

RESPONSE TO MARTIN MITTELSTADT

LEONARDO J. GAJARDO

Spiritus 9.2 (2024) 307–309

<https://doi.org/10.31380/>

© The Author(s) 2024

The experience of participating in our three-year exploratory dialogue was enriching and rewarding for me in several ways. The one that I had anticipated, and that certainly became a reality, was the blessing of learning about Pentecostal theology from Pentecostal brothers and sisters who have been formed by and have formed others in that rich theological tradition. One unexpected way in which I was enriched and rewarded by our three years of dialogue, prayer, and fellowship was that our reflections together afforded me the opportunity to revisit some of the theological tenets and insights of my own Catholic tradition. That was certainly the case with Martin Mittelstadt's paper, "Called: A Pentecostal Theology of Vocation."

In his paper, Mittelstadt frames the question he considers as follows:

Theology and vocation cannot be separated. Who are we? Why are we here? What does God require of us? And specifically, how do Pentecostals answer these questions? Pentecostals deserve a theology that offers vocational clarity for their lives. Pentecostals deserve a theology that will enrich their lives with deep satisfaction, meaning, and liberation.¹

He also identifies three consistent hurdles that have made a Pentecostal theology of vocation difficult to develop: 1) the dualism between the sacred and the secular; 2) the erroneous assumption that church-related ministry is vocationally superior to other vocations; and 3) the difficulty of articulating a sense of calling beyond the workplace. According to Mittelstadt, only by overcoming these hurdles will Pentecostals be able to ensure that the "life in the Spirit" or the "Spirit-filled life," which they cherish so much, "extends to every moment of their lives for the duration of their lives."

While I cannot speak for Pentecostals, I would say that, not just Pentecostals, but all Christians deserve a rich and robust vocational theology, so that they can perceive and respond to the Spirit's call in every aspect of their lives. I also must confess that Catholic theology, imagination, and practice have faced the same hurdles in articulating a theology of vocation that Mittelstadt identifies. But thanks to the questions he raised and the reflections he offered, as well as our rich dialogue, I was led to reflect on what my own Catholic tradition has to say about the vocation of all believers.

As I read Mittelstadt's paper, but even more so during his presentation of the paper and our subsequent discussion, I was struck by the resonance between the

¹ Martin W. Mittelstadt, "Called: A Pentecostal Theology of Vocation," *Spiritus* 9:2 (2024), 286.

questions and ideas he raised, and the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) on what the Council fathers called the universal call to holiness. This teaching had been important for me during my ministerial and theological formation, but, in recent years, other theological questions and ideas had caused me to “forget” this important teaching of the Council. I am very grateful to Mittelstadt for helping me to rediscover it and to recognize how it might contribute to the vital work of ecumenism.

The Council’s teaching regarding the universal call to holiness in the church is found in the fifth chapter of the Council’s dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (*LG*), which was approved by an overwhelming majority of the more than 2,000 bishops present at Vatican II and was officially promulgated by Pope Paul VI in November of 1964. The chapter begins by affirming that God alone is holy, and that through the saving work of Christ, God has sanctified the church and bestowed on it the gift of the Spirit. It then declares:

For this reason, everyone in the church is called to holiness, whether he belongs to the hierarchy or is cared for by the hierarchy, according to the saying of the apostle: “This is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Th 4,3; see Eph 1, 4). This holiness of the church is shown continuously, and it should be shown, in those fruits of grace which the Spirit produces in the faithful; it is expressed in many different ways in the lives of those individuals who in their manner of life tend towards the perfection of charity and in so doing are a source of edification for others.²

Later in the chapter, the Council fathers declare that “all the faithful, whatever their condition or rank, are called to the fulness of the Christian life and the perfection of charity. And this sanctification is conducive to a more human way of living even in society here on earth.”³ The chapter goes on to describe how all the faithful, each according to his or her own vocation, can live out the universal call to holiness.

The teaching of Vatican II on the universal call to holiness marked a new and decisive, although still not fully appreciated or embodied, effort by the Catholic Church to provide the faithful with the kind of vocational theology that, it seems to me, Mittelstadt suggests that Pentecostals need and deserve. The quotes from *Lumen Gentium* cited suggest how the Council fathers tried to address the very same hurdles that Mittelstadt argues Pentecostal theology confronts as it seeks to articulate a theology of vocation. The Council fathers, grounding their teaching on the holiness of God, affirm that all the members of the Church, whether lay or ordained, are called to live

² *Lumen Gentium*, 1964, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html, 39.

³ *Lumen Gentium*, 40.

the holiness of God, which can in be expressed in “many different ways,” and which is meant to bear fruit in the others and in the world.

While Catholics still need to do much reflection on this teaching in order to receive it and reflect it in their concrete lives, my sense from our dialogue is that the universal call to holiness could contrive to a fruitful and mutual enrichment between Pentecostals and Catholics as we seek to discern and articulate a theology of vocation.