

The individual who undoubtedly did the most to build this new dialogue, Harold Hunter, actively pursued a national ecumenical dialogue between Pentecostal and Catholic scholars for years. The records in the Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the USCCB include copies of correspondence from Dr. Hunter to my predecessors dating back to at least 2010. There are also notes that were prepared by my predecessors promoting the idea of establishing a more formal relationship with Pentecostals, yet I am unaware of the contexts in which they were used. Harold shared with me details about many collaborative efforts he engaged in with the late Brother Jeffrey Gros, someone I, like many Catholic ecumenists, consider to have been a mentor. During Brother Jeff's ecumenical outreach, which included the crossing of many former barriers, he had the opportunity to address the Society of Pentecostal Studies a number of times and even as president in 2012.⁸ In that presentation Brother

⁵ The Azusa Street Revival Movement in 1906 is acknowledged by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity's document "The Bishop and Christian Unity: An Ecumenical Vademecum" as what is "usually considered" the beginning of the Pentecostal Movement (47).

⁶ For example, it has been noted that in 2023 for the first time Pentecostals might outnumber Catholics in Brazil. <https://yourbibleversedaily.com/2022/01/wall-street-journal-catholics-are-losing-ground-rapidly-in-brazil-what-else-is-new/>.

⁷ The history of the Christian Unity Commission is recounted in the PCCNA's website: https://pccna.org/commissions_unity.aspx.

⁸ Brother Jeff gave the Presidential Address to the society in 2012: "It Seems Good to the Holy Spirit and to Us: The Ecclesial Vocation of the Pentecostal Scholar," *Pneuma* 34 (2012), 167–84.

Jeff acknowledged groundbreaking foundations to Catholics and Pentecostal dialogue here in the US. Harold began his work with the international Roman Catholic-Classical Pentecostal dialogue in 1983 and has not only published extensively on Pentecostalism and ecumenism but also offered personal testimony to the dialogue group about his appreciation for aspects of Catholic prayer and spirituality. All of this background brought Harold to most fittingly serve as the Pentecostal co-chair of the exchanges that would be inaugurated in September of 2021. I have found collaborating with him in the development of this dialogue to be a blessing and appreciate the many gifts he has brought to our table.

Harold and I first met at the CCT annual forum in Montgomery, Alabama, in the fall of 2019. It was during that interaction that he approached Bishop Joseph Bambera of Scranton, the chairman of the Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the USCCB, and me as his staff member, to inquire about starting a Catholic-Pentecostal national dialogue. Ironically, Bishop Bambera would soon after that meeting be assigned to serve on the international Pentecostal-Catholic dialogue sponsored by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Unfortunately, it was not long after that interaction that the normal day-to-day lives of all in the world were interrupted by a global pandemic. Despite that challenge, we were determined to make this aspiration come to fruition in an actual dialogue between Catholic and Pentecostal theologians.

On a cool winter's day in 2020 I made my way to a hotel near Washington, DC, where Harold was lodging. Given he was in my area, we decided to take the risk of meeting in person, despite the ominous reminders of the pandemic, namely mask regulations, prohibitions of in-person work, and news stories about lives lost. Harold graciously bought me a cup of coffee to dispel the chill I had from the walk over, and we dreamed together of the moment when we might begin a national theological dialogue between Catholics and Pentecostals. Those dreams seemed to be such a hopeful contrast to the sadness that surrounded us. Nevertheless, we were both convinced that it was the right time to proceed.

During that meeting Harold suggested that we spend the dialogue discussing issues related to prayer, liturgy, and sacraments. In accord with the spirit of receptive ecumenism as an exchange of gifts, he expressed his opinion, much to my surprise, that there might be some aspects of Catholic practice that could be beneficial to Pentecostals. As you could imagine, this was an unexpected request, especially given obvious observations that have been made in the past about the divergences of practice between our communities on such issues. The international dialogue had already noted:

It is true that in worship Catholics are more oriented toward liturgical rites while Pentecostals emphasize the charismatic dimension of the worshipping assembly . . .

Charismatic manifestations like *glossolia* and sacramentally orientated devotions such as exposition of the Blessed Sacrament may seem opposed to some.⁹

Nevertheless, the both of us felt that the group would be up to the challenge. I suggested that we divide up the three years of meetings around the three traditional ways sacraments are grouped together in Catholic thought: Initiation, as experienced through Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist; Healing, as experienced through Confession of Sins and Anointing of the Sick; and finally, Service or Vocation, as expressed through Holy Orders and Marriage. While traditional, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* does explain that there are other ways of grouping the sacraments that are just as acceptable. However, these three groupings highlight stages of life that I felt could be beneficial to this initial sharing between our communities of faith. The *Catechism* explains:

Christ instituted the sacraments of the new law. There are seven: Baptism, Confirmation (or Chrismation), the Eucharist, Penance, the Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. The seven sacraments touch all the stages and all the important moments of the Christian life, they give birth and increase, healing and mission to the Church's life of faith. There is thus a certain resemblance between the stages of natural life and the stages of the spiritual life. Following this analogy, the first chapter will expound the three sacraments of Christian initiation; the second, the sacraments of healing; and the third, the sacraments at the service of communion and the mission of the faithful. This order, while not the only one possible, does allow one to see that the sacraments form an organic whole in which each particular sacrament has its own vital place.¹⁰

Leaving the language very broad, by simply assigning the general topics of initiation, healing, and service, offered to the theologians enough latitude to be themselves and express how their communities of faith live and manifest these three aspects of growth in the Christian life. Other than a general sense that the dialogue would develop the topic of liturgy and sacraments, as well as the “specific” topic of each of the three years, the theologians from our respective groups were given no further instruction. With plenty of room for the working of the Holy Spirit and the creativity of the theologians that could stretch across the aisle into another set of pews, we were ready to prepare for the dialogue.

This initial dialogue consisted of three annual meetings and was provisional/exploratory in status. There were a number of reasons for this decision. First of all, this dialogue was our first interaction, and there needed to be an opportunity to learn about the viability and potential of success for such an encounter before making a longstanding commitment. Secondly, I needed to present the results of the interactions

⁹ “On Becoming a Christian,” ¶¶ 189 and 191.

¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, ¶¶ 1210 and 1211.

to the USCCB's Bishops' Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs so that they could discuss it and discern whether or not to formally endorse the dialogue. Finally, observations from the experiences of the provisional dialogue helped the bishops' committee to discern if the presence of a bishop as Catholic co-chair would be useful to the relationship. I would also note that at the USCCB there are mundane financial matters involved with the distinction between exploratory, as opposed to official, dialogues.

Developments at Dialogue Sessions

Although one of the first aspects of this exploratory dialogue to be developed between the PCCNA and the USCCB was the overall theological theme and the topics of the papers, in addition, we felt strongly that there also be an exchange of faith experiences, religious cultures, and piety. Each day we were together was enshrined in prayer, one group leading in the morning and the other in the evening. Those daily prayers were developed in accord with the diverse spiritual expressions found in our various communities of faith. We also shared all of our meals in common, which offered the opportunity for the theologians and participants to share their faith journeys with one another in an informal setting. These dialogues also gave to all of the participants an opportunity to learn about their faith communities through brief pilgrimages to places of particular significance for Pentecostals and Catholics in the United States. Many of those sights made a lasting impact upon the participants.

The first dialogue session was held in September of 2021 in Washington, DC. The theme was "initiation." It was most appropriate to begin our time together with a dialogue on the beginning of the life of faith for the Christian. Lodging and dialogue sessions were at the Washington Retreat House. That retreat house is of particular historical significance for the Catholic ecumenical movement because it was built in the early twentieth century by Mother Luana White. Along with Father Paul Wattson, she founded the Franciscan Friars and Sisters of the Atonement, which is a religious community that has as its main charism the unity of Christians. This was the community that began the "Octave for Christian Unity," which would eventually become the "Week of Prayer for Christian Unity." A member of the Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement, Sister Nancy Conboy, SA, offered a presentation on the history of her community's involvement with ecumenism to our group. We also spent a morning at the National Shrine of Pope St. John Paul II. In addition to his considerable outreach to the Jewish community, St. John Paul was a strong promoter of ecumenism, authoring the first and thus far only papal encyclical on ecumenism, *Ut Unum Sint*. Another place we were able to visit was the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land, which includes life-sized replicas of a number of important monuments and shrines in the Holy Land.

We were led on that tour by Fr. Jim Gardiner, SA, who is a Franciscan Friar of the Atonement that has made his own contribution to the ecumenical movement in the United States. Finally, we were led on a tour of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception by the director of pilgrimages, Monsignor Vito Buonanno. The basilica is in a particular way an architectural representation of Catholicism as it is experienced throughout the United States. These visits enabled the Pentecostal team to have a fuller picture of the lives and history of Catholics in the United States.

The Pentecostal team also led us on thought provoking pilgrimages as they hosted our dialogue in September of 2022 at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The first place the dialogue visited in Tulsa was the Greenwood Museum followed by a Pentecostal prayer service at the John Hope Franklin Reconciliation Park. These visits were sobering reminders of the destruction of the prosperous “Black Wall Street” during the tragic Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. The visits also reminded us of the distressing historical development that preceded the massacre with the forced displacement of the Native Americans from their lands. These stark historical realities coincided well with the theme of that second meeting: healing. None of the Catholics had ever visited Oral Roberts University before. The experience of being in an environment that is saturated in Pentecostalism gave greater depth to our understanding of Pentecostalism. We appreciated the opportunity to visit the Oral Roberts Prayer Tower and the university’s deliberate efforts to provide an environment conducive to the building up of the students’ prayer lives. It was particularly refreshing to have the opportunity to interact not only with representatives of the theology faculty at Oral Roberts, including Wonsuk Ma, whose work in Global Christian Studies is an invaluable contribution to the ecumenical movement, but also those involved with Oral Roberts University’s commitment to creation care. We also found the experience of participating in chapel worship with the university’s president, Dr. Billy Wilson, to be a particularly joyful moment and were honored to be welcomed so graciously by Dr. Wilson and the students present.

The last session of this first, exploratory round, met in September of 2023 at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana. The theme was “vocation/service” and ministry, and it was another special opportunity to learn about how our faith communities live out their belief in the Lord Jesus and his love for all people. During this session Dr. Kimberly Belcher invited us to observe a course she teaches entitled “Holy Communion and Christian Disunity.” We also had the pleasure of interacting with graduate students in theology at a dinner hosted by the university’s Office of Mission Engagement and Church Affairs. Jerry Powers of the Catholic Peacebuilding Network spoke to us about the university’s promotion of Catholic peacebuilding efforts throughout the world. The group also enjoyed an experience at the *Digital Visualization Theatre*, a planetarium on campus, during which we heard a presentation by Keith Davis on “What the Ancients

Knew about the Heavens and What Scientists Know.” Kim mentioned how she brings her undergraduate students to the theatre when she discusses the creation narratives of Genesis. Once again, we were the recipients of tremendous hospitality at Notre Dame. All of these journeys helped to flesh out the necessary human and spiritual dimensions for a successful ecumenical dialogue.

Reflections on Theological Exchanges

The theological exchanges during the dialogue sessions were thought-provoking and exposed numerous unexpected areas of convergence between us. The presentations, once completed, will be made available for the public to read and reflect upon through both the journal of Oral Roberts University, *Spiritus*, and the Catholic journal *Worship*. Allow me to simply offer a few basic points on the Pentecostal presentations that are particularly interesting to Catholic sensibilities.

The first presentation on the topic of “initiation” was given by Rev. Dr. Frederick L. Ware (Church of God in Christ) of Howard Divinity School and it addressed primarily “water baptism.” The first point he mentioned that is of particular interest for Catholics is that “Pentecostals are rediscovering sacramental theology and exploring its relevance and application to Christian faith and practice in Pentecostal churches.”¹¹ Given the high emphasis on sacraments in the Catholic Church this “rediscovery” is most intriguing and could develop into an area in which Catholics and Pentecostals can fruitfully share their experiences with one another. This “rediscovery,” I would boldly suggest, could be the work of the Spirit through Pentecostalism to heal the divisions between Christians. It is interesting to note that Ware confined his paper to water baptism with a sensitivity toward Catholic practice.

Ware indicated that Pentecostals do not practice confirmation because adults are baptized. Yet, interestingly for Catholics, confirmation (or chrismation in the East) is not only associated with initiation and a personal testimony to faith but also the bestowal of the gifts of the Holy Spirit necessary to live the Christian life, which links it to baptism. One could suggest that confirmation is not perceived as necessary to the Pentecostal precisely because of an already high emphasis on the Spirit’s work in the lives of all believers. This leads me to think that while not formally sacramental in a Catholic sense, *perhaps every day is a day of “confirmation” for a Pentecostal?*

It was particularly interesting to be exposed to the denominational statements on water baptism by Dr. Ware’s paper. A number of those statements highlighted the immersion in water and use of the Trinitarian formula found in Matthew 28. Ware indicated that in the past many denominations would encourage baptism in the name

¹¹ Frederick L. Ware, “Initiation (Water Baptism) in North American Pentecostalism,” *Spiritus* 9:2 (2024), 175.

of the Lord Jesus alone but this has developed into a more common use of the formula found in Matthew 28 as a specific mandate of the Lord Jesus. This development indeed draws our communities closer together, given that for Catholics the proper form of baptism is always the use of water (regardless of the water being poured or the practice of immersion) and invocation of the Trinitarian formula.¹² The PCCNA membership being reserved to Trinitarian Christians is helpful since in Catholic theology belief in the Trinity occupies a prominent place in the “hierarchy of truths”—a notion that has been very helpful in our ecumenical dialogues.¹³

There are two important asides I would like to make with respect to the above observations. First, one crucial question Ware asked is, “How much variation can be accommodated without compromising the integrity of the baptismal event in Christian experience?”¹⁴ One of the points that Ware made is that “If there is anything that may be called typical, it is the diversity of experiences, thoughts, and perspectives among Pentecostals.”¹⁵ This begs the question for Catholics that, although denominational statements promote water baptism with the Trinitarian formula, what is the usual practice? For Catholics, matter, i.e., pure water, and form, i.e., the Trinitarian formula, are necessary for the validity of the baptism. Variations in practice compromising matter and form are a concern for Catholics, not only with Pentecostals, but also mainline Protestants and even Catholic ministers who might apply an overextension of variation to the conferral of the sacrament.¹⁶ The upcoming annual forum of CCT will actually seek to address these issues while also relating baptism to the call to work for justice.

¹² In the *Code of Canon Law*, it states “Baptism . . . is validly conferred only by washing with true water together with the required form of words” (c 849). The *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms of Ecumenism* is even more explicit in this regard: “Baptism is conferred with water and with a formula which clearly indicates that Baptism is done in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. . . . Baptism by immersion, or by pouring water, with the Trinitarian formula is, of itself, valid. Therefore, if the rituals, liturgical books or established customs of a church or ecclesial community prescribe either of these ways of Baptism, the Sacrament is to be considered valid unless there are serious reasons for doubting that the minister observed the regulations of his/her own community or church” (93, 95a). Notably, the Catholic Church recognizes the validity of baptisms from Christian communities that prefer the notion of ordinance to sacrament when done in accord with proper matter and form. A prime example of this for us in the US is the Common Agreement on Baptism reached between the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and Reformed churches that was issued on November 16, 2010.

¹³ As it states in the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity’s document “Reflections and Suggestions Concerning Ecumenical Dialogue” from August 15, 1970: “It will be borne in mind that ‘in Catholic teaching there exists an order of hierarchy of truths, since they vary in their relationship to the foundation of the Christian faith. Neither in the life nor in the teaching of the whole Church is everything presented on the same level. Certainly all revealed truths demand the same acceptance of faith, but according to the greater or lesser proximity that they have to the basis of the revealed mystery, they are variously placed with regard to one another and have varying connections among themselves’” (4, b).

¹⁴ Ware, “Initiation (Water Baptism) in North American Pentecostalism,” 186.

¹⁵ Ware, “Initiation (Water Baptism) in North American Pentecostalism,” 176.

¹⁶ The Episcopal Church USA continues to discern the use of inclusive language in its liturgy and should this impact the baptismal formula of “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” this would, in the view of the Catholic Church, render such baptisms invalid. See Fr. Matthew S. C. Olver’s commentary on changes in

The second aside relates to an important caution Dr. Ware makes, one I find to be less of a caution and more of a convergence. He states, “Clearly, and without question, these rituals have been instituted by Christ. After giving these rituals, is there yet freedom for God to act beyond prescribed liturgy? How does God use the ritual, but also transcend it?”¹⁷ This is indeed a question Catholics have considered, and an opportunity to make clear that Catholics do not consider the sacraments as in any way capable of limiting the activity of God. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains this important nuance carefully so as on the one hand not to denigrate a Catholic sense of the importance of baptism while at the same time preserving the sovereignty of God:

The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude; this is why she takes care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptized are “reborn of water and the Spirit.” *God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments* [emphasis is in the original].¹⁸

From this official teaching document of the Church Catholics can offer a resounding yes to Dr. Ware’s question of there being freedom for God to act beyond prescribed liturgy. How that might take place lies in the realm of the mystery of God’s grace.

Dr. David S. Han of Pentecostal Theological Seminary offered the Pentecostal paper for our second meeting that he entitled “Healing in the Pentecostal Tradition.” He began by emphasizing how fundamental the ministry of healing is to the identity of

the Eucharistic Prayers in his article, “New Rites: Expansive, Inclusive or Stifling?,” *Covenant*, November 18, 2018, <https://covenant.livingchurch.org/2018/11/14/new-rites-expansive-inclusive-or-stifling/>. There was a recent issue of a Catholic deacon using the wrong words of the baptismal formula and invalidly baptizing an infant who would later on become a priest. This mistake necessitated that he participate once again in ceremonies for his baptism, confirmation, and ordination. This was a particularly grave situation because as a result this young man functioned as a priest when he was not in fact validly ordained, rendering many of the sacraments he conferred invalid. For more information read Michael Stechschulte’s article in, “A Priest Discovered His Baptism Was Invalid. Its Ripple Effects Bring Heartache and Confusion to the Entire Church Community,” *America Magazine*, August 24, 2020, <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2020/08/24/detroit-priest-invalid-baptism-canonical-consequences>.

¹⁷ Ware, “Initiation (Water Baptism) in North American Pentecostalism,” 187.

¹⁸ Paragraph 1257. This is a summarization of the thought of Peter Lombard (twelfth century) who wrote, “Almighty God can and does give grace to men in answer to their internal aspirations and prayers without the use of any external sign or ceremony. This will always be possible, because God, grace, and the soul are spiritual beings. God is not restricted to the use of material, visible symbols in dealing with men; the sacraments are not necessary in the sense that they could not have been dispensed with. But, if it is known that God has appointed external, visible ceremonies as the means by which certain graces are to be conferred on men, then in order to obtain those graces it will be necessary for men to make use of those Divinely appointed means. This truth theologians express by saying that the sacraments are necessary, not absolutely but only hypothetically, i.e., in the supposition that if we wish to obtain a certain supernatural end we must use the supernatural means appointed for obtaining that end.” <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/13295a.htm#l>.

Pentecostals: “The experience of divine healing is, however, just as significant as that of Spirit-baptism. Donald W. Dayton would even argue: ‘. . . even more characteristic of Pentecostalism than the doctrine of baptism of the Spirit is its celebration of miracles of divine healing as part of God’s salvation and as evidence of the presence of divine power in the church.’”¹⁹ It is interesting to note that despite the tremendous emphasis Pentecostals place on healing that the international dialogue did not pick up the topic of healing in a substantive way until relatively recently. During the first dialogue (1972–1976) it was noted that healing should be a topic of conversation among numerous others. In October of 1979 the dialogue met in Rome and the topic of healing was discussed alongside a consideration of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition. In subsequent documents and discussions, healing was acknowledged as one among many manifestations of the work of the Spirit but not given particular attention. However, during the last round of the international dialogue, Catholic and Pentecostal theologians devoted an entire session to the topic of healing at their 2013 meeting in Baltimore. The document produced by that round, “Do Not Quench the Spirit,” dedicates a small section to healing and explicates the results of their discussions under three categories: healing in Scripture, healing in church history, and healing in the life of the church. It is apparent that more dialogue needs to be pursued in this area. Healing is not only an important part of Pentecostal life, but it has also been so in Catholic life, with the sacraments of Anointing of the Sick and Reconciliation as official public acts of the Church. The Catholic Charismatic Renewal also has a high emphasis on healing prayer. While some work has been done on Scripture and church history, a deeper appreciation and theological exploration of the phenomenological dimensions of healing, particularly as emphasized in Pentecostalism, would be helpful to Catholics and Pentecostals coming to understand each other better. Pope Francis in his letter for the World Day of Peace in 2021 urged all people to build a “culture of care.” Given the recent pandemic and greater emphasis on promoting good health this would be an opportune time to discern how Catholics and Pentecostals together can bring the healing power of Christ to those around us.

There is another point made by Han that has the potential of being developed into a substantive dialogue. He notes: “Healing envisages a holistic restoration of human being. Practices of healing are constant reminders to affirm the truth that human beings are only made whole when both their spiritual and bodily needs are brought to bear and met with nourishment.”²⁰ This aspect of the healing ministry of the church emphasizes a Christian anthropology that understands the unity of the human person, body, mind, and spirit, in contradiction to contemporary trends that

¹⁹ David S. Han, “Healing in the Pentecostal Tradition,” *Spiritus* 9:2 (2024), 218–19.

²⁰ Han, “Healing in the Pentecostal Tradition,” 226.

overemphasize materialism, reducing the human person to the bodily, and also Gnostic trends that denigrate the body and exalt the spiritual. Pope Francis has in a particular way pointed out the need to confront what he perceives to be an upsurge in Gnostic and Pelagian tendencies in today's world.²¹ Ministers to the sick from both Pentecostal and Catholic churches understand that when an individual's body is in pain, it can impact the person's spiritual and emotional life, while when a person is spiritually or emotionally wounded, those wounds can manifest themselves in physical ways and even interfere with the healing processes of the body. This is surely a point of convergence that can assist in our mutual attempts to bring people closer to Christ during their times of need.

The final point of convergence I would highlight that is helpful to emphasize is that both Catholics and Pentecostals understand our rituals associated with healing as being consistent with and inspired by sacred Scripture. Han mentions: "Of a particular note, all of the official statements of classical Pentecostal denominations appeal to James 5:14–16. It is partly due to the fact that this is the only place where we are given a description of a specific procedure to follow."²² When Catholic priests offer the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick, they read this same passage of Scripture. Although Catholics interpret the elders mentioned by James as having a responsibility reserved to a priest or bishop who has been officially ordained, precisely because this is an official act of the Church, both Catholics and Pentecostals engage in similar healing rituals. There is a laying on of hands and an anointing with oil. While the use of "anointed

²¹ The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued a letter, *Placuit Deo*, to bishops about certain aspects of Christian salvation on February 22, 2018. It stated: "Pope Francis, in his ordinary magisterium, often has made reference to the two tendencies described above, that resemble certain aspects of two ancient heresies, Pelagianism and Gnosticism. A new form of Pelagianism is spreading in our days, one in which the individual, understood to be radically autonomous, presumes to save oneself, without recognizing that, at the deepest level of being, he or she derives from God and from others. According to this way of thinking, salvation depends on the strength of the individual or on purely human structures, which are incapable of welcoming the newness of the Spirit of God. On the other hand, a new form of Gnosticism puts forward a model of salvation that is merely interior, closed off in its own subjectivism. In this model, salvation consists in elevating oneself with the intellect beyond 'the flesh of Jesus towards the mysteries of the unknown divinity.'" It also stated: "The salvific sacramental economy is also opposed to trends that propose a merely interior salvation. Gnosticism, indeed, associates itself with a negative view of the created order, which is understood as a limitation on the absolute freedom of the human spirit. Consequently, salvation is understood as freedom from the body and from the concrete relationships in which a person lives. In as much as we are saved 'by means of offering the body of Jesus Christ' (Heb 10:10; cf. Col 1:22), true salvation, contrary to being a liberation from the body, also includes its sanctification (cf. Rom 12:1). The human body was shaped by God, who inscribed within it a language that invites the human person to recognize the gifts of the Creator and to live in communion with one's brothers and sisters. By his Incarnation and his paschal mystery, the Savior re-established and renewed this original language and communicated it in the economy of the sacraments. Thanks to the sacraments, Christians are able to live in fidelity to the flesh of Christ and, as a result, in fidelity to the concrete order of relationships that He gave us. This order of relationality requires, in a particular way, the care of all suffering humanity through the spiritual and corporal works of mercy" (14).

²² Han, "Healing in the Pentecostal Tradition," 229.

handkerchiefs” is not popular among Catholics, there are other practices of popular piety, like the use of water from the grotto at Lourdes, France, and the relics of saints, that are known to have similar impacts and meanings. Hence there is much in the way of convergence in regard to healing that should be explored.

Dr. Martin W. Mittelstadt of Evangel University offered the third Pentecostal paper entitled, “Called: A Pentecostal Theology of Vocation.” It seemed to be particularly fitting to conclude our discussions with the notion of vocation since many of them eventually led to ways in which we could enrich each other’s work of discipleship. The topic of a Pentecostal theology of vocation is one that has been of particular interest to Mittelstadt for a long time. He wrote: “For over twenty years, I have been teaching a required first-year course that includes an intense unit on vocation. With my department colleagues, we provide roughly fifteen sections of this course annually. I listen to the students’ stories every day.”²³ Due to these experiences, Mittelstadt was particularly reflective and insightful.

One of the most important points that Mittelstadt continually made in his paper was that a theology of vocation is deficient if it is only in reference to the clergy. He wrote,

I believe the traditional narrative has led many Pentecostal believers toward church-related ministry because of minimalist theology of the call. Some of these folk, like me, have survived and thrived; others stumbled. Added to this, I have a concern for Pentecostal congregants who never receive the call to church-related ministry. Many struggle to understand why they receive no such call, and many more are left with little instruction and discipleship concerning their day-to-day vocations.²⁴

This exclusive attention to the vocation of formalized ecclesial service was also a challenge in the Catholic Church. The *Baltimore Catechism*, which was a text that was used to teach Catholic children in the United States about the faith before the 1960s, contained an illustration that on one side depicted a husband and wife with the caption, “good,” while next to it was a picture of a priest and a nun with the caption, “better.” Yet with the Second Vatican Council the Catholic Church recognized and emphasized the point that Mittelstadt is now making. It is referred to as the “universal call to holiness” and is described in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, in this way:

It is therefore quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society. In order to reach this

²³ Martin W. Mittelstadt, “Called: A Pentecostal Theology of Vocation,” *Spiritus* 9:2 (2024), 285.

²⁴ Mittelstadt, “Called: A Pentecostal Theology of Vocation,” 285.

perfection, the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gift, so that, following in his footsteps and conformed to his image, doing the will of God in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbor.²⁵

Mittelstadt contends that there is a certain equality among faithful Christians, each following an individual calling from Christ. He even goes so far as to make this statement: "If the Spirit enlists everyone, patriarchy and hierarchy collapse."²⁶ As a Catholic my ears naturally perk up when I hear the word "hierarchy." However, I believe that the use of the term as Mittelstadt understands it, seemingly individuals who "lord their authority over others,"²⁷ would render this sentence correct for Catholics. Pope Francis has offered a distinct view of hierarchy that is a description of the authentic Catholic understanding of that term:

Even when the function of ministerial priesthood is considered "hierarchical," it must be remembered that "it is totally ordered to the holiness of Christ's members." Its key and axis is not power understood as domination, but the power to administer the sacrament of the Eucharist; this is the origin of its authority, which is always service to God's people.²⁸

Catholics understand that when their hierarchs are immersed in humble service as opposed to domination they are fulfilling the will of Christ. They would consider it a part of the diversity of callings that exist in the Church in keeping with the sentiments of 1 Corinthians 12:28. Mittelstadt emphasized this diversity as it exists in the Pentecostal tradition. He used imagery from the African American spiritual song tradition to make this point:

Out of their spiritual songs, African-Americans gave rise to jazz, a genre that serves as a suitable metaphor for Pentecostal life in the Spirit. Pentecostal worship, liturgies, theologies, and—I suggest—vocations do not produce orchestral or symphonic performances; instead, Pentecostals celebrate oral and bodily spontaneity and improvisation. For this reason, *jazzolalia* serves as an imaginative extension of first-century glossolalia. . . . If applied to vocation, the aphorism by Nigerian-American Pentecostal scholar Nimi Wariboko resonates well: "It-does-not-make-sense-but-it makes-spirit."²⁹

²⁵ *Vatican Council II: Volume I—The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church 39 (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1988), 397.

²⁶ Mittelstadt, "Called: A Pentecostal Theology of Vocation," 290.

²⁷ Matt 20:25.

²⁸ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, The Joy of the Gospel, Apostolic Exhortation, 103. Available at www.vatican.va.

²⁹ Mittelstadt, "Called: A Pentecostal Theology of Vocation," 291.

Before one might jump to a conclusion that this is a far cry from Catholic perspectives on vocations, it would be wise to note well these sentiments of Pope Francis:

Differing currents of thought in philosophy, theology and pastoral practice, if open to being reconciled by the Spirit in respect and love, can enable the Church to grow, since all of them help to express more clearly the immense riches of God's word. For those who long for a monolithic body of doctrine guarded by all and leaving no room for nuance, this might appear as undesirable and leading to confusion. But in fact such variety serves to bring out and develop different facets of the inexhaustible riches of the Gospel.³⁰

The Catholic Church does accept a variety of paths and ways of thinking that lead to holiness. This is most clearly demonstrated by an examination of the collection of names of those canonized as saints by the Catholic Church. These are individuals who are held up as examples of living the Christian life with heroic virtue. They include people of all walks of life, men and women, young and old, hailing from highly diverse cultural and national backgrounds.

One point of divergence, which might be more of emphasis than practice, is the role of the community (to Catholics, the institutional Church) in the discernment of vocations. Given that the Catholic Church holds that its leaders have been given gifts of discernment (as in Matthew 16:18 Peter is acknowledged to have a wisdom about the identity of Jesus that comes from his heavenly Father), Catholics contend that the clergy have a special role in helping Christians to accept their vocations. Vocations are callings that come from God, and while there is a charismatic aspect of this particular individual being given a particular call by God, Catholics contend that this calling is only recognized as authentically from God through the discernment of the clergy. While Pentecostals do have seminary and congregational boards that discern when one is called to formalized Church ministry, this was not highly emphasized in the discussion.

Possibilities for the Future

This first exploratory dialogue between the PCCNA's and the USCCB's representatives concluded in September of 2023. By all accounts it was a success. All of the participants entered into the interaction with the greatest of respect and maturity. From the onset the theologians attempted to discern connections and convergences between our practices and theology. The experience of praying together was particularly lifegiving. The USCCB's Bishops Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs has been continually updated on the progress of this dialogue. In its October 2022 meeting the

³⁰ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 40.

bishops unanimously agreed to send a member of the committee to the September 2023 session. The observations that Bishop Peter Smith, auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Portland, Oregon, brought the bishops' committee to agree to elevate the status of the USCCB-PCCNA dialogue. We look forward to a future in dialogue together and an incorporation into the regular rhythm of the committee's ecumenical portfolio. Discernment will need to be made about the next topic to be developed. Another issue to consider is that the PCCNA is international in scope while the USCCB is confined to the United States. It might be appropriate at some point for the Catholics to consider including the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops in the dialogue. With widespread fluency in online platforms, it would be possible to be both financially responsible and have our theologians meet together with more frequency. Yet at the same time, given the mutual emphasis by Pentecostals and Catholics on the experiential, the importance of periodic in-person meetings cannot be overemphasized.

Conclusion: Reaching Out to the Periphery

I would like to conclude by returning to the theme for this conference, "Amplifying Minoritized Voices." When thinking about such voices my thoughts bring me to the theologians who graciously volunteered to participate in this first national dialogue between Pentecostals and Catholics. Harold and I were deliberate in seeking out a diverse group of participants. The theologians have included women and men, clergy and laity, as well as individuals with Asian, African American, Hispanic, and European backgrounds. We can celebrate together that there are "varieties of gifts but the same Spirit."³¹ Should they maintain this mutual commitment to listening to all voices, especially those on the periphery, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Pentecostal Churches of North America will surely come closer together.



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³¹ 1 Cor 12:4.