

# **Classical Italian Pentecostalism and ecumenical dialogue: A constructive proposal**

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Dissertation accepted in fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree *Master's of Theology in Church and Dogma History* at  
the North-West University

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## Title

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my friend Dr. Danilo Consiglio, for his support and for his great professionalism and patience in the coordinator service.

Furthermore, I also want to dedicate this dissertation to David and Connie Forni, for their support and for their continuous encouragement.

## Declaration

I, Nicola Palmieri, declare that the dissertation hereby submitted to the North West University for the degree Magister Theologian has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at any other university; that it is my own work in design and execution, and that all material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Marius Nel, supervisor, and Carmine Napolitano, co-supervisor, without whose support this dissertation would not have been completed.

## Abstract

This research has been an attempt to present the relationship between some of the classical Pentecostal churches in Italy in respect to ecumenism and the ecumenical movement. Unfortunately, though these two movements may be most important in the twentieth century to have made a mark on and changed the face of Christianity, classic Pentecostals in Italy have given little concern to, or completely ignored, the movement to seek unity in the Church (Napolitano, 2015). The reality of the Italian Pentecostals is very particular because it goes against the trend of the other classic Pentecostals in the world, especially those in America. In fact, during this same 50-year period, thanks to several churches and theologians, Pentecostals around the world have acted in an ecumenical spirit in a fight for the unity of the Church. An example of this would be the dialogue between the Roman Catholics and the classic Pentecostals.

Two principal motives gave birth to this research. The first was to provide a small ecumenical *vademecum* to the Italian churches where they can inform themselves of all that is happening around them concerning ecumenism. This is necessary because this kind of information has been presented badly in Italy, and in a fractured way, there is no concise or succinct text that provides comprehensive information regarding a single Christian confession. Therefore, the first aim of this research is that of gathering information into a single work and putting it at the disposal of the Italian Pentecostals relevant to the classic Pentecostals and their ecumenical dialogues in Italy first and then internationally. The research was not meant to be exclusively a compilation, a gathering of information, but all of the information gathered, even within the dialogues themselves though compiled in synthesis, has always been subject to the critical structure of the author. This critical structure consists of a presentation of the dialogue itself, that is, the dialogues are directly presented and recounted through the critical perspective of the author, and the reading of them is made through the knowledge and perspectives that the author desires to propose through the presentation.

The second reason, which is maybe the more significant one, has been the author's desire for the classical Pentecostal churches to find inspiration through this kind of research and be encouraged to develop a less diffident vision of ecumenism. The author hopes that even the Italian Pentecostals might have the beginning of an ecumenical Spring brought about through a greater knowledge of their part of the bilateral dialogues between Pentecostals and other churches, which could indicate a first step on the part of the local Pentecostal churches towards an ecumenical approach in their relationship with other Christians.

Finally, the author found great benefit for his own development through the research carried out. This is because this has not just been a wealth of information personally, but by enabling a comparison with other Christians, above all through the study and comments on the bilateral dialogues, the author has been able to strengthen and deepen, through a greater awareness of own identity first as a Christian, then as a Pentecostal.

### Key word

Unity, ecumenism, diversity, uniformity, classic Pentecostal churches, ecumenical debate, separation, seeking of unity, documents on the ecumenical debate, fellowship, bilateral dialogues, classic Italian Pentecostal churches.

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# CHAPTER 1: Research proposal presented for the Master's degree in Ecclesiology at the North-West University.

*Title:* Classical Italian Pentecostalism and the Ecumenical Dialogue: A constructive proposal

*Key words:* unity, ecumenism, diversity, uniformity, classic Pentecostal churches, ecumenical debate, separation, seeking of unity, documents on the ecumenical debate, fellowship, bilateral dialogues, classic Italian Pentecostal churches.

## 1.1 Abstract

This proposed research regards the relationship that some classic Pentecostal churches in Italy have with ecumenism and the ecumenical movement. In spite of the fact that the two movements are perhaps the most important movements of the 20th century and have marked and transformed Christianity, for many years in Italy classical Pentecostals did not participate in any ecumenical endeavours (Napolitano, 2015). At the same time, for the past fifty years classical Pentecostals worldwide, thanks to some churches and theologians, had acted in an ecumenical spirit to strive for the unity of the Church. One example is the dialogue between Roman Catholics and classical Pentecostals. It is suggested that Italian classic pentecostal churches can find inspiration and be encouraged to develop a vision for ecumenism by understanding the international dialogues between Roman Catholics and classical Pentecostals. Greater knowledge by the Italian Pentecostals of the bilateral dialogues between Pentecostals and other churches as well could indicate a first direction to local churches in ecumenical attitudes towards other Christians.

## 1.2 Background and problem statement

### 1.2.1 Background

The research is generally conditioned by the religious experience of the author. In reality, the context of who is writing cannot be separated from the objectives established by the research itself, which arose from circumstances and experiences lived through his confession of faith and from some stimuli received through a particular theological formation, which occurred in several ecumenical institutes.<sup>1</sup> The author lives a particular ecclesiastical experience, in a classical Italian pentecostal church, situated in Giuliano (in the province of Naples where there are diverse

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<sup>1</sup> The institute in which the researcher studied is the San Bernardino di Venezia, "ISE", an institute that was founded and projected by the Catholic Church, connected to the Institute of religious studies, Gregoriano di Roma.

pentecostal churches) and collaborates actively in the ministry of the local church through the teaching and preaching of the Word.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, as in many Italian Pentecostal churches, even in this particular church, there are not many ecumenical activities, except for its participation in the activities of the FCP.<sup>3</sup> In fact, especially in Italian Pentecostalism, ecumenism is still not understood to be something important for the essence and survival of Christianity; on the contrary, it is sometimes seen as something negative (Burigana, 2013: 6).

The presupposition of this study is that all of the Christian denominations must be involved in ecumenism and work together to find a way to render it effective, including the classic Pentecostal churches in which the author has an active part. The church most certainly cannot allow itself to ignore it. It is necessary to consider ecumenism as an essential question and part of the Christian experience in the church of Christ and is fundamental for every Christian community. (Cereti, 1992:153). The premise upon which to construct a project which would enable the seeking of the unity of the Church is based on the vision that the Church is “one” and “united”.<sup>4</sup> The problem is that not all of the leaders and believers in the Italian churches believe that this unity should be pursued at all costs because many believe that this has already been accomplished because it is a part of the Church of Christ. This is a conviction that derives from the fact that a fictitious form of unity has been internalised, centred and bound within each single community. From this perspective, the initial paradigm of the local community remains as a reflection of a part of the Body of Christ, and division is a necessary result (Napolitano, 2011:127).

Ecumenism, as the deliberate and planned movement towards the unity of the Church, is in continual evolution both through visible and invisible forms. The problem that will be investigated is the lack of the ecumenical spirit on the part of the Italian classic Pentecostal churches and their individual associations.<sup>5</sup> Its origins define Pentecostalism as ecumenical, healing the scandal of

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<sup>2</sup> The Pentecostal Church of Giugliano in Campania in Naples is part of the FCP and its leaders are also part of the executive council of the FCP.

<sup>3</sup> The classic Italian Pentecostal churches consist of the following main groups: The Assembly of God in Italy (ADI); the Apostolic Church in Italy, the Italian branch of the Apostolic Church; the Elim Church of Italy, the Italian branch of the Elim Pentecostal Church; the International Evangelical Church and Missionary Association, the Italian section of the International Evangelical Church; the Italian branch of the Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee); the New Movement of the Pentecost; and the Church of the Word of Grace. These last two, together with other organisations such as the CCPI (Italian Pentecostal Christian Church), and the Apostolic Church in Italy with the Italian Elim Church, are gathered together within the FCP.

<sup>4</sup> This premise rests on the New Testament texts of John 17:20-22, and especially I Cor 12:12-13; texts that should be studied through an exegetical analysis to be then presented through a biblical hermeneutics that has the scope of showing the will of God for his Church and that is “that of being a united community in the fellowship and in the power of the Holy Spirit, through faith in Jesus Christ to the glory of God the Father.”

<sup>5</sup> The classic Pentecostal churches originated at the beginning of the twentieth century in America through the so-called first wave of the movement of the Spirit. The classic Italian Pentecostal churches are those, such as the Assemblies of God, that maintain the same theological views, but are differentiated by their congregationalism. Many of these denominations are federated within the FCP (Federation of Pentecostal Churches) (K. Kay, 2009:128).

racism and separation (Vondey, 2010:8). However, its theology of restoration<sup>6</sup> and the criticism from other churches led Italian Pentecostals over time to be skeptical of any ecumenism (Anderson, 2014:98). They do not view the scandal of separation as a compromise of their Christian identity and credibility. In Italy only the FCP (Federation of Pentecostal Churches), along with sporadic participation of some pastors of "independent" local churches, has engaged in an official dialogue with other evangelical denominations, including the Waldensian and Methodist Church, Adventist Church, Baptist Church (UCEBI) and the Evangelical Alliance. With the Catholic Church in Italy there has never been any official dialogue on the part of classical Pentecostals, with the exception of the Church of Reconciliation that differentiated itself from the classical Italian Pentecostals. In contrast stand the many effective and less effective ecumenical efforts that characterise international bilateral dialogues between classic Pentecostals and other churches. The purpose is to describe these initiatives and their outcomes, with the aim of motivating Italian classic Pentecostal churches to address their ecumenical deficit. For instance, some confessional differences between Pentecostals and Catholics, such as Marian worship, eucharist, baptism and Catholic mass, cannot be bridged. However, the discussion still remains active. At the same time, international dialogues between Evangelicals and classic Pentecostals have been floundering, not for theological and confessional reasons but rather over ethical ones. This, however, has not impeded the reciprocal recognition between the two churches. The supposition of the research is that Pentecostals can make a contribution to the unity of the Church because in Cullman's (1987:34) words, "Nothing is more important to the unity of the Church than those who have experienced the power of the gift of the Holy Spirit".

### 1.2.2 Problem Statement

The overarching research question of this study is:

What is the reason for the lack of ecumenical spirit in Classical Italian Pentecostal churches, and how might this be rectified?

Sub-questions to be answered in this study are:

- What does the Bible teach about ecumenism?
- What is the actual state of ecumenical endeavours within Italian classical Pentecostal churches?

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<sup>6</sup> The theology of restoration is the urge to return to the early church of the first two centuries as a model.

- What is the actual state of international dialogues between classic Pentecostals and other churches?
- What factors determine the phases of these debates?
- Which conclusions can be drawn from the documents and minutes of the diverse dialogues, and what lessons can Italian Pentecostals learn from these experiences?
- How can bilateral dialogues between Italian Pentecostals and other churches contribute to ecumenism?

### 1.3 Aim and Objectives

Dialogue is defined as a method and instrument in the church's search for unity between churches in order to realise the Body of Christ consisting of one church. The objective of the research is to define ways of increasing receptivity of ecumenism through interpretation of the documents and minutes of the various international dialogues in which classical Pentecostals were involved. The purpose is to address a lack of ecumenical interest in Italian Pentecostal churches by informing them of the successes (and failures) of existing ecumenical dialogues at international level. Observations of ecumenical bodies can serve as models to promote ecumenical interest and activities.

The aims of this study are:

- To describe the biblical vision of the unity of the Christian church.
- To describe the current position within the Italian classical Pentecostal churches with regard to ecumenical endeavours.
- To describe the status quo of international dialogues between classical Pentecostals and other churches, in terms of:
  - classical Pentecostals and the Catholic Church
  - classical Pentecostals and other evangelical churches
  - classical Pentecostals, the CEC and the Global Christian Forum
- To present these findings to Italian Pentecostals as a vision of the unity of the church of Christ envisioned in the New Testament and to facilitate a self-examination process among these churches.

### 1.4 Central theoretical argument

The central theoretic argument is that the Pentecostal churches are not contributing in any way to cure the scandal of division because they do not have any vision for ecumenical endeavours (Maffei, 2000:122). They justify their non-participation by the theological position that the Holy Spirit unites everyone in their community through the charisms, in spite of their differences

(Moltmann, 1998:65). There is no necessary reason for engagement with other churches, because they believe that unity will be accomplished in the eschatological future by God. It is proposed that through the lessons that can be learnt from the international movement, Italian Pentecostal churches may find motivation and advice for the way forward to contribute toward uniting the Body of Christ divided by denominationalism. In the end, churches may celebrate a communal celebration of the Lord's Supper,<sup>7</sup> opening up a true path of sharing and fellowship. In effect, through the Dialogues, especially with the Catholic Church, a common base was underlined upon which it is possible to hope for such a shared Supper. This base is the commandment of the Lord Himself, that of celebrating the Supper "every time that one remembers Him" (Cereti, 1992:280; Neuner, 2011:204). This is a fundamental point because only if it is possible to reach this objective is it possible to say that the various confessions, through the common Supper, are truly in fellowship, because the presupposition of the common Supper is first of all the recognition of a single baptism in its trinitarian form and also the recognition of the other church as part of the same body that is united as the Body of the Lord. The Dialogues also brought to the attention of non-Pentecostal churches the realm of experience in the Christian faith, a fundamental part of pentecostal spirituality, underlining its value and its importance within the same Christian faith and proclamation (Macchia, 2006:98). The international dialogues are discussed in more detail and lessons are derived from those experiences and the documents it generated, in order to serve as a possible motivation and vision for classical Pentecostal churches for generating ecumenical zeal.

## 1.5 Research design/Methodology

The method that will be used for the research consists of comparative bibliographical research through a selection of diverse books and articles in order to describe the different international dialogues between classical Pentecostals and other Christian churches, with the aim to instil lessons to inform Italian classical Pentecostal churches. Main texts consist of documents and minutes related to these bilateral international dialogues. In presenting the various dialogues, a summary of findings and experiences is made to underline diverse perspectives and positions. The conclusions of academics occupied with the outcomes of the dialogues are also considered (Eco, 2008:26). The purpose is to awake an ecumenical awareness in Italian classical Pentecostal churches. In conjunction

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<sup>7</sup> In reality the problem of the Lord's supper regards all of the Christian confessions. It is the main argument which is discussed at all levels in the Church. The researcher believes it is the focal point of the whole discourse of unity in the Church. A solution that some of the churches hold to (especially the Reformed and Lutheran), but not that of the Pentecostals, is that of eucharistic hospitality; a solution that this researcher does not believe solves the problem but can be a beginning step.

with the literary study, auto-ethnographic observations are made on the (non)involvement of Italian classical Pentecostal churches in ecumenical activities.

## 1.6 Clarifying of Concepts

*Ecumenism*: A term which indicates, within the Christian religion, the movement that seeks to facilitate and promote cooperation and communication between Christian churches (Neuner, 2011:23).

*Classical Pentecostal churches*: Churches that recognise continuity with those born in the renewal movement in the first years of the 20th century in the United States of America, with the experience of *glossolalia* perceived as the initial sign of the baptism of the Spirit (Pace & Butticci, 2010:34).

*Ecumenical debate*: The discussions of dialogues between two or more churches, through their representatives, on the themes of faith and Christian life, with the aim at arriving at conclusions agreed upon by the participating parties (Ferrario, 2008a:20).

*Ecumenical brotherhood*: A model of unity which contraposes that of uniformity. A “communion” that is not such only at a theoretical or idealistic level but finds its fulfilment in a visible and concrete reality (Cullmann, 1987:45).

*The ecumenical movement in Italy*: The movement within the Italian Christian churches or Christian ministries that works in Italy to promote the knowledge and fellowship amongst themselves (Napolitano, 2011).

*Bilateral dialogues*: Dialogues between two parties.

## 1.7 Provisional classification of the chapters

Introduction.

Chapter 2: A biblical vision of the unity of the Christian church

Chapter 3: Italian classical Pentecostals and ecumenism

Chapter 4: International dialogues between classical Pentecostals and other churches

4.1 International dialogues between classical Pentecostals and the Catholic Church

4.2 International dialogues between classical Pentecostals and other evangelical churches

4.3 International dialogues between classical Pentecostals, the CEC and the Global Christian Forum

Chapter 5: Lessons to be learnt by Italian classical Pentecostals

Chapter 6: Conclusions, recommendations and themes for further study

## 1.8 Ethical Considerations

In this research, the researcher will respect the general ethical principles aiming to carry out the research with honesty and transparency, seeking to avoid misleading information or distorted representations of the research data and assuring an adequate level of confidentiality throughout the research. The study only utilises literature that is widely available to all interested parties and auto-ethnographical observations will not implicate any identifiable persons or churches. As such, it poses a low ethical risk.

## 1.9 Proposed Research Schedule/Time Frame

First phase: bibliographic collection

Second phase: consultation of collected texts and subdivision of the same

Third phase: writing the research and starting to make an index

Last phase: writing conclusions

## 1.10 Schematic Presentation

| Research Question                                                                                                                  | Aim and Objectives                                                                                                                                                                                  | Research and Methodology                                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| What is the actual state of Italian classical Pentecostal churches in terms of ecumenical endeavours? (Naso, 2013)                 | To gather pertinent information to describe the status quo.                                                                                                                                         | Comparative literary research of relevant material about ecumenism and Italian Pentecostal churches, along with auto-ethnographic observations.                      |
| What is the current position in international dialogues between classical Pentecostals and other churches? (Nel, 2018)             | To understand what has slowed down and often blocked the ecumenical dialogue.<br>To understand what makes the dialogues successful. To formulate lessons that churches can learn from this process. | Comparative literary research of relevant material about these dialogues and academic evaluations of it.                                                             |
| What lessons can the Italian classical Pentecostal churches learn from the experience of international dialogues? (Ricca, 2010:34) | To present the failures and successes of the international dialogues in such a way that it serves to motivate the Italian church to engage in its ecumenical responsibilities.                      | Evaluation of results of research about dialogues with the aim to develop some lessons for other churches, in comparison with academic evaluations of the dialogues. |
| What does the Bible teach about the unity of the church?                                                                           | To understand biblical data about the normativeness                                                                                                                                                 | Grammatical-historical exegesis of relevant texts                                                                                                                    |

|  |                                             |                                                |
|--|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
|  | about the unity of the<br>Christian church. | found in the New Testament<br>regarding unity. |
|--|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|

## Chapter 2: A biblical vision of the unity of the Christian church

### 2.1 Introduction.

The return to a study and a greater study of the Bible in the 1930s and 1940s was one of the main causes of decisive impetus for dialogue between the Churches. The return to the Word of God was greeted by the Christian world as the best and clearest sign of hope, even regarding the rethinking of the ecumenical path. In fact, it is established in the history of the church that the removing of all the veils that hide the view of the Christian origins, that is, all of the ecclesiastical, catechetical, and dogmatic formulations developed over the years following the initial Christian experience, allows the Christian to draw closer to the truth of God and of Christ. Sometimes it is disconcerting, considering the obscure past, how much the biblical text has been placed under the name of pure historic/theological speculation. While today we find ourselves with an ever increasing need to enter within the biblical text to discover and “touch by hand” its truths, above all as regards the problem of the unity of the Church (Bathasar, 1966:11). The awareness of the fact that Christianity originated in pluralism, testified to by the New Testament texts and the composition of the canon itself, has led scholars to discover how, within the New Testament itself, there was an effort to render this pluralism a richness for Christianity and not a drawback (Rinaldi, 2008:12). The plurality of Christianity is by now uncontested and only a historian wanting to be a sterile demagogue would try to hide its heterogeneity, seeking to harmonise the whole by hiding the rifts, cracks, leaps, contrasts, and incoherencies that appear in the various ecclesiastical traditions, and the story of Christianity in general (Kung, 1997:35). This is a given fact that finds its first testimony within the biblical texts themselves, but above all the New Testament ones. As it was for the Hebrew Bible, so likewise for the New Testament; it is not possible to deduce a single conceptual system and a coherent academic dogma. What Paul refers to a sound doctrine, speaks of the announcement of salvation in Christ and certainly not in a series of religious dogmas, and much less did he not have in mind a monolithic and uniform Christianity, also because Christianity was still in a missionary development (Lohse, 1987:99). Historical critique has shown how many layers, traditions, and theological diversities are possible to be distinguished in the New Testament (Kung, 1997: 32). Even a superficial reading of the texts that form the basis of the Christian faith; those are the 27 books that Christians call the New Testament, is sufficient to convince readers that the original message of Jesus was conjugated according to different sensitivities. A plurality which has always been a point of strength for Christianity, that of James, of Paul, of John and of Matthew and so on, led along differing paths, even while originating from a single font of revelation and inspiration and yet converging towards a shared

experience, illustrating in different ways the event of Jesus (Rinaldi, 2008:12). In fact, in 1951 exegete Ernest Käsemann (1960: 214) affirmed: “The New Testament canon does not as such lay the base for the unity of the Church but rather, the plurality of the confessions.” The various biblical ecclesiologies justify opposite ecclesiastical orders so that it is possible to note in them differences in the New Testament message. These show not a single church, but rather a confederation of churches which tries to present itself by all parties as the Church of Christ to the world (Neuner, 2011: 194). In the church of the New Testament, even before a written liturgy existed and even before affirmed doctrinal formulae were generally accepted, it is easy to find as many different forms of worship meetings as the churches described. In fact, one of the problems would be to establish what would be the minimum requirements for a community to be considered Christian. Unfortunately, within the Christian world of the first century, there existed together a variety of doctrines and practices that characterised the churches, but all of them affirmed their to belong to Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, the first real problem to be resolved was that of clarifying for all of them what would be the minimum common denominator for each single Christian community. In short, where it was possible to stray from the apostolic *kerygma* without being termed heretical. The answer towards which the church in the first century was guided can be found in the canon of the New Testament itself. The writings that were excluded from the canon were those which, even though they boasted a relationship with the apostolic tradition, presented a picture of Jesus that was incompatible with that which could be found in its totality with the writings which now make up the New Testament. This shows us that, at its very base, there was a normative profession of the Christian faith commonly recognised by all Christians, which was formed from the essence of the apostolic *kerygma* which in turn served as a watershed between the Christian communities and other communities which aspired to Jesus but did not have fellowship with the central fulcrum of the Church of Christ, with which only the recognised Christian communities had fellowship. The right of existence of every Christian tradition always had to be evaluated based on the principle of whether or not it was at the service of the Christian proclamation and of the words of Christ (Käsemann, 1977:86). The church of the first century, then, within these confines contained a notable variety of accents. In fact, the writings of the New Testament show us this variety and help us to discern how it expressed itself (Moule, 1971: 215-218).

It is for this fact, then, that we find within the biblical text various souls of Christianity, *ipso facto* it is easy to understand how, at the same time, there would be within the same proposed texts an active energy to present a pluralistic Christianity but which united together would make up the sole church of Christ. An example would be the Johannine Christians, which had a paradigm at their base which considered itself a school, but with Jesus as the only teacher and his disciples as bearers of the tradition (John 18:15-27). Unfortunately, such a paradigm needed to be immediately updated

after the death of Jesus. In fact, from the moment that Jesus arose and ascended to the Father, there was a shift of authority to the Spirit of Jesus: the *paraclete*, which works in all (John 16:13-15). Such a concept, one of a pneumatological community (today the term charismatic would be used) finds its expressions in metaphors such as a shepherd and his flock or of a vine and its branches (John 10:15), all indicating a direct relationship with Jesus. Even when doctrinal problems arose within the Johannine group, it was possible to maintain the original directive of the guide of the Spirit and refuse any form of established order. However, in spite of this practice and this attitude towards a theological base, the Johannine group managed to save its very concept of community and Christian service in respect to others, ensuring its place guaranteed in the canon itself. This occurred through an attitude of openness and fellowship towards the other Christian church, which was maybe more institutionalised and less close to a pneumo-charismatic type of spirituality. This is testified to in the added chapter of John 21 in which Peter, as a symbolic figure of the other church, is designated and recognised as pastor (verses 15-19). However, at the same time that Peter is re-established by Jesus and recognised as one of the leaders of Christianity, Jesus lays out and proclaims, referring to the apostle that he loved while speaking to Peter words that refer to and identify the Johannine community: “That he should remain until the return of Christ.” (verses 20-23)<sup>8</sup> These words are not referring to the biological life of the apostle but that, if first the validity and importance of the ministry of Peter as pastor is attested to, so likewise also the Johannine community is recognised, opening up in this way a possible path of fellowship and unity ‘now’, through the same words that Jesus directed to the disciple that He loved. Peter and others like him would have to recognise the validity and the authority of the Johannine theology, inasmuch as it is as long lasting as the other churches, because it is a part of the Christian message. In fact, the remain refers in a concrete way to the Johannine writings, even though in it the basic paradigm is set, that of a community without a minister but with the Spirit of Jesus for everyone and in everyone (Ebner, 2009: 60-61). In reality the acceptance of the Gospel of John itself in the canon is a clear and important demonstration of the integration in the Christian tradition of thoughts and theologies that appear in their origin to be in open contrast to the tradition itself. Thus, the canon of the New Testament exists in its multiform and was formed through real contradictions which reflect the complex and pluriform history of primitive Christianity. Therefore, the churches must take note, through the Bible text, that if they recognise it as a revealed text, then they must accept it *in toto* with its varied divergent tendencies and even the contrasts contained in it, while at the same time accepting its message and its indications so that these divergences might be overcome or limited in the light of the one Church of Christ (Käsemann, 1977:87). Another very illuminating example is the Jerusalem council which is recounted in the book

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<sup>8</sup> Bibbia (1994), Nuova Riveduta, Società Biblica di Ginevra, Torino: La Casa della Bibbia

of Acts (Acts 15:6-29). Luke presents the relationship between Peter, James and those of Jerusalem with Paul in a rather idealistic manner, but in reality, critical history has demonstrated the contrary. In fact, apart from the successive ecclesiastic interpretations, these were sometimes turbulent meetings and revolved around two events that conditioned the future of Christianity: the Jerusalem agreement and the Antioch question. These are informed both directly by the Apostle Paul in the letter to the Galatians while the Jerusalemite position appears only in the book of Acts. Luke recounts the details relating to the two events in a way to present Peter in the positive light of moderation, seeking to convince the reader that the difficulties had been overcome. Above all, after the council of Jerusalem was presented by Luke as a kind of definitive council that had resolved all the contrasts (Filoramo and Menozzi, 2001:103). In effect, we know through historic sources that the idealistic picture drawn by Luke did not reflect reality, but the evangelist had sought to present us with such a scene to show us once again that it was possible to walk 'together' and to live in fellowship under the sign of Christian unity. In this case, the path that he presented to us was that of a council where the presence of the Apostles allowed the outpouring and intervention of the Holy Spirit, true comforter and counselor, and where the principle aim was the widespread diffusion of the Gospel in the world amongst the gentiles (Bock, 2007:1446-1447).

In reality, within the New Testament there is a unifying thread that is clear and coherent. It immediately marked Christianity and furnished the heart of integration for the divergent expressions of itself. This unifying element has always been the unity between the historical Jesus, and the Christ, risen and elevated in glory. That is to say that the charismatic, itinerant preacher from Nazareth was He who, having shown the glory of God through signs and wonders and having preached the Kingdom of Heaven, died but was then raised from the dead to reunite God and man. Besides this, there was also the recognition that the same power that had raised Christ from the dead was that by which it was *now* possible to meet the Risen One, Jesus the Lord, the Son of God, that is, the quickening Spirit, the Holy Spirit. In whatever ambit the church of the first century is found, whether in its preaching, its confessional formulae, the concepts of service, or practices of worship meetings, the focal point remains one and the same. Jesus was first man and then the Risen Christ, the Son of God; *The continuity between Jesus the man and Jesus the exalted One*, this continuity was in short, the unifying factor for the entire Bible and for all Christians (Dunn, 2006:452).

Unfortunately, this return to the Bible has not been seen as an opportunity to revive an ecumenical spirit by all Christians. In fact, attention to the Bible has not always been an occasion for ecumenical opening for Christians and an encouragement towards reconciliation and unity. Sometimes the opposite has occurred, a unilateral reading of the Bible where the Christian community

identifies itself as the true and sole Church of Christ, that is, recounting New Testament texts through this type of hermeneutics has led these Christian communities into a net closure through a particular interpretation of the biblical text, a justification for separation from the other churches. This difference is to be noted within the same Christian confessions and even within the same evangelical denominations. In some Christian confessions, such as the Catholic one, the rediscovery of the biblical text, above all in the light of the Vatican II, where the council fathers once again laid the Bible at the centre of the message and Christian revelation, encouraged the rise amongst some of its leaders with a renewed ecumenical spirit that involved many parts of the Catholic clergy and its faithful followers (Ceretti, 1992:25). For those who did not allow the diffusion of this new wind of the Spirit however, there was a more marked position based upon the theology of the return. (The theology at the heart of the Catholic Church which believes that the ministry of the Pope is the gift of God to all Christianity, and therefore unity of the Church is based on all Christians returning to the Pope). In fact, for these the biblical text has become a pretext to add strength to the concept that the only Christian church is the Catholic one. Instead, within the evangelical world, the ecumenical spirit reached the hearts and minds of the historic churches and convinced them of the necessity to seek a unity for all Christians, encouraged by the biblical texts themselves. By and large, there was no doubt amongst the historic churches that the reaching of unity needed to be a priority, a conversion, a necessity of the Spirit to heal the Church of Christ from the scandal of divisions. Unfortunately, within these same historic churches, there are groups and movements of believers who have not been so enthusiastic for the movement of unity of the Church and they even use some biblical texts to demonstrate the incompatibility of some Christians with others (Ferrario, 1999:65). Furthermore, there are within evangelicalism, above all in Europe, younger denominations amongst which is the pentecostal movement that, while recognising the role of the Spirit in the unity of the Church, consider this a referral to the last days because they continue to consider the ecumenical movement as an exclusively political movement, instrumentalised in favour of powerful forces. This type of attitude, according to the pentecostal denominations, leads to a consideration of ecumenicalism as a part of temporal and secular powers in the world, and this type of power is severely condemned by the Bible because the New Testament carefully warns Christians to maintain a distance between temporal and spiritual powers. Therefore, for a pentecostal hermeneutics of the biblical texts, a distance must be kept from all that tend towards institutionalisation. To this is added the problem that every church, and above all the younger evangelical denominations, are convinced of holding the truth. They believe that they may relive the book of Acts through their own church, excluding from their perspective 2000 years of Christian history by denying it. Their only reference text, both spiritual and ecclesiological, is in fact the New Testament but interpreted through a unilateral perspective, that of

a prejudice towards all the other churches. These forget that the only possibility of recognising and reciprocally accepting each other is to allow themselves to be examined by the Word of God; and that being a word that does not illuminate my truth, but that unmasks my sin and nothingness.

With this chapter, the researcher will look to examine, through some texts in the New Testament, how the Bible can furnish guidelines and ecumenical horizons, contributing with its message and providing for its own authority a biblical and textual base to the movement in search of the unity of the Church. Besides this, with this chapter the researcher will try to answer the question of whether the ecumenical initiatives are correct, inasmuch as they have biblical validity, or if they are only the fruit of a movement that springs from a concept of human need. All of the evangelical churches consider Scripture as the sole source of revelation and is therefore the supreme authority for faith, doctrine, and life. The biblical text encompasses all that is necessary and sufficient for faith and for salvation. The communal recognition of the Scriptures as the Word of God is, however, expressed in many diverse ways in the evangelical churches, giving way to diverse biblical readings which are often conflicting.<sup>9</sup> This position regarding the Bible is often noted in the conscience of all believers, above all those evangelicals, and therefore, in order for ecumenism to take root within the faith of the churches, it cannot but find its authority and its justification through the elements and texts of the Bible. Sometimes ecumenism tends to focus itself on political and social messages. Often the ecumenical mission seeks to transform the political, social, and financial environments. At the same time, it must show that the necessity of the unity of the Church is to be found and required in the Gospel itself and this brings a rethinking of ecumenism itself, giving it not only a social and political function but also an expression of faithfulness to the Gospel in its fundamental message and aims to speak to the hearts and minds of whoever draws close to it.

This chapter is thought-provoking, to demonstrate that unity is only possible through diversity. It will be seen that even when considering some passages of the New Testament at face value, the width and the diversity is not insignificant, even if it is possible to speak of a unifying nucleus for the *kerygma* post-resurrection, in any case (Dunn, 2006:63).

## 2.2 The Prayer for Unity. John 17:20-23

In the composition of John 17, the evangelist uses a literary scheme that is commonly found in literature worldwide and is therefore common in Judaism and in the New Testament; the valediction of a man who is about to die. This chapter contains a special prayer and is distinguishable

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<sup>9</sup> Document: "L'Ecumenismo e il dialogo interreligioso;" approvato dal Sinodo 1998, in: <https://www.chiesavaldese.org/documents/doc-ecumenismo.pdf>, data di accesso: 2020/08/25.

from that of the disciples because it demonstrates the unity of Jesus with the Father. From the point of view of its context, it is not a prayer of supplication even if it puts forth requests, and as regards content, is an instructional passage as are all valedictions (Käsemann, 1977:17-18). The pericope that begins with verse 20 and ends with verse 23 is known as the prayer of unity, and is original, even when examined as a literary Greek text. In fact, in verse 20 we find the verb ἐποῶ, <sup>10</sup> which is translated as pray (verse 20: “I do not pray...”). In reality the Greek literally assumes the significance of asking and is therefore tied to the dimension of the dialogue. The New Testament author immediately shows his readers that the prayer of Jesus does not have a ritual form but is a true and proper dialogue, a request of the Son to the Father with certainty, for the presupposition presented by the verb is that of the dialogue to be in the presence of the Father and that the Father is listening. Then in verse 21 is found the preposition ἐν, which is the very soul of the prayer for unity. From the Greek, the preposition indicates by its state, movement, and the term that accompanies it, to be almost always dative (Corsani, 2007:67). This preposition is the fulcrum of the entire discourse because it indicates the state of being in Jesus in the Father and the believers in Jesus. Translators translate the first part of verse 21: “That they may all be one followed then through the literal translation of the second part: “As You, O Father, are in (ἐν) me and I am in (ἐν) You, so that they may be in (ἐν) us.” It then ends with the third part: “So that the world may believe that You have sent me”. The preposition ἐν does not only indicate being within, but in this context it indicates what it means to be one in Christ. The concept that is presented by the prayer is not a unity in being one attached to another, neither is it a unity where one is fused with the other, but it is a unity in which one exists in the other. The believers are one “in” Christ as Christ is one with the Father because He is “in” the Father. If the believers are one in Christ, and Christ is one because He is in the Father, then the believers in Christ are one in the Father. This is followed by verse 22: “I have given them the glory that You have given to me so that they may be one as we are one”. In this verse, is found the verb δίδωμι (give, donate) expressed in a particular historical tense, which is used only in Greek and in the perfect tense. This verbal tense is important for the understanding of the text and, above all for the correct exegesis. In fact, the perfect tense in Greek indicates an action completed in the past which has effects and results that last through to the present (Corsani, 2007:152). Therefore, the biblical author presents to readers that the giving of Jesus in John is an act made in an historical moment, but the effects last and will last for all believers who live in their present. Finally, verse 23: “I in them and You in me, so that they may be perfect in unity and so that the world may know that You have sent me and You have loved them as You have loved me.” The verse in Greek presents with two particulars; the first is that the verb τελέω (fulfil), is found the perfect plural participle which is translated with *perfect*. This, however, once

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<sup>10</sup> Nestle-Aland (2006), Novum Testamente Graece, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

again indicates that the action is something that was started in the past but continues to maintain its effects in the present. Therefore, the perfect work of love was fulfilled for those disciples who lived with Christ but must still be fulfilled for those who live in their present. In fact, the verb is followed by the preposition; εἰς which precedes the Greek ἐν. Literally, this part of verse 23 should be translated: *perfect towards one*. So, εἰς is a preposition that literally translates: *towards*, because it indicates the aim of going towards an objective (Corsani, 2007:66.) Thus, the evangelist is explaining that the unity of which Jesus speaks has not yet been reached but the prayer of the Lord is that the believers can move towards this aim to reach perfection, which is love.

The prayer that is read in John 17 is the last prayer of the Lord before He dies; the prayer is the goodbye that will be accompanied, not by death, but by the light of hope; that of finding Himself again together with all of his disciples and all of those that the Father will give Him but which do not yet belong to his flock. It is a mystical prayer because it gives expression to the intimacy of the heart and reveals a future reality in order to fulfil the prayer of Jesus in John; also, through this the disciples are brought into a clearly heavenly event. They assist and become witnesses to a discourse between the Son and the Father. This reveals the desire of Jesus, who asks the Father that all of his sons including those dispersed abroad, should find themselves where He is present, as a single person and as a single, living reality (Ravasi, 2020:72). As such, in view of the desire of the Lord, the prayer of Jesus, as reported by the testimony in the Gospel of John, is the biblical passage that lays the base for the ecumenical movement: “That they may all be one” (John 17:21). In fact, the prayer for the unity of all believers seems to be one of the main requests of Jesus; it is the centre of his prayer and is, therefore, the fulcrum of his passion, to which it contributes to give it meaning (Neuner, 2011:19). The prayer contained in John 17 in fact constitutes the motive for the depth of inspiration for the commitment to, and the service of unity. In fact, through this it can be understood that the Lord invites believers not only to fulfil the duty to love the brethren, but to enter in and fully take part in the mystery of fellowship that unites the Father and Son of which the ecclesiastical fellowship is a mysterious participation. It is the answer to the design of God that calls all of humanity to fellowship with Himself through Christ and in the Holy Spirit, through the Church in which the fellowship of faith and of love cannot be limited only to an invisible dimension, but must be manifested also in a visible way (Cereti, 1992:154-155).

The prayer for unity shows us that the community of believers is *one* because of its unity with Christ and not vice versa. The community is one in Christ and He is one with the Father, therefore the members of the community of Christ are one and consequently can be close to the Father. Just as the identity and the individuality of the Father and of the Son is maintained, so also that of the

community. In fact, the unity of which is spoken of in Christian relationships: *One with another and all with and in Christ* is modeled on the relationship that exists between Christ and God. So this, however, tells us that even if the believers are united in Christ, and Christ in God, this does not mean that they are completely annulled and absorbed into the person of Christ. Even if the prayer is a mystical prayer from the moment that it reveals an intimate desire to live the experience of a desired reality even before it is realised, the unity that is proposed by the Johannine prayer of Jesus does not have a mystical conception of the community. In fact, the identity of the believers, understood as a distinctive individual identity as also for the community of faith to which they belong, is maintained and conserved within the unity in Christ, as the identity and person of Christ is preserved in his unity with the Father. The believers are one but united as individuals and each bearing his singular specifications which is maintained and valorised within the fellowship as much as it is a part of that unity in Christ with God (Kysar, 2000:175-176). As in the prayer, the Father and the Son are distinguishable, because the Son prays to his Father and the Father commissions and sends his Son who obeys Him, even though they are one. In the same way the believers, even though they are always distinct, have to be one in their aim, in their love and in their actions, one towards another, in submission to the common revelation they have received. Therefore, as a demonstration of an authentic love between believers attests that they are disciples of Jesus: "From this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another." (John 13:35), so also in the same way the demonstration of this particular kind of unity, because it is to be found exclusively only in and of God, not worldly but yet attractive, renders their testimony convincingly to the world and shows Christ to the unbelievers. The unity of the disciples step by step as they draw close to perfection, which is the final objective, serves not only to convince many in the world that Christ is most surely the supreme demonstration of the divine revelation, but also that the Christians themselves have the same love that the Father has reserved for the Son (Carson, 1991:1404-1408).

The prayer of Jesus that is found in chapter 17 of the Gospel of John is considered today to be the *magna carta* of the ecumenical movement and for all those who work towards the aim of unity between the churches. In fact, if believers want to understand this affirmation, it is sufficient to examine the prayer and they will become aware of how true such a claim is. The prayer of Jesus has as its pinnacle the Father to whom all the disciples of the world are called and entrusted. All the believers, beginning with the first disciples through to the furthest generations, form an integral community, gathered and held together in unity by Jesus, who has opened up for them access to the Father. This is not dealing with a human closeness, of an understanding reached on the basis of agreements or a resolving of contrasts, rather the unity of the Church is initiated by God, comes from Him, and He is the foundation. So, the perfect unity between the Father and the Son is an ideal model

of the unity between believers. It is humanly impossible to reach, but however, has in its merit the illumination of believers and the stimulation of believers to always move towards this goal, even knowing that it will never be possible to reach. This should not be a discouragement as all believers are destined to enter a divine unity and to be gathered into fellowship with the Father and with the Son. This unity within the fellowship comes through the work of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, the spirit of love, renders the believers able to preserve and operate within the unity with God. Jesus Himself lives in them and He lives in the Father, and this allows them to live in an ambit of perfect unity that humanly speaking remains unreachable. For John, the unity of the believers founded in God has also an earthly dimension. In fact in verses 22 and 23: "I have given them the glory that You have given me, so that they may be one as we are one; I in them and You in me; so that they may be perfect in unity, and so that the world may know that You have sent me, and that You love them as You have loved me." Twice over unity is emphasised because through it the world, separated from God, will recognise and believe that Jesus is the savior sent from God. Therefore, as God has sent his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to save the world, Christ sends his Church, united in Him, into the world to announce such a salvation. A community of believers is recognisable in its unity and its very unity is a sign of God in the world, that same world that is always further away and separated from God (Schnackenburg, 1994:82-84). The disciples of Christ must know that they have an obligation, as disciples, to be involved in the work of salvation. In view of such a challenging task, they become a priority of the intercession of Jesus before his Father; a task so challenging because Jesus returns to the Father, and therefore it is up to them to assure the development of the work of Jesus and to go to and into the world. It should not, however, escape the disciples the fact that thanks to the intercession of Jesus: "To be sent by God is equal to being loved by Him" (Culmann, 1995:177). The prayer of unity is so rooted in God that it reveals itself and gives itself as love and for love; revelation and gift culminating in Christ. Therefore, the unity of the disciples between themselves and for the world is the foundation of the knowledge of God; in it the world must come to know the current of love that springs from the same fountain of the love of God, Christ, disciples, world: "I in them and You in me, so that they may be perfect in unity and so that the world may know that You have sent me and that You love them as You have loved me." (verse 23) The world follows the path of knowledge backwards; first seeing the bonds of love achieved between the disciples, to then come to know and believe that God has sent Christ into the world because He loves it (Culmann, 1995:177-180.)

The vision of Jesus, through the prayer for unity, transcends the present, going beyond the temporal limits. It is directed not only to the disciples that followed Him, but to all those who would believe through the announcement of the Gospel. The concern of Jesus for unity is for all those who

would believe and it is his very great burden even while his mission is drawing to a close. Jesus had finished his task on the earth as revealer of the Father, and now it touches his disciples and all those who would come to carry on the *Missio Dei*, through the message of Christ announced in the Gospel. The concern of the Lord is precisely the fact that without unity, without that which would render them one as the Father and the Son, the Church could not fully complete its mission of the Lord. This is because, only through the same love with which the Father loves the Son and the other way around, the Christian community could be credible in its testimony to the world (Köstenberger, 2004:1224-1228.)

## 2.3 The Ecumenism of Paul

From the Pauline epistolary, a model may be deduced that permits the reader to understand that Paul had found his own uniqueness within the Christian world. He had always been aware of the plurality of Christianity, but this had never been so big a problem for the apostle as to cause a separation (I Corinthians 12:18). Rather, it was necessary for everyone to be aware of this diversity in the Church, so as not to generate arguments similar to those existing in the diverse philosophical schools (Romans 14:1). In fact, for Paul, divisions would be the consequences of a secularised Christianity and a purely human religiousness victim to the evils that afflict it (I Corinthians 3:1-3). From the moment the Church is a spiritual entity, a mystery held together by God, it would be that the same God who, at an opportune moment, would bring to light what is an enduring truth and, therefore, there would be no need to resolve the theological conflicts before that moment (I Corinthians 3:4-8). So, for as much as has been said, it may be understood that Paul was aware of his own uniqueness, but at the same time reflects on how such uniqueness may be received within the totality of the churches. Even if it is certain from his profession of faith, he leaves to God the solution for the diversity among Christians, and will do so on the day of final judgement (Stendahl, 1995:136-137). However, in spite of all the individual peculiarities and in spite of the alarming backsliding that emerged from the environment from which the Pauline Christian communities came, and in spite of the notable differences between the levels of language and style, as indeed these are elements that characterise all of the New Testament, the Pauline writings, as well as the other New Testament writings, speak with a surprisingly unanimous voice of a single Gospel and a single Lord (Moule, 1971:245). Is this not perhaps a miracle of the Spirit?

In this paragraph the researcher will analyse texts drawn from some Pauline epistles which, according to this author, encourage believers towards a path of unity for the Church. Unfortunately, the exposition will not be exhaustive, because this author is aware of the research that would be necessary to treat other Pauline texts with a greater depth to be able to present the complete

ecumenical dimension of the thought of the apostle concerning this. It will be limited to a few verses chosen from many which, for this author, represents the sum exposition and the clearest demonstration of the Pauline thought on the argument under consideration.

### 2.3.1 Receive one another (Romans 15:7).

For Paul Rome was the crowning of his efforts poured out through the years of his ministry for the advancement of Christianity. Arriving in Rome he could boast of having announced the faith from Jerusalem to the heart of the Roman Empire. He hoped to be able to take on the same role in the capital as he had in other cities in the eastern part of the empire. Unfortunately, he knew that not all of the heads of the Roman communities were very happy to see him, for this he feared that his gospel would have provoked resistance and malcontent within communities that were composed both of Hebrew-Christians and of pagan-Christians. Many feared that he would have behaved here as in other places which would have served only to further augment the contrasts with other preachers in the city. There were others who did not make a secret of being disciples of conservative preachers and, therefore, the worry was that the apostle could endanger the fragile harmony within the Christian communities in Rome (Mejer, 2017:266-267). In fact, Paul writes his epistle to a community where the problem of predominance is still an open question. It is a mixed community, diverse from that of Corinth where the community was certainly exclusively pagan-Christian. In the community of Rome, there was an active conflict between Jewish-Christians and pagan-Christians (Taubes, 1997:48). Therefore, in the light of what has just been said, the reference verse (Romans 15:7) assumes a great importance, especially because Paul, aware of this problem of the diverse views and attitudes towards him even before he arrived, invites, as an older brother, all the members of the community in Rome to: “Therefore receive one another even as Christ has received you for the glory of God”. It is quite particular to note that in this verse, the Greek verb used by Paul is in the medium/passive form; in the first part of the verse it is with an imperative mode while in the second part it is with an aorist form of the verb προσλαμβάνω. This verb is composed of: λαμβάνω, which means to *take* or to *receive*, having as its prefix the preposition πρὸς which means *next to* or *on the part of*. The verb would then be literally translated: *take or receive next to or on the part of*. In the first part, in its imperative form, it is used as an exhortation given by Paul to the believers in Rome to receive. This verb indicates the idea not only of being accepted, as a form of courtesy or of hospitality, but indicates taking part of the entire life of the other to reach an end or a goal. In this case, the goal is the unity of the Church through reciprocal fellowship and solidarity. As regards the second part of the verse, the verb indicates the scope of Christ, that is, to give readers the glory of the Father and therefore the Son renders the believer part of Himself. In this Jesus Christ is the example *par excellence* of true

acceptance, that is to take with and for Himself the other person, not to take advantage of or instrumentalise him, but so that the other may receive the glory of God.

With this verse, therefore, Paul urges the believers to follow the example of Christ, who has received them without any discrimination, in spite of their great differences. The Pauline exhortation is to receive all Christians as brothers in their hearts as well as in their own houses. This means that the welcome should be unconditional, *tout court*, because God will be glorified in the love and gentleness that is exchanged between one another. Paul, most certainly had in mind the practice of unconditional fellowship among all Christians, whether Jews or pagans, or from different social classes (Bruce, 1973:312-313). The apostle does not care if there is something, or some reason, to divide the Christians, such as whether one was a Jew and another a gentile, but each must receive and accept the other, as Christ has accepted every man and every woman that has come to Him. The Pauline exhortation is to receive one another as Christ has received us. The reciprocal acceptance in the fraternal fellowship is the most evident sign of living united as members of the same Body of Christ. Thus, God Himself unites all peoples in a great harmony of goodness and mercy as shown in Christ Jesus (Erdman, 1969:171). This exhortation to reciprocal acceptance of the two groups in the Roman church is not the main driving force of the epistle, but it is one of the main motives converging on the others that led Paul to write about the Gospel to the Romans. Certainly, his exhortation to all the believers in Rome, and not only, brings the section to its apex. To receive one another signifies more than to tolerate or give official recognition; Paul desires that all Christians would accept one another as members in the unique family in Christ, with all the love and cares and responsibilities that this should entail within this special family of brothers and sisters in Christ (Moo, 1996:896-897). The invitation to reciprocal acceptance must not only be limited along horizontal lines, because reciprocal acceptance is an obligation the moment it is the preferred way to glorify God. In a certain sense, sin has for a while, (John 3) distanced God by refusing Him, and has upturned the harmony expressed in the fellowship of believers united together, above all, in celebrating a worship meeting in fellowship with the Lord. Therefore, the unity of all believers, Jews and Greeks, pagans and gentiles, is manifested in worship and in praising God together. This united worship fulfils the ultimate objective of God, that is, that his Name should be honored and praised amongst all the peoples. In no way then is Paul's objective simply to establish a social peace between the Hebrews and the Gentiles, a civilized coexistence. The objective of his mission is to bring everyone, all Christians, Hebrews and Gentiles, into a fervent praise and worship of God (Schreiner, 2013:1876-1877). The Pauline exhortation is very important also because of its basic pretext, that is, all the parties and every single believer must understand that receiving and being received must always be bidirectional and never unilateral. It must never be an acceptance on one part alone, renouncing one's

individual originality to accept the ideas or interpretations of the other. The acceptance must be reciprocal in agreement with Christ. This same principle could also be applied not only to the social and political level but also between the different souls within the same Christianity, as it could be the liberal and conservative one. An example could be a proposition concerning two Christian souls; today we could say one more liberal and one more conservative. The first must not try to impose his own liberty on the second but maybe try to limit it where it could be a cause for concern or a wall of incomprehension towards the other. At the same time, the conservative should accept the more liberal as a brother and companion in Christ, trying not to use one particular understanding of Christianity to exclude the other. The work of the Spirit, with the aim of fellowship and the overcoming of diversity, must be common acceptance, so that a church recognises in the other a dimension of the truth that it does not possess, and so likewise, the other church towards the first (Dunn, 1988:1421-1422).

### 2.3.2 The Church of Jesus Christ is “one” (Ephesians 4:4-6).

The epistle to the Ephesians has in itself one of the first purely ecclesiological doctrines, that is to say that it has as its subject the Church and the relationship of Christ with it. The Church is to Christ as the body is to the head; as the bride is to the bridegroom (Cullmann, 1968:92). A particularity of the epistle is the use of the term church, because, in the Pauline writing the term always indicates the universal church, while in other Pauline writings the same term can also indicate the local church (Corsani, 1998:184). The existential problem for the church in Ephesus was that of unity. Paul considered the unity of the Church threatened by the local community that was, in their turn, an easy prey for false apostles that preached doctrines contrary to the Gospel of Christ; or else the charismatic exuberance of some was in contrast to the weakness of others. Furthermore, the unity of the Church was threatened on the level of its being together and never regarding the local community, a threat that comes, above all, from the existence of two large, contrary blocks, that of Hebrew origin and that of pagan origin. Their reconciliation and unification are the central fulcrum of the letter, the true problem that remained unresolved even for Paul. The particularity of the letter is that the problem of the two blocks in it is turned upside down, inasmuch as it is not the Jewish-Christians that needed to accept the pagan-Christians, but vice versa. In fact, it is the pagan-Christians that must now put away their reserves and their spiritual sufficiency with which they judged the Jewish Christians. Therefore, the path towards unity passed through an abandoning of positions of reciprocal diffidence and every sentiment of superiority one towards the other to reach a fellowship and a true integration in receiving each other (Corsani, 1998:189). The writer of the epistle, therefore, proposes a solution through the announcement of Christ as the Lord of the universe which means that He is the head of “all” the

Church in his universality in which He already exercises a cosmic government. The wall of separation between the Jews and the pagans, the rich and the poor, the owners and the slaves, no longer exists (Ephesian 2:11-22). In Christ, everyone together is united as a single, holy people of God under the same head, to form the Body of Christ (Lohse, 1987:203).

The proposed verse is the synthesis of the entire Pauline discourse that is found within the epistle: “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6). This passage of the epistle is so clear that it doesn’t leave any space for theological speculation. The writer states that there is one faith because there is one Lord. Furthermore, there is only one baptism because there is only one Lord Jesus Christ in whom the believers are united, because there is only one body in which the believers are its members. Those who have been baptised in Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27), therefore, from the moment that there is only one Christ, to be clothed with Christ through baptism means to be all one and united, for it is Christ who has given the believers to be raised again from their sins. Therefore, as the Church is one inasmuch as it recognises only one Lord, so also in its unity it is given faith in the single Father of all, God, Creator of the heavens and the earth, and Father of the Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ (O’Brien, 1999:589-590). In fact, it is worth noting the end of verse 6 for the successive use of three Greek prepositions: ἐπὶ, διὰ, ἐν, all of which precede the term all. This passage renders the idea even clearer of the unity that the writer of the epistle intends, that is the centripetal unity where the centre is the community of all believers, while the Lord is; *above, amongst, and within it*. Therefore, the community itself is held together by this centripetal movement, where the Lord works through the Spirit and ties together “all” through a harmony of love and fellowship. This section has the nature of a primitive Christian creed not without precedent in the Pauline writings, but more elaborate in respect to its predecessors, as for example, that of I Corinthians 8:6: “There is one God...”; or 1 Corinthians 12:4-6: “The same Spirit... the same Lord... the same God...”. So also the formulation of Ephesians 4:4-6 is built up around: “One Spirit... one Lord... one God...”. In this way, we have the prototype of the oriental creeds, with their emphatic repetition of the number one. Therefore, a common confession of faith is found that recognises the unicity of God, of the Son, and of the Spirit for all Christians, which for his own confession is the model of unity for those who confess it, not only for the Christians at Ephesus, but it is the one and only for all Christians forever (Bruce, 1984:687-689). The author of the epistle thus exhorts all Christians, not only to those to whom the epistle was directed (which in reality are fictitious because the epistle is addressed to the universal church), to maintain this unity that already exists in God and in the actions of the Spirit as agents of peace and reconciliation. This is possible if every believer has humility as a fruit of the Spirit that of

giving greater value to his companions of faith, the meekness that considers the needs and necessities of others to be greater than one's own and patience, that is, to tolerate the lack and weaknesses of others. In short, what is necessary is the power of love. In fact, the fruits of the Spirit are realised when there is a common response to the single call in view of the sole hope in Christ. The only call is to live out one's own life contributing to the unity of the Church, together with that one hope of a cosmos unified to and reconciled with God, if not at this present moment, most assuredly in the future of God (Lincoln, 1990:1420-1423).

### 2.3.3. The Lord's Supper as a Sign and Testimony of Unity (I Corinthians 10:17).

The epistle to the Corinthians presents itself as a manual of evangelical ethics. This is because Paul, through the epistle, responds to some questions that arose in the church in Corinth. The apostle, however, directs it to all Christianity. It is written to the Church of God that is in Corinth (1:2 a) and then to all those who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ in every place (1:2 b). The epistle, therefore, constitutes a first universal and ecumenical manual of the Christian life in the history of Christianity (Marguerat, 2004:195). The subject verse (I Corinthians 10:17): "For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread", has in the adjective *ἐν* the same construction that we find again in the prayer for unity (John 17:21-23). In fact, even in this adjective "one single" before the substantive *bread* and *one single* before the substantive *body*, indicates an inclusive unity, that is, to be one because it is a together and not one separated from another in its own solipsism.

In this verse, Paul underlines the fact that the Lord's Supper generates collaboration, friendship and fellowship. The way in which he describes the Lord's Supper underlines its community character. The cup is something in which thanks is given and the bread is something the communicants break. Certainly, it is the Spirit, not the meal, that creates unity among the believers, but the meal confirms and reinforces this unity, from the moment that it reunites everyone as a single body around the Lord's table. The Lord's table brings all Christians around the table, diverse but united, because when they are together to share the supper, they represent the single Body of Christ. In the ancient world, meals brought with them obligations, both to the owner of the house and to those who were at the table together. This way, participating together at the supper and believing that the Lord is present, indicates not only one's own adhesion and solidarity with he who has invited us to the supper but also to all those who, together with us, have been invited and participate, reunited and gathered around the same table together with the same Lord (Garland, 2003:1304-1305). In fact, the similitude that Paul uses is very illuminating as those who eat of the same bread form an earthly

family, so likewise those who live of the bread of life, Christ, form a single spiritual family and a single, mystical body. Thus, at the supper all those who participate make an act of fellowship with Christ but also with his entire Church (Bosio, 1997:84-85). The affirmation of Paul that the single eating of a single bread renders all a single people and transforms the exhortation into a true and proper imperative. In fact, unity becomes an absolutely indispensable prerogative from the moment that believers find themselves before a group of people who, around the common meal, celebrate and testify to the death and resurrection of Christ, which were accomplished by God so that all those who should believe in Him might be united with Him. Therefore, the Christian meal should be the most solemn moment, the first occasion to manifest and testify to such a unity, first with the Lord then with all Christians; a moment so solemn that recounts a unity so special. In fact, because the believer is united to God and to his Church, that they are separated from the world and from the wicked (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010:1808-1810). The supper should be the most tangible and open sign of the sharing and fellowship as a single body amongst all Christians. The celebration of the Lord is then for Paul the celebration of their common life and the single Body of Christ; a life in fellowship with God and with all Christians because it is based on a new alliance in his blood, that He had beforehand united together rendering them one in Christ through the Holy Spirit. As such it is this unique relationship between believers and their Lord, celebrated by this meal, that renders impossible such similar associations and particular fellowships with others who have not believed or realised Christ's salvation because they are given to pagan worship and corruptions of sin; that which Paul calls *the table of demons* (Fee, 2014:1210-1212).

#### 2.3.4. A Single Spirit but Diversity of Gifts (I Corinthians 12:4).

In this verse, as for the rest of chapter 12 of I Corinthians, Paul puts the nature of spiritual gifts with the role of those who minister them into a correct perspective; that is, those who have received them have received them as a gift through the work of the Holy Spirit through the grace of Christ. Paul clarifies the fact that there are diverse gifts but only one Spirit who distributes them as He pleases. Every gift is given only and exclusively for the common good and therefore, every single believer is necessary for the good of the community. Paul clarifies well the function of the gifts, so that there would not arise any radical individualism within the community, which is the chronic infection of the church which produces a variety of symptoms, the most serious of which is the wounding of the community itself by the abuse of a gift, or rather, by one individual to the damage of another (Garland, 2003:1526-1527). Paul once again by this verse, exhorts every Christian to a unity of Spirit but not to uniformity; to diversity in the context of unity. God, who is characterised by diversity and unity through the very Trinity, has decreed the same for believers that must carry the

image of God, restored by the power of the Holy Spirit. Diversity has its roots in God, one and triune, whose diverse activities are expressed through his attributes. In like manner, the diversity of the gifts manifests the work of the Spirit through a single grace that works in every believer. Therefore, the diversity of the Spirit renders the believers one in Christ for a single grace given by God through the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit (Godon, 2014:1478-1480).

The Corinthians had evidently used the gifts as a way of inciting divisions. In fact, the context of the entire chapter gives the impression that they had used the gifts of the Spirit as a pretext for boasting, standing up one against the other, dependent upon their having a certain gift or not. Paul is trying to correct such an attitude through his exhortation. In fact, the apostle, even while recognising the diversity that had been created within the church itself, precisely thanks to the actions of the Spirit, reminds believers that the giver is the same and sole Spirit. The Spirit does not struggle against Himself and within Himself there are no divisions, but the diversity which is created by Himself is enacted towards a communal goal and the good of all, to be together one in Christ (Morris, 1974:199-200). In fact, in this text the apostle demonstrates that the Holy Spirit creates unity in diversity and not in spite of it. Every member of the church, precisely thanks to its structure and particular function and exactly through the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit, contributes in forming an entity that is radically one, as it is in a similar way in a human body. Therefore, as is for his own nature, the Holy Spirit in exercising a diversifying action does not lead to fragmentation but rather towards the unity of the body (Cullmann, 1987:19-20). In reality, diversity is certainly an essential element of unity, but does not produce unity as such. It is certainly not diversity itself that creates unity, but the Holy Spirit, who brings about this diversity by his essence, that tends towards unity. This occurs because the *Koinonia* cannot be separated from unity. The Spirit produces the *Koinonia* by the fact that He gives his gifts simultaneously in diversity, and therefore the unity through fellowship is reached within diversity (Cullmann, 1994:32-33). In fact, as Paul exhorts with his reference text: “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit” (I Corinthians 12:4), the community of Christ is constituted by the acceptance of others in their likenesses and in their differences. The adjective that is used by Paul in the Greek text is very particular: *διαίρεσις* (diversity). It does not indicate diversity as one separate from another or that the one is incompatible with the other. It indicates, rather, a diversity in the fact that each one has been given something particular, and that something original has been distributed to each; it is this something that renders it different from the other. For Paul, as believers in Christ lay down their natural gifts to the service of others, so life itself in all its dimensions is lived entirely in a charismatic dimension, that is, a gift used by the Spirit as it seeks the common good in the unity of the Body of Christ. Any restrictions or uniformity of thought, word and works have devastating effects for the community, while only unity in diversity confers to a community the

traits of a welcoming church, of a community that, within a uniform society, demonstrates its very capacity to restore: “Life is pluralistic and even more so for the recreated life. Whoever is not ready to accept this chooses death and hardens himself until all differences are flattened” (Molmann, 1995:214).

## 2.4 The Need to Rediscover Unity in a Moment of Crisis: Acts 15

The most evident historic event in favour of diversity in the ambit of primitive Christianity is the conference of the apostles described in Acts 15. For a full understanding of the episode, however, it is necessary also to consider what Paul himself wrote regarding this subject in the epistle to the Galatians in chapter 2. From this parallel between Luke (Acts 15) and Paul (Galatians 2), readers can immediately note some differences in the interpretation of the event as each one presents their own personal perspective. Luke, through his account in Acts, strives to present a fairly peaceful picture of the question with little contention, while Paul, in what he writes to the Galatians, tells of a moment of tension, and certainly, remembering the episode, does not renounce some sharp pointed arrows, as will be seen further ahead (Stendahl, 1995:135). Chapter 15 of the book of Acts belongs to the third part of the book that is entirely dedicated to the first extra-Palestinian mission of Paul that begins in Antioch and includes Barnabas and John Mark as protagonists, the latter starts out with them but will then leave the group at Perge in Anatolia. This first mission finishes in Antioch where it began, where the protagonists recounted all that God worked amongst the Gentiles (Acts 14:27). In the light of this testimony, there is opposition from the Jewish Christians. They want all of the Gentile neo-converts to be submitted to the rite of circumcision and to *the law of Moses*. The clash brings into discussion, not only the method used by the two missionaries, but also the principle of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is moved to Jerusalem where an assembly is organised with the apostles (Peter, James, and John) and the representatives of the local church. Acts 15:6-29 seems to testify of a letter document that was drawn up for the occasion. This pericope recounts the conclusions of the first official act of the Church that defines the statute of the one and only people of God, which is composed of Jews and pagans in a pacific coexistence, and free from the laws and rites of circumcision (Fabris, 2004:28-29).

This passage of scripture shows how the first century church is called upon, amongst the many questions that arise, to affront the most important question, which from that moment would characterise Christianity up until today. The question was the involvement of Gentiles within the Christian community. The point in question was to ask what the basis of their inclusion within the Christian church was. Was it enough to simply believe or, as the Hebrew Christians claimed, was it necessary for them to also be circumcised and follow the precepts of *the law of Moses*. The resolution

that was pronounced by the council at Jerusalem was an affirmation of inclusion and complete equality of the Gentiles with the Hebrews. Together pagans and Hebrews form a single church and there was no need of circumcision or the observing the *law of Moses*, but in Jesus all were one in Christ (Bock, 2007:1410-1412). In reality, however, even if Luke presents the question in a very tranquil way, from the epistle of Paul to the Galatians and from the many studies made regarding this question, it must be understood that the Jerusalem conference was anything but a serene meeting (Marguerat, 2004:131). The passions for the grave question and the awareness of the consequences that the decisions taken would have on the entire Christian world, both for those present but above all for those in the future, were greatly aroused. In fact, from the epistle to the Galatians (2:5-9) it can be deduced from the account of Paul, especially from his part, that on this occasion his tone was strongly contentious against those who argued that the Gentiles should observe the Jewish law. He together with his played a direct polemic role rather than a simple testimony that is purposely presented by Luke in the book of Acts 15:12 (Keener, 2019:441). However, from the epistle to the Galatians (2:5-10) it seems that Paul contrasted very directly with those who: “Seemed to be pillars” (verse 9), not for love of himself and his reasons, but for love of his gentile converts, in a way that the truth of the Gospel might remain firm and continue to exist in the same manner that it was announced to them, so that they might rejoice. For Paul the ideas of the Judaisers are not a different aspect of the truth of the Gospel, but rather an absolute and complete lie that tends to overturn and transform the message of the true Gospel of Christ (Cole, 1974:84). Even if, the conclusions of verse 10 show that, in spite of everything, it was Paul himself who instituted the collection for the poor, thus recognising the other Christians, especially those of Jerusalem, as brethren. This is an important fact that should not be read superficially. The important fact symbolised by the collection for the church in Jerusalem is cited in Galatians, referring to the poor, while in other parts it is mentioned more explicitly (Romans 15:25; 1 Corinthians 16:1; 2 Corinthians 8:9). This is important because it is a manifestation of unity in spite of the divergences on the controversial points of doctrine. Paul demonstrates his unity with other Christians precisely through a policy that today would be termed ecumenical. Paul shows with the collection for the poor, or for the church in Jerusalem, a certain unity in the policy, and above all, in the solidarity of love towards those who, as part of a single family, are in a moment of difficulty (Stendahl, 1995:136).

While according to Luke the conference in Jerusalem should be considered as a meeting between the apostles of the Lord and their closest collaborators, comparing their experiences of evangelisation and in such an occasion looking to resolve the difficulties in a way that is acceptable to the Jews and to the pagans; in reality the conference in Jerusalem testifies to a serious problem that needed to be resolved at the heart of the church in the first century, a rift so serious that if a common

solution could not be found, it could have compromised the future of the whole of Christianity. The solution that was found by the mouth of James (Acts 15:14-21) refers to the Old Testament passages quoted in Acts 15:16 (Amos 9:11-12; Isaiah 45:21), in which, it must be remembered, underline the rebuilding of the Israel of God reflected in: *The tabernacle of David*, which not only describes the re-establishment of the Jewish people, but also includes *The rest of mankind*. This presupposition is important because, through James, Luke proposes the evangelisation and conversion of the gentiles as a fulfilment of those Old Testament promises in which, finally, the world will know the one and only people of God, without racial or national difference. In fact, the final reconstruction of Israel renders the conversion of the Gentiles indispensable. This very reconstruction is the preliminary condition for the salvation of the Gentiles; it is what is known as the centripetal universalism of the Old Testament prophets. Israel, purified and renewed, becomes the point of attraction for all peoples, but the words of James must also be read in the light of the eschatological perspective, interpreting the first conversions of pagans as the start of a universal movement that is the Christian community. It represents only a provisional and partial beginning but does not exclude the anticipation of a “full” restoration through a unique community of those saved in the future of God (Fusco, 2003:414-416).

The decision recommended by James and accepted by the whole assembly had, as a presupposition, the liberty that is included in salvation in Christ. It was not necessary to observe the law of Moses because it was not this that constituted the base of salvation, but faith in Christ was the sole element necessary to being saved; a liberty that should not be used as an occasion for licentiousness, inasmuch as liberty is free from the law, but also, and above all, from sin. There is liberty to be saints in Christ; to testify to the liberty of love; to be free to love, accepting and including “everyone” within the people of God without distinction of race or nationality and especially without the need for particular norms or rites or acceptance of exclusive precepts or beliefs (Erdman, 1996:132).

Finally, in verse 28 of chapter 15, we find a conclusion that is the fulcrum of our entire discourse and is central to the Lukan idea as a way in which to reach the unity of the church; “...It seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us...”. The use of the Greek verb: *δοκέω* (seemed/we believed) is quite particular in this verse. The verb is used in the aoristic tense, a past tense that indicates a completed action. The particularity of this verb which reveals the true presupposition that the apostles used in making their just decision, is that where judgement or choice always presupposes, not so much the experience of empirical data or imminent or real testimonies, but rests always on an act of faith; the right solution is that which “*believes itself to be such*” and through this verse, Luke shows that the capacity to discern is the revelation itself, as a word of wisdom or knowledge worked by the

Spirit, which works by infusing into the hearts of the disciples inspiration and indication of the way. These, being sensitive to his workings, choose to follow the way that is indicated because they trust and are certain of the guide Himself which has revealed the right decision, because the Holy Spirit acts and continues the mission of Christ in the world through his church. In fact, for Luke the Spirit is the fabric which connects and unifies many aspects and dimensions of the Christian experience. The book of Acts speaks on every occasion of this particular action of the Spirit in history. Every time there is a problem to resolve, as in Acts 15, Luke wants to demonstrate that the Christian continuity is an important part of the story of salvation through the presence of the Spirit. Consequently, the true protagonists in the Christian story are not the men, nor even the apostles, but the Holy Spirit. He renders the community universal and does not allow it to close itself off in any way as the enemies of the church in Jerusalem tried to do. It is from this imprint of universality and inclusion that the missionary drive is derived. As is demonstrated in this last verse, the place of the arrival of the Spirit is the community "...to us"; the assembly. The Spirit renders the assembly open then to go out without fear, able to propose and to make itself understood. The universality of the Spirit does not mean a community that is dispersive and fragmented, rather, in light of this strongly inclusive universality, is able to manifest itself to the world as a sign of a community united through love and brotherhood (Maggioni, 1992:46-48).

## 2.5 Conclusion: chapter 2

Despite that, with what has been written so far, this researcher has tried to demonstrate how important the search for the unity of the Church has for the New Testament, also indicating some paths that Christians can take to obtain it, having as support the biblical texts. The problem is by no means solved indeed, whenever believers turn to the Word of God, the wound seems to widen. This is because, despite the fact that Christians read the same Bible and the same texts, they have different interpretations of these, which most of the time are precisely the fruit of a confessional heritage and traditions that have merged into the experience of faith of every single church. However, the diversity of the interpretations of the texts, including those proposed, is linked, in a certain sense, to the very nature of Christianity. In fact, as this research has tried to explain, they are born according to an evolution or contextualisation of faith in the environments where they germinate. As has been written, Christianity was born plural and certainly not as a monolithic religion without diversity. This has made it so that, immediately, there were Christians, who while believing in God himself and recognising Jesus as his son and therefore Lord, differ in theological and other aspects. The texts of the New Testament are sufficient to demonstrate what has just been said. In fact, the original message of Jesus was conjugated according to different sensitivities. There were different paths which,

although started from the same source of inspiration and converging towards the same experience, illustrated the Christ event differently. In the beginning this was a richness and source of strength for a Christianity that knew the truth of its proclamation not singly or in a single vision but in its plurality. The fact that the evangelists provide four perspectives of the Lord testifies to this reality, sometimes forgotten (Rinaldi, 28:12).

Unfortunately, from a pluralist source such as the texts of the New Testament, plural interpretations of the same texts by different Christians have also arisen, who at times even reading the same Bible have had contrasting positions. Therefore, it is necessary that all Christians not only return to confronting themselves with the biblical texts, but also that they can, together, by reading the same texts, reach shared conclusions and perspectives. In fact, from what is believed to be the correct interpretation of the texts of the New Testament, its own orthodoxy arises for each confession. Orthodoxy indicates the theological and doctrinal system that a church has for a clear distinction of its truth from doctrinal error, which then becomes the basis of the confessional interpretation of one or another Christian confession. Therefore, orthodoxy is the correct teaching, we would say pure and that it must be accepted by all those of the same Christian confession but, for those who profess it, it must also be accepted by other Christians. This is because every single Christian confession believes that their own is the true and correct interpretation. Each church believes that its orthodoxy is as close as possible to the truth of the gospel. By contrast, all variations and all that is different from the doctrine of one's church, are called heresy. In short, for each Christian denomination its doctrine is orthodox, because the absolute truth of God has revealed itself to its own church. However, heresy indicates any deviation from that single and clearly defined faith different from one's own.

In reality, the churches must realise that the interpretation of the texts already raises fundamental problems. The first of all is to clarify whether there is only one univocal and equal interpretation of the same text for all Christians, that is, a final expression of Christian truth which meaning is unequivocal. The second but no less important question is to recognise whether Christian truths can be reduced to eternal dogmatic formulations or if the subjectivity of the apprehension and the relativity of the context condition of the individual's interpretation and therefore their dogmatic confessions. In reality, as biblical Christianity has shown, the final revelation of truth is not a thing but a person, Jesus of Nazareth. Such a revelation cannot be reduced to a single statement, much less can it be reduced to dogmatic statements. The ramifications of this problem extend throughout theological thought and throughout Christian history (Dunn, 26:2-3). In this, the same mistake as Pilate's is often made. Although he has the truth before the incarnate Christ, he is not aware of it, because he places himself in the wrong position, asking the wrong question: "What is truth?" (John

18:38). He seeks the truth in a thing; and does not realise that Christian truth is always a who; this is Christ Jesus the Lord.

The main way is that of the Lord Jesus who in his interpretation of the Scriptures has always entrusted himself to the guidance of the Spirit. A guide that is never a free subjectivism but that is always in communion and in accordance with the central message of the gospel. Discovering the fulcrum of the gospel should be the hermeneutic key and the only presupposition for all Christians to help interpret the texts in a way that is not the same for everyone but looking for interpretative perspectives that allow believers to have shared paths at the end. The central message of the gospel is the love of the Father which is manifested through the son Christ Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. Then, every biblical exegesis and hermeneutics should learn to put aside all those interpretations that are in contrast or do not move harmoniously with its central fulcrum. Paul too shows an example of what was said through the writing on love that is found in the first epistle of the Corinthians (chap. 13). The mysteries of God were revealed to the Apostle, who considers himself to be his administrator, because he has the mind of Christ. He is aware of the knowledge he has received from the Spirit and that he imparts through his teachings. However, he affirms that love is what governs his apostolic ministry. If he had not done it all for love, all his teaching and knowledge would have been useless (Garland, 2003:1661-1663). Then, churches should learn the hermeneutics of love from this. The only one capable of ensuring a common home for all in Christ and for Christ. Because believers are aware of the greatest revelation that Jesus of Nazareth himself revealed and that is: “God is love” (1 John 4:16).

## INTRODUCTION: The state of the affairs “today”.

The problem of division between the followers of Christ has afflicted the church since the birth of Christianity. Problems are already recognised in the New Testament writings, which however identify in *koinōnía* the way to overcome the separation, so that the various ecclesial and sometimes even theological positions do not become a danger for the very foundation of the faith and being "one" in Christ (Filoramo & Menozzi, 2001:45). Therefore, the question of how to remain united despite diversity does not only arise in modern times but has always existed in the context of the Christian people. Above all, it does not concern a single church, but it is a problem with which all confessions must confront each other and find a solution to repair such a serious wound within the body. It is an issue that should concern the entire community of believers and all church leaders, rather than involving only theologians or insiders (Neuner, 2011: 23). The attitude of the Christians and especially of the Pentecostals towards ecumenism must be understood in the dynamics of the deepest conversion. A conversion capable of involving every single believer in his/her own church, so that communion among Christians is based on a new relationship with the Lord, a renewal that broadens the horizons of the mind and heart. A second conversion is understood as the capacity to let oneself be carried away again by the Spirit (Cereti, 1992:112). The Pentecostals believe that the Church is *one* and *united* and this happens through the diversity given by the charismas of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, unity is not to be considered an ideal to be pursued; on the contrary it is given by the very action of the Spirit, present within the communion of believers. Every Pentecostal church feels part of the universal one but imagining itself through a particular paradigm, that is, it believes, unlike other Christian confessions, that the universality of the church does not have its distinctive element on the level of the visible. The Pentecostals, in the course of their even brief history, have found forms of unity far from Scripture, because they are aimed at giving a worldly structure to the Body of Christ. For this reason, the Pentecostals remain anchored to their positions, the initial paradigm remains, and division becomes necessary (Napolitano, 2011: 129).

The research does not want to re-present writings and positions around the central theme but wants to provide first of all critical hermeneutical and interpretative keys to read, free from prejudices and external conditioning, who understands the contribution of the Pentecostals in the ecumenical field. Furthermore, it is hoped that it will be an instrument that has elements of novelty and stimulus in itself to reopen a debate that for some seems to have come to an end. It is driven by a desire to encourage the Pentecostals to engage in a new dialogue and perhaps to review some positions, which with regard to the ecumenical movement, are too conditioned by past history and little open to what has instead come. Like all things, truth is never resolved within the confines of its own world. On the

contrary its meaning is always to be found outside it. Although many times it transcends any good intention or purpose, but this awareness should create bridges and not walls or small strongholds (Natoli, 2008:68). It is intended, from the outset, to warn the reader of the danger of believing that this research work is aimed at writing about everything that has been produced on the subject matter. With this paper the researcher assumes the responsibility to provide simply a position, a line, but that can act as an icebreaker or watershed for the many who, after and with the same passion, want to deal with the subject. In fact, the success of good research is not determined by its completeness, but by how much it can open new and old questions. This is the only possible perspective when an attempt is made to talk about a phenomenon in continuous evolution such as ecumenism (Burigana, 2013: 25). A movement that, even when it seems to be still, continues to grow and move in ways that are not official, less visible, but not less important. In reality, the ecumenical movement is a tool, like others, for reaching and finding unity among churches. What is suitable and how to achieve the goal for humans, even though they are men and women of God, is still not entirely clear. But all agree that the Holy Spirit produces this communion, even if only because He simultaneously gives his gifts, his *charismata*, precisely in diversity (Cullmann, 1994:67). Starting from this awareness, many Catholic and Protestant theologians consider the charismatic movement to be the right path to reach Christian unity. John Paul II considered the emphasis placed on the Spirit to be an initiative of primary importance for the renewal of the whole Church. The new charismatic *oikumene*, for Philip Popper, Secretary General of the CEC, is: “A link between for all the churches” (Marrazzo, 2007: 68). The substantial criterion is baptism in the Holy Spirit; in fact, all those who experience spiritual charismata are *ipso facto*, already in the line of the new humanity united by the bond of love. The doctrines have created separations, divisions and breakages, but if the Spirit grasps people, wherever they are, a true ecumenism can be created, no longer according to men, but that which comes from God (Marrazzo, 2007: 68).

Starting from these positions, therefore, it is easy to understand why it is so important to import the Pentecostal contribution to the search for unity. It is: “The people of the Spirit, more than other Christians” (Claudiana, 2010: 17). Pentecostals consider the Spirit as *Spirit in action*. Therefore, if it is the Spirit that creates unity, then, unity cannot do without the people of the Spirit. Indeed, it is hoped that soon the Pentecostal world will be aware of how important its role is in an ecumenical discourse. Then, despite some already known problems, it is the responsibility of the Pentecostal leaders to make their believers reach the awareness of the importance of their role within the movement for unity, also, for recognising their own survival (Claudiana, 2010: 25). It is necessary to start from this common basis to build bridges and an ecumenical theology, which can not only include the Pentecostal churches, but see them as an active part. Since the pentecostal world is by its very

nature divided and fragmented, it will be impossible to know the positions of all the individual associations and small groups. Furthermore, this would be completely misleading for the purposes of this research. Then, the official positions, the Pentecostal groups and denominations that have participated and offered, officially and otherwise, their contribution and their presence to the already published international and national ecumenical dialogues, being identified with the so-called historical or traditional pentecostalism. In this way, the research will focus on a recognisable and well-defined object, which is also such for others (Naso, 2012: 70).

## CHAPTER 3: ITALIAN CLASSICAL PENTECOSTALS AND ECUMENISM

### 3.1 Introduction.

The majority of Italian Pentecostals have not shown any particular interest in ecumenism. This reticence has a number of reasons, firstly because many Pentecostals, especially Italians, know almost nothing about ecumenism, and their leaders and pastors simply do not have personal ecumenical experience and are often without a formal theological education. This lack of preparation and the lack of interest in all ecumenical activities is a peculiarity of the Italian Pentecostal churches. Because their interest is spent entirely on the problems within the churches and they lack a real project of dialogue with other churches. Only in recent years is something moving in this direction, especially thanks to the FCP. Secondly, the congregationalist orientation of the majority of the pentecostal communities, together with their ecclesiology, renders it extremely diffident towards wider ecclesiastical structures, and particularly those that have well structured, international organisations (Rausch, 2012; 32). In spite of this lack of ecumenical interest from the Pentecostals in general, the Roman Catholic Church has begun a path of international dialogues with some pentecostal representatives. Unfortunately, what the Catholic Church has done, and is doing with the international dialogues, is all outside Italy and is diametrically opposed to those in Italy. In fact, the indifference of the Italian churches is not only on the part of the Pentecostals, but also and especially, on the part of the Catholics. While outside Italy, the dialogues have been taking place since 1972, at home the Church of Rome and the Italian Pentecostals have still not managed to meet together. In this chapter, the researcher will try to gather together all that has been done in Italy by the Pentecostals in the ecumenical field although almost nothing between Pentecostals and Catholics, and very little with the other churches. This should not, however, discourage because the longest paths always begin with a first step. Maybe today, Italian pentecostalism is taking its first steps in the ecumenical field and it is hoped this will be the beginning for a new time of ecumenical life for Italian Christianity.

### 3.2 Italy: A Special Case

Italy always merits a separate chapter every time Christianity is mentioned, maybe only because it is the nation in which the Catholic Pope resides and a small part of its territory is occupied by what constitutes the Vatican State. This particularity should never escape the reader, in fact it is the first element to take into account every time one wishes to trace the history or a part of the history of the

Italian religious world. This fact has influenced the ecumenical experience of Italian Christians quite considerably; even more unique in its nature for how it has evolved and how it has been received by believers in their respective churches of origin. This is a particularity that has acted and still acts as a determining factor also for Italian Pentecostals and their relationship with the ecumenical movement. The history of the ecumenical dialogue in Italy begins only half a century after the Conference of Edinburgh (1910), that is, after there was a clear indication from the Vatican Council II. Only after this can it truly be said that a new season of relations between all Italian Christians began, sometimes only in appearance and other times in greater depth (Burigana, 2013: 13). The Catholic Church in Italy has always enjoyed the benefits of being the first state church with the majority of believers and, to the detriment of others, in the matter of religious liberty. On the contrary, where the church has not been in the majority, it has always shown itself to be much more tolerant and less exclusive. In these nations, where Christians are not in a majority and where there is no religious majority, it has always shown itself to be more open to dialogue and reconciliation with other Christians, not exaggerating its exclusive positions as regards salvation or its pretension to be the True Church of Christ. These factors initially contributed to the embittering of ecumenical relations between the Evangelical churches and Catholics in Italy. Besides this, after 1870, once the experience of an Italy truly liberal as regards religious freedom was exhausted, the possibility for Italian Evangelicals to influence the fate of such liberty in their country was reduced to almost zero. First Italy moved away from their close ties with the Protestant nations and then, with the disappearance of the Risorgimental political class and those Evangelical personalities with close ties to the Risorgimento, there was a clean cut between the political interests and those of the minority churches (Spini, 2002:73). This downward arc of Italian politics as regards religious liberty quickly led to, with the coming of Fascism, the most tragic consequences and it was the Italian Pentecostal Church that paid the highest price. It was persecuted “in its own house”, by a government circular; the infamous Buffarini-Guidi (1935-1955) that marked the beginning of the Fascist persecution to the advantage of the Catholic Church. It was a circular that was revoked only in 1955, ten years after the end of WWII and the fall of Fascism; a measure that has been considered the most serious act of religious intolerance ever enacted in Italy since its unification. It had serious repercussions on the lives of hundreds of Italians only because they were Pentecostals. This tragedy is still rooted in the historic memory of many Italian Pentecostal Churches from their beginnings; which still has amongst their members, persons who were directly involved in these events, events lived or recounted by their grandparents or their parents.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In: <https://riforma.it/it/articolo/2015/04/09/80-anni-fa-fu-emanata-la-circolare-buffarini-guidi>, date of access: 20/05/2020.

The situation is still difficult today. Certainly in Italy Pentecostals enjoy the liberty to profess their individual faith, but there is still a disparity of rights between the two churches. Unfortunately, very often the Italian State forgets that the Pentecostals, even though they are in a minority in comparison to the Catholics, are still Italian citizens and as such should enjoy the same religious rights as any other citizen. It is necessary to note that the Italian Pentecostal world, besides being in a minority, though certainly not amongst Evangelical churches, however, remains disjointed and badly organised. This fragmentation, therefore, leads to a weak, juridical preparation which exposes them to a privation of their rights, because they are continually impeded by that Italian bureaucracy that seems made to give advantage only to those who have the means and the structures to understand it and maybe even gain a profit for themselves, as can happen in the face of a majority church that has the seat of its very State in Italy. Besides this, several Evangelical churches, especially the Italian Pentecostal ones, have always viewed with perturbation and open dissent the dialogue between themselves and the Catholics because they have always interpreted an eventual rapprochement of the two churches as a renunciation of evangelisation and a weakening of their own identity. In fact Evangelicals in general and Pentecostals in particular have always believed that one of the prime objectives in evangelisation was to bring Italians into an Evangelical faith, considering from the beginning that the Catholic Church is an apostate church and above all, given to enrich itself and involve itself in politics. This is an inheritance that the Italian Pentecostals gather from the foreign missions, above all American, that came to Italy immediately following the war, believing that it was possible to demolish the Vatican precisely through the conversion of Italians to the Evangelical faith (Ricca, 1998: 26).

The relationship between the Pentecostals and the other Evangelicals in Italy in the ecumenical realm is less problematic than on the Catholic side; it is still growing even if in some points, it is still at an embryonic stage. However, from the end of WWII, the Pentecostals have participated in several initiatives, some quite significant, proposed by Italian Evangelical churches where some Pentecostal churches have joined up with a certain enthusiasm, even if later along the way, a little of their initial zeal has waned. In 1967, the FCEI was born, that is, the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy, which distinguishes itself in the search for common positions in its relation to the State and its fight for religious liberty, to which initially the Baptist, Methodist, Waldensian and Lutheran churches in Italy adhered, besides the ecumenical community of Ispre-Varese followed by the Salvation Army, free churches, the Italian Apostolic Church, and in 1994 a few Pentecostal communities also joined. Meanwhile, the Assemblies of God in Italy from 1984 and the Federation of Pentecostal Churches from 2001, joined with the majority of Italian Evangelical churches to form the CCERS: “Commission of Evangelical Churches for Relations with the State”, and act as a single unit in this ambit of such importance (Ricca, 1998: 20-21). In reality, the main problem that keeps a distance

between Italian Pentecostals and the other Evangelical churches, above all those historic churches, has almost all to do with an ethical nature; that is, the way they interpret and apply the biblical perspectives for a Christian life in their customary procedures. In fact, Pentecostals tend towards an ethical dimension that can, in a certain sense, always have the support of the biblical text even where a more free interpretation is required to adapt to the times, contexts, and environments. While the historic churches tend always to hold in consideration that the ethical indication of the Bible must always be translated to a culture that is their own, which is very different from that which has seen it originate. Holding space for the liberty that there is in Christ, it is translated in that single true and great commandment, the foundation of every Christian ethic and that is love (Ricca, 1998:25). Therefore, Pentecostals have the impression that classic Protestantism puts the Bible in parenthesis when it comes to ethical questions. In fact, Pentecostals often reprove the Protestant brethren of a dull adaptation to the ethical mediocrity of the secular world. To this is added a problem of hermeneutics, a different approach that the two Italian churches, Pentecostal and Protestant uses to interpret the Scriptures (Ferrario, 2008a:19). That of the Pentecostals is seen by the Protestants as a kind of *literalist* approach while the Pentecostals judge that of the Protestants as *liberal*. Both use the term towards the other in a discriminatory way, but this author believes that both must still understand the way in which the other church interprets and understands the Bible itself. Paradoxically, the Italian Pentecostal churches, with time can open themselves more to a dialogue with the Church of Rome on the basis of their consensus on ethical questions, rather than a Protestantism held to be permissive and compromising (Ferrario, 2008a:19).

In conclusion, for the Italian situation the researcher believes that the reaching of a real and true dialogue between the Christian confessions, including that of the Pentecostals, is only at its beginning, or even awaiting a more convincing start. With this the researcher would not want to discredit all that has been done up to this moment, rather is the researcher convinced that all of the ecumenical work of the churches completed up to this time is only the beginning and an encouragement for all Italians. The dialogue with Catholics for the problems indicated above remains still in the dimension of a fleeting hope because this cannot be followed in just any way. At the base of dialogue, there is a precise opposition about the ways to bring about the desired consensus. A true dialogue that could be the beginning of a relationship to construct a fellowship between Catholics and Pentecostals could not come about where such differences are to be found as to put persons or groups in a condition of subjection in respect to one another, for in this way the possibility of dialogue would be compromised from the roots. As long as there is dialogue, both subjects must reciprocally recognise themselves as interlocutors with equal rights and each has to accept the other as one free to express their own opinions, but still more to freely insist upon their own rights that have to be the same thickness and

weight as the other. The sedimentations of the consciences of the individual confessions were born in a history marked by conflict and reciprocal miscomprehensions. This must be recognised as such by everyone and can be overcome only through “acts and words” that coherently follow the objective of re-establishing conditions of mutual trust (Maffei, 2000:148-152). While as regards the rapport between Pentecostals and other Italian Evangelical churches and with those others that are in Italy, the problem is no longer the asymmetry of rights and trust, but a radical lack in mutual recognition due to the haughtiness of each single church. Being part of the Evangelical world together, each should be ready to go beyond himself to meet upon a common ground that is precisely the Evangelical faith and the faithfulness of the Bible. In fact, when one fails to notice the haughtiness of the other because maybe, in a project of unity in diversity, diversity can be seen as an enrichment and action of the Spirit and not as something to fight against, but rather even to encourage (Culmann, 1994: 35). A model of “fused” unity is confronted that cancels the distinction and the “originality” of a single church, where a dialogue can only be, at most, an appearance. This is because dialogue has, as a presupposition, an openness towards the other in being itself, that is, different. Above all, this requires the readiness to listen to whoever is obvious, and who reveals himself, and asks for and requires recognition (Maffei, 2000:147).

### 3.3 Who are the classic Italian Pentecostals?

Pentecostalism was born at the beginning of the twentieth century within the current that constitutes what scholars call, the fourth Protestantism, that of charismatic-pentecostalism. This appears in an era in which relativism and the lack of values rule the day. Pentecostalism shares its time with a sense of revolution against any kind of organisation, especially that of religious orders. Consequently, it developed without any ecclesiastical structure and with a very simple ecclesiological concept, tied to the words of Jesus in Matthew 18:20, “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them”, and its development is established exclusively through a spreading network (Introigne, 1966: 16-19). The pentecostal movement is not of a theological and ethical monolithic form but is widely diverse to the point of appearing fragmented and disunified. This researcher believes that it is, amongst the Christian churches, that which has the greatest plurality, to the point that some scholars prefer to classify the movement as plural and not singular, in other words, pentecostals (Naso, 2013: 20). In fact, what unites the Pentecostal churches is not so much a common doctrine, but rather a religious experience, which however, can be interpreted and expressed in different ways, according to the context of the Christian environment in which it finds itself.

All the Pentecostal churches began as ecumenical revival movements. They did not intend to form new churches but desired to revive those to which they belonged. This meant that when the pentecostal groups separated themselves from their original churches, they carried with them their ecclesiology and a massive dose of their background theology (Hollenweger, 1996:22-24). Accordingly, pentecostalism by its very nature could configure itself only along congregationalist ecclesiological lines. This meant that it could adapt itself to the environments in which it found itself, creating local movements which, in a short space of time, assumed important dimensions. In fact, from a revival movement in Protestant lands, it was transformed into a reformation movement in Catholic and Orthodox lands to the point of becoming missions in lands that were not even Christian. (Napolitano, 2001:7-8). All of this, if on one hand it contributes to its fragmentation, on the other this plurality allowed the first Pentecostal churches to be ‘particular’ locally where they were formed, and this was especially true of the Italian Pentecostal church. Even though it had its origins in America, because it was founded by Italian immigrants to the United States, it had characteristics that immediately distinguished each Pentecostal church from another. Where the Italian Pentecostals opened missions, the churches that grew up from the Italian missionaries reflected a type of pentecostalism that could be termed ‘Italian’; that is, totally autonomous in relation to other types of pentecostalisms. Initially, pentecostalism in general was seen as a son of its times in the sense that it was engrafted into the trunk of the great American revival at the end of the 1800s, that of the holiness movement, assuming all of its peculiarities and characteristics. Over time, especially the Italian style of pentecostalism assumed more of its own characteristics and special identity that brought the movement to a more institutionalised form, meaning that it lost a little of the reformist and innovative essence of its first hour, so much so that ‘today’ it is the Italian Pentecostals themselves that are starting to wonder if a change at their heart is necessary along the lines that they themselves advocated in their time regarding the evangelical churches in general (Crescienti, 2017: 152).

The Italian pentecostal movement distinguished itself by its faithfulness to the doctrinal inheritance of the preceding revival movements with the addition of particular doctrines regarding the work of the Holy Spirit. Their ‘doctrine’ was summarised in the articles of faith formulated in the first general assembly of the Italian Christian Churches of North America held at Niagara Falls, NY, in 1927. These were accepted in their totality by the constitutive assembly of churches present in Italy in 1928. Apart from the doctrine, the Italian Pentecostals also inherited from the pentecostal fathers a very particular type of ecclesiology, that is, the congregationalist governing structure that upholds the absolute sovereignty of each single community. This was for the Italian Pentecostals a form of government that was closest to the characteristics of the model of Christ. In fact, the Italian church in Chicago was a clear example. Even the missionaries that were sent to different parts of the world, had

to depend exclusively on the providence of God because they lacked the support and organisation that they might have had from their local churches if only they had been better organised (Toppi, 1999a: 41-49).

As with all newly born movements, so even within the Italian Pentecostal churches the first doctrinal disputes and divergences soon arose. Unfortunately, a tight congregationalism would not permit them to resolve the issues quickly because they did not have the mechanism to bring the members of the movement together under a supervising structure. They were not able to come together to clarify and arrive at common positions that could guarantee a single foundation upon which all of them could agree and construct their individual experience of the Spirit as part of a Pentecostal church, above all the Italian Pentecostal Church. To meet this need there was an initiative from those Italian Pentecostals still resident in America, while still remaining convinced that the Church of Christ should maintain a congregationalist structure, to organise a convention which in some way could bring everyone in agreement on the particular points of controversy. During this first phase they had no intention of giving an organisational structure to the movement, but rather to continue with the actual functioning congregationalism, to the point of defining the conference as: “The Assembly of the unorganised Italian churches resident in the United States”, which took place in the United States in 1927. The adjective *unorganised* was chosen with the understanding that this would be enough to preserve the framework of the congregationalist movement. In reality, though unintended, that first conference indicated the first step towards a system of organised government. The first effect was the redrawing up of a common statute for the churches involved, through the articles of faith. Some of the Italo-American Pentecostals did not participate in the assembly but later met together as a separate fellowship because of some divergences of a doctrinal nature, but especially because they opposed any form of ecclesiastical organisation. The most representative figure of this independent group was Giuseppe Petrelli. Consequently, in 1927 in the USA, not only were the basis laid down for the first form of organised structure for the churches, but also the lines were drawn for the ecclesiological division that would develop to the point to be even today an unhealable rift within Italian pentecostalism; that is between the churches that have become organised (more about this later) and the churches that remained bound to a strongly congregationalist structure, refusing any kind of organisation (Toppi, 1999a: 50).

The originality of Italian pentecostalism was that it had its beginnings far away from Italy; in the first decade of the 1900s, and without a true missionary design. Amongst those Pentecostals who had, a few years earlier, emigrated to the USA to seek their fortune, some returned to Italy, to their respective towns of origin, but with something new to recount and testify to their friends and relatives:

*the experience of, and with, the Spirit.* Thus, the factor of emigration played a fundamental role in the birth of the Italian pentecostal movement, in both the going and the returning (Crescienti, 2017:118). In fact, only in 1928 in Rome, the first constitutive assembly of the Italian Pentecostal churches, also entitled “The First National Convention of the Elders” was organised on Italian territory under the presidency of Michele Palma, representative of the Italian churches of North America. 29 leaders of communities participated, even though some sisters who were present at the various sessions were omitted from the official list. The main responsibility of Palma in Italy was to put in place, even if only in an embryonic state, a way to coordinate the existing communities. At this point, it was decided not to modify the name of the churches, which is what happened in the USA, and led to the division between the two factions, one led by Menconi (Christian Assembly), and the other by Francescon (Christian Congregation). It was preferable to remain with the original denominations and, in fact, in the minutes only the generic term appears: “Italian Christian Churches”, which will be referred to as “The Italian Assemblies”. This first meeting was important if only for the fact that the leaders of the churches became aware of the necessity of a national coordination of the movement to defend itself against false doctrines and infiltrations from the outside world (Toppi, 1998:50). This did not, however, manage to persuade the ‘Italians’ to immediately and fully abandon congregationalism in favour of an organisation. In fact, when a second assembly was convened, the congregationalist approach was even more strongly proposed as the single obvious choice for the Pentecostal churches. In 1929, there was the second general assembly at Rome defined as a “National Convention” with 58 participants and 11 adhesions by letter; even in this the names of the sisters were omitted. In this conference, besides affronting doctrinal questions, as always tied with the Council of Jerusalem or the baptism with the Holy Spirit in relation to the work of regeneration, the question is faced which for Italy will become of vital importance, that of religious freedom, or rather, the attitude to take regarding the new law of worship meetings permitted by the Italian State and eventual contentions (Nicandro, 2014-2015). The conference of 1929 was under the guidance of Luigi Francescon who urged the Italian leaders not to let go of their own origins, which were those of congregationalism, allowing the desire for organisation to take control, as that had been the cause of the coldness and the repression of the Spirit in the historical churches (Womack and Toppi, 1989: 131). Francescon had a strong conviction that any organisation outside of the local church would be a danger to the liberty of the Spirit and for the faithfulness to the New Testament. It was therefore decided not to take any steps towards a recognition as a moral entity and to establish the name of the Italian churches as Christian Congregations. Furthermore, the vision of congregationalists as a distinctive element of the pentecostal population was that Francescon convinced the leaders of the Italian communities not to take advantage of the possibility of constituting an association that would be legally recognised, an

opportunity that had opened up with the request on the part of the Italian State, which was then of a liberal leaning, to normalise the relationship with the non-Catholic Christian confessions through the application of laws that would allow worship meetings. The consequences of this particular choice was that once the Lateran Pacts were concluded between the State and the new government of Mussolini with the reaching of an concordat between the Italian State and the Vatican State, that Ettore Strappaveccia as leader of the Church of Rome was warned with an order received on April 14 of that same year by the prefect of Rome to close the meeting place because the government allowed: “Only those places of worship outside of the Roman Church that are organised, having an administration of such places of worship here at Rome to whom the government may address as required” (Toppi, 1999a: 50)

It is important to understand that the position of Francescon in favour of a radical congregationalism was not an isolated one but rather it was strongly rooted within the Pentecostal churches of the first hour, so much so that it became a true and proper mark of identity, above all for the Italians. Maybe a primary reason is to be sought in the fact that the Italians, through the movement, did not come in contact with the world of revival as had happened in the Protestant nations, but for them to be pentecostal was to return to the original apostolic church and therefore, with pentecostalism came a desire to reject all that could be linked to the Catholic Church, above all, the strong ecclesiastical structure and its sacramentalism in which they saw the primary cause of the apostasy of Christianity. One of the first Italian pentecostal leaders, Giuseppe Petrelli, wrote that: “The church is not an organisation but certainly an organism; it does not function according to premeditated agreements and directed by men, but through a spontaneous working by the head of the members” (Petrelli, 1950:3). He held, therefore, the possible existence of an organisation which was superior to any human structure, that of the Holy Spirit. It makes it possible for believers to come together, certainly not through preordained ecclesiastical structures, but through the awareness of being the children of God, inasmuch as they are saved in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, and it is the awareness of being such that allows the redeemed to come together in a predetermined place where the Church of God is to be recognised, having as its binding glue the liberty of the Holy Spirit, that creates submission one to another without the need for permanent committees and human organisations. (Petrelli, 1950:3-4)

Another pioneer of the original Italian pentecostal movement was Roberto Bracco who rode astride initial congregationalism when Pentecostals were strongly convinced and tied to it and the decision to pass to an organised type of government which would be the A.D.I. (the Assemblies of God in Italy). He wrote that the organisation had assumed control of the movement of the churches

and had conditioned even the ways of thinking of its ministers. This had troubled the true unity and fraternal fellowship of the Spirit bringing into the spiritual relationships of the church the human authority that substituted the divine one (Bracco, 1993:26). In reality, this type of ecclesiology was common amongst the first Italian Pentecostals and all of the original Pentecostals of the world. In fact, the idea of the original Pentecostal church was the presupposition that it would be ‘such’ only in the measure that it would be a congregation of people who laid their faith in Christ and had experienced a spiritual baptism. The members of the community would need to be led by a pastor and from among their number it would be possible to choose and send evangelists and other ministers as had happened at the times of the book of Acts. There was a distinction made between the local ministers, tied to a congregation, and trans local ministers that would be involved in missionary journeys (Kay, 2009:243). Consequently, congregationalism was a major identifying mark for the first years of the pentecostal movement wherever it sprang up.

After the years of WWII, though Pentecostals were still subjected to the persecutions enacted by the fascist regime through the infamous Buffarini-Guidi circular (1935-1955), things began to change in 1944. With the liberation of southern Italy by the Allied Forces, the Italian Pentecostals found a little respite after years of clandestine existence and persecutions. Taking advantage of the climate of toleration that was created following the liberation by the Allied Forces, a third conference of the Italian churches was organised in August at Raffadali in Sicily, where there was clearly a full participation from the Sicilian churches; it was still considered *de-facto* as a national convention, that is of all the churches regarding the decisions taken. Once again through this conference in Sicily, an effort was made to give a unified structure to all the Italian Pentecostal churches that emerged after the war; tested but certainly not decimated. In fact, the Italian pentecostal congregations found themselves after the war with a greater number of believers than were present before the infamous circular. This new wind was certainly conditioned, even in this conference, by the presence of Michele Palma and Massimiliano Tosetto, who had already for the last 20 years in America, organised structures such as the “Missionary Society of the Christian Church of North America.” Roberto Bracco notes in one of his articles that the presence of the two American pentecostal pioneers had, as in the conference of 1928, been motivated by the desire to consolidate, even in Italy, the imprint that the Italian Pentecostal churches in the USA had received, and seeing the way that this third conference was organised, this interpretation was not to be excluded (Nicandro, 2014/2015).

In 1945, again at Raffadali, Sicily, and again in August, a fourth conference was organised. This time it was not just the representatives of the Sicilian churches that participated, but they came from all over Italy, even with considerable sacrifice for those who came from the farthest regions.

The *leitmotiv* of the conference was to overcome the isolation that during the war, and because of the infamous Buffarini-Guidi circular, the Pentecostal churches were subjected to. The only decision truly worthy of note was that, at the fourth convention, Goriatti was given the responsibility to explore the possibility of obtaining some kind of juridical recognition, because even though the war had ended and the fascist regime was finished, the Circular was still valid in the Italian cities, above all, those in North Italy. The particularity of this fourth conference was the strong congregationalist prejudice, but this was put under discussion in the fifth conference that was held in Rome in August, 1946. In fact, during this conference the participating churches took note of the need to create a structure that could guarantee some kind of economic covering for the funds given by the American churches in solidarity with the Italian church. The Italian churches emerged from the fascist persecution rich in new converts but short of any sizable financial resources, especially those in the small towns. A missionary committee was therefore organised and was called 'Central Committee'. It was composed of three sub-committees, one for each part of Italy: south, centre and north. At the conference of 1946, two personalities, both sent by the American churches, found themselves in opposing positions. One was Nicola Di Gregorio, sent by the good Francescon, who presided over the conference and was a convinced supporter of congregationalism which, of course, was also true of Francescon. The other was Dr Henry Ness, who represented the experience of the American Assemblies of God in Italy. This was an organisation formed in 1912 during the conference in Hot Springs, USA, with those churches under the leadership of Duram. He was also a convinced supporter of congregationalism, but after his premature death, the Pentecostal churches that drew inspiration from his ministry preferred to leave the Church of God in Christ, the organisation that Duram adhered to, though for only administrative reasons, in particular to organise and form the new Assemblies of God. The way that the conference in 1946 was directed and for the decisions that were taken, one of which was to institute a 'Central Committee' which, as the name itself indicates, was an overseeing structure that had relationships with, and above all coordinated, all of the Italian Pentecostal churches through a single, central organisation. This leads to an understanding that the perspective of Dr Ness was the one that began to predominate within the Italian churches, sidelining that of Di Gregorio who represented the congregationalist position that was initially the pentecostal ecclesiology, but from this moment began to change in the face of the new needs and necessities as they developed, and also by the recent experience of persecution. In fact, it was from this very experience of persecution that the Pentecostals began to hope for a recognition on the part of the Italian State, so that what happened during the years of fascism could be avoided in the future. This laid very concrete bases for a future organisation at a national level. The following year the conference was held at Naples, where the Italian Pentecostal Assembly, recognising the urgent need to regulate their juridical position, decided

to choose a foreign affiliation in order to obtain the recognition of the State. The affiliation was drawn up with the Assemblies of God in the United States, even if the Italian churches maintained their own individual autonomy after the act of affiliation. It is necessary to note, however, that even if the term affiliation was used, it seems that it was only used as a programmatic choice, because more than a spiritual affiliation, the ties with the American churches were a true and proper Memorandum of Understanding. From this, on Dec. 13, 1949, with the resolution of the National Convention, was born the A.D.I. (Assemblies of God in Italy), having as its first president Umberto Goretti and as secretary, Roberto Bracco (Introvigne, 2004: 65-72). The affiliation did not yield the desired outcome because the American churches, on their part, did not yet have the recognition as a juridical entity and therefore could not recognise their ordination of the Italian churches. It was only in December of 1959 that the A.D.I. obtained a fully autonomous identity, because by now, loosed from the affiliation of the American churches, the juridical recognition followed in 1988 with the understanding with the State. For the Italian Pentecostals, this was a great victory for liberty because they could finally announce the Gospel, taking advantage of all of the civil rights as citizens, and above all, as a Christian confession diverse from the Catholic one. This brought about a radical change in the ecclesiological structure within Italian pentecostalism; in fact, it moved from a rigid congregationalism to a 'particular' form of government which was defined as Presbyterian-congregationalist, which in some ways is very similar to the American Assemblies of God. This is a form of government which synthesises the first-born congregationalist form of the movement with the current needs of the moment; that is one which gives the movement a national structure to receive the benefits of an organisation that could regulate its relationships with the State and at the same time maintain a unity of the churches through a system of annual, national conventions with which to supervise the regional organs that could monitor the life within the single churches. In fact, the single churches, even if they are part of a single, national organisation with a president at its head, conserve a certain autonomy for the normal proceedings of the worship service and for the internal workings, while still coordinated by the regional committee and above all, by the National Convention, which once a year meets together to decide the structure and the general progress of all the churches. Another function of the National Convention is to present the new pastors and to direct them to their respective local communities and also to select the diverse institutional responsibilities. The National Convention is composed of all the pastors of the A.D.I. with a special directive council, a president elected by the pastors and a secretary chosen by the members of the directive. Besides this, during the work of the council all of the activities at national and regional levels, as well as all the missionary activities are programmed.

However, not all of the Italian Pentecostals were ready to abandon their congregationalist nature in favour of this new form of government. They preferred to renounce those privileges that this change would have brought them, in order not to betray the original structure of the movement. These preferred to remain firmly in their original structure because they believed that a denial of their original congregationalism would bring the movement to an institutionalisation and therefore lose the freshness and the ‘newness’ of the Spirit that was, and always will be the soul and substance of the pentecostal proposition. In fact, one of the original Pentecostals wrote that in the passing of time men believed that to add something to the purity of the church with the aim of enriching it externally and render it attractive to the world, to be admired by the indiscrete gazes of the princes of the earth, without noting that the beautiful exterior has emptied itself of its interior purity, and the interior glory which only the eye of the bridegroom could penetrate (Ferri, 1991:213). These churches, therefore, chose to continue with a form of government founded on the original congregationalism, refusing affiliation with the A.D.I. and constituting among others separate Pentecostal churches that could lay the basis for further development and progress of pentecostalism in the nation. Some of those were known as: Congregation of Pentecostal Christians, the Zaccardiani’s, those of the ‘Sele Valley’, and many other small, local realities that lived for their radical congregationalism, unfortunately with a certain initial isolation. Many of them were influenced by the writings of Giuseppe Petrelli, through which he refuted the denominationalist structure in the name of the universality of the Church (Introvigne, 2004:66) These last mentioned groups were later identified by those who followed the way of organisationalism (A.D.I. churches) as: *Free Pentecostals*, with a negative connotation of the term. Many brethren who preferred to organise themselves, being a majority amongst the Pentecostals in Italy, labeled the other *unorganised* Pentecostals with the adjective: *free* but it was as if the term was synonymous with *anarchists*, that is without rules or discipline. However, the response of the *unorganised* Pentecostals was to welcome the adjective *free* because it wedded itself to a positive position, happy to declare itself free because it enjoyed the liberty of the Spirit and therefore freed from any human form that tended to grieve the Holy Spirit. In reality, they recognised that in Petrelli they had a direct connection with their co-nationals; with those who were first to enjoy the pentecostal experience; those who knew the experience of the Spirit through the charismatic personality of Duram, who held the denominations to be the greatest obstacle to the advancement of the revival promised by Christ. He was a great supporter of maintaining the pentecostal network and opposed any attempt to transform the movement into a denomination, even if he adhered to the ‘Church of God in Christ’ but only for administrative necessity (Criscenti, 2017:131).

It is necessary to underline that the ecclesiological problem within the Italian Pentecostal churches arose only after WWII when the different models presented ignited disputes over the concept of organisations and the kinds of organisations, which have always produced unhealable divisions. In reality, between the supporters of the original congregationalism, there were those amongst whom Petrelli, who based their reasons not on an ideological factor or even theological factor but because it considered the movement to be still too young and inexperienced to be able to make the change to a well-structured organisation. In fact, the aversion to the attempts to an ecclesiastical organisation is derived from the consideration that the Pentecostals, at least those at the origin but also those of the first half of the 20th century, did not have either the maturity or the preparation for a sound organisational project. It is also important to remember that the Italian Pentecostals came out of WWII where, on one side the faith and the number of converts increased exponentially in spite of the fascist persecution, on the other side in such a context it was not possible for them to develop neither the maturity nor the formation that would allow them to undertake such a path as organising a structure such as the one that was constituted within the American churches. For Petrelli and for those who saw a fountain of inspiration in him, it was clear that without an ecclesiastical awareness and a well-defined ecclesiastical consolidation any attempts to organise an ecclesiastical structure were bound to create more problems than those it resolved. To reach the level of an organisation, it was important to have a strong juridical preparation, to avoid the trap that good intentions would in practice reveal themselves to be constraining and coercive mechanisms. (Napolitano, 2015: 90-94.) In fact, there was a very illuminating comment on the subject by Petrelli in answer to the excessive zeal of the leading Pentecostals who desired to bring the ecclesiological experience of others to the heart of the Italian context: “Wishing to imitate others brings with it two evils: we lose the primitive anointing and we cannot have the same good results that others have had because others have human ways and means that we do not have.”<sup>12</sup>

So, just a few years after their beginnings many churches began to move slowly but surely away from the A.D.I. towards their original model. At the end of the 1950s, the Italian Pentecostals were structured in five main groups independently from one another: the Zaccardinian churches; the A.D.I.; the churches of the Sele Valley in Campagna, which already in the years following the war had grouped together as autonomous churches; The Congregation of Christian Pentecostals, founded in 1958 at Vittoria in Sicily and which had immediately expressed their dissent with the new

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<sup>12</sup> Annali, vol. I, pp. 95-96; vol. II, p. 46, in: Carmine Napolitano, Giuseppe Petrelli, teologo pentecostale delle origini, Fondazione Charisma Edizione, Aversa (Ce), 2015, p. 94.

organisation of the A.D.I.; and finally a host of local, independent churches. To this it is necessary to add the Apostolic Church in Italy, which although present in 1927, only in these years began to assume a numerical and organisational consistency; and the Elim Churches. To have a form of fellowship between the Italian Pentecostal churches outside of the A.D.I., but within a federalist structure; that is, an organisation that functions as a ‘common house’ for the member churches, while yet preserving the ecclesiology of every single church and its autonomy, it would be necessary to wait until 1999 with the constitution of the FCP (Federation of Pentecostal Churches) (Cutri, 2011: 69).

### 3.4 Italian Pentecostals and the Catholic Church

The international dialogues between classic Pentecostals and the Catholic church began officially after Vatican II, in 1972.<sup>13</sup> At the centre of the dialogue there was always the way in which the two churches lived their own relationship with the Holy Spirit; rather, the dialogues were born on the basis of the awareness that the Holy Spirit is the initiator and the basis itself of every fellowship in view of a true unity.<sup>14</sup> In spite of this, Italy is still an “exceptional” case, because in all the international dialogues Italians are almost never found, in fact just once in 1985<sup>15</sup> (Cereti & Puglisi, 2004: 957). Unfortunately, Italy has always remained on the outside, as though it was almost impermeable to all that was happening in the surrounding world. The Italian believers have never been involved because they were not interested in what the churches were doing outside their own borders. The problem is not only on the part of the Pentecostals, but above all, on the part of the Catholics who, paradoxically moved and cultivated dialogue with the Pentecostals in all the world apart from their own Italian brethren. Only after several years, thanks to echoes from afar of what was happening around the world, even as if by the service entrance, and even then so very little, in Italy some initiative towards dialogue began to spring up, but always in private form and through a few informal meetings that were certainly not official. In Italy, everything has been kept quiet, as though dialogue between Italian Christians was not something to make known, but rather to keep hidden for fear that, through dialogue, the two Italian churches might lose a part of their history and

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<sup>13</sup> In: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/Pentecostals/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_1972-1976\\_final-report-Pentecostals\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/Pentecostals/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_1972-1976_final-report-Pentecostals_en.html), date of access: 20/05/2020.

<sup>14</sup>, In: [www.lastampa.it](http://www.lastampa.it), date of access: 21/07/2019.

<sup>15</sup> The only participation of an Italian in the international dialogue between the two churches was Pastor Silvano Lilli, of the International Church of Rome, in 1985, the first and only presence of an Italian Pentecostal within a bilateral, international dialogue. His presence did not provoke any reaction within the Italian Pentecostal churches, maybe because almost nobody was informed even if, the researcher does not believe that they would have been interested in such a question. This author believes that the motive of such indifference is to be found in the conviction, justified on the part of Pastor Lilli that it would have aroused much argument if his presence would have been noted more than was required, and for this, the researcher believes he preferred that the event should pass almost “on the quiet”.

their identity. A fear completely unfounded as is widely demonstrated in other parts of the world, rather, wherever the churches had more dialogue between themselves, there was a greater history and a greater awareness of themselves and their own faith.

Among the initiatives and ecumenical meetings that some Italian Pentecostal churches autonomously held together with a few representatives of the Catholic side, one encounter to be emphasised is that of the charismatic Evangelical Pastor, Giovanni Traettino, from the Church of the Reconciliation in Caserta, with Pope Bergoglio, right there in the city of the Pastor. On 28/07/2014, for the first time a Pope went on a private visit to an Italian pastor with a Pentecostal type spirituality. Their meeting was helped by the fact that the two had got to know each other at the time that the Pope was in Buenos Aires. In fact, the Pope had known Pastor Traettino since 2006, when the Pastor participated in an ecumenical meeting in Buenos Aires between the Catholics and charismatic Christians. At that time the Pope was Cardinal Bergoglio, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires (Bobbio, 2019). An eyewitness of the meeting in Caserta recounted that it happened in a very informal atmosphere, almost friendly. There were no reserved places, or barriers between the rows of seats, and there were no strutting authorities in fancy robes, and neither was the rite of kissing on the agenda; everything occurred as though it was a meeting between friends that met each other again after a long time. The place that hosted the event was still an unfinished structure, that is, the temple of the Evangelical Church of the Reconciliation in Caserta that was still under construction. It was a structure without doors and even without pavements and windows; it was open on all sides because the walls had not yet been completed. A place that almost seemed to be the metaphor of how a church should be according to Francis, not made of bricks and a work of art but the work of men and women who love the Lord. On the platform there were only two seats, with a cross made of simple pieces of wood as a background with a white banner written in red “Jesus is the Lord”. “An essential part that broke all the ceremonial protocols that usually saw decorations and special platforms was substituted by a more authentic sense of a meeting between persons that were human beings before anything else” (Nogaro & Tanzarella, 2015: 83-84). Even though Pope Francis’ visit to the Evangelical Church of the Reconciliation was of a private nature, it could have been a seed for a future ecumenical dialogue in Italy, but upon condition that it involved all or at least a significant representation of Italian Pentecostals; unfortunately this did not happen. In fact, the historical importance of the event was not small; it was the first time that a Pontiff made a visit to an Italian Evangelical church with a pentecostal type of spirituality. However, while for the Pope it was not unusual because in his country, as a bishop, he had often participated in public and private meetings with exponents from the charismatic and pentecostal communities, and so the visit to Caserta for the Pope was only a part in the pathway of the Catholic-pentecostal dialogue that he knew very well; for the Italian Pentecostals,

to the contrary, the event constituted something new, a great novelty that surprised everyone. The majority of Pentecostals, when they came to hear about the event in Caserta, they found themselves totally unprepared, not hiding a certain embarrassment in front of their churches and above all, in public opinion.

During the meeting, the words of the Pontiff should be underlined, above all, his asking for forgiveness for the “Catholic” complicity during the time of the Fascists for the persecution that the Italian Pentecostals suffered under the regime. Besides this, he suggested no longer using an offensive language towards the Pentecostal churches as had happened in the past, attaching to them the term sect. These two elements were important factors for the healing of memories and for the path of future dialogue (Calisi, 2014). Even for Pastor Traettino, the meeting was an important objective, or rather a crowning of a dream that had had its beginnings already in the 1980s, through the dialogue between the Community of Jesus in Bari and his own movement. In fact, in 1992, Traettino was invited by Calisi, as leader of the Community of Jesus, to speak on the occasion of the Catholic conference in the football stadium, the San Nicola in Bari. On that occasion Traettino, as a gesture of humility and for many also a prophetic act, washed the feet of a representative of the Catholic Church. The gesture was held to be prophetic because it marked a long collaboration between the Community of Jesus and the movement of Pastor Traettino. In fact, shortly afterwards the two leaders: Calisi and Traettino constituted an organism of “Consultation for Italian Charismatics”, a pioneering work at an ecumenical level, that had its birth in Italy but has now extended to many nations in the world. In fact, it is thanks to this organ of consultation that Pastor Traettino came in contact with Cardinal Bergoglio in 2006, in Buenos Aires (Introvigne, 1996: 41-46). While at an international level, the visit of the Pope to Pastor Traettino was considered a positive step for its spiritual and historic value. In Italy the comments from the “Evangelical” part and above all the Pentecostals, in spite of significant exceptions, were generally negative. These were to be expected after the publication, some days before the meeting, of a communication signed by the main Italian Pentecostal organisations that stressed the impossibility of a real ecumenism and any form of dialogue with the Catholic Church.<sup>16</sup> Instead, the reactions from the historic churches were much more encouraging. In the Italian Catholic world, there were also dissenting voices contesting those who, instead, saw the event as a seed for a future unity of the Church (Nogaro & Tanzarella, 2015:12). One of the Pentecostal voices that judged the meeting as a purely private affair that should not interest the Pentecostal world, and above all, should not be considered as an “ecumenical” event because it did not represent all Pentecostals, was the then President of the FCP, Pastor Remo Cristallo. Through a public interview,

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<sup>16</sup> The document was very explicit: *Italian Evangelicals on Contemporary Catholicism*; and signed by the major Italian Evangelical and Pentecostal “acronyms”, In: *Evangelici.net*, date of access: 22/07/2014.

that can still be read in its entirety on the site of the FCP and on the sites of some Pentecostal churches, he made it clear that the movement of the “Reconciliation”, while not denying its origins within the alveolus of the historical Pentecostal churches, it is actually connected within the wider so-called “charismatic evangelical” sphere as can be seen from the circuits to which it adheres. As such, he obviously cannot represent a world with which today his relations are weak and rare. In fact, it was always contested by the Italian Pentecostal parties that Pastor Traettino should attempt to put himself as a representative of the Italian Pentecostal world, a position that he never had. For these, and for other reasons, the fact is, neither he nor his church was accepted by the Pentecostal Federation. The then president, Cristallo, added that the context in which the gesture occurred and the interlocutors were chosen, was not correct even if this did not take away from the relevance of the event itself. In Italy there is a long pentecostal tradition that is embodied in well-known organisations and a long history. These represent the history and the creed of Italian pentecostalism. Therefore, if a dialogue is desired with this reality, the modality of approach must be different and taken more seriously.<sup>17</sup> This position reflects that of the majority of Italian Pentecostals but that it should not be a discouragement towards the goals of a future dialogue between the churches. Above all, the final part of the interview could be read, not as a polemic, but as a proposition for both churches. The researcher hopes that, in the future, it will be possible to organise something constructive that foresees the participation of everyone, without reservations and misunderstandings. This however, should not completely diminish the meeting at Caserta, because, for this author there remains a seed, or better still, a demonstration of a possible beginning, an occasion that should be gathered by the Italian churches to begin a common and special path within a more general framework which is the ecumenical movement in the world.

### 3.5 Italian Pentecostals and the Waldensian and Methodist Church

“To recognise the actions of God in history is of fundamental importance for a true ecumenism” (Cullmann, 1987: 42). In fact, only through the common awareness of the two churches, that the realisation of being a part of a single branch within the Christian trunk has made it possible to share a common path through different parts of this history. The awareness of being part of a common family brought the Waldensian Methodist Church and some Italian Pentecostal churches to

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<sup>17</sup> In: [www.chiesadiroma.it/La](http://www.chiesadiroma.it/La) visita del Papa al Pastore Traettino: un'intervista al Past. Remo Cristallo. Date of access: 23/07/2019. For the love of truth, for the occasion even the then vice president of FCP, Silvano Lilli, was also involved and through his intervention repeats as much as was said by Cristallo, recounting the event as “a gift that the Pope wanted to make to Pastor Traettino in the name of their progressive friendship, matured in contexts very different from the pentecostal one, and therefore the objective had been completely missed, in fact, seemed to have disturbed everyone looking at the reactions of the Catholic Ecclesiastical Institutions as well as those Pentecostals.” in: [www.fcpitalia.org](http://www.fcpitalia.org). La visita del papa al pastore Traettino, i pentecostali si interrogano. Date of access: 24/07/2019.

sit around a table for dialogue. Unfortunately, there is also a history of antagonism over principles of salvation, whether the sin of man against the divine plan manages to destroy it or only to slow it down (Cullmann, 1987: 43). In the same way, in time it has managed to slow down the dialogue between Waldensians and Pentecostals that had its beginnings under the best possible premises, but then suffered a sharp slowdown, above all on the part of the Pentecostal churches, which was always poorly attended and with little reception within the local communities.

In reality, even though there was an awareness that the dialogue between the Waldensian church and the Pentecostals was stagnating, it's undeniable that in the ecumenical discussions, especially those about theological discourses, there was a series of results that could certainly be considered both as openings and steps from which to resume. The results that were reached represented for both parties, models with which to open perspectives, that once developed could be useful towards a common path and a mutual recognition. For the moment, some openings have yielded good results, above all as regards procedures, even if they have been received only at a few levels, above all amongst believers with a certain theological depth but still well short of being received by the local communities (Neuner, 2011:165).

### 3.5.1 Dialogue 1998 to 2000

The first dialogue between Waldensians and Pentecostals began in 1998 in the green oasis of Monteforte Irpino, Avellino, between a small Waldensian and Methodist commission and a certain number of leaders from Pentecostal churches. Everyone participated as representatives of a single church, for which each one represented himself. At the first moment of dialogue, it was preferred to meet together to speak about those things that already united them both. The *lietmotiv* that accompanied this first discourse was: "Aware of what destroys us and still more, what separates us. We are instead well aware of what we share and already unites us more than what we dared to imagine" (Claudiana, 2002:8). In fact, to know one another means, above all, to recognise one another. To recognise one another as sons and daughters of God, as also brothers and sisters in Christ in the fellowship of the faith, in the love and hope through the power and work of the Holy Spirit, sharing in the unmerited and unconditional grace of God.

#### Dialogue as an Instrument to Understand One Another and Oneself

Man is structured for dialogue. In fact, his life consists of a web of relations that may be called dialogues. Faith is a divine gift given to the believer through which to perceive, in his capacity to dialogue, man in the image of God, as if dialogue as a relationship is a reflection of God Himself of

which man is made to resemble. To dialogue means first to speak and then to listen. Without listening, there is no dialogue and therefore no fellowship. This is true at every level, both for individuals as for the together, as our churches can be called meetings, places to hear and then to proclaim the message of the Gospel. Believers live dialogue in the church and between churches as a gift of God, through which they may express their fellowship, or deepen it, searching together for agreement with the Word of God. So, dialogue between Christians is at the service of fellowship in Christ and between themselves, to manifest, to feed, and to widen it. Dialogue brings, by its nature, a direct exchange of information between those involved. This is because each one must be able to say in the first person who he is, what he believes, and what he does. Dialogue is not an end but a means. In fact, there is dialogue to attain a goal. For the two Italian churches the goal is *to know one another* (Claudiana, 2002: 30).

### One God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit

The Waldensian as well as the Methodist churches have always been, throughout their history, accompanied by faith in God as One and Triune. For the work of the Holy Spirit, faith is laid solely in God and is first revealed in the history of Israel and then in that of Jesus of Nazareth, which we find in the proclamation of the Gospel (Ferrario, 1998b:12). In the same way, the Pentecostal churches that participated in the dialogue confessed the same faith in God, One and Triune, as is taught by the Scriptures and was transmitted by the ancient Christian symbols (Apostolic and the Nicene-Constantinople Creed). For the Christian faith, it is fundamental to affirm the unity of God that is not uniform, but diverse within (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). It is important not just because it speaks of God, but because it is a revelation of God, and so it is also a revelation of man. In the Father, believers recognise themselves as sons, in the Son, they recognise themselves as brothers and sisters, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, realise themselves as true worshippers. So, for both, it was clear that the confession of the Triune God would imply that whatever discourses were held about Him could not be separated from a discourse about his Word and of his Word. In fact, it is the revelation of God through the story of humanity, through Israel first, and then Jesus of Nazareth, and is now rendered actual and real through the action of the Holy Spirit. To know God means to believe in his presence here and now, that is, God enters into the field of everyday human life and is realised as an event and sign of a life that transcends the present. “In the meeting with creation, the action of God is liberty in its fullness. God does not renounce his own sovereignty and does not limit the freedom of the creature, the liberty of God and the liberty of man, also because the Spirit of God is liberty (2 Cor 3:17)” (Claudiana, 2002: 31-34).

## I Believe in the Son of God: Jesus Christ

The Waldensian and Methodist Church, as also the other churches which participated in the dialogue, agreed and confessed together, not only that Christ is God, but that also He was true man, according to the Scriptures and as is transmitted by the ancient Christian symbols. A proof of this agreement of position is above all underlined by the confessions of faith of the churches that took part in the dialogue. As regards the Waldensian Church, it is easy to read it in the confession of faith of 1655.<sup>18</sup> The Pentecostal churches that participated in the dialogue referred directly to the first confession of faith of the Italian Pentecostal churches, written in America in 1927 at Niagara Falls. (Toppi, 1999a:217). Comparing the two confessions of faith fully accepted by the two evangelical denominations, it's very easy to note the great agreement that existed regarding the divinity and humanity of Christ and at the same time, his sovereignty over the Church, over men and over everything, in heaven and on the earth (Claudiana, 2002: 53-40).

## I Believe in the Holy Spirit

The churches that came to the dialogue agreed to the confession of their faith in the Holy Spirit. They recognised that, already from the second century, this faith had a few difficulties of expression. In fact, the experience of the Spirit, even though it had always been alive constantly through all of the centuries, it was stressed above all at the beginning of the 1900s, coinciding with the birth of the pentecostal movement. This imposition of the dimension of the Spirit in the theological reflections, and not only, gave birth to the question of what is understood in the confession: "I believe in the Holy Spirit". However, a common confession regarding the Spirit does not guarantee an unequivocal interpretation and a shared thought regarding it, in spite of the diversity of approach about the Spirit, in the seat of dialogue, it was possible to arrive at a common testimony regarding its value and importance within the Trinitarian God. There was full agreement amongst the parties on the fact that the Spirit is the lasting memory of the words of Jesus to the Church, that the divine strength that renders them present to spread to the extremities of the earth. In synthesis, there is a full fellowship in declaring that the Spirit is the great witness of Christ and that fulfils the promises of the Lord. In the Pentecostal understanding, with the expression *baptism in or with the Holy Spirit* is intended an indication of a particular experience of God, that is to realise God as a transforming and

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<sup>18</sup> [https://www.firenzevaldese.chicsavaldecsc.org/documenti/confessione\\_di\\_fede.pdf](https://www.firenzevaldese.chicsavaldecsc.org/documenti/confessione_di_fede.pdf).  
Date of access: 19/05/2020.

characterising power. In the light of the experience with the Spirit, the faith of the believer assumes a more authentic character according to the perspective proposed by the Gospel. The fruit of the Spirit is the moral miracle in the life of man. The man who realises this miracle lives a supernatural life, according to a divine ethic (Bracco, 1992: 88). This man presents himself before society in a more authentic way and in a certain sense, more proactively because to the proposition there is now added a particular experience that together speaks of his own faith. A new dimension for the believer, even within his own community, inasmuch as he participates in its life according to the gift that he has received, putting it to the service of others. “Without the Spirit the Church is a dead body or a worldly institution, even if a religious one. The Church is the Body of Christ and the Spirit is its soul” (Claudiana, 2002: 40). The participating Pentecostal churches remind Christianity of all the actions of the Spirit throughout the world, which as in the times of the Apostles, is still the believers now and is ready to act and manifest itself. Unfortunately, these are also aware of the fact that there has not always been an ideal exercise of discernment of the charisms as the Scripture teaches. Nevertheless, such a shortcoming should not put into question the effectiveness and the manifestations of the gifts of the Spirit. Finally, this phase of dialogue was concluded with a renewed invocation of the Spirit that He might act and show his glory through the Church of Jesus Christ that is on the earth (Claudiana, 2002: 41-54).

### 3.5.2 Dialogue 2002 to 2009

The second phase of dialogue had as its presupposition the desire for discussion about what distinguishes the two churches but without dividing them. So, it was necessary to clarify to what point diversity would not be an impediment to fellowship and instead when it would be the cause of divisions. In fact, there are diversities that enrich while others divide. This second dialogue was dedicated to those diversities that do not divide but which can be a source of dialogue and comparison. Amongst the many matters that could be brought to the attention of the table, two were chosen: the comprehension of Scripture and the practical elements of ecumenism (Claudiana, 2010: 9). It is a common opinion that Pentecostals read the Scripture in a *fundamentalist* way. In reality, from the dialogue it was understood that this idea is only a prejudice on the part of the other evangelical churches. In fact, the churches of the FPC that participated in the dialogue, held that: “Literalism is harmful for a correct understanding of Scripture”.<sup>19</sup> Certainly it was necessary to understand what was meant practically by reading Scripture in a non-literalist way, but in awaiting this clarification,

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<sup>19</sup> [http://www.fcpitalia.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2\\_documents-dialog2.pdf](http://www.fcpitalia.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2_documents-dialog2.pdf). Date of access: 18/05/2020.

the deep unity of the biblical message should not be distorted because in its entirety it constitutes the very substance for fellowship between the two churches.

The second argument on the table for this second phase was that of the relationship with ecumenism. The Methodist and Waldensian churches participate to a large extent in the Italian ecumenical movement having basic relations with all the Christian confessions, including the Catholic one, laying ecumenism as one of the priorities in the *to do* and *to seek* lists. The Pentecostals, touching this, believe instead that the times are not yet mature for such an opening towards the other churches and, above all, towards the Catholic church, cultivating no little reserve of a diplomatic political nature and of a theological nature. Fellowship is a work of the Spirit, but it only passes through an authentic conversion. This is the indispensable condition to overcome every element of fracture and to favour dialogue and brotherhood (Palmieri, 2013: 93). In spite of this, the Pentecostals recognise the importance of the ecumenical movement, but the intent to participate in it will follow steps of priority. The first is to come to an understanding with the other Pentecostal churches, then with other Evangelicals, then with Judaism (in particular with a messianic branch), then under certain conditions, also with the Orthodox and the Roman Catholics. As regards the relationship with the other two monotheistic religions, Judaism and the Islamic religion, the Pentecostal churches insist on the necessary priority of announcing Christ in view of conversion to Him. They ask not to speak only of the centrality of Christ as the Savior of the world, but above all, in his uniqueness. In this, a line of agreement with the Waldensian and Methodist churches was reached.

### The Understanding of Scripture

Both participants agreed on the fact that believers read the Bible, though it is as if the Bible is reading the Church. The meaning of this affirmation is to be found in the conscience itself of the Church that recognises its continual need to be reformed every time they set about discussion of the Scripture, interrogating themselves on the quality of their own faith and life, trying to correct it where it finds itself in contrast with the testimony of Scripture. Only from this continual self-examination is born the desire to announce the Word of God to the world, which the church can present to the world but only because it has first submitted itself to it. The Bible is that which indicates the things that have to change, and the true Church is that which is bound to the sifting of Scripture (Gounelle, 2007: 18). For Pentecostals, Scripture is the Word of God written in human words throughout history, without suppressing the humanity of the authors. The insistence of the principle of the guidance of the Holy Spirit is not purely subjective or an abstract spiritualism, but is made by the conviction of the real action of the Spirit through the preaching and announcement of the Scripture, which is the

Word of God because: “As He spoke in ancient times by the mouth of the prophets and then through the mouth of Jesus and through the Apostles, He speaks still ‘today’ as then, through the work and power of the Holy Spirit” (Napolitano, 2015b: 87). This means that the Pentecostal churches lay the Bible at the centre of all their faith, as sole and irreplaceable source of revelation and no other writing, tradition, principle or normative could ever have the same value and authority as the Bible. This is the principle and the basis for the establishing of the historic churches, that of: Scripture alone, which also constitutes one of the cornerstones of the Waldensian and Methodist churches. So, even if the Waldensian and Methodist churches live their encounter with Scripture in a different way and express it in a diverse form from the way it is manifested in the Pentecostal churches, both remain united in their affirmation of the Bible as their only common base; both of them confessing only a diversity of form and certainly not of substance.

The position of the Pentecostal churches as also that of the Methodist and Waldensians regarding the hermeneutics of Scripture, coincides with their recognition that Scripture itself presents the conditions for its own interpretation. The search for a literal sense is fundamental to draw out of the text a truth that can be expressed through a right interpretation of what is read, because it is the source from which to draw in order to bring the message to today without the conditioning of the historic background that belongs to the time in which it was written. In fact, the emphasis in Scripture and its message constitute not only a specific point for all of the Evangelical churches, but also the ecumenical contribution of Protestantism (Ferrario, 2008b: 266). However, an important element is added by the Pentecostal perspective and that is, the possibility to relive the Spiritual experience indicated by the text. For Pentecostals, whoever interprets Scripture must proceed from faith to faith, and to do this it is necessary to move along the spiritual horizons of the author every time the text is approached. The understanding of this horizon of the faith of the writer allows readers to truly understand the text and this can only come about in the involvement of that same interpretation (Claudiana, 2010: 30).

### Ecumenical Practice: Lights and Shadows

The Pentecostal churches, differently from those Waldensians and Methodists, show a certain caution regarding the ecumenical movement. Reasons can be summarised for their diffidence on three fundamental points. The first is the fear that the ecumenical relationships could be used to soften and control the impact of their mission. The second question consists of a theological objection, that relative to the ecumenical consensus on baptism. This consensus presupposes a vision of church that considers it to be an element characterising the people amongst whom it is to be found. The

Pentecostals, meanwhile, consider baptism as a testimony and a fundamental step in the process of conversion. It does not end there but continues long after. However, baptism is a moment to confirm the individual's personal decision of faith. For Pentecostals, baptism is administered to believers that are those who have already believed. Baptism is a conscious decision of the believer as a public testimony to their personal belonging to the Lord Jesus (Toppi, 1999b: 10). The final question is its fear of having to renounce some deeply held ethical, bio-ethical, and social convictions in order to establish ecumenical relations. The Pentecostal churches having suffered discrimination, persecution, and limitations in their liberty towards their own missions, fear that the ecumenical dialogue could be exploited, making an improper use of it, that is, to use it to limit the activity of evangelisation and conversion by making it dependent on the goodwill of the religious confessions that have a majority in the land. To all of this is added the diffidence of the Pentecostals towards those churches that are historically structured and institutionalised. The Pentecostal church was born as a movement that organises itself mainly as a "network" and during its history has always seen every form of organisation as a betrayal of its original matrix. The Pentecostals considered any form of institutionalisation as a betrayal of the sovereignty of the Spirit.<sup>20</sup> This last position has always made dialogue more problematic, not only with the historic churches, but above all with the Catholic Church. Certainly, even the Church of Rome still continues not to recognise the churches born from the reformation of the 16th century and those of Pentecostals as true and proper churches, but at most recognising them as ecclesial communities,<sup>21</sup> and does not favour dialogue, especially in Italy. So the Italian Pentecostals hold that dialogue above all that with the Catholic Church, is not an active priority. Differently the Waldensian and Methodist churches, in spite of a hardening of some positions by the Catholics, continue to hope in a dialogue that can build bridges, above all, with the Church of Rome, considering dialogue with the Catholics as one of their priorities as Christians (Claudiana, 2002: 35-52).

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<sup>20</sup> A Pentecostal from the early days wrote: "The Church is not an organisation, but an organism; that is, it functions not along premeditated agreements directed by men, but a spontaneous work, directed by the Head of the members.", Petrelli, G. 1956. *Il Messaggio di San Paolo agli anziani di Efeso*. Torre Pellice (To): Il Regno di Dio, p. 3. This way of proceeding, even though Pentecostals have, over time, assumed different forms of organisation, remain rooted in the base of its own ecclesiology, generating always a certain diffidence towards other organisations.

<sup>21</sup> Unitatis Redintegratio, capitolo 3, paragraph 2, In: [http://www.upcm.it/documenti/Concilio\\_VaticanoII/Unitatis%20Redintegratio.pdf](http://www.upcm.it/documenti/Concilio_VaticanoII/Unitatis%20Redintegratio.pdf). Date of access: 20/05/2020.

### 3.5.3 Dialogue 2009 to 2016<sup>22</sup>

This third phase of dialogue saw only a small group of representatives involved from the Waldensian and Methodist church and on the part of the Pentecostals a single representative, that of the FCP.

#### 3.5.3.1 The Final Draft of the Document on Baptism, 2009 - 2012

Baptism has always been a tough knot to untie for the convened parties. If it unites inasmuch as it is a symbol of conversion and of grace obtained through the name of the Lord, at the same time it is the cause of divisions as regards its practice and particular theological interpretations tied to the denominations themselves. The main problem is pedobaptism that is practised by all the historic churches while the Pentecostal churches practise baptism for adults. For these, baptism of babies is considered a non-baptism and therefore whoever wants to be a part of a Pentecostal church must be baptised as an adult, because if it is administered as babies it has no value to Pentecostals. However, it is necessary to clarify that Pentecostals refute the notion of re-baptism, given that they deny the baptism of babies is a true baptism; they in fact hold that the baptism of babies is a non-baptism.

#### What Unites in Baptism?

As a basis for baptism, there is the commandment of the risen Jesus. Consequently, it is the direct will of the Lord, ordained before his ascension to heaven for all those who desire to be Christians, because they have believed the Gospel through faith to receive grace in Jesus Christ. Both churches celebrate baptism in a trinitarian form. They consider baptism as a sign of the forgiveness of sins through the death and resurrection of Christ. It is the beginning of a new life, for the entrance of the neophyte to the Church which is the Body of Christ. In baptism there is a visible sign which is water and an invisible one which is the Spirit and it is tightly connected to the confession of faith of who is baptised, without which it has no meaning. If baptism is correctly administered, being tightly connected to the cross of Christ, it is a unique event as is the act of new birth, as a single sign of an event that happens only once, similar to the birth of a baby. As such it can be celebrated only once in the life of a person and in the terms of the confessions of faith of the respective churches.

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<sup>22</sup> These dialogues have not yet been published are therefore unedited, even if they have been accepted by both commissions as official documents.

## What Differentiates in Baptism but does not Divide?

The Waldensian Church, as regards baptism (and the Lord's Supper) speaks of sacraments, in the sense of it being the mark of a sacred thing, according to the Agostinian definition. Pentecostals avoid using such a term and prefer to speak of ordinances. Neither of the terms are biblical, because there is no term in the entire New Testament used to define the two most important moments of Christian worship. This difference, however, does not divide the two churches because its significance as a "sign" remains unchanged and shared by both parties. The two churches have two modalities in baptism. The Pentecostals for immersion, referring to the biblical text and the very meaning of the Greek verb *baptisein*, that is, immerse (active) or be immersed (passive). The Waldensians, meanwhile, going back to the ancient apostolic tradition, that of "*Didache*," prefer to baptise by aspersion. The diverse modalities of baptism, even in their differences, do not constitute a motive for division, in that both Christian denominations recognise the validity of the other. The final difference is to be found in the diversity of their confession of faith. The Pentecostals recognise the validity of the confession of faith only if it is made by one who receives baptism. The Waldensian Church, instead, practising baptism of babies, recognises the confession of faith by the Church, which declares its faith, that is Christ died and is risen again, also for the baby that is about to be baptised, even if the child is still not able to believe. The faith of the Church does not substitute that of the child which he will confess personally at his confirmation. This difference in considering the role of faith in baptism may become a divergence that divides, but only if it is held that the faith of the person baptised constitutes the baptism. It divides the moment that a baptism is held to be invalid where the faith of the person baptised is not required.

## What Divides Us?

The Pentecostals consider the positive answer in full awareness of the person baptised as a constituent part of baptism itself. For the Pentecostals without the confession of faith of the person baptised the baptism doesn't have any meaning. In short, the *yes* of the person baptised is fundamental to the baptism. Differently, the Waldensian Church finds an equal fulfilment of the baptism *yes* of God that was spoken to man pronounced from the cross of Christ well before man comes to believe ever independently of his faith. This is an objective *yes* that does not depend on human choice. It is therefore normal for Waldensians to also baptise children, having this theological basis as its presupposition. For Pentecostals, starting from theological presuppositions that are completely different, the baptism of children has no value whatsoever, because it lacks the *yes* of the baptised that a baby is not able to pronounce. In the New Testament, the baptism of children is not explicitly

forbidden, but neither is it commanded. In the understanding of the Waldensian Church, this implies that the baptism of children is possible. In the understanding of the Pentecostal churches instead, this is not possible. The basic theological perspective becomes decisive within the churches that affront this theme. The two commissions realised that the weight of the respective traditions does not allow them to see even on the distant horizon a common comprehension which seems, still today, totally absent. In this perspective it seemed useful to send the question back to the churches, waiting for them to arrive at answers that might untie these still unresolved knots.

### 3.5.3.2 Final Draft of the Document on the Lord's Supper, 2013 - 2016

For the Lord's Supper, in the Evangelical understanding it is fundamental as the sharing of the gift that Jesus makes of Himself to the Christian community. The bread and the wine are the signs of the death of Jesus and then for the announcement of his resurrection for the salvation for whoever believes. As regards the Waldensian and the Methodist churches, they use the term sacrament also for this, signifying that the rite was instituted by the Lord, giving the mandate to the disciples, so that the invisible reality of grace would be present through visible signs and received by faith. The Pentecostals, even though they understand the Waldensian/Methodist position, prefer to use the term ordinance to avoid misunderstandings of the significance attributed to the supper by other Christian confessions. Even if it is to be noted that in the Church of the first century, the celebration of the Supper would have occurred almost daily because it took place every time that Christians met together in their homes, but after some successive experiences it was preferred to follow more closely the procedure in the churches than to the ordinary Supper itself. Both convened parties held that it was necessary to preserve such a celebration as a *religious habit* rather than a degradation of the ordinance of the Lord with profound theological significance.

#### Fellowship in the Lord's Supper

The supper beyond signifying fellowship with the body and blood of Christ, that is, with his life and his death, intends to manifest the fellowship between disciples, both men and women, that approach it with faith. In fact, the single bread shared amongst all manifests the unity of the community gathered around the only Savior and Lord. From the Supper, nourishment and strength is drawn to continue the mission and stay in the footsteps of Christ. The fact itself that a single bread is shared in single pieces according to as many members of the community as are gathered around the Lord's Table, underlines the value of unity with Christ and with the brothers and sisters. The unity of the broken bread is reconstructed through the unity of the body. Thus, the fellowship that is realised with Christ is also the fellowship of all those who believe in Him. In fact, in the supper, it is not

possible to realise fellowship with the Lord without having fellowship with those gathered in his name. The importance of fellowship expressed in the Supper is both universal and eschatological.

### The Symbols of the Lord's Supper

The reality of his incarnation to fulfil the plan of salvation for whoever believes is expressed through the signs of bread and wine, tangible symbols to be passed down through all generations. Otherwise, his body and his blood would have been incarnate and tangible only for the generation in which they had been manifested. The substantiality of the bread and the wine brings alive the plan of salvation, binding the life and the work of Christ on the cross to the proclamation of the future fulfilment of his kingdom.

### Ecclesiastical Discipline and the Lord's Supper

Both churches regulate the celebration of the Supper with their own discipline as, of course, do all Christian churches. For some Pentecostal churches, as with the Waldensians and the Methodists, it is usual to allow whoever desires to approach the Supper, to do so considering the personal responsibility of whoever draws close to the table. The major part of Pentecostal churches, however, only allow those baptised in water to approach the Supper. The Waldensian/Methodist churches practise hospitality of the Eucharist towards all Christians without any preclusions. The Pentecostals are divided over this practice. Some Pentecostal churches are open to participation of the Supper with other Christians, but above all, with those who have a common baptismal procedure. For the greater part of them, sharing with other Christians is still, in a certain way, problematic. However, both churches encourage the hospitality of the Eucharist inviting their believers to participate in the Supper of the other churches and vice versa.

## 3.6 The Federation of Italian Pentecostal Churches and the UCEBI<sup>23</sup>

This phase of dialogue saw the involvement of representatives of the FCP on the part of the Pentecostals while the Baptists were represented by the UCEBI. This phase was characterised by the scarcity of the arguments treated. In fact, they confronted a single argument which was that of experience within the Christian faith. Even if this dialogue was the first attempt of rapprochement, it can be said, however, that it was a beginning, a first step for which to hope for a new path together made of many other meetings. A journey that can be useful to eliminate prejudices on both sides and

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.fcitalia.org/dialogo-battisti/>. Date of access: 18 October 2019.

the hearsay that up until now had only served to slow down and sometimes avoid completely a sound and right mutual knowledge and a first collaboration between the two churches. In 2008, the Commission for Equality met in Rome hosting the Pentecostal (FCP) and the Baptist (UCEBI) churches on the reasons for the distance between the two churches that are mainly of the nature of ethical interpretations rather than theological. Remo Cristallo, the then president of the FCP wrote this invitation: “to maintain in the form and content of language, the recognition of the Christian foundation of the other opinion and of the other church.”<sup>24</sup> It is to be hoped that this intervention would not only be considered in view to the tranquil coexistence of both churches, but a real point on which to construct a solid relationship of exchange and dialogue.<sup>25</sup>

### 3.6.1 Summary of the Document between the FCP and the UCEBI, 2006: “Faith and Experience”

The historic Protestant churches recognised that on the level of spirituality they had undervalued or even ignored the reality of experience, centring their own theological reflections on the level of faith. In contrast, the charismatic churches recognised that they were characterised by spirituality with a strong accent on experience but sometimes with excess. It was agreed upon that the experience that believers have with God is always conditioned by diverse factors: cultural, theological, and above all, personal. In fact, emotion, temperament, and character are the elements that most influence the religious experience. It was therefore agreed that faith can never be faith in the researcher’s experience. If faith was a subjective experience, then the experience of God would be led by human experience and theology would be anthropology. At the same time, Christian faith always implies an existential involvement of the believer and therefore means that the believer has to deal with an experience of their own faith. Experience is an action of God directed towards the possibility of establishing a relationship with man. The Holy Spirit is the originator of the experience of the grace of God, of salvation, and of the understanding of Scripture. The event of Pentecost testifies to this truth, through the narration we find in Acts. As such, if an experience does not return to the Scriptures it is not of the Spirit; neither is it if it fails to lead to Christ, then certainly it will be of a different nature than that of the Spirit.

For Pentecostals, the role of experience is fundamental, also as regards what is called baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Baptists, although they do not have in their tradition something precisely

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.fcitalia.org/dialogo-battisti/>. Date of access: 18 October 2019.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.fcitalia.org/dialogo-battisti/>. Date of access: 18 October 2019.

similar to what for the Pentecostals is the baptism of the Spirit, they do recognise that experience is a determinant for a focal point in a spiritual walk both of the individual and the community and directs and sustains important decisions for the Christian disciple. In fact, when the Spirit is manifested in the life of a believer, it renders the event an experience that marks the whole life, so much so as to require a new orientation in the daily life and the ways of being in the world. The experience of the Spirit strips believers of their pride and clothes them with humility, putting their lives in continuous examination, without ever boasting of their own virtue.<sup>26</sup>

### 3.7 Dialogue Between the Federation of Pentecostal Churches and the Church of the Adventist in Italy<sup>27</sup>

The meetings between the two churches was specifically between the commission of the Christian Adventist Church (UICCA) and the Federation of Pentecostal Churches (FCP). These began in 2008, and continued to 2010, the first phase was completed while the second phase began on September 19, 2011 and finished on October 7, 2013. The two dialogues were preceded by some explorative meetings that were held at the headquarters of the UICCA in Rome. The aim of this first moment of dialogue was to create a programme of collaboration between the two churches and to get to know one another. Besides this, it was decided that every meeting would have a space dedicated to practical themes such as: catechism for children, humanitarian missions, and alimentation and health.

#### 3.7.1 Summary of the Report of the Meetings from 18/02/2008 to 22/02/2010

On February 18, 2008, in Rome, at the headquarters of the Adventist Church, the representatives of the Adventist Church and those of the Federation of Pentecostal Churches held their first official meeting for dialogue with the objective of getting to know their respective ecclesial realities. For the occasion a cognitive and programmatic meeting was held, having as its objectives, brotherly fellowship and how to cultivate ties of friendship between the two components and to get to know the theological points of views of the parties involved and how the internal organisation of the respective churches work.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.fcpitalia.org/dialogo-battisti/>. Date of access: 22 October 2019.

<sup>27</sup> These dialogues have not yet been published are therefore unedited, even if they have been accepted by both commissions as official documents.

## The Role of Scripture in the Life of the Believer

Scripture has a central role in the life of the believer because it is a normative as regards faith and conduct. The convened parties recognise the authority of Scripture and base their faith upon it. The revelation of Christ is the centrality of Scripture at the heart of the contexts, in which the authors were moved to write on God's behalf by the Holy Spirit. The Adventists tied the concept of inspiration to that of the incarnation of Christ. The Word of God was incarnate in the nature of Christ assuming human words and expressed in human language. The message of salvation was only partially realised when Christ came because the actions of God still continue today and will until its completion. Therefore, if the message is still being fulfilled as it was incarnated in Christ, it continues to be incarnated and to be spoken through his faithful servants. The Federation, on the other hand, emphasises that the Word of God was incarnate in Christ but remains unique, the only truly trustworthy and complete revelation of God for humanity. It is unique because it is inspired by the one and only divine author which is the Holy Spirit. In spite of the diversity of approach, both delegations realised that there was a meeting point, because at the end they arrived at the same conclusions, even if from different angles. Both of the commissions agreed that the revelation of God was given to men as a message transmitted by God and expressed by the biblical authors according to the understanding they had. In short, God adapted his revelation to the human capacity to enable them to understand it.

## The Relationship Between the Old and the New Testament

The parties underlined the frequent errors in which the churches fall into through a superficial and sectarian reading of the Bible. The one is legalism, where too much stress is laid on the first part of the Bible, while the other is not to consider the New as a follow on from the Old but to believe that the New is less authoritative than the Old. A final error is that of Marcionism, which is when one considers the New Testament as the only font of revelation and completely excludes the Old. Both delegations recognise that the two Testaments are intrinsically part of the Bible and the first is the promise of the second, which is its fulfilment. Furthermore, the first Testament is considered the prophecy of the second, it is its foundation. Therefore, for this fact, the First Testament cannot be considered superfluous.

## The Sabbath of the New Testament

For Pentecostals the Christian holy day is the day of the resurrection and so the substitution of Sunday for the Jewish sabbath is justified because Sunday is a sign of a new beginning in Christ.

Besides this, for the Pentecostal delegation, if the Sabbath was a necessary observance, also for the “Gentiles”, it would have been made clear in the New Testament. For Adventists, the Sabbath was instituted from creation, before the foundation of the Hebrew people. It was observed by Christ and his disciples, while it was substituted by Sunday only in 321 AD. The Sabbath is a distinctive “sign” for all those who have accepted the Lordship of God in their lives rather than earthly authority.

### The Experience of the Spirit: the Pentecostal Perspective

The Pentecostals testified at the seat of dialogue, that the experience of the Spirit is part of the revelation of God and not a different source. Jesus Christ remains always at the centre of Pentecostal spirituality. In the Pentecostal understanding, baptism in or with the Spirit is nothing other than the experience of God as power according to the promises of Jesus, with characteristics analogous to those described in the Book of Acts. This kind of experience is a certain sign of the indwelling of the Spirit. It creates a new dignity even where this has been cancelled out by the various forms of exclusion. The Spirit is one but the gifts are many, but the gift of each is for the common good. The unity of the church is realised, above all, by an exchange of gifts. Also, ministries are different but all of them move together for the edification of the Church. Pentecostals believe that the action of the Spirit in the Church, through single believers, can manifest itself even today in the same way that it manifested itself in the church of the first century. These believers are aware that the gift of discernment has not always been exercised regarding charisms as the Scripture teaches. However, this should not bring in question the legitimacy of the pneumo-charismatic manifestations.

### The Experience in the Spirit: Short History and Clarification on Glossolalia

The most important novelty of the Pentecostal movement was that of joining the baptism of, or with the Holy Spirit, with *glossolalia*, which becomes the sign of the indwelling of the Spirit in the life of the believer with its outpouring and power. For the Adventist church, the understanding of the experience of the Spirit is essentially of an ethical nature. It sanctifies and completes the work of Christ and is the hermeneutic key to understand the Scripture. For Pentecostals, this means that the Adventists relegate the Spirit to a subordinate role exclusively given to the surveillance of the Church, ignoring the biblical teaching that presents the Spirit as bringer of life, as He who reveals, and He who moves the prophets and gives power to the Church. In spite of the different positions, both parties agreed in a spirit of sharing and a sincere desire to deepen relationships with one another, in the conviction that the experience could enrich both movements. They had an auspicious follow-up to the dialogue for the edification of believers in both denominations.

### 3.7.2 Summary Report of the Meetings: from 19/10/2011 to 07/10/2013

The second phase of dialogue began on September 19, 2011 and ended on October 7, 2013. The steps of the meetings that began in 2011, would be held twice a year, to then conclude with a meeting in January of 2014. The argument decided on for the dialogue was regarding ecclesiology. It was to be presented with historical and practical references through biblical and theological foundations.

#### The Church: One and Holy, Aversa (CE)

The actions of Christ and of the Spirit through the Word, the ministries, the charisms, and the eldership are planted in the active faith and love of the Christian community, which is always in tension with the world and for this reason it is always on a mission. This is what renders the Church one and holy. The faithfulness of the Word of God for the proclamation of the Gospel renders the Church apostolic and if the Church is apostolic, it becomes universal precisely when it assumes for itself the commission of Christ. (Mark 16:15-16). From this base, those participating in the dialogue underlined the necessity of an ecclesiology that could be shared within the evangelical world itself, presenting an alternative to that which is already in existence, as it regards the ecumenical question and its own evangelical identity.

#### The Ecclesiastical Organisation, Rome

As regards the argument in question, the Pentecostals could not avoid noting the heterogeneous nature and the great pluralism in their world; a plurality that does not regard theological or doctrinal difference but has to do with the ecclesial structures and their organisational models. Also in Italy, as in the rest of the world, Pentecostals do not have one monolithic organisation, but they mainly divide into two larger families. The first, and those in the majority, are the ADI (the Assemblies of God in Italy) with a Presbyterian-congregationalist structure. The second is the FCP itself, Federation of Pentecostal Churches, with a very particular structure: heterogeneous because of its internal differentiation, which allows their churches to maintain different types of organisation, but with an umbrella structure to gather them together under a single federation for all of the churches and groups of churches that take part. The “UICCA” has, instead, a homogeneous structure with an organisation that looks towards a single paradigm, that of a federalist structure, with an executive committee; a system of the Presbyterian-synodal type.

Ministries are an emanation of the will of God to be instruments of Christ for the edification of all Christians. They have a particular modality of expression which is the vocation which they are given. Their authoritativeness is above all, tied to the recognition of the Church and are functions of the service conducted in the Christian community. The sacraments are signs of consecration and obedience to God. Both churches recognise two: baptism and the Lord's Supper, which are also known as ordinances. Baptism is considered a community event in which the believer commits himself to God through an exterior rite. The Lord's Supper is a memorial to be re-lived together by the entire community gathered around it.

The plurality of charisms and the diversity of ministries are given by the Spirit as a dynamic presupposition with which to be able to construct the unity of the Body of Christ, the Church. In fact, the entire community is uniformly equipped with gifts and ministries for the common good. None of the believers is excluded from the vocation of receiving or exercising the charisms. Ministries have the aim of involving persons for the reaching of a goal. This tells us that the *diakonie* has, in itself, the function of putting into practice the task with which it has been entrusted through the actions of the Holy Spirit. This emphasises the charismatic dimensions of the ecclesiastic ministries. The charisms were recognised by both commissions, however, from the moment they are exercised the entire community is involved and is itself called to evaluate the charisms in a responsible manner.

### 3.8 The Federation of the Italian Pentecostal Churches and the Italian Evangelical Alliance<sup>28</sup>

In this dialogue, once again there were involved a few representatives of the FCP with others from AEI (Italian Evangelical Alliance). This took place between 2011 and 2013 and the main theme that was discussed was that of Scripture and its relationship with the Spirit. It was characterised by a spirit of harmony and fraternal friendship. The theme was chosen as an answer to an increasingly diverse and growing multi-religiosity that moved the convened parties to ask themselves, and then to

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<sup>28</sup> [www.alleanzaevangelica.org/index.php/documenti-significativi/iten/107-dialogo-teologico-tra-l-alleanza-evangelica-italiana-e-la-federazione-delle-chiese-pentecostali](http://www.alleanzaevangelica.org/index.php/documenti-significativi/iten/107-dialogo-teologico-tra-l-alleanza-evangelica-italiana-e-la-federazione-delle-chiese-pentecostali). Date of access: 10/10/2019.

confirm the role of Scripture on an ecclesiastical and theological plane, inasmuch as it is the Word of God. The result testified to a level of substantial unity in the Gospel and in its proclamation. As regards evangelisation, both concurred with the conclusions arrived at by the “movement of Lausanne,” recognising for themselves the article on Scriptural Commitment released from Cape Town, 2010.

### The Holy Spirit and the Revelation of the Written Word

Biblical revelation is the work of God in his pluralistic unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the Spirit is equally involved in the inspiration of the biblical authors. He is a direct and intimate participant, having moved such men to speak and write on behalf of God. The work of the Spirit in the process of inspiration was absolutely determinant and unrepeatable. The Spirit guided the authors in writing the Bible, as also in forming and establishing the Canon. Scripture is the Word of God written in human words throughout history, but without suppressing or annihilating the humanity of its writers. The Bible interprets itself. So, it must be read in its entirety and never in a partial form. It represents a unique historical process in which God and history are deeply interconnected, in fact, it is God Who makes history through the progressive path of revelation.

The Spirit is also the One that will announce future events, those that Jesus did not reveal to his disciples because they were not yet ready for them. This is not dealing with a novelty as regards Scripture, but a greater knowledge and awareness on the part of the disciples towards the mystery of God. Amongst the charisms of the Spirit, there is the gift of prophecy which is a gift of word. Once the biblical canon was closed, prophecy must not go beyond what is written and must not add or take away anything from Scripture. The Spirit, who is the same in and for everyone, creates a community of brothers and sisters. This is what characterises the Christian community, while ministers and those who possess charisms, though delegated by the Spirit, are but men and women given to service.

### The Holy Spirit and the Interpretation of the Written Word

The interpretation of the Bible follows a trinitarian circle: The Father reveals the Word of truth, the Son is the truth, and the Spirit guides the Church in all truth which is fixed in the written Word. The guidance of the Spirit is necessary to know those things that need to be revealed, otherwise they would remain hidden and incomprehensible. The same Spirit that inspired the biblical authors, enlightens also those who interpret it. The Word is the canon of the Spirit and the Spirit is the canon of the Word. Besides this, the Bible cannot be understood if not through its author, that is, the Spirit, through an action bound up in the trinitarian economy. The scope of Scripture is to conduct to Christ,

but this scope cannot be reached if the Spirit does not guide the Church in this direction. The guidance of the Spirit, in the interpretation of the Bible, must not be an excuse to neglect the commitment and dedication to its study for hermeneutics that cannot simply be entrusted to an improvisation. An example is literalism. This is a key to reading that compresses and flattens the richness of the biblical text which is, instead, composed of various literary genres, which must be read with respect to this variety. Conversely, it is necessary not to abandon oneself to a purely historico-critical reading of the text, vivisectioning it, bringing into doubt even its divine inspiration and supernatural character.

### The Holy Spirit and the Preaching of the Written Word

The Holy Spirit is He who preaches the Gospel, through messengers who proclaim the Good News of Jesus that is read of in the Scriptures. In fact, the preaching of the Gospel is such only if the spoken words are rendered powerfully by the Holy Spirit for the conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgement. The extraordinary works of the Holy Spirit can accompany the preaching of the Gospel, which demonstrate the “real” presence of God. A deep understanding of Scripture passes through hermeneutics that aims to recuperate the experience to which the biblical text refers and so conserves the kerygmatic character of the text. So, this allows believers to meet Christ as the Living Word. The preaching of the Gospel is powerful when the Spirit transforms a human discourse into a proclamation of the great things of God.

## 3.9 A Testimony: The First Italian Pentecostal Presence in a “Lay” Ecumenical National Organisation, the “SAE”<sup>29</sup>

Susanna became an official part of the SAE Cosenza, 2016, having collaborated with the group for many years through which grew a strong friendship that goes back a long time, and a deep respect for the excellent work of the group, through the years, in the religious fabric of her city. The SAE in Cosenza was born in 1992 from the need, felt above all by the Waldensian Church of Cosenza, for a dialogue that would not be limited to sporadic meetings, but could extend, in the course of the year, through the realisation of initiatives of cultural exchange and confrontation. The first confrontation, however, was between the Catholics and the Waldensians, which had, in the past,

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<sup>29</sup> The gathered Testimony given directly from those personally involved and is therefore a firsthand source. The researcher thanks the Dr Giovannini for her courtesy and readiness to contribute, recounting her own ecumenical experience to this research.

formed the beginnings of mutual rapprochement in fraternal fellowship and a communal listening to the Word of God. Following this, the group opened up to other Christian realities, involving also the Pentecostal Church in Cosenza. In 2008, the group together with the Pentecostal Church discussed the Hebrewness of Jesus and Paul and the following year, baptism, and the one after, the Christian beginnings of the evangelical churches, then on the importance of non-violence, and so on. Several years passed before Dr Giovannini received an invitation to participate, from those responsible, because they felt the lack of the Pentecostal point of view, and the church of Giovannini is certainly the largest one in that city. The invitation was made again in such a way that made Dr Giovannini feel responsible for her calling, hence, she could not refuse to participate in the discussions. In fact, in 2016 she became an official part of the group that included a Catholic of the Byzantine Rite and an Adventist.

With a new impetus, the group followed the path of new ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, contributing in 2017 to the creation of the group for interreligious dialogue for peace, made up of Christians, Buddhists, Muslims and Bahai, and various associations working in the ambit for the promotion of intercultural and religious dialogue. In April 2019, the SAE Cosenza voted Giovannini as the new leader of the group; it was a responsibility that had never before been given to a Pentecostal (who also remains the only Pentecostal member in the national SAE). Her presence, in some way testifies to the extraordinary laicity that the SAE has always demonstrated over time, in a spirit of dialogue that has always kept away from every form of integralism and fundamentalism, concentrating on a brotherly dialogue, in prayer and with concrete cooperation.

### 3.10 Conclusions: chapter 3.

Italian Pentecostals must realise that to be a Christian is to belong to the Church of Christ as a universal body of all believers who are essentially connected. This is because God renders as participants of his Church, all those for whom He provides and gives salvation. Whoever lives always trusting in God, never experiences God in an exclusive way, that is, only for himself or his community, but always together with all those who believe in the same God (Kasper & Wickens, 2012: 149). Unfortunately, division is a historic effect of a Christianity that is born in plurality. In reality, the problem is not one of plurality, which in the light of the gift and the workings of the Spirit should be a richness for Christianity, but it is the sin of separation that springs up the moment that diversity is not seen as a treasure but as a cliquish identity to the point of distinguishing one's own church from others because at heart it is believed that one's own church is the only true church. This mean thought is unfortunately dominant in Italy in almost all the Christian confessions, in particular

and above all, between Pentecostals and Catholics. The hope is that by informing the base of what is happening in the ecumenical ambit even in Italy, it will be possible to bring about, in the hearts of believers, a kind of second conversion towards the seeking of that true unity that the Lord desires for his Church (Cereti, 1992: 92).

## CHAPTER 4: INTERNATIONAL DIALOGUES BETWEEN CLASSICAL PENTECOSTALS AND OTHER CHURCHES

### 4.1 Introduction.

The international and national dialogues between the classical Pentecostals and the other Christian churches began on two premises. The first is the awareness reached by some of them that the separation of Christians is a sin and manifests a formal disobedience to the will of the Lord. The division among Christians is a cause of scandal to the world and causes distancing or a certain deafness to listening to the voice of the Spirit, especially among the authors of the separation (Cereti, 1992: 92). The second is that the birth of different Christian confessions for the achievement of unity, precisely within the economy of the history of salvation, has a positive function. In fact, these confessions help guide the believer to attain faith in Christ and therefore in God. Because, through the very plurality of Christian confessions, every Christian can find a confessional dimension more in keeping with his own personality and experience of faith. An experience that falls not only in the person, but also in that person's environment or context. The confessional choice, in fact, is very often linked to various factors that are part of the believers' cultural heritage. In this the purely charismatic value of Christian confessions has been recognised, as gifts of the Spirit always for the economy of salvation for the well-being of the believer.

Unfortunately, the participants in the dialogues confessed that, over time, Christian communities have lost the path of unity, favouring a metamorphosis in considering confessional diversity. The first plurality of Christianity, on the other hand, of representing an enrichment, has become a pretext for dividing Christians. This is the consequence of human sin and certainly not a gift of the Spirit. Indeed, the sin of separation is the work of man and involves an obstacle to God's work and generates all the negative and nefarious aspects of a hostile separation (Culmann, 1994: 38-39). In reality, it is precisely through these ecumenical dialogues that the churches have realised that

the great obstacle that prevents Christians from recognising each other as members of the one Church and belonging to the one Lord is precisely the imperfect adherence to faith in the one Christ, thus moving away from the true sense of unity that Christ has always transmitted (Cereti, 1992: 88). Different confessions, even for Pentecostal ones as it is for other Christians, have a particular dignity, which is linked to the history of salvation and coexists in the framework willed by God, within which Protestant, Catholic and Pentecostal charisms are preserved and flourish, towards its full potential (Culmann, 1994: 42). Today, among the parties that have agreed in the dialogues, especially in the international ones, a level has been reached in the discussion on confessional differences, at least from the exegetical point of view, much more serene because it is free from apologetic concerns. On both sides a certain plurality of New Testament ecclesiologies is recognised. Catholic Christians recognise that a kind of post-apostolic ministerial order cannot be expected to be found in the writings of the New Testament. While Protestant and Pentecostal Christians recognise the gradual emergence of a ministerial organisation. Some scholars go so far as to recognise that, in some writings, a type of ministerial organisation would be present not only as a fact but would emerge as a constitutive ecclesiological element (Fusco, 2003: 525). In reality, the real achievement of these dialogues was to make the participants aware that the achievement of unity among Christians is not an ecclesiological relativism for which the division of Christians loses its painful aspect, but it is something that must be pursued and reached according to completely new criteria and perspectives that is not dictated by human needs but by the will of the Holy Spirit (Saroglia, 2004: 35-36). Certainly, as the facts show, the goal proposed by ecumenism on Christian unity is far from being achieved, but these dialogues between some Pentecostals and some other Christian churches are indicative signs that give hope that a journey together is possible. The way and the moment of realisation depend on God. The history of salvation continues and we do not know in what form the Holy Spirit will create unity in and through diversity, even in the future. However, certainly the confessions in the history of salvation have a determining role because they constitute, in their independence, the *tòpos* in which the gifts of the Holy Spirit expand in view of their complementarity (Culmann, 1994: 47-48).

For many years the other churches have wanted to see in the others and especially in the Pentecostal ones the deformation of the charism and not the charism itself, making the mistake of believing that each church had to renounce its 'particularity' in order to achieve unity. In these dialogues it was finally realised that abandoning charisms in the name of uniformity is nothing more than a false unity that no longer has any relationship with that of the New Testament and with that Church created by the Spirit. In fact, in this way there was a risk of creating unity on the basis of a political ideal and certainly not on the indication of the New Testament. Researchers have probably begun to understand that the discourses and reflections on unity must assume presuppositions that,

even today, have not been followed much, because members have been deliberately deaf to the many voices that tried to indicate a path to follow to reach the goal. In reality, these Christian confessions, comparing themselves, realised that they share the same problems and for this reason they could elaborate very similar conclusions and solutions.

As paradoxical as it may seem, these dialogues have shown that the theological studies that so often in the past have separated Pentecostal Christians from others, today represent an element of rapprochement. In fact, in the International Societies of scholars whose purpose is the study of the Bible and ecclesiastical and patristic history, theologians, both Catholic and Protestant, work together to get closer to the Pentecostal world, as shown by the dialogues that will be examined in this chapter. The community of scholars have the arduous task, to foster ecumenical dialogue, of seeking in the right way the necessary compromises between traditions, without destroying the identity of any Christian confession and making mutual recognition to all. They are like farmers who prepare the field and wait for the life-giving rain from heaven, like workers who build a canal to carry water to irrigate the fields. Until the rain falls, the seed does not sprout (Miegge, 1997: 38).

## 4.2 International dialogues between classical Pentecostals and the Catholic Church

### 4.2.1 Introduction

The Catholic Church, through the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, and some classic Pentecostal leaders representing a few churches, finally started to talk to each other officially in 1972. Certainly, this was made possible due to a renewed spirit, post-Vatican II Council, which for many was a true revival within the Church of Rome; above all through an ecumenical opening and a softening of Catholic oligarchic structures (Maffeis, 2000: 52-53). On the part of the Pentecostals, this was made possible thanks to the courage and the vision, possibly prophetic, of some of those, amongst whom was David du Plessis, who together with others, in spite of facing a variety of criticisms and excommunications, acted as an ice-breaker to open up the way along which even today the two churches proceed. The communal consensus of Christian faith has been the presupposition that has allowed for the dialogue between the two churches. In effect, it would have been impossible for the two churches to begin any kind of dialogue were it not for the common base upon which the interlocutors were able to meet. So, from the dialogues can be noted this common base, even though a common language, which is the most evident expression of this consensus which was in existence

even before the dialogue began (Maffei, 2000: 107). The choice of categories on which to meet for dialogue was shown to be fruitful, even from a theological point of view. It has allowed the conversation to describe the relationship between revelation and faith, between the Word of God that was revealed to man, and his answer, but above all, to put on a common table all of the things that divide the two churches as well as those they have in common. In the last phase of the dialogue the churches learnt to confront one another about what would still be possible to do together to announce the Gospel to the world.

The next chapter consists of gathering all the international dialogues held between Pentecostals and Catholics from 1972 to 2016. The chapter will not be exclusively a gathering of all that was said during the dialogues, but (even if every dialogue will be the synthesis of the argument treated) in recounting the argument, there will also be the perspective and the critical reading of him who is writing. Through the choice of some parts of the dialogues as regards others, and through the terms and categories that were chosen, the desire of the researcher can be recognised to present a perspective to the reader. Also, the titles of the individual dialogues are important. In reality, they are not the copy of those presented by the authors that have edited and compiled the dialogues, but they are the fruits of the interpretation of who is writing, so that the title of the dialogue can already furnish the reader with a hermeneutic key with which to understand the perspectives and the interpretations of the researcher. Within the dialogues, there will be references made to both Pentecostal and Catholic authors from outside. This is because the researcher desires to compare some of the declarations noted during the dialogues with some of the texts of authors from outside the dialogues but expressed on the arguments treated during the meetings. The idea is to underline or expand some of the points of view that were presented during the meetings through a comparison of the texts of these authors.

#### 4.2.2 Some preliminary remarks.

The Pentecostals and the Ecumenical movement arose almost together and each of them constitutes one of the most relevant events in contemporary Christianity and even perhaps the entire history of Christianity. Unfortunately, as brothers divided from birth, they grew up along parallel lines and seemed as though they were destined to never meet, above all for historic and theological reasons. The contemporary ecumenical movement of which the date and actions coincide with the missionary conference in Edinburgh in 1910, took form under the banner of dialogue between those churches that, in those very years, considered the Pentecostal revival as a threat from which to defend itself rather than a proposition with which to confront themselves. The theological motives for this rested in the fact that the pentecostal spirituality had been considered for decades as more of an

extravagance than an experience that based its roots in the most ancient Christian tradition. On the other hand, the Pentecostals did not do much to correct this kind of prejudice, rather some of their ways of presenting and facing questions encouraged such misunderstandings. This had the effect of further separating the two movements, generating suspicions and prejudices that produced a reciprocal closure up until modern times (Napolitano, 2015a: 71). Another element in the cooling of their relationship can be found in the dynamics leading to the birth of the Pentecostal churches. In fact, these developed transversely as a revival movement within the already existing Evangelical churches, above all in the Anglo-American regions. The phenomenon, if on one side raised up interest and a renewal of faith, on the other hand led to much criticism and opposition from the local leaders who in the space of a decade constrained thousands of people who had lived and touched a kind of Pentecostal experience, to organise themselves in new forms of churches. After the Second World War there were signs of change related, above all, to events that occurred in the USA that had engaged personalities in the pentecostal world who produced a significant opening, which according to scholars is known as the *second wave* of pentecostalism (Introvigne, 2004: 58). From this more open vision on the part of the Pentecostals sprang their presence onto the Ecumenical circuits which some years later culminated in the invitation directed to Pastor David du Plessis (1905-1987) to participate as an observer at the WCC and as a guest at the third session of the Vatican II Council. From this last event sprang the dialogue between Catholics and Pentecostals, even if there had already been initial contacts ten years before but only at a personal level. In much more recent times there have developed dialogues, no less important, between Pentecostals and Reformed traditions. It is curious that the dialogue between Pentecostals and Reformed only took place twenty years after the dialogue with the Catholics. No doubt it is necessary to consider that the opening of the dialogue between Pentecostals and other Christians is of a particular nature. In fact, none of the classical Pentecostal churches takes part in ecumenical bodies such as the WCC; some exceptions only for some young churches in Africa and Latin America have joined more recently. As has been already written, the Pentecostal galaxy is so vast and varied at a world level to make it difficult to enclose it in a single theological and ecclesiastical framework of churches and movements. Sometimes the Pentecostal churches are so diverse in themselves, and some of the protagonists are moved by personal motivations, even in their ecumenical choices (Hollenweger, 1966: 54).

Pentecostals identify themselves largely along phenomenological models and this renders its own form of Christianity as though it were a constant flow of experience, above all, thanks to its intercultural expression, as though it were a religion made to travel. From a global perspective, this is not primarily a worry for the Pentecostals, that of transposing cultural values. Rather, for them it is the Holy Spirit that should etch out the way of God in a particular environment and speak to the lives

of people wherever they find themselves in their own contexts. Some churches have bishops, or concentrate on apostolic leadership, while others are governed by a church council and remain proudly independent. Some Pentecostals refer to baptism and the Lord's Supper as sacraments, while others refer to them as ordinances. All of these, however, celebrate these rights with a strong sense of the presence of God. This approach opens the door to dialogue between the Pentecostal churches and those so-called historic that have a sacramental tradition. Besides this, Pentecostals generally sustain an elevated vision of Scripture and emphasise that *we are saved by grace alone*, which renders it closer still to the Reformed churches. These premises, in spite of their varied shades, are generally accepted by all Pentecostals which enable an Ecumenical dialogue.

The issue of proselytism which is a central argument in many bilateral dialogues between Pentecostals and other Christians has shown that it's not just an accusation leveled above all at the Pentecostal churches, but a problem involving all of them and there are challenges that have to be affronted globally and with a sense of realism. All the churches need a new theoretical and practical approach. The question may be asked for new Ecumenical hermeneutics instead of reading documents on confessional positions and theological pedestals. Christians must learn to recount events that illustrate the context of faith in an appropriate manner. A similar hermeneutical approach would invite also the churches in the southern hemisphere to participate in the ecumenical dialogue, above all the Pentecostals, because even they would feel more at ease in a phenomenological appreciation of faith. To have Pentecostals in ecumenical discussions may open a new perspective to present and resolve old problems. Finally, this researcher is convinced that the search for unity is changing. The ecumenical movement of the twentieth century concentrated much upon the theological and ecclesiastical affirmations, upon a working together and upon a series of fusions between the churches. Was that good? Then a period began in which spiritual ecumenism began to find an expression from within itself. The emphasis was to participate in the spiritual activities of others. The different churches were encouraged to share the gifts they have received and there are those which must be discovered and received. The researcher also now believes that an ecumenism of the Spirit can now be gathered. An ecumenism of the Spirit would change the priorities, above all those classical works of ecumenism. Instead of focusing on theology, doctrine, ecclesial structure, ministry and sacraments, leadership could begin with the confession of the actual Lordship of Jesus Christ and a receptivity to the work of the Holy Spirit (Pluss, 2014 :21).

#### 4.2.3 Pentecostals and the Catholic Church

The greater part of Pentecostals has a certain reticence for the move towards unity of the Church. The reasons for this difficulty are to be sought for in their own self-understanding, in the light of a particular, individual conscience that comes with being a Christian and doesn't consider any ecumenical formation to be necessary. For them the movement for the unity of the Church is nothing other than the fruit of modern times and something to stay far away from. This happens, above all, because of the congregationalist orientation of the larger part of their communities which, together with their *very fundamental* ecclesiology inherited from the Reformed church and especially from the various revival movements of the 18th and 19th centuries, renders them extremely diffident towards ecclesiastical structures with a strong ecclesiastical tradition and with a strong tendency towards universalism. Historically the principal Christian division in the Western world has been between the Catholics and the Protestants, including in this last category all of the groups springing from the great watershed of the Reformation. In this subdivision the Pentecostal movement should be considered the last in the time-line, also because it developed from other Protestant churches and revivals, and in particular the Methodists. The pentecostal movement has inherited a type of faith leaning towards fundamentalism regarding the authority of the Scripture, typical of all the Protestant/Reformed churches. In reality scholars tend to differentiate Pentecostals from others because of the growing divergences that exist on questions of faith and experience, above all for their customary practices that increasingly separate Pentecostals from other Christians. An important difference is the fact that Pentecostals are based upon spiritual revelations which, through a process of drawing close to the Scriptures, find their authority. The differences are further marked when considering those involved. Different from other Christians, Pentecostals find their support mainly from the least well-off, amongst the poorest components of society and different from Catholics, these do not constitute *only* the believers, as for the Catholic world, but they form in its fullness the Body of Christ, having each one open in it in its charismatic dimension. The same difference may also be noted in regard to the Protestants, because these by and large belong to the middle class. Even if in the West this kind of distinction between Pentecostals and Protestants is less noticeable, it is very evident in the southern hemisphere (Jenkins, 2004: 154). Finally, Pentecostals often have painful memories of refusal from churches that "today" are part of the ecumenical movement, which have used discriminatory attitudes and assumed prosecutorial positions, especially in countries with a Catholic majority, against Pentecostals. Many Christians opposed the pentecostal movement, accusing it of giving free rein to emotionalism, of spiritual deceit, and subordinating Scriptures to experience (Hochen, 1994:87). This, however, did not impede the Catholic Church together with a few representatives from classic Pentecostalism from starting up a dialogue beginning in 1972. It is

important to underline that this was not an official dialogue between the two churches, rather a dialogue between the Catholic Church and a few exponents of the classical Pentecostal movement. The Pentecostal members were not official representatives of their original communities, and in fact many had to meet their own expenses.

The initiative of the dialogue didn't arise in the bosom of the Catholic Church but rather from a South African/American Pentecostal pastor, David du Plessis (1905-1987), who for some time encouraged the Pentecostals to include fellowship with the historic churches in their panorama of Christian life. He was invited as a guest to the third session of Vatican II (1964) and he participated at the six assemblies of the Worldwide Council of Churches that was held while he was alive from the time of the assembly in Amsterdam (1964) to Vancouver (1983). Certainly, his efforts did not leave the Pentecostals indifferent either for better or worse. Unfortunately, he initially paid a high price for his ecumenical commitment with a lack of understanding from his own association of churches, the Assemblies of God, which cost him a suspension from service from 1964 until 1980. Pastor Du Plessis contributed with his ecumenical commitment to a reconsideration of the ultimate aims of dialogue that were to be realised, no longer at a structured level, but rather one of "Developing a reciprocal environment of comprehension and respect as regards faith and practical religion, to discover points of authentic understanding and also to indicate areas in which further dialogue was necessary" (Rauch, 2012: 23).

It should be remembered that up until 50 years ago the Catholics knew little of the spirituality of the Pentecostals, and vice versa. The Pentecostals were little prepared to confront a Catholic style of spirituality, because the basis of their relationship was founded on aggressiveness and diffidence, in the light of the desire to convert the other which clouded minds and hearts. Pentecostals had to wait until 1972 to see the dawning of a dialogue between Catholics and Pentecostals. This was at least on one side in merit of the participation of a Pentecostal leader at Vatican II, and on the other side, above all, on the arising of the charismatic renewal within the Catholic Church. Thanks to the charismatic movement even within the Catholic Church there was talk of the pentecostal experience. This distinguished itself from other religious experiences because it was generated by the power of the Holy Spirit that lays hold of and transforms those baptised in the same way as the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Smet, 1978: 55). This fact, because the Pentecostals recognised that the Holy Spirit works in wonderful ways in those believers who had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, independently of which church they belonged to, brought some classic Pentecostals to establish contact in dialogue with this *kind* of Catholics. The dialogue had the initial scope of deepening the knowledge of one another in order to overcome the diverse misunderstandings. In the current

situation, through the published documents of the dialogue between Catholics and Pentecostals, the different confessional characteristics of the two interlocutors can be recognised, but also recognise a common basis on some categories such as, faith, conversion, follow-up, experience and training. In fact, these have been noted as common and complementary points. While, it was a different story for baptism in the Spirit; also because it is a fundamental experience for Pentecostals, but certainly not for Catholics. Around this topic profound doctrinal differences had emerged, especially on some issues that are for fundamental Pentecostals. However, the comparison between Catholics and Pentecostals on this question has led to both churches the need for a pastoral rethinking of baptism and experience with/in the Holy Spirit. A rethinking that comes from the awareness that not everyone has had such an experience and, above all, there is a plurality of interpretations (Gomez, 2006: 5).

In order to underline the significant points of the dialogue, even if briefly the final reports of the various meetings that took place between the Catholics and the Pentecostals must be considered. The researcher will present these as though they were a path which will be relevant only if it is seen as an action of the Spirit proceeding through different times and occasions and at opportune moments that He Himself creates. Recognising God's action in history is of fundamental importance for true ecumenism. Only by reading the history of salvation as an action of the Spirit in the history of humanity can a common thread be found that unites all confessions, through the action of the Spirit, as the Church of Christ in the world (Cullmann, 1987: 42). The dialogues officially began in 1972, although a few years earlier there had been contacts between the two interlocutors. In fact, between 1969 and 1971, some members of the Pentecostal churches and the Secretariat for Christian union began to dialogue with the intention of verifying whether, between the two churches, there were the conditions for starting a dialogue.

The final reports are considered as stops along this path towards a mutual knowledge that continues to this day. The researcher will now attempt to propose a reflection on the content and on the solutions that the Catholic Church and the Pentecostals have expressed regarding religious contentions, through what is termed bilateral commissions. Through these commissions the Catholic Church presents herself as the height of her own authority. This is to be understood, not in juristic or bureaucratic terms, but as expressions of a desire to be decisively involved and to assume all of the responsibilities for the ecumenical consequences. These commissions are recognisable when, on the part of the Catholic Church they are directly represented by the Secretariat for the Christian Union (Pattaro 1985: 122).

The international Pentecostal/Catholic dialogue from its beginnings up until about the mid-nineties was the only international dialogue in which the classical Pentecostals participated. Only in the last few years the international dialogues and discussions have been set in motion; that is between the classic Pentecostals and other non-Catholic churches, such as the Reformed and the World Lutheran Council of Churches. (Pontifical Council Promoting Christian Unity, 1998-2006).

#### 4.2.3.1 Dialogue 1972 to 1976

In this first phase, from what was discussed, it can be noted that it was accompanied by a certain enthusiasm, especially on the part of the Pentecostal leaders that participated. After the preliminary phases ended in 1971 with the formation of a small organising committee made up of members of both parties, they began to compile a list of arguments to be discussed during a series of meetings over the next five years. The opening of the official dialogue between Catholics sent by the Secretariat for the Union of Christians of the Catholic Church and several representatives from the classic Pentecostal churches happened in 1972 in Horgen, Switzerland. The arguments that were treated were organised in such a way that over the period of five years, it would be possible for both parties to open up to reciprocal understanding. However, more than a meeting of equals, from a reading of the texts it is possible to note that from the Catholic side there was a greater desire to study the Pentecostal faith in depth by some of the themes discussed, rather than the Pentecostals towards the Catholics. It seems that, in this phase the dialogue was more of an instrument on the Catholic side to get to know and to form an idea of Pentecostals, and not so much a dialogue that could provide elements for a reciprocal understanding. In fact, the path of the first five years was structured in such a way that it could be seen to immediately treat arguments that more characterised Pentecostals and would bring to light Pentecostal spirituality, maybe because the participants of the Roman church were so convinced of their Catholicism that they took for granted that it was already known amongst all the Christians regardless of what their churches believed or professed. In fact, this phase of dialogue can probably be interpreted as though it was a meeting between two believers, one Catholic and one Pentecostal where one is interested in knowing the faith of the other because he considers his own taken for granted by everyone. This is most likely the everyday experience of almost all Pentecostals living in countries with a Catholic majority. It is as though at a meeting on the streets, a Catholic desire to know the Pentecostal in front of him, not knowing of his spirituality but only having heard about it and asking the Pentecostal for clarifications. The researcher believes the dialogue between two Christians would have been structured in the same way and along the same lines that can be found in the steps that were discussed in the first five years of the bilateral dialogue.

In this phase the Catholics recognised that the Pentecostals are a people for whom “The true reality is an eternal one desired and hoped for but also loved and almost already lived” (Vetralli, 2000: 281). Believers are those who have had a direct experience where they’ve learned *to taste* God and gather God as a gift. So, in light of this meeting/event, both parties agreed that for a spiritual ecumenism it is fundamental to be laid hold of by the Holy Spirit and therefore to gather as an accepted practice the criterion of epiclesis; to invoke the Spirit as the gift which God has given to the Church. He exists through the individual confessions which remain his own because they are the actions and the desires of the Holy Spirit. The true ecumenical effort of all Christians must be that of making sure that it does not ever become the confessional ownership of one alone (Montresor, 2011: 48).

What does the Pentecostal believer mean with the expression: Baptism in or with the Holy Spirit? Horgen, Switzerland 1972

In the first meeting both parties were united in a climate of respect and reciprocal recognition. The first argument was presented and discussed through different exegetical interpretations, even if bound without doubt to their own confessional traditions. Pentecostals were first to speak and from their perspective demonstrated that through a particular exegesis (that which presupposes a pneumatic fountain and reach of a few New Testament texts, such as: Acts 2:4, 8:27, 10:44, 19:6), to be baptised in the Spirit is an event that happens as a decisive experience separate from conversion, “An experience through which the Holy Spirit manifests Himself, gives power, and completely transforms whoever receives it and illuminates him for the entire reality of the Christian mystery” (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 221). The importance of the baptism of the Spirit is significant both for the Pentecostal churches and others, because it has the greatest potential to connect between the Christian traditions. Unfortunately, this central point, so heavily underlined and occurring in different phases of the development of the Pentecostal movement initially had resulted in the distancing of the pentecostal world, not only from other Christians, but also from theology in general. The theologians from pentecostal roots have always found no small difficulty in justifying, in the light of Scripture, this strong centrality of the baptism in or with the Holy Spirit, because it renders some Christians “exclusive” in respect of those who have not shared the same experience, and especially to those who consider the experience with the Spirit a principal and essential determinant for the Christian initiation and sanctification (Macchia, 2006: 64). The Pentecostal proposition was not contradicted by the Catholic party, but neither was it accepted in its entirety. These laid the accent on the fact that the promise of the Spirit is for all those who enter, through the baptism, that fulfils the commandment of Christ in Matthew (Matthew 28:19) to be a part of the new eschatological people of God. In fact, it

is the Spirit of Christ that makes the Christian, and he is such in the measure in which he is submitted to the Spirit's transforming power. In this first phase, as far as regarding the baptism with/in the Holy Spirit, several reciprocal misunderstandings were clarified, and false convictions corrected. The Catholics experienced and learned to understand the other party, accepting the way in which it speaks of itself. The Pentecostals gathered up the challenge to express in a more understandable way their own proposition of faith and their own biblical interpretation around the argument that was treated. (Gomez, 2005).

What is the difference between a committed Christian that has had a kind of Pentecostal experience with respect to another Christian that has not had the same experience? Rome, Italy, 1973

In this second phase, the dialogue continued to develop along the lines of comparison and awareness of each other. The Catholics started to truly take seriously the Pentecostal proposition. For them it was not a theology to fight against, but a true and real spirituality to search out and discover. The presupposition for both was that the experiences of the Spirit are tied exclusively to his will and He distributes his gifts in his liberty and sovereignty. From this common presupposition the Pentecostals proposed their perspective, that in which it is believed that who has received or receives a Pentecostal type experience "Receives with this a greater opening and a wider expectation regarding the Holy Spirit and his gifts" (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 159). The Pentecostals offer other Christians their proposition of the experience with the Spirit which becomes a paradigm. It's true that what the other Christians may learn from the Pentecostals is the priority of divine praise, of thankfulness, and of glorifying worship. This is the fruit of the *koinonia* that has as a presupposition an effusion of the Holy Spirit. Important elements regarding this truth exist in all the liturgical traditions of the Christian churches, but very often lack the lively enthusiasm and freedom that only the Spirit allows through his particular presence, "The Holy Spirit is not always a devouring fire, but little by little, becomes a heap of cold ashes" (Kasper & Wilckens, 2017: 198). Once again, the Catholic party accepted the pentecostal proposition, but reiterated that in the face of the proliferation of charismatic manifestations, it was more necessary than ever to exercise discernment of the spirits. The Catholics proposed a model for discernment that has love as an instrument and method for a diagnosis, because love is the place where the gifts of the Spirit are manifested and because the aim of the Spirit is to bring the believer to a greater faithfulness in Christ; this is only possible through love of, and for God. Therefore, the principal activity of the Spirit, through his gifts, is that of rendering the believer ever more in love with God and his work. From this perspective there is not a difference in levels between committed Christians, because the end and substance are equal for all.

The mystical experiences are directed more towards a personal fellowship with God, but it is necessary to distinguish them from the gifts of the Spirit that are directed more to service

Do Catholics and Pentecostals have the same baptism, read the same Bible, and follow the same tradition? Schloss Craheim, West Germany, 1974

During the third phase, there was a true and proper confrontation between the parties. In it the differences emerged more clearly above all because they started to touch upon a few questions important for both parties; it was unthinkable that, sooner or later, the differences would not have formed a watershed within a dialogue which, up until this moment, had proceeded along the lines of a reciprocal getting to know one another. In the end it was necessary to recognise that there were substantial differences on the question of baptism regarding which both parties tried to present their own general procedure. Both justified their baptismal procedure for what it could signify in the light of the future reality and certainly not in the strength of the act itself. The same procedure was chosen for the relationship with Scripture, and above all with tradition. The researcher believes that this was the least brilliant phase in the dialogue where very few conclusions were reached. In fact, on these arguments it was decided in the end to let things go, noting that "This ecumenical problem requires further study" (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995:156). The issue of the debate on the sacraments in ecumenical discussions is always complex, independent of the parties involved given that the paths taken have been different, whether regarding the methodology or the content, but above all their development in history. The decree on the sacraments of the Council of Trent (1574) which definitively established the Catholic conception of the sacraments, both in terms of their number and their meaning, left little room for discussion and comparison. Therefore, the story of the debate between sacraments in the ecumenical discussion was complex to follow, because the paths taken by the two churches had been different, both for the contents and for the methodology of the contents (Sgroi, 2007: 237).

What is the difference between the mass and the pentecostal meeting? Venice, Italy 1975

In Venice, a city with a great ecumenical as well as irreligious tradition, the fourth phase of this first path of dialogue began. In this phase, once again, meeting returned to attitudes and presuppositions that were less contradictory and sought to create a hospitable and welcoming "context" for both parties; something that seemed lost in the previous phase. This time even the arguments could be steppingstones towards further clarification and definitions for the diverse perspectives of spirituality, but it was preferred to keep the level of the meeting to a common base, without ever creating and looking for the differences that once again would have marked out territory. The principal argument of the dialogue was public worship, what happens from within, the human-

divine dimension of those who participate, and above all the liturgy. It was a peaceful meeting and for both parties it was clear that within the members of the Body of Christ, the Lord is present and manifests Himself through numerous charismatic expressions, as He is present, in the same way through the power of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist. From this common base, once again the criteria for discernment was revisited and that within the public meetings needed to be exercised when faced with some manifestations. The Pentecostals preferred to return to a scriptural principle of the incarnation, of the Lordship of Christ, and of the edification of his Church (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 198). They proposed that within a community, the same community of faithful should be responsible for discernment. In fact, there is the underlying belief that if believers walk and are guided by the Spirit, they are entrusted to them in the moment that the gift of discernment must be put into action. From this derives a greater request for maturity on the part of all believers. To this, the counter idea of the Catholics conceives a community discernment only when its leaders are endowed with a special charisma. This does not exclude, however, that every single believer may exercise a particular discernment for his own life as a gift of the Holy Spirit. In reality, those participating in a worship meeting must enter into contact with others in the dynamic of Christian fraternity, and this must be lived through experience. The meeting point in the Christian worship service must be God Himself. The Christian worship service must be a moment in which the believer meets God in his dynamic presence. All of this requires more space for spontaneity and for the creative initiatives of the Holy Spirit. This requires a new way of conceiving God, for everyone, whether in the worship meeting or as a personal experience; to seek and experience this as though it is continually a new orientation (Beke, 1985: 45).

#### Can Catholics and Pentecostals pray together? Rome, Italy 1976

For the last section of this first pathway, they returned to Rome and chose to end this time of getting to know one another with a farewell. The most important part of this last meeting was the aim of preparing a new path of dialogue. Beyond what was said, the parties that came together recognised that getting to know one another had been fruitful and had contributed to the common good. In fact, the meeting in 1976 was properly *a see you later* because after not even a year, in 1977 the bilateral dialogue between Catholics and Pentecostal resumed. However, even this phase was accompanied by a theme by which to confront each other. Having as a presupposition the desire absolutely not to break the path that had begun five years earlier, but to continue without hesitation. They chose a theme that could indicate a line of agreement and continuity for the future; this couldn't be anything other than prayer. Finally, they agreed that, as prayer was a fundamental aspect in the life of a believer towards God, it represented a moment of worship. For both it is made in worship

of the Father, in the Spirit, and in the truth of Christ. Christians pray and worship a sole God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and one of the expressions of this prayer of praise is the gift of tongues, with joy and enthusiasm. The responsibility of worship is not given by a confession but of a single believer, who must always distinguish in this that the Giver of the gift is God alone to whom it is necessary to offer personal worship. Without forgetting that, for the believer, prayer is the substance of communion with God, while the Bible is his guide. In synthesis, everyone agreed with the fact that the fellowship and the reading of the Bible are essential parts of a spiritual life within the Christian experience.

#### 4.2.3.2 Dialogue 1977 to 1982

From 1977 to 1982 there was the second phase of the dialogue between Catholics and classic Pentecostals. The Catholic party was represented by the Secretariat for Christian Union, while for the Pentecostals the participants came with a variety of types of representatives; some were nominated by their local churches, others with the approbation of their national churches. Still others participated upon their own account, even if their churches of origin were notified of their participation. This second phase found the parties more careful to present their diverse theological positions and spiritual experiences. The aim was always to move towards a reciprocal knowledge and understanding of one another, but this time they attempted to attain this through tones and positions that marked out their confessions. The aim was not to seek a structural unity, but rather more to focalise the problems and the reasons which rendered the parties so diverse. Differently from the preceding dialogues, it was preferred to involve only those parties directly interested (classical Pentecostals and Catholics who have been sent by their directives), leaving aside the others and excluding even the Christians that had however received a kind of charismatic experience. The idea was to touch on topics that would put the various theological positions and their spirituality on the table of discussion, above all those that represented unique aspects, the *glossolalia* on the Pentecostal part and the role of the veneration of Maria as regards the Catholics.

This bilateral, international dialogue was characterised by a great seriousness in relationships and exchanges. Both sides, even during the most difficult discussions, have always tried to reflect on their particular positions, remaining true to themselves. That is, without ever abandoning the perspective of each one's own confession of faith. The presupposition was to consider each diversity as an enrichment and not as a problem or obstacle for all of Christianity. The diversity was considered as an action of the Spirit within the plan of salvation for the whole world. Acting in this manner, the participants allowed themselves to be guided by the other in order to discover the true nature of their

particular faith. Specifically, this second five-year series of conversations, from 1977 to 1982 (the meeting in 1978 didn't happen because of the deaths of Pope Paul VI and then Pope John Paul I), followed the steppingstones already determined previously. The first took place in Rome, Italy, 1977. The argument dealt with speaking in tongues and the relationship between experience and faith. The second was again in Rome, 1979. The meeting discussed the relationship between Scripture and tradition and the ministry of healing within the church. The third was held in Venice, Italy, 1980. On that occasion they faced the theme of the church as a community of worship and the relationship between Tradition and traditions. In the fourth meeting in Vienna, Austria, 1981, the role of Maria was the main subject of discussion. The last meeting of the series was held in Collegeville, Minnesota, USA, in 1982, and was given to the theme of ministry (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 223).

#### The Badge of Pentecostalism: Speaking in Tongues, Rome, Italy, 1977

The classical Pentecostals presented a clear position about the sign of tongues. They repeated the fact that speaking in tongues was not the only sign manifested if a Christian was in fellowship or in relationship with God. Fellowship with the Lord is determined by the very nature of being Christian and therefore, does not have a single property or evidence. At the same time, they revealed as a historical fact that within the entire history of Christianity there had always been men or movements which testified to this particular charism. The work of Pentecostals within Christian history has been that, through the exercising and seeking this particular charism, to stimulate other Christians to revive and value the gifts and work of the Holy Spirit, which is the testimony in Scripture itself (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 302). For Pentecostals, the seeking for the charisma introduced a new Biblical category which is that of experience. For them, to receive God in their own lives is to experience his Spirit. Only in this way the believer reaches a personal relationship with God. From an experience with God springs a new anthropological perspective in which man is involved *in toto*, or rather, human faculties altogether are an active part. The experience of the Spirit has in this way a visible testimony through new expressions and new gestures which become in themselves a sign of an experience with and of God, as happens with speaking in tongues, an experience that becomes an event in the common understanding. This is a fact that manifests itself as it is bound to the principle of the great gestures of God. This understanding models the conscience that becomes, for the Pentecostal, a patrimony that contains within it a universal dimension, because it is the basis with which to know the power of the Spirit. Through the effusion of the Spirit, God gives witness to Himself, an action that becomes, for the understanding of the Pentecostal community, multi-individual. In this way, with the effusion of the Spirit a force field is created that reaches and involves all those who have an experience with and

in the Spirit, rendering whoever has such an experience part of a universal community that the Spirit has founded (Welker, 1995: 296).

This special relationship with the Spirit also forms the basis for the Pentecostals for their relationship with the Scripture. The experience with the Spirit has in itself a particular prerogative, that of providing the believer with a special attitude. Anyone who has had experience with the Spirit has a special relationship with what he reads from the Bible, because the Spirit makes the words read and meditated upon imprinted in the mind and in the heart to live again in the world as an experience of life of the believer. Therefore, the understanding of the Text is a further sign of the indwelling and intimate personal relationship with the Spirit which does not end only in the understanding of it, but also in a particular ability to transmit it. This is why Pentecostals have affirmed that there do not exist two authorities (Scripture and tradition) but only one that is the Bible. It is the only authority and is read and meditated upon through the enlightening of the Holy Spirit; in fact, the true discernment in the interpretation of Scripture can only be the unique working of the Holy Spirit (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995:327). As regards the physical sphere, Pentecostals recognise that, following an experience with the Spirit, He had the power to heal the body as well, with the same power that brought new life within the person who readies himself to receive it. So, while the Catholics considered the healing of the body as a consequence of the ministry to the sick of the church, Pentecostals believe in waiting for healing on the part of the afflicted person and obtained through the preaching of the Gospel. Personal and communal prayer are activities in which and for which the presence and communion with the Spirit is guaranteed. Under this perspective, even the healing of the body is transformed into a “sign” of the indwelling and of a particular experience with the same Spirit that has re-established the sick person. The experience of healing was part of the same experience *as charismas of life*. The healings are seeds and signs of the new birth; in fact, if the Spirit of God, in light of the resurrection of Christ, has been experienced as He who raised the dead, then the healings are interpreted as anticipatory signs of the resurrection of the dead and of eternal life (Moltmann, 1994: 128).

For the Pentecostals the church itself, in its invisible form, is the mark or sign of the Spirit in action which manifests itself in the fellowship of the believers or those “born again” in a specific location; the Catholics however underline the role of the church as the authority that recognises and proclaims the truth of the Gospel through doctrinal ordinances. For Pentecostals, the church itself was formed by the Word of God, preached and received through the actions of the Spirit. The church is such if it interprets, transmits, and applies the message that the Spirit gives it in the understanding of the Gospel (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 298).

## Scripture and Tradition for the Life and the Future of the Believer. Rome, Italy, 1979

In this phase of dialogue, the parties agreed that there is a primary source of revelation, that is the Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testament, and these constitute the source of revelation for all Christians. However, for the Catholics there is a second source that is called Tradition. This is the fruit of the living faith within the church which has developed independently through the Christian councils and symbols taught by the heads of the church. Even if the tradition is a source that is independent of the Bible, it is enacted in it because tradition becomes the voice of Scripture for the church living in the world. The Pentecostals, instead, affirm that there cannot be two sources of revelation but only one sole authority, the Old and New Testaments. The Bible must be read and understood through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. However, they do not refute some of the fundamental developments that characterised the Catholic Christian faith but preferred not to attribute to it the character that Tradition has for the Catholics, above all in the places where this seems to be in contradiction to the Gospel (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 301). From this presupposition it is easy to understand that Pentecostals, trusting completely in the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the interpretation of Scripture, have no dogmatic structure for the interpretation of the Bible, as there is present within the Catholic church.

The convened parties separated, discussing the ministry of the church for healing. Both agreed that the Christian community, through prayer, had amongst its functions that of asking God to heal the psychic, physical, and spiritual needs of individuals. The Catholics considered the healing of the body to be a consequence of the ministry of the church to the sick. So, they viewed a path that has healing as a final goal but passes by way of the sacraments.

## Church, Community of Worship, and Tradition of Traditions, Venice, Italy, 1980

Catholics considered the Church, its ministry and its sacraments, as instruments and manifestations of the actions and presence of Christ through the gift of the Spirit; also and above all, for the conversion of the believer and his support, towards the end of reaching salvation. The sacraments are actions of Christ that render present and active the saving power of the paschal ministry (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 359). The Pentecostals underlined the fact that the saving faith of the believer in Jesus Christ is a witness and a personal testimony and is fundamental in the Christian community. Rather than the sacramental and ecclesiastical approach, the individual experiences Christ in every element of communal worship, in songs, prayers, testimony, baptism, celebration of the Lord's Supper as Holy Communion, and also through everyday experiences of life.

The differences between the two concepts of Church were even more evident and acute in the way of interpreting the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper. For Pentecostals the breaking of bread within the worship service does not occupy a predominant place. Some celebrate it as a ritual in deference to the Lord's command while for others it is simply the remembrance of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Catholics consider the Eucharist as a memorial sacrament of the sacrifice of Christ at Calvary. For the power of God, in the celebration of the Eucharist, Jesus is rendered present in his death and resurrection. This for Catholics is the central act and element of the worship service and is the privileged means of grace. In fact, if for the Pentecostals the church is founded on the same Word of God, this is essential to guide the believer. Instead, for Catholics as well as the Word, even the Church that celebrates the Eucharist has the role of guide for the believer. The Catholic Church proclaims itself as an authority that recognises and proclaims the truth of the Gospel through doctrinal statements. In order to do this Catholics also use a second source, other than the Bible, which is Tradition. For them Tradition touches everything that has occurred and has been transmitted by whom, as representatives of the church, and therefore guided by the Spirit, has laid in written form the "proclaimed" word of God as the answer of the community, clothed by the Spirit to the truth of the Gospel. Understood in this way, the Tradition is a continual process, having a passive part that is the material already transmitted, while the active part is that which the Catholic church continues to transmit (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 342). Pentecostals do not recognise in tradition the same value as the Catholics, but on occasion of this dialogue they were ready to consider that, even amongst themselves, through their history, traditions have arisen independently of Scripture, but these have very little authority for them.

#### The Badge of the Roman Catholic Church: Veneration of Maria, Vienna, Austria 1981

The Catholics and Pentecostals agree that Maria was the mother of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, recognising as such, an absolutely unique place. Both recognised the historic origins of the title "Mother of God" (*Theotokos*), derived from the Christological dispute from the 5th Century during the council of Ephesus (43A.D.). It is a category that is useful in specifying the two natures of Christ, divine and human, so that the title given to Maria during the council was always referring to a Christological theme. Both agreed that only at the moment of incarnation Maria became the mother of God, but she was not mother of God in his existence as God, one and triune. Pentecostals interpret the Marian figure based only on scriptural data. at the same time, Catholics consider the scriptural data as the basis and support for the truth. For Catholics, truth progresses through a tradition that does not change it but interprets it, in the light of the times in which the Spirit manifests itself. In fact, Catholics laid the presupposition for a correct Mariology in that *a correct veneration of Maria is*

*always Christological.* Even the prayers of intercession directed towards Maria do not terminate in her but in God. Certainly, this conclusion was arrived at also thanks to the ecumenical movement and to the pre-Vatican II theology. These had initiated a renewal and offered a new Mariological and Marian proposition in a large part of the Catholic world, recuperating the necessary trinitarian, Christological, and ecclesiastical re-centralisation. This was done in a way that if, on the one hand, there began a process of reconversion to Marian veneration; on the other hand, it was possible to arrive at a full conformity to Scripture (Perrella, 2008: 34).

Catholics continued to reprove Pentecostals for not rightly holding in consideration the place that the Holy Scripture has assigned to Mary in the plan of God. Certainly, the veneration of Mary finds in the Catholic Church its major point of convergence, rather the *topos* from which this sprung and developed because it mirrors *in toto* its vision and the sacramental theology; for this the Marian veneration is like a stronghold in the Roman Catholic tradition. For Catholics the principles of Marian theology, that is: the virginity, immaculate conception, and assumption of Mary into heaven are an integral part of the hierarchy of the truths of the faith, but they believe that as many as do not profess this truth are therefore outside the Catholic church and excluded from salvation. The Catholic Mariology is characterised today differently from how it was portrayed in the past, by its ecumenical dimension. The ecumenical dialogue was considered important not only within the Christian confessions, but also in the Catholic one inasmuch as it was important that even Mariology needed to present itself and confront itself always in an ecumenical perspective. This requires not only attention regarding others, but also in its own correct presentation of the celebration of Mariology. This has to come about through an elaboration that can confront itself and be understood by everyone, that reflects continually upon this proposition so that it may be able to offer a benefit to all Christians. In the light of these dialogues, it was possible to gather a new direction for both confessions. Beyond the simple dialogue it was possible to arrive at a real fellowship that found bridges and common points, even upon arguments that, in appearance, tended towards exclusive conclusions. There was enough wisdom to include “the” biblical Mary in a common conclusion, while remaining open to the question of the dogmatic and cultural traditions of Mary. These questions were entrusted to the next dialogues because the difficulties of a solution were recognisable, but always necessary and indispensable (Bruni, 2009: 21).

Ordained Ministry and Charismatic Ministry, Minnesota, USA, 1982

The Pentecostals that took part in the dialogues recognised the apostolic nature of the ministry wherever the Gospel is preached, and the manifestations of the Holy Spirit are present. This results

in the foundation of churches and the conversion of persons through the charisms given by the Spirit for the edification of the Church of Jesus Christ. Instead the Catholics for the occasion underlined the necessity of ecclesiastic officials as part of the plan of God for the Church. They found in the New Testament the reality of the official ministerial office and in this they see the expression of the design of God through a line of continuity that passes through the bishops of the early church. The Pentecostals instead held that the real actions of the Holy Spirit rather than the uninterrupted chain of episcopal succession were more important for the aims of the apostolic ministry and of the faith.

#### 4.2.3.3 Dialogue 1985 to 1989

Even if both parties were aware that the unity of the Church would be a distant objective, whether for the Catholics or for the Pentecostals, this was not a reason for discouragement. Rather it was this awareness that pushed the two churches to continue with even more determination the path of dialogues that had been pre-established. In fact, they did not pre-establish as an objective the reaching of an organic or structural unity, but had once again, as a common aim to establish between the parties a climate of reciprocal comprehension in areas of faith and practical Christianity. In this way they reached a third series of conversations, taking place from 1985 to 1989 that indicated a turning point for the dialogue. The first new element was that the dialogue finally assumed an official nature because it was accepted by many Pentecostal communities at a worldwide level. Another attainment was that for the first time, diverse Pentecostal churches designated in an official form their representatives that participated in these dialogues. Unfortunately, during the work, one of the historic protagonists of the Catholic/Pentecostal dialogue, the Reverend David du Plessis, passed away in 1987. For this phase of dialogue: *koinonia* as a category of the New Testament, was a word to build the present but also the future. A strong theological category of the New Testament that the dialogues wanted to establish as a catalyst to create a common front, which would be the shared basis for sharing proposals and ideas. This is a prophetic word, an objective to reach but at the same time the cause of contention, so that the present would have to wrestle with it. A theme rich in possibilities which is tied to a much wider ecumenical dialogue, that between other churches at a worldwide level touching on the theme of fellowship was raising much interest and many expectations (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 298). This was a possibility for Catholics, because through *koinonia* they could finally gather the positive aspects of the churches that preceded them in the world, considering the brother, in his diversity, an enrichment and certainly not another problem to "recover" or "convert". *Koinonia* was a possibility for the Pentecostals, because in their doctrine the brotherhood is understood as an essential aspect of the life of the church both from the point of view of their relationship with the world and of their relationship with other Christians. This is a gift from the part of the Spirit for all

Christians, because only through fellowship is it possible to overcome the dogmatic barriers and instead of constructing walls can, through this, bridges be built towards others. In fact, both of the gathered parties agreed on the fact that “The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of unity in diversity and not a Spirit of divisions” (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 302). This unity was, more precisely, seen as a unity of fellowship and certainly not a uniformity in the procedures and ways of being Christian. Its foundation was given from a common faith and experience with and of Jesus Christ as Lord and the trinitarian foundation of the faith. At the end of this path, the parties were convinced that the ecclesiastical procedures of the two churches would need to show that there existed something real, even if imperfect, as *koinonia* between them.

Fellowship between the Saints and with the Saints: Between Heaven and Earth, Riano, Italy, 1985

Catholics, according to their doctrine, consider fellowship as unity with and of the saints, that is, a relationship with all the saints of God, those on earth as well as those in heaven. In the faith and in the Catholic practice, only God must be the objective of worship, but this does not exclude the veneration of those who have fought and sustained the faith, like the saints. No Catholic is obliged to venerate relics, icons, or the saints themselves. This is held to be a kind of devotion not necessarily to the end of salvation, but, in spite of everything, the Catholic Church recognises the validity and recommends it to all its members and opposes any form of condemnation or despising of these practices. Pentecostals who participated in this phase affirmed their position against that of the Catholics. They excluded every kind of veneration, also because for the Pentecostals there is no distinction whatsoever between veneration and worship as there is for Catholics. For Pentecostals the one and only mediator between God and men is Jesus Christ and only He should be the object of worship and veneration. In fact, for Catholics the fellowship among the saints is that which is created while worshipping God now on earth, but at the same time, the saints on earth are joined to the saints in heaven and form a holy, catholic, and apostolic Church (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 323).

The Holy Spirit as Creator and Maker of Fellowship, Sierra Madre, California, USA, 1986

At this point of the dialogues, both Catholics and Pentecostals agreed on the fact that the Holy Spirit is the source of fellowship and the Church is united in the Holy Spirit. The differences emerged when the parties faced each other over the ways in which the Spirit creates and maintains such fellowship. For Catholics, He works through the means that He has given to the Church to sustain and realise itself, that is, the Word, the ministry, the sacraments, and charisms while for classic Pentecostals He acts convicting the hearts of each individual sinner to then bring Him, through

repentance and personal faith, to a communion with Christ and with the Church. These become believers filled with the Holy Spirit and are led to create a greater unity of faith with other Christians, because the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of unity (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 259). For the occasion, both parties agreed that the church of Christ is one, holy, catholic and apostolic church composed of all believers, but the problem arises in the conception of this single Church and the way in which to belong to it. Catholics consider the formation of other confessions and Christian denominations as moving away from the unity of the Church. The all-inclusive reply from the Pentecostals was that the birth of Christian confessions and denominations was due to the Spirit Himself who creates and maintains the unity. These are legitimate manifestations of the one and only universal Church. They agreed on the fact that the Holy Spirit creates and preserves unity only in its diversity (Culmann, 1994: 76). The unity of the Spirit shines in its diversity, while the foundation of this unity is not uniformity or homogeneity but participation in the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

#### *Communion with Eternal Life and Participation with the Trinity of God, Venice, Italy, 1987*

In this phase there were several points which the parties found themselves sharing. They recognised that the believers participate in eternal life through the communion with the Father, who is in the Son and in the Holy Spirit that is in fellowship with Christ. The believers, only when they realise and participate in this indwelling, trinitarian fellows does the promise of eternal life realise. The first step for this participation is baptism, to then arrive at the second level that is the Eucharist which is the fellowship with the body and blood of Christ through his death and resurrection. This must always be shared through a trinitarian dimension which brings the believer to realise their own salvation. In fact, both testified to the presence of the Father, the Son, and of the Holy Spirit within the life of the believer that participates in such fellowship through baptism and the Eucharist. The substantial differences come when, according to the Catholic ecclesiology, the Church can be both a sign as well as an instrument of the actions of God in this world. At the same time, it is a sign of that eschatological unity to which God calls all people. For them the Church itself is like a sacrament, in line with their sacramental conceptions as signs and instruments of the saving power of God. For Pentecostals however the Church can be an instrument of salvation, but certainly not through a sacramental concept like that of Catholics. This is an instrument of salvation because it reflects the new, eschatological people of God throughout history, announcing the Gospel to the world, and preparing the way for the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Church is an instrument of salvation provided that every one of its members opens himself to the work of the Holy Spirit (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 332).

### Baptism as Fellowship with Christ and his Church, Emmetten, Switzerland, 1998

As regarding baptism, Catholics and Pentecostals agreed that it must be preceded by faith which is a necessary precondition to its validity. Pentecostals' faith has to be lived in a personal manner and therefore a child cannot receive the communication of faith, creating a conscious response to it and to the proclamation of salvation and therefore, they do not baptise children. The Catholics, meanwhile, practise pedobaptism because even recognising the scarcity of New Testament texts that in some way implicitly testify to this practice, they prefer such a baptismal procedure because they recognise that the Christian truths, even though they do not change, respond through history to the needs of the church through the working of the Spirit, forming such truths in relation to the biblical text. The church recognises that Scripture must also correspond to the needs of the times in which it finds itself immersed. Therefore, they believe that, in time, the church has recognised the necessity of a certain change of direction, preferring pedobaptism to the baptism of adults. In fact, Catholics believe that conversion is a process that incorporates an individual in the church, that begins with his baptism, which becomes a sign of faith that introduces the child to the Christian faith and promise and expectation of the community of believers towards the child. All of this contradicts the Pentecostal idea of a church of the converted and therefore, that baptism is a public testimony and serves to strengthen the faith of all those who have already repented and have believed in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

For Catholics, baptism is the sacrament for the entry into the church, and fellowship with those saved in Christ and incorporated into his death and resurrection. For the Pentecostals it is a public demonstration of their personal identification with the work of salvation of Christ. Furthermore, for some Pentecostals it is also an initiation rite for the full acceptance into the church. As regards the unity to be reached between the two Christian confessions, baptism can be an occasion for both, considering its trinitarian foundation, which is common for all Christians, much more than their procedures. In fact, the trinitarian foundation of baptism implies a common faith in Christ as Lord and Savior in the Holy Spirit. So, whether Catholic or Pentecostal, at the moment that they recognise one another through this common presupposition, they may declare themselves in fellowship even if this is still imperfect (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 278).

### A Summary to End with a Goodbye, Rome, Italy, 1989

The participants of the third dialogue of this five-year period participated in a worship service of the two traditions. Getting to know each other was not limited only to a table for discussion but continued through direct contacts with the local parochial Catholics and with the Pentecostal

communities which were visited during this series of discussions. The informal conversations that were held during the intervals between the different sessions were also very important (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 328).

#### 4.2.3.4 Dialogue 1990 to 1997

The fourth phase of dialogue that was held from 1990 to 1997 had as its theme: “Evangelisation, proselytism, and common testimony”. This was no less demanding than the previous ones, also because this phase moved the dialogue to the relationship with society and culture” (Rossi, 2016). The confrontation did not occur purely at a theoretical level, but this time the conclusions and the agreed actions had to find some practical application. The objective was to try to come to terms with how best to fulfil the Great Commission of the Lord. For the first time, in the ambit of dialogue, practical propositions expressed in an explicit way were found that resulted in a commitment to work together for the evangelisation of all people. In fact, it arrived at an awareness that the separation was a wound for the entire body and a visible impediment for their common goal, the evangelisation of the world. Seeing that the evangelisation of the whole world was one of the main aims of the apostles, it should be embraced by all Christians. For its fulfilment, it is a necessary condition that all Christians begin to make themselves available to work towards the healing of the wounds of separation. Therefore, rethinking a more ecumenical procedure becomes one of the ways to reach the common goal, the being together to fulfil the Great Commission. Even if it is dealing with a common objective, it represents a first step in a possible shared path to reach fellowship between the different parties. This phase of dialogue rendered both churches more sensitive to find a solution for a testimony that was not so divisive, confessing in this place of dialogue, the enormous suffering that has pushed them to seek ways to overcome these divisions (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 321). In this way they arrived at a first important convergence and that is the work of evangelisation, to lead other individuals to conversion. They decided that this has to be the means to transform the cultures and reconcile the nations. Together they agreed on points to establish when evangelisation contradicts the central message of the Gospel. They agreed that this was the case whenever persons were considered as objects to be won on behalf of the denominations or the local churches. Moreover, when evangelisation has adopted exclusive evangelistic methods and strategies, which constituted communities formed by a single ethnic group or by a single social class. Even when, sometimes even involuntarily, they fed and favored a certain social segregation. Both the Catholics and Pentecostals recalled the biblical foundation for the evangelisation of all people and a greater social justice. The Holy Spirit poured out on everyone had to be realised as He who confers the power necessary for the entire process of evangelisation, as an instrument with which to bring salvation. Salvation for both

will be possible only through the proclamation of Jesus Christ. The preaching of the Gospel was understood as the necessary means of liberating humanity from sin because it is the only condition for receiving salvation (Cereti & Puglisi, 1995: 365).

For those gathered at the dialogue, the life in the Spirit gave Christians the strength to commit themselves to the evangelisation as also working towards justice in society. The transformed persons are moved by the Spirit to transform the world in the light of the coming of the Kingdom of God. In fact, the love and the commitment for one's neighbour is tied to an active commitment for social justice, as an evangelistic commitment cannot be separated from an equal commitment for the social wellbeing of one's neighbour. The Pentecostal churches considered the event of Pentecost to be the work of God per definition. This was the beginning and the inauguration of the age of the Spirit, as also that of the Church, which is what it is only in the power of the Spirit and part of the message that it announces. The announcement of the gospel makes possible a communion that actualises the love of God in the daily life of the believer and of the Church in which, thanks to it, justice and virtue are made present and operative. "The Church exists only because it is an integral part of the entire human community" (Bosch, 2000: 234).

Within the Dialogues a problem emerged which proved difficult to find an immediate solution to, and it was tied to evangelisation that is, proselytism (to try and convince Christians who belong to one confession to embrace another, because the other would be more "Christian" than the one from which you come). This springs from the fact that Pentecostals and Catholics have always had different ecclesiologies and this has, without doubt, repercussions on the ways of evangelising. If for Catholics there was a close relationship between church and baptism as an expression of a lively faith, for Pentecostals the true church was formed exclusively of the converted, that is those who have given a public testimony of a radical change in life and faith. In reality, if it was accepted that evangelisation would be the simple proclamation of Christ, the number of conflicts would be diminished or maybe even disappear completely. This is still not practical today because, together with the proclamation of the Gospel, it is not possible to avoid transmitting a particular confessional conviction (Cereti & Puglisi, 2006: 229). However, in this phase, in spite of the differences, both parties recognised their responsibility in having fallen, in the years, into such a problem and arrived at the conclusion that proselytism was an immoral activity that could assume many forms. At the end of the sessions the parties realised that proselytism remained a delicate aspect and certainly without an easy solution, but it was to be hoped that through a frank confrontation, free from prejudice, and above all through fellowship with and of the Holy Spirit, it would be possible to find a common solution. The love of

Christ constrains all Christians to act in such a way because only in this manner is it possible to testify to the gospel in a credible way.

Regarding the perspective of laying out a pathway together towards a common objective within the bilateral dialogue, two principles were drawn up that could synthesise and at the same time lay a trail along which to walk together. The first was to not do anything to which one's own conscience would object, while the other would be to do whatever one's own conscience allows as common testimony. The first sought to preserve the individual's own diversity, as a gift and not as something to overcome, as an enrichment in presenting a person with the message of Christ. The second laid down the responsibility and the question to ask on each occasion, what could be done together for the good and the advancement of the Gospel? This would bring about a progressive growth and would grant an awareness that maybe "there is far more that unites us than what divides us" (Cereti & Puglisi, 2006: 287).

*Evangelising is Taking the Mission to the World, Emmetten, Switzerland, 1990*

The Pentecostals and Catholics agreed that evangelisation as such must always be a clear proclamation of the Gospel that consists of announcing Jesus Christ as the Son of God made man, who died, and rose again. Through Him salvation is offered to every man as a gift of grace and mercy of God. Both testified that the primary work of evangelisation would be to lead individuals to conversion. Besides this, through the conversion of believers, it is also a means for God to transform nations and cultures. In this conversation, they confronted each other on the common desire, which is that the Lord could add to the Church all those who would accept the message of salvation. Unfortunately, they registered their preoccupation about some Christian evangelists who contradicted the central message of the Gospel. In fact, this happens every time that people are treated as impersonal objects to be won instead of respecting them as people, created with their own dignity and in the image of God. This happens also when the evangelistic strategies aim at forming communities made up of a single ethnic group or a particular social class, basing itself on an intentional segregation that offends the true nature of the Church of Christ. Even though the intervening parties agreed upon the essential nucleus of the proclamation of the Gospel and its announcement that God has reconciled the world to Himself through Christ, they recognised that every individual Christian confession is different in its language and its practice, even though the aim and the objective remains in common (Cereti & Puglisi, 2006: 302).

### Evangelising to Fulfil the Great Commission, Venice, Italy 1991

The parties agreed that evangelisation was necessary, above all for its biblical foundation and is a commitment for all believers towards all people and cannot be delayed or put off. They agreed on the fact that the proclamation of the Gospel was necessary to set humanity free from sin and the attainment of salvation, recognising that because everyone is lost, they are subject to the fall of man. The announcement of the Christian faith is the presentation of Jesus Christ as the way for reconciliation with the Father through the Holy Spirit. This is the heart of the dynamic process of evangelisation for the salvation of the world. This dynamism has always been upon the Church from the first day of Pentecost, when the disciples received the extraordinary power enabling them to fulfil the Great Commission that the Lord had entrusted to them before ascending to the Father. A commandment that was entrusted to the Church, but which makes the Spirit its true craftsman, from the moment that the Spirit was poured out upon all people (Macchia, 2006: 102).

### Evangelisation and the Culture of the Peoples, Rocca di Papa, Italy 1992

The Pentecostals, like the Catholics, realised the evangelisation must always take into account the context and the environment of those evangelised and must not work in a cultural void. Whoever evangelises must learn to discern how faithful the message is to the Gospel and how much it becomes only an instrument to transfer cultures or ideas. At the same time those evangelised must be made aware of their religious culture and history and discern how much of their response to the evangelists is part of the announcement of the Gospel for salvation, embodied in their culture and religious history, and how much is only an acquisition of a new culture or another form of religiosity (Newbigin, 1995: 134). The Pentecostals made known during the dialogue their conviction that the good outcome and the development of their evangelistic campaigns, above all in countries in Africa or Asia, would favor the seeking of the liberty of the Holy Spirit through the subsequent openings to the various forms of expression during worship and praise to God. This kind of awareness on the part of the Pentecostals brought them to consider this liberty of the Spirit as a principal requisite for evangelisation and the proclamation of the Gospel. This was an analysis that not all Catholics could agree with, because they took the occasion of this dialogue to reaffirm the idea that evangelisation would necessarily be directed not only to individual believers, but also to a transformation of culture and context. In fact, Catholics considered the questions relative to social change, to church-state relations, human rights, all with a perspective of a social Catholic doctrine that is both rich and complex. Every initiative in the field of evangelisation would be incomplete if it did not remember and make reference to the religious Catholic community in which it operated (Cereti & Puglisi, 2006:

300). The Pentecostals, meanwhile, did not believe that the New Testament laid a great priority on structural changes. They noted that the accent was placed on personal conversion and commitment regarding the community of faith. For them it was only by this process that social change could be realised.

*Evangelisation and Social Justice, Paris, France, 1993*

Those who had come together for this dialogue agreed on the fact that the Word of God is the foundation of evangelisation and of social justice, and that the evangelisation and love for the neighbour are intrinsically attached. Without the challenge to achieve social justice in the places evangelised, this love cannot be manifested. Even if the churches are actively evangelising, they are, however, always called to pay attention to the wellbeing of those who are before them. The life of the Holy Spirit empowers Christians with the strength to dedicate themselves to evangelism while contemporarily working for social justice and the wellbeing of others. The people who are transformed by the creative and regenerative power of the Spirit are equipped to transport the world that surrounds them to the light of the hope of the coming of the Kingdom of God (Moltmann, 1994: 186). The Catholics helped the Pentecostals to understand that their evangelising theology was limited because it focused on the individual, neglecting the battle for social justice. At the same time, Pentecostals have invited Catholics to reconsider their personal and community transformation, which promotes both individual and environmental change, with greater commitment and conviction (Cereti & Puglisi, 2006: 345).

*Evangelisation or Proselytism? A Problem Still Unresolved, Kappel am Albis, Switzerland, 1994*

The members at the dialogue who arrived at this point couldn't help referring to proselytism as an unresolved problem for all the Christian confessions. As regarding the bilateral dialogue between the Pentecostals and the Catholics, a good part of the problem was due to the different concepts each had of the church and what it means to be a part of it. This was quite evident when they had to confront each other on the relationship that exists between the church on one side and baptism as an expression of living faith on the other. In fact, conflicts spring up when the church that already exists in a certain place does not recognise the role and importance of others in all aspects of the life of the inhabitants of the region. The conflict springs from the fact that the two Christian communities are separate and have not recognised their reciprocal legitimacy as members of the unique Body of Christ. Each one has elaborated a series of prejudices towards the other and drawn judgments towards them without a reciprocal consultation. In this phase of dialogue, however both parties confessed the

gravity of this problem, above all because the conflict derived from Christian divisions is a scandal for the world and damages the cause of the proclamation of the Gospel. For both a solution would be to return to the pure preaching of the Gospel, being in agreement that evangelisation is exclusively this, announcing salvation through Jesus Christ, starting from a reciprocal respect that begins with loving one another.

The legitimate proclamation of the Gospel must be accompanied by Christian charity. The dialogue is the instrument *par excellence* by which differences can be an opportunity to learn from one another through reciprocal understanding and knowledge rather than wounding one another. Through dialogue believers can learn to respect the right to evangelise in every church, avoiding those conflicts that are an obstacle to the spread of the Gospel. In fact, the first result of this dialogue was that the parties involved declared that proselytism was an immoral activity that could assume many forms, above all, where churches are near but not in dialogue between themselves. Unfortunately proselytism remains a very delicate subject between Catholics and Pentecostals but both hoped, thanks to the Dialogues that there had been so far and that there would be in the future, and above all the work of the Holy Spirit, that in the future they will be able to overcome this challenge, and so give a credible testimony of Christ in a world always in greater need of salvation (Cereti & Puglisi, 2006: 279).

Evangelisation as an Instrument to Reach a First Unity, That of Intent, Bressanone, Italy, 1995

In this phase of the dialogue, the parties recognised that the common witness was the first step towards a visible unity even though it could still be imperfect. In addition to this, they have confessed that for a common witness there is need for an inner transformation on the part of all Christians. A conversion that would be like a reversal of the trend through a renewal of the mind and heart, capable of listening to the Word of God in a new way to return to listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit (Cereti 1992:126). The parties, however, clarified that the common testimony did not mean uniformity or even denial of their own theologies. Rather, to reach a common witness, contrary to what one thinks, it is necessary to value the peculiarities of each individual Christian confession, reaching a greater awareness of each owns identity. In fact, precisely when the parties discussed how to present a common testimony, especially in the area and function of evangelising the world, this made them even more aware that unity is possible only if it is considered as a unity in the diversity. Therefore, for the common witness to be fully realised, individual believers or churches must never be prevented from presenting and confessing their individual inheritance.

In this bilateral dialogue between Catholics and Pentecostals, they arrived at the profession of two principles that should serve as tracks along which a common testimony might run to reach together a single destination, which is the announcement of salvation for men. These principles were: We cannot do anything that our conscience forbids. This tends always to maintain consciences within a confessional awareness through which our Christian faith develops. The second: We can and must do together what our conscience permits in the field of common testimony. This raised the question of why we do not do everything together that is possible to do. This is a principle that calls churches to their responsibilities so that they can immediately make use of all of the occasions and all the goals already reached in the ecumenical field to work towards the construction of a common testimony with a view to a visible unity (Cereti & Puglisi, 2006: 332).

Bressanone, Italy, 1996 and Rome, Italy, 1997

The members of the commission for dialogue came together again at Bressanone, Italy in 1996 to compile a first draft of the report of this dialogue. The elaboration of it then followed in Rome, Italy, in June 1997, although this time they examined and gathered the observations of the participants. The final draft was concluded in November of that same year in Geneva, Switzerland. The procedure that was chosen for the occasion of this dialogue was that of beginning discussions on the basis of relations that each one of the parties presented for each of the chosen arguments. Then, each party asked the other to respond to a series of questions that were raised from the discussions on the relations. The substance of these discussions was conserved in a kind of common report that noted the areas of agreement and disagreement and the areas that require further, additional investigation. These materials, together with the draft of the conversations, constituted the basis for the final report (Cereti & Puglisi, 2006: 398).

#### 4.2.3.5 Dialogue 1998 to 2006

This phase of dialogue was characterised by the desire of both parties again to go over all the steps that had been taken since 1972. The purpose of this work was to make a summary, but with the intention of reopening all of those questions that had been brought to the ecumenical table to re-examine them and represent them in a way that was understood, also by all other Christians. In this phase, a third element was inserted for discussion which had not yet been put on the ecumenical table, that of the “patrician” perspective. It almost seemed as if this time the confrontation was with a third interlocutor, a new participant to the dialogue and this interlocutor was “the Fathers of the Church”. It was a way of proceeding in which the Catholic party was perfectly at ease, but the novelty was that the Pentecostal group did not refuse this way of proceeding, indeed, it welcomed it without

confessional and doctrinal prejudices. This allowed both parties to achieve an important goal that is, the history of Christianity is not the story of a single Christian confession, but it is a heritage for all Christians. In all Christians, present and past, there will always be found, independently of their Christian confessions, elements of continuity as well as particular points of view. However, this advance brought to light the fact that this sensitivity had not yet been realised or accepted only in part.

At the first meeting in 1998, at Bolton, Ontario, Canada, the dialogue again started to reflect on the baptism of the Holy Spirit. In the following years in Venice, 1999, the category of faith was proposed and in 2000 in Vienna, that of conversion. As also in 2001 and 2002 at Celje, Slovenia, and Sierra Madre, California, other biblical categories were considered, this time closer to the life in the church which are, experience and discipleship. Then in 2003 at Rottenburg, Germany; in 2004 at Torhout, Belgium; in 2005 at Prague, Czech Republic; and in 2006 at Bose, Italy, it was agreed to discuss and categorise the theme of redemption: not only as a theological category but above all in its existential dimension, and its relationship with the life of the believer. They discussed how redemption transforms and conditions the experience of an individual and if a redeemed life is able to actually transform the world. Besides this, it was edited in three smaller meetings held in Amsterdam, in February 2003; in Springfield, Missouri, USA, in February 2004; and at Rome in November of the same year. (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1998-2006).

Of all of the arguments that were discussed, according to those who wrote the report, the one with the most new elements and that merited a discussion on its own was that which regarded experience. It was very important that both parties recognised that experience would be a process or an event through which it was possible to arrive at a personal awareness of God. The participants agreed with the consideration that experience was not would not exhaust itself exclusively in an emotional moment, but it was a means through which *we meet God*. In Pentecostal churches believers speak of rebirth to signify the experience, profound and continuous. God comes to the believer as such to his very being through varied experiences from which they attempt to discern the divine will and from this, how they can grow in our relationship with Him (Moltmann, 1998: 37). The experience is not finished in the first moment, but it is an active part also in the formation of discipleship that includes the daily process of experiencing Christ in the service of God and in serving one's neighbor. Also, conversion, for both parties began with an experience with God, but is manifested through ways that determine the confessional choice. In fact, for Pentecostals, conversion results in an almost immediate and sudden break from the old life; a transforming work of the Holy Spirit. This would mean that for the convert there would be a clear *before* and *after* so that many Pentecostal believers

can pinpoint a moment in time and space in which the experience with God, through the Spirit, would have brought about a true and real conversion, almost as though an unexpected change of gear. For Catholics however, conversion to Christ is an incorporation into the Church. It is a process that should start in a person's heart which is attracted to God in many ways. Whoever is seeking God is received, with the assumption that it is the Spirit that creates a thirst for salvation that could be satisfied only with the water of eternal life. (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1998-2006).

In the course of the dialogue, the parties realised that they had, on this point, many more things in common than what they were expecting and such a category, being not only theological, brought both parties to appreciate one another. Catholics and Pentecostals recognised that the thirst for salvation was a work of the Holy Spirit and not a human answer and that this level of experience continued in every activity and in the very being of the believer.

Reflecting on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit in an Ecumenical Manner, Bolten, Ontario, Canada, 1998

In this phase, both parties agreed almost immediately on the importance of the Holy Spirit in the entire history of salvation and is a constant and unceasing presence in the Church of Christ through grace, signs, and charisms. Both Christian traditions identified two distinct moments for receiving the Holy Spirit. For the classic Pentecostals, these moments are, conversion and baptism in or with the Holy Spirit. The Catholics instead, recognised the work of the Spirit in the sacrament of baptism and in that of confirmation. Beyond these first differences, the parties agreed that the baptism in the Holy Spirit should not be a problem or cause of divisions for the true Church, rather, it should be able to form a bridge, giving a base and support that could guarantee for all Christians a greater understanding of the spiritual and charismatic dimensions that binds them, and is a foundation for fellowship. In fact, the Spirit as part of the reality of the community of Christ, was a gift for the Church. In this section, there was a sustained effort from both parties to explore the Scriptures and the patristic literature in a common search for a greater illumination on the baptism in the Holy Spirit. This serious research was the first great success of these bilateral dialogues. (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1998-2006).

Furthermore, on this argument, there was also a comparison between several patristic texts; these demonstrated in a very clear manner the great consideration that the Fathers of the Church had for the work of the Spirit and for his work of transformation and of perfection. Paradigmatically it was the contribution of Cyril of Jerusalem (315 to 386) that defined baptism in the Spirit as a work for perfecting or rather completing that followed the conversion of a Christian. He said that the

baptism of the Spirit was as when one is dunked into water and is baptised. As water surrounds the entire body of the neophyte, in the same way the Holy Spirit through the outpouring wraps around the believer; immersed in the Spirit and the Spirit manifests in him. It is an ancient interpretation but is found within the classic Pentecostal churches and amongst many convinced Catholic sustainers.

The Catholic group recognised that before the charismatic movement sprang up within their own church, there had not been a careful reflection on the work of the Spirit and a correct theology on the charismas and their implications. A void that could be calmed, even if not fully, above all thanks to, and through, the development of the charismatic renewal but also thanks to the pentecostal movements, which from outside stimulated and inspired the birth of the renewal because they were both children of the Spirit. Even if they hold themselves back because of the differences, the baptism in the Spirit, however, became a point for the two churches in which to confront each other and at the same time was a place in which to meet. The substantial differences remain those that are always tied to the model of church upon which the experience of the Spirit falls. The Catholic model is that of a sacramental church and therefore, the baptism of the Spirit will always be considered as though imparted through the celebration of the sacraments, in particular that of confirmation. Both baptism and confirmation mark an indelible spiritual sign that brings the Catholic to a new life and grace, and the power of the Holy Spirit to grow in holiness and commitment in the mission with all of the gifts that the Spirit imparts. For Pentecostals, rather, which finds itself as a church that is certainly not sacramental but is tied directly to the narration of the Gospel, the baptism in the Spirit will always be an experience distinct from that of conversion that marks and at the same time empowers the believer for the testimony of the Gospel in its own context and to fulfil the Great Commission.

#### The Faith That Renders Believers “One” in Christ, Venice, Italy 1989

The Pentecostals and Catholics agreed that becoming a Christian and living for Christ was understandable only by faith; the same that introduces and leads the individual to choose to be baptised independently of the rite. For both, becoming a Christian implies first baptism, then receiving the Spirit, and finally to receive the Eucharist or sharing the Lord’s Supper as essential parts of the process. All of this has no sense unless it is lived as an act or testimony of a living faith pre-existing in the heart of whoever takes part. The same is true for the Christian progress, and in fact, for both, only faith that gives birth to the desire to begin the Christian walk, is the same that leads to the progress of the believer who has undertaken the path of the Spirit. To live in the footsteps of Christ is a continual progress towards heaven and is always rendered such through faith of and in Christ through the power of the Spirit. All of the New Testament agrees that the Church always acts

through two actions; the first is the proclamation of the Gospel, and the second is that of discipleship and formation. Both ministries always have the support of faith, which comes about when the announcement is accepted and it is always the faith that then has in itself the seed that would grow into a new life in Christ.

In this phase, differences between Catholics and Pentecostals were recognised above all in the interpretation of Scripture. The Catholics set out the interpretation of each single text in the context of its origins and its consequent understanding within the Christian tradition through the course of the centuries. The official teaching of the bishops in apostolic succession exercised a decisive role in discerning the correct interpretation of Scripture for the Pentecostals the Bible is illuminated by the Holy Spirit and is the sole authoritative source that acts as a guide for faith and practical Christianity. In spite of these differences, both parties recognised that it is always faith of and in Christ that renders the Word preached, both in the believer and for the life of the church, as a living seed and health for the salvation and the growth of whoever believes. (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1998 - 2006).

#### *Conversion and a New Life in Christ, Vienna, Austria, 2000*

Both the Catholics and Pentecostals agreed during the dialogue that conversion was necessary for salvation in Christ and needed to be followed by a true and real discipleship. At the same time, they realised that within their own particular Christian tradition there was a diversity of approach between speaking of and presenting conversion to the world. The main principle for the discussion was once again whether conversion was an event as the Pentecostals believe, or rather a series of events and the result of a process, as Catholics believe. Catholics, for their concept of a sacramental church, believe that conversion must be seen from within a wider context that begins with a process of Christian initiation. This process includes some substantial elements; the proclamation of the Gospel, the acceptance of the Gospel, the profession of faith, baptism in water, the effusion of the Holy Spirit, and the admission into Eucharistic communion. Without forgetting that, Catholics link baptism with the Holy Spirit to the sacrament of confirmation. Catholics affirm that even this confirmation sacrament is a function of conversion which is in itself a profound existential change in the life of the believer. For Catholics water baptism is the door for incorporation into Christ and in the church and therefore, inserts a person on a path of the various steps through the other sacraments, that will bring the individual, only at the end, to be converted. Differently Pentecostals understand conversion as a new orientation of the person and his priorities, models and attitudes that are manifested in the new way of believing and practicing the Gospel. In Pentecostals, conversion is a

process that includes the proclamation of the Word, acceptance of the Gospel, profession of faith which follows repentance, abandoning sin and turning towards God, and the receiving of the Holy Spirit. After this there is immediately the incorporation of the individual into the Christian community. The majority of Pentecostals understand conversion as an experience distinct from that of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Instead, baptism in water is only the testimony of an event and not the moment that a Christian life begins, because conversion has already occurred and precedes the rite of baptism. In this phase, both parties took note of these differences regarding conversion and did not consider them as free interpretations on the part of the two Christian confessions, but as different perspectives seen in the light of the Bible. In fact, it presents various perspectives on the argument and therefore are open to a plurality of interpretations and permits every Christian confession to choose which preference is closer to its own experience of faith and above all, the historic path that it has followed. This, however, did not exclude the Catholics and Pentecostals from very closely sharing aspects and characteristics regarding conversion, similar perspectives that can be found within Scripture. More than anything else, they shared the view that conversion is always a personal response to God's initiative and implies a mysterious interaction between man and the divine. In this phase of the dialogue a moment was taken to share, and a possibility given to understand the baptismal rite as a Christian initiation but only through RCIA. This is the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults drawn from Biblical and patristic sources and adopted by the Catholic Church in 1972. This offers an opportunity for an agreed expression of understanding and practical theology. In fact, within the text of the RCIA it is possible to discern several elements of Christian conversion which finds agreement between Catholics and Pentecostals. More than anything else, there was agreement when the text presented the baptismal rite as an immersion and in identification with the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ. The hope of the Pentecostals was that the RCIA, because of its common component, could be adopted by the Catholics on a much greater scale. However, both identified a valid resource in the RCIA to be able to construct an even more profitable and open dialogue for the pastoral and theological questions on baptism and the procedure for conversion. (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1998-2006).

Experience of and with Christ, Celje, Slovenia, 2001

At this point of the dialogue the parties examined a fundamental biblical category, that of the religious experience. Pentecostals and Catholics shared many important aspects of spiritual experiences including the presence and the power of the Spirit as well as the discipline of contemplation and when it becomes a type of spiritual mysticism. They shared the work of the Spirit in the believer; when it touches the heart and the mind, the sentiments and the will of the person in a

way that the believer meets a renewed awareness of himself and the Lord. This is the authentic experience of God, a relationship that creates and makes itself part of whoever receives it, and that is analogous to the internal movements of the Trinity itself. However, both parties did not consider the experience as an end in itself but rather a means through which to meet God. He comes to us in our “moment” through different experiences of Himself, and the believer tries to discern from it his divine will and how they can grow in their union with God. In fact, discipleship includes the daily process of experiencing Christ in service to God and to the neighbor. Both Catholics and Pentecostals appreciated the experiential dimension of faith found in the writings of the Church Fathers. The Catholics appreciated the continuity of the ecclesiastical order, of the sacramental life, and the conferring of grace of the Holy Spirit through baptism. The Pentecostals, in particular, appreciated the charismatic dimension that could be noted in the patristic writings; above all, the liberty and the sovereignty of the Spirit testified to by many ancient texts of the Church. The first differences became evident when the experience of God was interpreted within the event of conversion for the Pentecostals; or the path of conversion for the Catholics. For Pentecostals, an experience with God is fundamental for the goals of conversion because it is the sparking off of the main event which then determines a decisive break with the past and which is determined by the Holy Spirit. For these there should be a clear *before* and *after* in the story of the converted. Many Pentecostal believers believe that they can pinpoint the moment in which and where the event of conversion began while in the Catholic perspective, conversion is the incorporation of one into its Church, and the experience is nothing other than the process that begins in the heart of the person that is attracted to God in many ways. The individual becomes a believer because the Holy Spirit creates a thirst for salvation that is satisfied in accepting the Christian faith, which is then formalised when he becomes part of the catechumen. Again, the Pentecostals openly speak of the role that experience has in the Christian life. It is not rare to hear particular testimonies of a divine manifestation that occur during their meetings and also outside. Sometimes these kinds of experiences can lead to periods of profound reverence and reflection, times in which a *holy silence* could fall upon them while God comes amongst them. On other occasions, they can shout or cry or dance or sing and speak in a language different from their own. These however, are not always aware that their response depends upon the presence of God in their midst. The Catholic party recognised, in the dialogue, that in the history of the Church, the religious experience has always been loved, as was testified to by the Fathers. The various movements that manifested, and still manifest, a certain vitality of the Spirit have generally been received favorably and encouraged as expressions of the vitality of the life of the Spirit. At the same time, however, because of their potential to set alight both authentic experiences of the grace of God and those that are not, the Catholic church has always tried to use prudence and a sound discernment

towards them, to separate the authentic new movements from the popular devotions. The last decades have seen a renewed emphasis on the importance of experience within the Catholic theology that has contributed to the birth of the Vatican II. (1962 to 1965) In synthesis, in the course of dialogue the parties realised that they had much more in common in their understanding of experience as an integral part of the spiritual life than they would have expected. This meant that they would receive a reciprocal appreciation of how the life of the Spirit is lived within the emotive and personal sphere in their own churches. Catholics and Pentecostals recognised that the thirst for salvation and, at the same time, a work of the Spirit is also a human response. This level of experience continues even after conversion in different areas such as family, work, civil life, and the promotion of justice and peace in society. (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1998 - 2006).

*To Be Disciples of Christ, To Be in Christ, Sierra Madre, California, USA, 2002*

Discipleship and Christian formation are correlated terms and involve all Christians, independent of their confession. This principle finds agreement in both parties that are always working to such an end, even if with particular methodologies and programmes, but in substance they all have the aim of forming the believer as a follower of Christ. In fact, discipleship as is also formation, are tightly connected to faith, conversion and the Christian experience. In these phases of dialogue, both recognised that formation or discipleship was a continual process that embraced the entire life of the believer. It has its beginnings as soon as there is contact with Christian faith and is completed with the growing experience of conversion and regeneration. Every person that recognises himself in the Christian faith as a believer is called to live a maturity that is fulfilled both within the Christian community and outside, finding in this the approval of the Holy Spirit. As has been stated during the phases of dialogue, many aspects of the Christian formation have been clarified even if they are practised in different ways in the churches, but the substance is the push that moves every formative activity within the community and is always the same, that is, that of learning and recounting how to follow Jesus. The experience of this dialogue has been useful in helping all Christians that are involved in the formation and discipleship of believers to recognise the gifts and the grace of God in all the Christian traditions because in each one of them there is a distinctive formation in the Word of God. In fact, preaching, teaching, Bible study, doctrinal instruction or catechism, and pastoral exhortation are all ways in which God speaks through his Word. Certainly, the Pentecostal churches with respect to the Catholics, have a long tradition of Bible study whether communal or personal, but it is necessary to remember that for the Catholics, Vatican II was significant in that it encouraged all the members of its own church to study Scripture at every level. The publication of Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of

the Church, demonstrated the worry and the commitment from them to make known to their members their own faith and the Word of God so that the faith becomes alive, because it is lived through individual, daily life. So, Catholics and Pentecostals in this dialogue agreed that formation and discipleship are indispensable for a lively, personal relationship with the living God and this is the reason and the stimulus that should move Christians towards such a necessity and a commitment. (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 1998 - 2006).

Full Report of the Sessions; Rottenburg, Germany, 2003, Torhout, Belgium, 2004, Czech Republic, 2005, and Bose, Italy, 2006

In this fifth phase of dialogues the Pentecostals and Catholics were able to appreciate the Scripture together, the testimony from the patristic sources of the Gospel, and the ways in which the Gospel teaches about conversion, faith, discipleship, and the experience of receiving the Holy Spirit. During this fifth phase, there was a parallel noted between how the Holy Spirit acted between both communities of faith during all of the twentieth century. In fact, the very moment the Pentecostals attributed the birth of the experience of and with the Spirit in Topeka, Kansas, in January 1901, in Rome, Pope Leon XIII entrusted the new century to the Holy Spirit. For Pentecostals, the outpouring of the Spirit at Azusa Street (Los Angeles 1906) marked a significant beginning to the movement that then spread through the entire world, at the same time within the Catholic church evident signs of the Spirit emerged through various movements from within, which then developed through the twentieth century moving and renewing the fundamental aspects of Christian faith and life. The climax of this outpouring of the Spirit within the Catholic church would be the Vatican II, which for all Catholics was inspired and produced by the Holy Spirit. This led everyone to reflect on the fact that Pentecostals and Catholics, even if they laid emphasis on different aspects of what it meant to be Christian, it is undeniable that in substance each of them promotes the Christian life to the glory of God. To reach this awareness could help both parties overcome the misunderstandings and stereotypes that could develop towards one another. This phase could be of help to many who would want to continue to confront each other to share the common sentiment of Christ, that of being brothers and sisters.

#### 4.2.3.6 Dialogue 2011 to 2016

This was the sixth phase of bilateral dialogue between Catholics and a few classic Pentecostal churches. It was characterised by its concentration on reflections on all the charisms and several specific “gifts” such as prophecy, discernment, and healing. The dialogue sponsored by the Catholic Church, was through the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, while from the Pentecostal section some were nominated by their communities as representatives, while others took

part having only the support of their local churches as participants in the dialogue. The first meeting was held in Rome, 2011, with a panorama of interpretation of charisms, the work and the power of the Holy Spirit for the edification of the Church, and as a power for the missions. At Helsinki in 2012, the argument was about the gift of discernment and after that in Baltimore in 2013, their attention was concentrated on the charisma of healing. In 2014, at Sierra Madre, California, USA, the convened parties confronted the charism of prophecy, and finally in 2015, they returned to Rome to summarise their progress and present a shared reflection on the charisms in theology, in pastoral and spiritual dimensions. (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 2011-2015). This phase was very significant and really acted as a watershed. During this phase of dialogue, the ancient doctrinal discussions were finally abandoned because they were now antiquated and even abandoned by the churches themselves and went on to face those matters that concerned the real life of the believer and those of the individual communities. This bilateral dialogue brought out elements that both Catholics and Pentecostals could affirm together, as well as clarify the challenges and differences they would have to affront. The first truly important goal was reached because Catholics recognised that the Pentecostals had revived a greater sensitivity towards the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the exercise of spiritual gifts. The Pentecostals, in their turn, confessed that the effusion of the Holy Spirit was not limited to the Pentecostal churches, but considered the charisms as a gift for the entire Christian community. Both Catholics and Pentecostals recognised that the contemporary effusion of the Holy Spirit was a grace for the whole Body of Christ and had exceeded every expectation, even if both recognised that in all ages and cultures the Holy Spirit had always equipped Christians with charisms to testify to the Gospel and constitute the Church. Beside this, they rejected the idea that the gifts of the Spirit had ceased after the apostolic age or in any other point in history. (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 2011-2015). From these five years of reflections, it emerged that if the unity of the Church was the work of the Holy Spirit, then the charisms as his free gifts were destined to be the instruments that He Himself would use for the restoration and the formation of that unity so desired and sought for. The document that was produced in that phase of dialogue was the first bilateral dialogue in which the charisms were examined in depth by the two churches through an ecumenical perspective.

The pentecostal movement had the great merit of bringing the twentieth century to a renewed appreciation of the gifts of the Spirit that in the past had been ignored or even excluded from the life of the churches. Of all the gifts, the one that stands out is prophecy. The movement brought to light that this, amongst all the charisms, is for the equipping of the true Church of Christ. Prophecy has always been an extraordinary event. It has been defined as a miracle in verbal form, because it descends directly from God, an extraordinary work because God speaks with human words to the

minds and the spirits of the gathered people. Thanks to the Pentecostal movement, Christianity has just begun to appreciate the powerful gift of prophecy. In fact, it is no wonder if the Apostle Paul wrote that we should seek for it above all. “We should not seek for this gift for personal glory, but so the voice of God should be heard and his people edified.” (Williams, 2009: 219). Maybe the problem in the exercising of this charism has always been in discerning the veracity and the paternity of the prophecy, but this should not impede its exercise. Pentecostals and Catholics were united in affirming that Christ continues to heal, even today, in extraordinary ways. The entire work of Christ in salvation is a work of healing because He heals humanity of all the spiritual and physical fractures caused by sin. Healing was part of the New Testament account that is used both for conversion and salvation. As happened in the New Testament world, many Pentecostals and Catholics connected the fight against the powers of evil with the seeking of healing for the body and mind, considering both as a form of liberation. In fact, Christians that approach the healing ministry were not short of scriptural passages for their inspiration (Jenkins, 2008:124). Catholics, beyond this, recognised healing through the intercession of the saints, above all, through Maria, the mother of the Lord. They recognised healing also through pilgrimages to sanctuaries and, thanks to the sacraments especially that of the Eucharist. Some Pentecostals believed that healing was available through the Lord’s Supper and in the practice of anointing persons with oil. (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, 2011-2015). Other Pentecostals used some ceremonies for healing which could represent an attempt to reconstruct ancient Hebrew rituals. These rites are inspired, more often than not, from biblical texts and in particular, some Old Testament accounts. This practice would find its place in a particular dimension in the worship service as if it was a particular exegesis of the text written and preached, an attempt to give meaning, not only theoretically, but above all experiential to a text chosen with this objective. Still others used objects that had been previously anointed upon which to pray for the healing of the sick. Many times objects are chosen that would refer to the biblical accounts, especially those used by the prophets to heal the protagonists of these narrations. (Jenkins, 2008:139). This did not exclude, however, that both parties recognised that God heals also through the ordinary work of doctors. The pastoral care of the sick, including sanitary assistance and counseling, has always been held as an important part of the ministry of the Church.

Finally, the last of the charisms of the Spirit to be discussed was the discernment of spirits. Both Catholics and Pentecostals noted this particular gift of discernment as the source of spiritual manifestations, almost a diagnostic gift because it could discern if the manifestation came from the Holy Spirit or simply from something else. Discernment is made possible through the Holy Spirit and involves the entire variety of spiritual powers present in a given situation and environment. Through the actions of the Spirit, the believer is rendered able to separate and understand a certain

phenomenology or certain manifestations in words or actions recognising their nature and substance (Arrington, 2014: 92). Both Catholics and Pentecostals confessed to their shortcomings in the exercise of this gift. The Catholics, foreseeing the incapacity and danger in dealing with some of the extraordinary manifestations, had tried to understand this particular charism as though it had a marginal function. They established doctrinal confines and procedures beyond which what happened would be judged beyond their own sphere and consequently, beyond the Spirit. Meanwhile the Pentecostals had recognised that in their story they had practised discernment, but without enough effort towards an in-depth theological reflection. They declared that very often the exercise of discernment in their churches had not always demonstrated a steady trustworthiness.

#### 4.2.4 Conclusions to paragraph 4.2

In the course of the dialogues, the participants arrived at the understanding that in their experience of spiritual life, they had much more in common than what they expected, compared to a few differences that appeared in ecclesiastical procedure. The sharing of a particular spirituality as an experience through the Spirit with prayer and praise, brought the churches to deeply appreciate their common Christian faith. This awareness of a spiritual experience that was common to both churches includes both the affective and aesthetic dimensions. Besides this, what moves a person through conversion to become a Christian, whether for Catholics, or for Pentecostals, is the thirst for salvation and at the same time the human response to the spiritual world. This level of experience that leads to conversion also continues afterwards in different areas such as family life, work, civil life, and the promotion of righteousness in society. Without doubt, the differences between Pentecostals and Catholics are still quite evident, especially regarding the understanding of the charismatic manifestations such as *glossolalia* among others. Other substantial differences emerged regarding sacramental devotions and their celebrations, so much so that the ecclesiastical procedures and the ecclesiological interpretations can seem to be worlds apart. Beyond the differences, the dialogues brought to light a truth that cannot be ignored in following an ecumenical path, which is that the charismatic experiences have been present also in the course of their own histories, even the Catholic history while the Pentecostals recognise the authenticity of the actions of the Spirit even amongst the Catholics. In conclusion, the dialogues brought both churches a little closer together because they discovered that listening to one another and testifying of the faith, hope, and reciprocal love, they are more deeply attracted to Christ. It is hoped that through the power of the Spirit the reciprocal recognition can empower the communion of the Catholics and the Pentecostals and strengthen their common testimony to the world (Cecil, 2010: 86-87). The dialogues took place in a true and valid path of comparison. Sometimes the paths seem to be quite rugged, other times steep climbs, but also

roads that have been cleared and levelled. In the first dialogues that took place in 1972 to 1976, the desire of the Catholics to immediately get to know the interlocutors was seen, allowing them to understand who they were speaking with and what their real intentions were. In fact, the themes were all those that characterised the Pentecostal church, such as the baptism of or with the Holy Spirit, or the difference between the Catholic mass and the Pentecostal worship service, or the particular spirituality of the Pentecostals.

The second section of this path from 1977 to 1982 finds the Pentecostals this time listening to the Catholics. In these meetings are found the themes that rather characterise the Catholic church, such as Marian worship and the place of tradition and traditions within Christianity. In the third section of dialogues, which took place in 1985 to 1989, the participants debated themes on mutual fellowship. After the two churches had begun to get to know each other, there was finally a series of meetings to lay the common bases for a more serene and shared path forward. In the series of meetings from 1990 to 1997, the path was much more arduous because it was a confrontation on evangelisation and the methods of evangelising. Here there were many difficulties, above all in the clarification of the difference between proselytism and evangelisation, given that the Pentecostal churches are often accused of proselytism. In reply, the Pentecostals reproved the Catholics that behind their accusations of proselytism, there was the design of the Catholics to impede the Pentecostals in the preaching of the Gospel. Another painful note was the social question. The Catholics noted that the Pentecostals have little impact in the context in which they find themselves and work in, occupying themselves too much in the preaching and too little in the lives of the persons involved. Vice versa, the Pentecostals reproved the historical churches of dedicating themselves too much to social activities, neglecting the announcement of the Gospel. At this point, the discussion arrives at the penultimate section between 1999 and 2006 where their positions became smoother and in the light of the past dialogues, the two churches went over the main themes and issues of their meetings, but with the experience that both parties had accumulated during the years spent speaking to one another. Finally, the last section was dedicated entirely to the charisms and to some specific gifts that are moving within the Church.

## 4.3 International dialogues between classical Pentecostals and other evangelical churches

### 4.3.1 Introduction.

This phase of meetings between Pentecostals, Reformed (AMCR), and Lutherans were all concentrated on the particular doctrines on the Holy Spirit, above all, seeking to understand the Pentecostal proposition compared firstly to the Reformed perspective and then to the Lutheran. Some points of view followed the sequence of dialogues and were discussed in depth. Considering the starting points, the researcher believes that the dialogues were an important step towards fellowship between the evangelical churches, including above all, the Pentecostal churches. In fact, in the beginning when the first groups of Pentecostals began springing up, there was a single, unambiguous voice from both the Reformed and Lutheran churches by their mainly conservative, evangelical scholars that argued strongly against the Pentecostal claims of having received the gift of the Spirit through the sign of tongues, without giving the Pentecostals an opportunity to reply. The Calvinist and Lutheran churches were always more critical and sharper to the point of accusing Pentecostals of heresy and even of being inspired by the devil. In the following years, with the softening of their positions and thanks to a greater opening on the part of the historic churches, the discussions became less polemic and more open to a true comparison between the churches, especially through theological categories. So, this also became possible because Pentecostals began to develop an academic theological base for preparation and formation. The principal thesis of the historical churches remains bound to the fact that the gift of the Spirit is mainly an experience tied to conversion, against which the Pentecostals continue to affirm that it is a distinct experience following conversion. For Pentecostals, the baptism in or with the Holy Spirit is an experience that Christians should be encouraged to seek (Anderson, 2014: 184).

The international dialogues between the representatives of the AMCR and some classical Pentecostal churches and leaders, touched the relationship between the Word and the Spirit and between the world and the church. Through these, the churches identified areas of agreement but also differences in their history and theological convictions. The dialogues went a long way towards dissipating the stereotypes and correcting misunderstandings. In fact, bit by bit as the dialogues progressed, both the Pentecostal and the Reformed representatives could recognise in one another the fullness of the faith and apostolic testimony. In spite of this, the partners in dialogue recognised that apart from the good relationships that had been formed and the fellowship established between the

participants, there still existed tensions between the Pentecostal and Reformed communities in many parts of the world (Vondey, 2010: 217-218).

As for the preceding chapter, also in this one, the researcher will try to present the two dialogues with the Reformed and Lutherans so that the synthesis of what was said could be presented by the individual perspectives of the researcher and an encouragement to those who read it, not only as an informative base, but above all, to encourage and cultivate an ecumenical passion, especially within the individual communities, and not only those given to the work.

#### 4.3.2 Some preliminary remarks.

The dialogue between the historical churches and the Pentecostals, in spite of their confessional closeness, had no small difficulty in finding meeting points because of the ecclesiastical make-up of the invited churches. To identify the Lutheran partner was simple, because it was possible to refer to the member churches of the “Worldwide Lutheran Federation” (LWF), that is the communion of all those churches with the same tradition and that confess the Holy Scriptures as the only fountain and norm of their doctrine, life, and service thus, having as an interlocutor an organisation that groups together the greater part of the entire denomination, they were able to involve a small group as their representatives. As regards the Reformed churches, even though they have a similar structure as the Lutheran’s at a worldwide level that is, The Worldwide Alliance of the Reformed Churches (WARC), it was much more difficult, because the WARC has a less rigid structure than the Lutheran’s and therefore a greater diversity. Then, to reach the Pentecostal part through a group of their representatives, noting by now all of the difficulties involved in identifying them, was no small task. In fact, it is a vast movement, growing rapidly and evolving continually and is made up of many independent congregations. Therefore, to have reference points in a universe so diverse and vast, for the Pentecostal delegation, those churches who had at least a partially similar structure to be considered communion of churches were invited to the dialogue. Amongst those there were also individual denominations but those who had an umbrella structure, such as the “Pentecostal World Fellowship” were to be preferred. This is a communion of Pentecostal churches who in spite of some differences among the member churches, did however for the occasion, fully recognise their reciprocal partnership in almost all the aspects of the Pentecostal ministry. It was important for a common goal that those Pentecostals involved looked upon the Scriptures as the standard source for all of their faith and life and accepted the historic teachings of the Church. This provided the common base upon which to construct a dialogue and to get to know one another (Machia, 2010: 247).

The dialogue between the Reformed and the Pentecostals was without doubt that which stimulated greater reciprocal knowledge of the parts involved, at least amongst those who were participating. The first substantial difference between these, and that with the Catholics, was that the dialogue was between churches of a like Christian confession or at least so it would seem. Therefore, the differences, rather than being of a substantial nature, as was the case between the Catholics and Pentecostals, were more of a theological interpretation, or rather, of shades and accents, but certainly not in the substance of their actual faith. This, although at first sight might seem that the dialogue would be quicker and less difficult, in reality was not so. The greatest difficulty of this dialogue was its nature. In fact, as Pentecostals the Reformed do not have a pyramidal structure such as that of the Catholics, so the dialogue was certainly not amongst all of the Reformed, not even a representation of the position of them all whether on one side or the other. As for the Pentecostals so for the Reformed, only a part of them came to the dialogue. This meant that both the reception and the progress of the dialogue was not easy. In fact, that which was established and agreed while certainly valid for those who participated, did not find the same consensus and participation amongst all of the Reformed as neither amongst all the Pentecostals. This dialogue may then be defined as an exercise undertaken only by a few, that is, only those who decided to sit around a common table. These could be considered as pioneers, as the first to break the ice, to cut away through many difficulties and reciprocal miscomprehensions. These felt a responsibility to be involved and interested in the questions of an increasing number of churches between the Reformed and Pentecostals. Unfortunately, the effort did not give the hoped-for results because the problem is, as always, strongly ecclesiastical. In fact, for both, ecclesiology is very simple and calls for a structure that guarantees the service and the communion but gives very little attention to the ecclesiological forms and hierarchy. In fact, both of them were without an office which would have been able to form a common and representative front to reach the shared goals. The parties that came together always had an ecclesiology that tended to include everybody around a central fulcrum, which is the preaching of the Word of God. Unfortunately, it remains without any reference or ecclesiastical limitations or ministry, as happens with the Catholic Church and in some respects also the Eastern church that guarantees and represents everyone. For the Pentecostals the difficulties were greater, because, along with doctrinal divisions, are also ecclesiological structures which are often competing amongst themselves. This gives the reader an idea of the dynamic and pluralistic nature of Pentecostals which is an integral part of its own structure. In the Pentecostal history outreaching has proved to be a powerful instrument and this has meant that even the most traumatic divisions within the movement became an instrument and an important function in the wider strategy of Pentecostalism. The scheme has always been what could be defined as a cutting. As happens to flowers, when a part of the old

plant is transplanted into a new flower pot it makes two plants. Likewise, Pentecostalism in many parts of the world has developed following a similar process; groups of believers have left their own original church to establish another. It seems absurd, almost paradoxical, that the strong points of Pentecostalism, that is its attitude towards polarisation and fragmentation, division and recomposition is a problem and creates many difficulties for the aims and the ecumenical life of the movement (Naso, 2013: 55).

The dialogue developed through two periods. The first covers an arc of time that sees the churches confronting one another between 1996 and 2000, while a second took place between 2001 and 2011. Everything was preceded by a long phase of preparations which began already in 1993 when Milan Opocensky, General Secretary of the MRC and Cecil Robeck Jr., teacher of the history of the church and ecumenism at the Fuller Theological Seminary and Pentecostal minister, started exchanging letters for two entire years, because they believed that it might be possible to organise this kind of dialogue. In 1995, Dr Opocensky was encouraged by the WARC to have an explorative meeting with the Pentecostals. The first explorative committee met at Mattersey Hall in Mattersey, England, on the 8th and 9th of July. The committee recognised that the dialogue would be very useful for both parties, above all in regard to the desired objectives and one in particular, to be united as disciples of Christ. For the occasion the committee established three objectives to begin the dialogue: to increase the knowledge and respect between the Reformed and Pentecostal churches, establish ways to identify areas of agreement and disagreement, and a convergence at a theological level so that the parties could come out stronger. The last point was that of exploring the various possibilities of reaching a common testimony to increase the collaboration between the churches. As has been stated, as there was no organisation or international body such as the WARC or as the World Lutheran Federation amongst the Pentecostals, the very fact of organising a dialogue with a party so little organised and so diverse was no small task (Cereti & Puglisi, 2006: 289).

### 4.3.3 Pentecostals and the Reformed Church

#### 4.3.3.1 Dialogue 1996 to 2000

The first meeting was held in Torre Pellice, Italy on May 20, 1996 and the theme was: “Modern Spirituality and Challenges”. The second was held in Chicago, Illinois, USA from May 11-15, 1997 and the theme of the meeting was “The Role and Place of the Holy Spirit in the Church”. The third meeting was held at Kappel-am-Albis, Switzerland from May 14-19, 1998, and the theme was “The Holy Spirit and the Mission in an Eschatological Perspective”. The fourth meeting was held at

Seoul, South Korea from May 14-20, 1999, and the theme was “The Holy Spirit, the Gifts, and the Kingdom of God.” The fifth and final meeting of this first phase of bilateral dialogue between the Reformed and the Pentecostals was held in Sao Paulo, Brazil from May 20-24, 2000, with the objective of summarising and elaborating on the four preceding years (Cereti & Puglisi, 2006: 309).

From what we can learn from the arguments dealt with, the Holy Spirit was at the heart of every meeting. The argument of and around the Holy Spirit became a true ecumenical theme, the communal table about which to discuss a common relationship. The dialogue was very important for both parties, at least for those who officially participated. For the Reformed Churches, the dialogue was an occasion to rediscover a theology of the Spirit through a pneumatology that for many centuries, in their churches had too often occupied the role of Cinderella. The Reformed rediscovered that the Holy Spirit was still in action and in fact, if one attempted to forget or to shelve Him, his voice and his actions became even stronger. The Reformed Churches realised that the inherent and transforming power of the Christian faith did not begin, and follow on, if not through the Holy Spirit, *who is now upon the earth and works the work of Christ who is with the Father*. The Pentecostal churches meanwhile, thanks to the dialogue, found a balance in that the declaration and announcement of the gospel with Pentecostal emphasis would not be only purely spiritual, or a single event that exhausts itself only in an initial experience, but that the Pentecostal proposition would be able to transform not only the individual through the power of the Spirit, but also the society and the world, even without ever losing the eschatological perspective, and the Christian awaiting, which is typical of Pentecostalism and of all the revival movements. For both parties, the individual came to Christ, who is the Baptiser in the Spirit; this was a description of Christ in all four Gospels. The believer reaches Christ and is immersed by Him in the river of the Holy Spirit. Only Christ can baptise in the Spirit according to the Holy biblical texts and is exactly what happens to the candidates for baptism in water; as they are surrounded by water, so also in the baptism of the Spirit one is immersed in the enveloping experience of the Spirit of God. In this there is a sense of the encompassing power and presence of the Holy Spirit (Kay, 2009: 87).

The Bible is essential for the faith and the life of the Reformed Church. This occupies a central position in the reformed experience and service while, for the Pentecostals, the divine truth can be given through songs, testimonies, the preaching, or through spiritual gifts. All of these avenues, however, lead back to the Scriptures. These consider the biblical text as a testimony of God, his voice that speaks through the centuries, and meeting with the Scriptures is a meeting with the living God. However, both agree that all of Scripture is the Word of God and it is totally valid for faith and conduct. Through the entire dialogue the Bible was the basis for every doctrinal declaration and for

their living in the Spirit. In fact, “The point of view of Pentecostals on the Scriptures is permeated by their experience of the Holy Spirit” (Arrington, 2014: 296). For the Pentecostals it would have been an error to concentrate their attention exclusively on the extraordinary charisma because, those that are manifested through the daily life of the church, such as the teaching and the preaching of the Gospel, are every bit as important, if not more necessary. “That which we consider natural in the church, could be considered a miracle, in nature, in personal experience, or in the story of humanity” (Cereti & Puglisi, 2006: 332). On the other hand, both parties agreed that all of the activities enabled by the Holy Spirit are his manifestations and signs of God’s presence amongst his people.

The starting point for the Pentecostal theology was its distinctive spirituality *the Holy Spirit, that is God with us*. The main Pentecostal thrust was to emphasise the everyday reality of faith, life, and the service of the people of God that have been organically constituted as the Body of Christ by the presence of the Holy Spirit. The heart of this spirituality is prayer, through which believers respond personally to the revelation of God. Pentecostal spirituality has had its origins in many diverse sources, which have given origin to a movement of participation with the Spirit. The first Pentecostals did not try, at any cost, to resolve theological problems, because the only legitimate aim, before the second coming of Jesus upon the clouds from heaven, was to sanctify and unite the children of God and to evangelise the entire world within a single generation. In spite of the inevitable dissipation of this first pentecostal vision through institutionalisation, for the majority of Pentecostals and charismatics today, this experience of the immanence of God through prayer, worship, and the gifts of the Spirit, that allows believers to evangelise, would still be their principal characteristic. The fullness of the Spirit always meets the presence of God through prayer and worship while the spiritual gifts of whatever nature or expression, enrich the lives of people and the community itself (Anderson, 2014: 91). On their account, the Reformed churches confessed that they had neglected the seeking and receiving of the gifts of the Spirit and therefore gathered the occasion, taking advantage of the opportunity presented by the dialogue with the Pentecostals to underline with emphasis that it was God who grants his gifts to us. They took to heart the pneumatic dimension that they came in contact with through the dialogue with the Pentecostals and understood the necessity of learning to go beyond their own boundaries and theological and doctrinal limits. They testified that the reform should have embraced the occasion to benefit from the gift of the Pentecostal church to liberate itself from the vain attempt to keep alive the inefficient and anachronistic institutions in the modern times. The Reformed church should have learnt to conserve its strengths without wasting them on theological categorisations that can be divisive and inappropriate concentrating itself around that which could truly contribute to the growth and advancement of the mission. Learning from pentecostalism which saw its exponential growth in its capacity to welcome specific problems, whether linguistic, ethnic,

class, economic condition, gender, and to support a need for identity. Pentecostals were able to join both a greater recognition as a worldwide religion with a local dimension. This type of pentecostal spirituality has learnt to value the particular together with a global dimension, which guarantees the participation of a transnational movement in expansion (Trombetta, 2013: 129).

The dialogue still remains a project to be completed, because the reception of this type of spirituality by the historic churches may open the door to unforeseeable developments for both parties involved. The Reformed churches, still bound by some forms of institutionalism and anchored in a theological scheme that is well structured, confronted with the dynamism and the liquidity of pentecostalism that does not easily fit together with the institutional rigidity of the Reformed, would have been able to recuperate a certain vitality. In fact, an element of the renewal that pentecostalism would have desired to bring to the world of the Reformed, through the ecumenical dialogue, is the capacity to be an alternative to the jurisdictional model of the church. Through the pentecostal paradigm, the churches in the dialogue would be helped to free themselves from a type of religious jurisdictionalism, that binds the historic churches in their mission towards the world (Napolitano, 2001: 6). The pentecostal protest against a heavily institutionalised church, which in turn generates a rigid denominational structure, has always manifested itself through its organisational form, that is, that of a network. Paradoxically, this almost spontaneous choice to be a church was not born of an exaltation of fragmentation, but to the contrary, the rejection of denominationalisation was born from the fact that the Pentecostal churches considered the very institutionalisation and the desire for a strong identity on the part of a few churches, to be responsible for the divisions in the Christian world. By the very act of contesting a form of church that is overly institutionalised, the divisions within Christianity, according to the pentecostal dream, could be overcome. The fact is, it was from being a movement that developed through a network and not through rigid and corporate bonds that the great desire for unity grew for the Pentecostals. Believing that, in the last days the unity of the Church will be realised by the work and the intervention of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers that would make them available for the mandate of Christ and not through human organisations (Introvigne, 2004: 27). As a confirmation of this, in the archipelago of pentecostalism, next to floating islands, dry land emerged upon which churches were built that could boast of a complex organisation with highly specialised internal functions, with a solid network of means of communication, with efficient financial systems, and with its main hierarchy highly visible. Paradoxically, it's precisely these, amongst the Pentecostals, least willing to dialogue with other Christians and more likely to dig into the ecclesiastical and doctrinal positions, precisely because they have a structure that tends towards a certain institutionalisation (Pace & Butticci, 2010: 86).

#### 4.3.3.2 Dialogue 2001 to 2011

The central theme for this second phase of dialogue between the The World Alliance of Reformed Churches and some Pentecostal churches was “the experience of faith in the Christian life”. In fact, the main aim which then became the *leitmotiv* of every argument was the question regarding the different valuations of experience as the normative spring for the Christian faith and testimony. After a planning session held in 2001 at the Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, USA, the first true session of dialogue was held in Amsterdam in the Low Countries on May 16 - 23. The theme of this first session was worship. The one that then followed in 2003 was held in San Juan, Puerto Rico, from June 5-11, and the theme was discipleship. This session was particularly important because it was held contemporaneously with the synod of the Reformed Churches of Puerto Rico, and therefore, for the occasion the involved parties could assist and participate in an active way in an event that was important for one of the two churches, that is the Reformed and at the same time it was a significant experience, above all for the pentecostal party. After a pause of a year, the dialogue was continued in 2005 at Detmold, Germany, May 25-31, and the theme was discernment. It then arrived in 2006 in Louisville, Kentucky, USA, from May 17-24, where the theme was communion, while the session in 2007 was held in Cape Town and Stellenbosch, South Africa, on May 21-24, and the theme of it was righteousness.

With the sessions of dialogue behind them, the group met in 2008 at Edinburgh, Scotland, on May 22-27, to begin to draw up the final declaration of the second cycle of dialogue between the Reformed and the Pentecostals; a revision that brought about not a few lively and deep discussions. On this occasion they were able to produce only a draft of what would then become the future relationship, prepared for the churches. Everything was finally concluded in 2011 at the campus of McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois, USA where the final, definitive text was agreed which would then be placed at the disposition of the churches. (The Report of the International Dialogue between representatives of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders, 2001-2011)

In the meetings between 2001 and 2011, there was a real effort to know what the common ground is rather than to underline the differences. The group had made great effort to think globally, to represent the respective communities in other parts of the world. The second cycle of dialogue showed that there is common ground in many aspects of the experience of faith and life in the respective churches. The different theological accents should serve as a challenge to try to understand one another.

For both participating parties, the service is not only a human act, because the Holy Spirit equips the community for the service and the worship of God, purposes itself to receive and then to bring what it has received by the Spirit of God, for his worship. However, the service does not need to be limited only to a liturgy on Sunday when the church meets together. It also has to have an existential dimension for the believer, that is, it has to form the human life in a right way, in every time, in every place. The centre of the Christian service has to be the Bible, or better, the Word of God. Worship emphasises the proclamation of the Gospel through preaching. Even if the two churches Reformed and Pentecostal evaluate the sacraments differently, for both, the preaching of the Gospel is the fulcrum of the service and the basis for all worship. For the Pentecostals, however, the service is not limited only to a meeting with the Word through the hearing of it, but it is also a meeting with the living God, that is, the preaching is always accompanied by an event or experience that includes tangible manifestations of the presence of the Spirit, and above all, exercising the gifts during worship. Both recognise as fact the indispensable role of the Holy Spirit; He gathers, gives and guides the people of God. The Spirit inspires, instructs, and sends the community. However, the Pentecostal service testifies in a more evident way the presence of the actions of the Spirit in its midst, through manifestations and particular actions with respect to the Reformed, where the actions and the manifestations of the Spirit are less evident. With regards to certain dynamic demonstrations during the meeting, both parties agreed on the necessity of a critical judgement, with the help of the Holy Spirit. In fact, to structure the meeting to satisfy the needs of individuals, or to satisfy the hopes of the people, can draw away from the true worship of God, placing man himself in the place of God.

As regards the basis of service for events that bring to remembrance the incarnation as the work of salvation, the Reformed churches see this incarnation during the Christmas period (Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany), and the Easter period (Lent, Holy Week, Easter Sunday, and Pentecost). The Pentecostals differ, considering the liturgical calendar only as a single event to remember the incarnation and the work of salvation. In fact, the Reformed took the occasion to propose to the Pentecostals the rediscovery of the liturgical periods, believing that these, as for their own churches, can bring benefits for them also. It has been clarified that, the Reformed emphasis on the experience of the presence of the living Christ in the Word and sacrament does not neglect the Holy Spirit; as also, the Pentecostal experience in the tangible presence of the Holy Spirit should not neglect Jesus Christ in the Word and in his ordinances. In fact, the Reformed invoke the Holy Spirit in their service to transform the Word and Sacrament in the knowledge and presence of Christ. The Pentecostals invoke Christ so that his presence, through the Spirit, might be shared and experienced by all believers

as victory over sin. A difference in the service between the two churches is that, if the Reformed tend to announce the work of the Spirit in a way that can be then made real and lived in a more private way by the believer, receiving and then experiencing it in his daily life. The Pentecostal meeting always leaves open space for the unexpected. In fact, for the Pentecostals, during the meeting there is an expectation of the movement of the Holy Spirit through the gifts such as prophecy, tongues, interpretations, discernment, and still others. In the Pentecostal meeting there is a readiness to receive, at the same time, the Word of God through the preaching and also through something meaningful to be lived or realised by one or more believers, as some manifestations of the Holy Spirit, always moving within the community, united in the name of Jesus Christ. (The Report of the International Dialogue between representatives of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders, 2001-2011)

“To be disciples of Christ, to make disciples of Christ” San Juan, Puerto Rico, 2003.

For all Christians, the community has the task of encouraging believers to offer themselves completely to God, in the sense of making their lives available for the Lord and to seek for the “will” of God for their life. In this the Holy Spirit works to distribute his gifts to believers and so establish the Body of Christ and equip the community for the work of service. From this spring the *Missio Dei*, that is, the participation of the Church in God’s own mission. In fact, the Church has been designated by Christ to proclaim the Gospel by words and actions in the whole world. Every believer, regardless of his particular confession, is called to be a witness for the Gospel. It can be understood that God’s mission in the world involves and promotes righteousness and the process of peace, and their testimony is a function of these values or rather the proclamation of the Gospel is the basis on which to construct the pretext for such ideals. The Pentecostals contributed in emphasising, during the course of dialogue, that the effusion of the Spirit that was upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost created a new community, which, in Christ, has overcome social, political, and racial differences, so that the Church, being united by the Spirit, can be a faithful witness and fulfil the mandate of the Lord as a testimony to the extremities of the earth. To this emphasis placed by the Pentecostals, the Reformed churches received positively the invitation, clarifying that this is the invitation of God to participate in a ministry of reconciliation. This is the testimony of God in Christ that reconciles the world with God. The Christian churches are called to be a *community shaped by the Scriptures*. In fact, Jesus Christ is the Word of God known through the Word of God written in the Bible. Christ is the Word of God proclaimed through the preaching and the Word narrated through baptism and the Lord’s Supper. From this perspective the community becomes also a place of formation for the believers, so that through its very functions they learn the will of God and not just the worship of

God. Through the Church, the Christians of all ages are encouraged to offer themselves completely for the service of God and to seek for the will of God for their lives. At the same time, the community of believers is called, on one hand to give value to the attitudes and individual gifts that every single member makes available, and on the other hand, to recognise and to utilise in the best way for the common good, all of the gifts that the Holy Spirit distributes to establish the Body of Christ, to equip it for its work of service, and to bring every believer to the knowledge of God and “To the measure and full stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

“Discernment as a diagnostic gift of the Spirit to form the believers” Detmold, Germany, 2005

For both groups it was clear that discernment always involved a valuation of the facts and results to be able to arrive at a decision or a judgement. A certain tension, however, was felt the moment the parties had to express the ways in which discernment could be reached. Discernment is essential and of vital importance for the life of the community of faith. This would not only be exercised by ministers or leaders of the community, even if for them there was a greater responsibility in its exercise, because they found themselves having to carry out a decision-making role for the entire community. It also had to be exercised by every believer, not so much for the lives of others, but for their own good and necessary well-being, especially when trying to live in a dimension of faith. The Reformed party had wanted to underline the formative dimension, with the objectives of receiving and being able to use discernment. For them, discernment was obtained within the Church, through a correct interpretation of Scripture. This is a fruit of the Spirit thanks to the vocational, and theological Christian formation, that is only possible within the community of faith. The use of discernment for the Reformed, therefore, tends to be limited to the development of an individual spiritual personality or to a spiritual process of a group. While the Pentecostals, though not excluding this first part as a way of arriving at discernment, emphasise the importance of the charismatic gifts within the community, because discernment, following the Pauline discourse, is part of the list of gifts or manifestations of the Spirit for the edification of the Body of Christ. Thus, for the Pentecostals, discernment, even if it may require a time of formation and bringing to perfection, remains a gift of the Spirit to be exercised as such, with whom, as believer and bearer of the Spirit, is connected. From this perspective, for the Pentecostals, discernment is not fulfilled exclusively to a useful role in judging and understanding that which is the better part or the correct interpretation of some Scriptures or situations, but it is also diagnostic, for the exercise for some spiritual manifestations such as recognising contrary spirits and a condition of demon possession. Besides this, it is also tied to the charismatic gift of the Word. It recognises and judges whether or not what is spoken within the community through prophecy, the gift of tongues, and the words of wisdom and knowledge are in

effect the Word of God. In fact, for all Christians it is essential to understand if what is said is the voice of God because whatever God says needs to always be taken seriously.

These differences, however, did not impede the parties in the dialogue from arriving at a common consensus on discernment, reasserting its importance and the fact that any community, to be Christian, needs discernment, otherwise it risks being other and not Christian. Discernment needs research and in-depth analysis, not only on the part of who exercises it at a decisional level, but also on the part of all Christians. It also requires interpretation, above all with the right ways and times, so that it is an act of edifying and not destroying the Body of Christ. Finally, it should never be received or exercised with superficiality or spontaneously, but it requires time and patience, above all when it is necessary to intervene for a prophetic promise, or in situations that touch the entire life of the community. For both, the assembled congregation should be understood as the main place to discern and hear the voice of God, trusting that when it is assembled together, it has the principal role in discerning the Word of the Lord.

From this dialogue, the Reformed Churches were challenged to discern with greater clarity the personalised aspects of evil in the world. They were called upon to gather a perspective incorporating, in the interpretation of the Bible, the recognition of personal and aggressive evil in the world. The Pentecostals, meanwhile, are challenged to take more seriously *the process* and *the formation* necessary for discernment, especially in its personal, congregational, and confessional exercise. More attention is necessary to evaluate the integrity of those who pretend to speak in the name of God or as self-proclaimed prophets. For the Pentecostals as for the Reformed, a greater reflection is required concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in the individual, in the local community, in the universal church, as also in the world.

“Koinonia as the work of the community of faith” Louisville, Kentucky, USA, 2006

There is no doubt about the fact that *koinonia* is the gift of the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Fellowship is the gift of God, given freely, manifesting the relationship between God and the believers and among the believers themselves. It is a new way of being, marked by the love for God and for one another. Seated in dialogue, it was reasserted that fellowship is not only a passive act for the community, but it is also a task for it; not only the seeking of it, but also the conserving of it after having received it from God. In fact, the communion of the Holy Spirit in the charismatic gifts and in the ministries and functions, is not to exalt or feed individualism, but to preserve and help grow the *koinonia* that is given by the Lord. God, in his being is triune, and in fellowship with Himself, and therefore with his Church to preserve it. The Church as a fellowship of

faith, believes and hopes to correct and to heal through love, which is the foundation of every fellowship, the congregational wounds, confessions, and all that divides the Body of Christ. Fellowship continues to be a central element in the actual ecclesiastical and ecumenical discussions, as the gathered parties have, for this kind of dialogue a main aim of reinforcing and encouraging fellowship, above all between the ecumenical centres. The parties recognise the importance of the communities, of which everyone has his own story and particular experience of faith which is part of his particular charismatic gift within the Body of Christ. This must not impede but should rather be the place upon which to meet to construct the true *koinonia*, that is, not that which is based on being equal, but on being diverse yet united in the fellowship with the one and only Body of Christ.

Fellowship, in reality, is already a given fact because it is embodied in the worship of the community. It is visible in the waters of baptism, in the sharing of the bread and the wine through the Lord's Supper, as also in the rhythms of prayer and praise. The fellowship becomes still more evident in the joys and cares, and in the reciprocal strengthening of the people of the Lord. Unfortunately, the denominations are too often in the arena of conflict where the divisions are put into the field; the religious families are often content to live isolated from other ecclesiastical families, preferring isolation to fraternal fellowship. In this way the preservation of the divine gift of the *koinonia* as the only way possible to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bonds of peace, is forgotten. In fact, the *koinonia* expresses the relationship of the Body of Christ and its Head. So also, it has to be within the community of believers, that is, it has sense when it testifies in the world to this kind of fellowship, as between the body and its head. Thus, fellowship between the communities goes well beyond thinking well of one another, or establishing diplomatic relationships, or coming together through conciliatory meetings. True fellowship must sink into the heart of every community and be lived as an indispensable part to be a community of believers. An example could be the models of mutual responsibility that the Church of the first century has left us, as we can read in the book of Acts. A sign of the true fellowship was the generous sharing of resources. The sharing of considerable material resources was only a tangible verification of how strong the fellowship between the communities was. The sharing of material resources was only one aspect, because, apart from sharing such things, for true fellowship it was also necessary to share energies, intelligence, projects, and above all, love.

“The Lord calls all believers to be righteousness for the world”, Cape Town and Stellenbosch, South Africa, 2007

For the Pentecostals and the Reformed who participated in the bilateral dialogue, the commitment and the realisation of righteousness was in answer to a righteous God who works through righteousness. The first interpretive differences came about because the Pentecostals had, in time, the tendency to spiritualise the argument and reject the secular and political commitment to realise this kind of righteousness. Therefore, the argument of social justice had been polarised and consequently, in the Pentecostal preaching of the Kingdom, the poor, and the liberation of the oppressed was often perceived through a theological understanding, limited to the biblical text, or some parts of it. This meant that the Pentecostals very often would refuse to intervene with means and propositions on behalf of the society all around them, putting off the fulfilment of righteousness to a future time. While the Reformed were tempted, in time, to eclipse the theological plane, to concentrate on its motives and on the commitment of the Church to improve and sometimes change the social environment and context, to realise in its own day a society and a world that could be a prophecy of what would be realised in a future period by God. This, however, brought the commitment of the Reformed to an excessive attention to its secular commitment on the rights, affirmations, and the concepts of equality and social justice, minimising the reflection and theological commitment to guarantee a biblical base to the term “righteousness”.

God gratifies the world with the effusion of the Holy Spirit with which it overcomes the alienation of Babel. The peoples, though they were once separated by nationalities, and confused by their incapacity to understand one another because of the diversity of languages, now listen to the Good News together. In the Spirit, social divisions between young and old, slaves and free, men and women, are overcome by the Spirit that is reserved for everyone. Thus, the true and genuine righteousness is only the righteousness of God, certainly not the product of human effort or the result of human ingenuity. The righteousness of God is given in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the realisation of righteousness has within itself pneumatological causes and must be sought in the effusion of the Spirit at Pentecost. So, the Holy Spirit has promised the Church that He would work for righteousness in a society fractured by racial, ethnical, and gender class divisions. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit equipped the Church to overcome these divisions and introduce new ways of interacting, proposing personal and social uprightness; a righteousness that is manifested through the Spirit and calls the believers through the Scripture to defend the rights of the orphan, the foreigner, and the widow and called to responsibility towards society so that righteousness would be realised.

The convened parties recognised that there are visions of righteousness competing within the single Christian tradition, something that is evident even in every international meeting; differences that spring from individual theological sensitivities and above all, those sensitivities towards political and social questions. This document was important because it encouraged everything to be done in the name of, and for, the attainment of justice, and independent of particular sensitivities. These sensitivities have been considered, from the perspective of charismatic gifts, as a gift and project of the Spirit, reserved in a special way to each single confession. In conclusion, it can be said that righteousness is a gift of the grace of God that has called believers to participate in his ministry of reconciliation. Therefore, the work for justice is a participation in the ways of God and in the movement of God.

#### 4.3.4 Dialogue between Pentecostals and the Lutheran Church

##### 4.3.4.1 Dialogue 2005 to 2010

The ecumenical dialogue between Pentecostals and Lutherans is relatively young. In fact, to date there has not been any formal dialogue between the two Christian families at an international level. However, a few leaders from each church came together for these dialogues, to act as ice breakers between the two realities that up until now were not very ready to speak to each other for various ecclesiological and theological reasons. This small number of leaders had much desired these dialogues, because they were convinced of the necessity and of the importance of being involved in dialogue with each other, above all, with a desire to better their reciprocal relations.

So, a small group of Pentecostal and Lutheran theologians decided to meet at Strasbourg, France in December 2004. For the occasion a methodology was established together with arguments with which to confront each other and speak together with the aim of getting to know one another better. In 2005, the group met again at Strasbourg and then again in December 2006 at Pasadena, California, USA. The meetings continued in January 2008, at Thousand Oaks, California, USA; in Zurich, Switzerland, in December 2008, and finally at Tampere, Finland, in January 2010. For the dialogue the participants chose a common theme on which to confront each other, so that the dialogue would not be just a simple doctrinal presentation. So, an experiential question was chosen and that is, How do we meet Christ? Both the families confronted one another on how to meet Christ in worship, in the proclamation and word, in the sacraments/ordinances, and in the gifts of the Spirit. Besides this, to these encounters there were added visits to the respective worship services and moments of reflection, which were immensely gratifying. “When the group met for the first time, it seemed that

the Lutherans and the Pentecostals represented two very different ecclesial traditions, but the participants discovered, already during the first rounds of the dialogue, that they had more things in common than what they thought before they met each other.” (Pluss, 2014)

The Lutherans, together with other Christians from the historic churches, had often considered the Pentecostals theologically unprepared, psychologically unstable, and sociologically irrelevant with a radical ecclesiology; in short, a species of fanatics to keep at a distance. At the same time, the Pentecostal Christians countered, describing those histories, including the Lutherans, as cold believers, that compromised their faith having an exterior form of godliness while denying its power. For the Pentecostals these were those who by now lived in a perennial condition of apostasy. The dialogue meant that these convictions, at least for those who participated, were demolished and for both sides a new discovery and knowledge of each other were possible for those who were ready to talk. This was, for those who gathered together, the beginning of a relationship which could become a true and real Christian fellowship. The first common point was precisely on Christology. The Pentecostals resonate with many aspects of Lutheran Christology and the Lutheran doctrine of salvation, as is evident in the hymns, prayers, declarations of faith, and proclamation of the Gospel, even if, at the same time, the Lutherans recognise that the Pentecostals have added accents to this central fulcrum. Often the Lutherans believed, erroneously, that these added accents were exclusively with a single focus, which is that of the experience of the Holy Spirit. In reality, the Pentecostals teach that the gift of the Holy Spirit has always been tied to the figure of Christ, because this is the power to be able to announce the Gospel to the World, against every difficulty and every time. The Pentecostals expected that those things that Jesus Christ worked in the power of the Spirit during his earthly ministry, He could still do and was doing in the Church and in the lives of believers, saving and healing them, liberating them from evil, and providing for their daily necessities.

#### Meeting Christ in the Worship Service

The Pentecostals understand the worship service as a meeting with Christ in the Spirit and as a testimony and the manifestation of the fellowship that is reached through the invitation of Christ that is extended to all humans. Besides this, the Pentecostal meeting is the moment that the congregation comes together and it becomes a body resonating through the proclamation of the Word and not just as a receiver of the Word.

Meanwhile, the Lutherans tend to align the proclamation with the work of the preaching of the pastor. This gives rise to the Lutheran understanding of the sovereignty of the Word that must be listened to and believed. The work of the Church for the Lutherans has always been the speaking of

the words of Christ to the faithful, so the meeting with Christ in the service is a meeting with the Word, which has been preached, so that Christ may reach whoever hears and believes it.

### Meeting Christ in the Sacraments or Ordinances

The Lutherans use the term sacraments, while the Pentecostals tend to differ, defining the Lord's Supper and baptism as ordinances, even if this is not valid for all of the Pentecostal churches, certainly it is for the majority of them. For the Lutherans, instead, the idea of the sacraments is more or less equal and fixed for everyone, while for the Pentecostals this is still in a phase of development.

Baptism is, for Lutherans, the adoption into the family of God, because it is an unbreakable promise of God that creates a new reality. Even if, the person baptised could choose to live in a way that contradicts the reality that initially brought him into the new family and thus, for him the baptism would have no benefit, but this does not invalidate the initial promise but renders it only incomplete or awaiting further fulfilment. For Pentecostals, instead, baptism is an ordinance inasmuch as it implies obedience to Christ, where the person baptised confesses and testifies publicly a decision to follow Christ. Therefore, baptism follows conversion, rendering public the new life attained through rebirth in Christ.

The Lutherans believe in the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. His body and his blood are truly physically present in, with, and under the form of bread and wine. The same Christ comes to meet the believers through the Word, but above all, through the Sacraments, through which Christ comes to meet his Church in a very different manner from his coming to it through the Word. The material elements remind of the incarnation of the Son and indicate the resurrection of the body. Meanwhile, the Pentecostals, even during the Lord's Supper, emphasise the presence of God during worship and they, therefore, expect that the Lord is present at his Supper, but as Presence and Action that is verified during all of the celebration of the service. Sometimes the Pentecostals claim a version of the Zwinglian comprehension of the Lord's Supper, often in the face of the dominant church position on the sacraments.

### Meeting Christ in the Gifts of the Spirit

For the Pentecostals, the event of Pentecost was the mark of its own spirituality and therefore, the baptism of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by the sign of tongues. From this the Pentecostals believe that the believer, after the baptism in the Spirit, can expect a flowering of spiritual gifts of a wide variety. As regards the fruits of the Spirit, which is read in Galatians, for the Pentecostals these are a

part of the sanctification of the Christian and serve as a guide for the believer in the use of spiritual gifts. The fruits of the Spirit, then, within the Christian life, assume a primary importance, and mainly the believers are invited to desire to grow in them.

The Lutherans, instead, tend to approach the gifts of the Holy Spirit in ways that have more to do with the formation, or education, in the lives of the believers, instead of seeking for a particular experience. Consequently, these dedicate themselves to things such as translation and teaching from the Bible, for the family, and for the clergy, education for children, holy music, service of deaconship, and social impact. All of these things have remained the primary characteristics of the Lutheran culture. In short, Lutherans, differently from the Pentecostals, are more at ease with the gifts of the Spirit given to teaching, to deaconship, to administration and to social service, instead of those of a more “extraordinary”, particular, nature such as prophecy, tongues, and particular manifestations.

Besides this, the Lutherans have a ministry ordered according to a certain ecclesiastical language. This has been divinely preserved, at least in part, through the apostolic succession, but based on a personal acceptance, recognising succession within its own confession but certainly not presenting it as the popes of the Catholic Church. The Pentecostals, instead, were, and to some extent still are, *restorationists*. They consider their ecclesial dimension as the result of a divine restoration, free from the apostolic schemes but exclusively founded on faith, and usual evangelical procedures. From this derived the fact that, the Pentecostals tend not to put much value on the history and much less on the tradition of the church, especially as it is expressed through an apostolic succession or in the formulation of a creed. For the Pentecostals it is essential even within the ministerial dimension to experience the divine reality in the lives of who feels called to Christian service. The ministry, as any service within the ecclesial body, finds its origin in the authority endowed through the effusion of the Holy Spirit.

#### 4.3.5 Conclusions to paragraph 4.3.

From the themes dealt with in these meetings, it can immediately be understood that the main argument had been about the Spirit. In fact, for the first section between 1996 and 2000, the theme was: “Spirituality and present-day challenges.” The second was: “The role and the place of the Holy Spirit in the Church.” The third was: “The Holy Spirit and missions in an eschatological perspective.” The fourth meeting was: “The Holy Spirit, the charisms, and the Kingdom of God.” While in the fifth and final meetings of this first series of bilateral dialogue between the Reformed and Pentecostals, they worked to revise and summarise the four preceding years (Cereti & Puglisi, 2006: 386). In this

first phase, certainly they were not able to establish a common line, and much less so to resolve the divergences of the two churches over the work and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but they recognised that the importance of the spiritual baptism for the Pentecostal churches is significant because it has the greatest potential to connect with other traditions towards the formation of an ecumenical pneumatology. The ecumenical challenge for the Pentecostals, then, will be to develop their particular position regarding the Spirit to enable the other churches to participate in their proposition (Macchia, 2006: 311). This first section was successful in bringing order for both parties to the various perspectives and propositions so that, finally, the two churches came to know and, above all, understand the position and the faith of the other regarding the questions dealt with.

The second phase was developed between 2001 and 2011, and the arguments dealt with were: “The worship of God and the service to the Lord”; “To be disciples to make disciples for Christ”; “Discernment as a diagnostic gift of the Spirit”; “Fellowship as a duty of the community of faith”; and “Social justice”. In this phase, it was decided to discuss arguments that could, in some way, have a bearing on the practical life of believers and in the procedures of individual churches. What was surprising is that from the moment that the reflection was turned from a purely theological environment to an area which touches practical issues, the two churches realised that they had more points in common than they believed, that in the mission field, the differences almost disappear when it comes to announcing the Gospel and contributing to the communal good in the context in which the Christian witness finds itself.

The dialogue with the Lutherans was held from 2005 to 2010. For the occasion, it was decided to focus on a single, crucial point, and that is: “How we meet Christ.” In fact, the themes were: “Meeting Christ in the sacraments”; “Meeting Christ in the worship service”; and finally: “Meeting Christ in the charisms”. This phase of dialogue was very much one of exploration, above all, on the part of the Lutherans that were able to face the Pentecostals on grounds where the Pentecostals felt more at ease with respect to the Lutherans, who find it difficult to separate a meeting with Christ with a meeting with the Word preached or the reading of Scripture. As for Pentecostals, apart from recognising a meeting with Christ in the areas accepted by the Lutherans, they stress very strongly meeting Christ in the categories of experience. Differently from the Lutherans, Pentecostals do not distinguish between meeting Christ and experiencing Christ, an experience that traverses the life of the believer in all dimensions of his existence, so much so that it involves a person in every dynamic of his being. In fact, the experience itself of God must be understood in terms of meeting God, but aware that the horizons of finite man cannot contain God, who remains truly apart. The experience of God is a meeting with God that is given to be lived by whoever experiences it, in spite of the limits

of his own finiteness. The experience of God is the witness of a meeting in which the transcendence of God is manifest. This renders the meeting with God something unique and particular in which all the things of God are realised and understood in the life of whoever experiences it, however, always keeping present the human dimension and how God, through his Spirit, meets with man (Neumann, 2012: 927).

Starting from what was said during the dialogues, a method was developed and adapted to the experience lived by both parties as ecclesiastical communities. These began with a mutual sharing of their experience of the actions of God in the lives of believers themselves, highlighting the experience of the Christian life together through the reciprocal participation in worship services and daily prayer, as also with testimonies and encouragements. The reflections on experience have naturally raised questions about doctrine and practical spirituality, but these kinds of reflections came about in a context that rendered the parties more accessible to one another. Even if sometimes the two churches found themselves sharing certain concerns about ecclesiastical procedures that were widely different, they never came into an open conflict because their ability to elaborate their common propositions and certain intuitions, rather than direct conflict, were useful in arriving at a certain common intent within the dialogues (Vondey, 2013: 36-37).

## 4.4 International dialogues between classical Pentecostals, the WCC and the Global Christian Forum

### 4.4.1 Introduction.

This chapter faces the problem of the relationship between the World Council of Churches (WCC) and pentecostalism, above all, as regards the membership of the Pentecostal churches in the WCC. Pentecostalism requires special attention on the part of whoever is interested in Christianity worldwide, even for the simple fact that it has become the biggest Christian tradition after Catholicism. The WCC, therefore, in the last few years, aware of the exponential growth of pentecostalism, has given it much attention. In fact, after a long period where the council ignored the Pentecostal churches, it has begun to accept some Pentecostal churches as effective members and looking towards the admission of others has instituted an effective work committee, the Joint Consultative Group (JCG). This is dedicated exclusively to Pentecostals and works towards dialogue with Pentecostals so that they will become more involved in the ecumenical activities. This is because, in the near future, it is thought that Pentecostals in the world will be an increasingly greater driving force for global Christianity at all levels (Buda, 2018).

The necessity to encourage a greater participation of the churches with a pentecostal-type spirituality in the ecumenical activities has led the WCC to institute the Global Christian Forum (GCF). The second part of the chapter will attempt to give a few short indications regarding the GCF. It has a lean structure to avoid a rigid institutionalism. The only full-time employee is its secretary whose role is that of an official representative of the Forum. The GCF has contributed considerably to the enrichment of the contemporary ecumenical movement, thanks to its initiatives that are always more inclusive towards the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches (Choromanski, 2019: 5).

#### 4.4.2 Pentecostals and the WCC (World Council of Churches)

One of the reasons which, from the beginning, moved the majority of Pentecostal churches against participating in any ecumenical organisation, much less the WCC, was their restorationist perspective on the history of the Church, which saw all those already in existence as having fallen from the original intentions of God through compromise and sin. Although they do not deny their restorationist viewpoint, maybe today what mostly conditions Pentecostals towards such a choice is their ecclesiastical position. For the most part, these are members of Congregationalists or Presbyterian-congregationalist churches which renders them diffident towards any form of organisation or institution. Another motive not to be undervalued is the prejudices and ferocious criticism the Pentecostals suffered, and maybe still suffer, on the part of some members of ecumenical organisations such as the WCC. This occurred every time they tried to propose their statement of faith outside their own world, with the result that Pentecostals developed a strongly eschatological line of thought towards all the other churches and consequently, to postpone the question of unity to the future of God. In 1947 in Zurich, some of the principal Pentecostal churches attempted to organise a worldwide conference of churches, an organisation similar to the WCC that in those very years was taking shape. This attempt did not give the hoped-for results precisely because of a strong congregationalist orientation of some of the Pentecostal churches. Even if the project of gathering all of the Pentecostal churches for a conference failed, in this occasion a group of churches decided to meet independently of the other *separationists*, maturing in this way the decision to begin a communal path that brought some of them to meet together in 2004 in Johannesburg, South Africa, where the Pentecostal World Fellowship was formed.<sup>30</sup> These constituted the first line of the Pentecostal churches that started out on a path of rapprochement towards the ecumenical entities, including the WCC. In reality, the question of the Pentecostals and their participation with the WCC through a complete opening towards their world on the part of the ecumenical entities caused problems within

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<sup>30</sup> Oikoumene.org, Pentecostal Churches. Date of access: 12/10/2019.

the WCC that are still not completely resolved. In fact, the Orthodox part above all, continually raised a series of objections against churches with a Pentecostal type spirituality from being received into the WCC. The first question to resolve was the attitude assumed by Pentecostals in their evangelisations, whether in their home territory or in mission fields. The Orthodox were not alone in accusing the Pentecostals of not evangelising but of proselytism, especially towards believers in their churches who were weaker in the faith, convincing them that the traditions and the liturgies of the Orthodox church and the historic churches in general were only a historic contamination through a series of superstitions that belonged to an old paganism and had not been transmitted by the Apostles through the Gospel (Buda, 2018). A second problem is that the historic churches complained and maybe still do, that Pentecostals were too ignorant and for this reason they are not interested in the ecumenical movement or any other ecumenical organisation. In spite of all this, thanks to the pioneering work of the Pentecostal Pastor, David du Plessis, an opening was created within the WCC, even if it was always limited to only a few exponents in the Pentecostal galaxy. In fact, those who adhered to the Council were in 1962, two Pentecostal churches from Chile, and Iglesia Pentecostal de Chile<sup>31</sup> and the second: Mission on Iglesia Pentecostal.<sup>32</sup> In 1969, a large Pentecostal church in Brazil: “Igreja Evangélica Pentecostal o Brasil Para Cristo”, even if then in 1983, when the guidance of the church passed on to the son of the founding pastor, the church retracted its adhesion. Another Pentecostal church founded in the United States, in Washington D.C., with a mission in Italy, The International Church<sup>33</sup> joined the CEC. In 1980 an Argentinian Pentecostal church joined the WCC: la Iglesia de Dios.<sup>34</sup> In 1985, an Angolan church joined: Missao Evangelica Pentecostal de Angola.<sup>35</sup> And finally in 1997, a third Chilean church joined: Iglesia de Misiones Pentecostales Libres de Chile.<sup>36</sup>

In 1998, in Harare, Zimbabwe, a group of consultation was started between Pentecostals and the WCC following a decision from its general assembly. The JCG (Joint Consultative Group) was made up of fifty percent representatives from churches that were members of the WCC and the other fifty percent were Pentecostals. The representatives of the Pentecostal churches that took part in the

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.iokoumene.org/en/member-churches/pentecostal-church-of-chile> date of access: 18 December 2019

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.iokoumene.org/en/member-churches/pentecostal-mission-church> date of access: 18 December 2019

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.iokoumene.org/en/member-churches/international-evangelical-church> date of access: 18 December 2019

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.iokoumene.org/en/member-churches/association-the-church-of-god> date of access: 18 December 2019

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.iokoumene.org/en/member-churches/evangelical-pentecostal-mission-of-angola> date of access: 18 December 2019

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.iokoumene.org/en/member-churches/free-pentecostal-mission-church-of-chile> date of access: 18 December 2019

JCG came from all four continents and immediately accepted the invitation of the WCC, but only in June 2000 at Hautecombe, France, was the JCG and the Pentecostal representatives officially presented to the Council of Churches. The aims of this group were to create better ways of understanding and sharing together the reciprocal testimony of faith and to discuss the differences between them but viewing it as a challenge to go beyond that which divides each single church and to learn from each other. The JCG was reconfirmed in the last assembly of the WCC in Porto Alegre in 2006, where they reviewed the dialogues from 2000 to 2005. At that time, they established an itinerary along which to work in the coming years.<sup>37</sup> At the same time the director of WCC inserted several pentecostal groups in their own programmes of evangelisation and missions. Also “Faith and Order” received contributions from several Pentecostal leaders on these topics in several of its publications. After Porto Alegre there was another meeting between the JCG and the Pentecostals in 2013, in Busan (Vondey, 2013: 64-65). The third phase of dialogue ended in Pasadena, California, (USA), at Fuller Theological Seminary, under the guidance of moderators Rev. Dr. Cecil M. Robeck (Assemblies of God) and Rev. Dr. Jennifer Leath (African Methodist). The guiding topic was: How does the Holy Spirit move within the Church to make disciples that will transform the world? At the conclusion of this third cycle, where the fulcrum was the making of disciples, it was decided to hold a new series of talks around the central theme: the nature of the Church and how an exchange of models can strengthen the Church of Christ in the world.<sup>38</sup>

At the worldwide conference on missions and evangelisation held in March, 2018, in Arusha, Tanzania, on the theme: Move in the Spirit to transform disciples, The JCG offered a unique perspective on authentic discipleship in the light of the cooperation there had been with several Pentecostal churches. At the end of this third series of discussions, the commission will present a report at the next assembly of the WCC in 2021, to continue the theme of discipleship and formation, together with the progress of the dialogues between Pentecostals and the member churches of the WCC.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the WCC must continue the process of discerning the significance of a continuing openness towards Pentecostalism, gathering an always greater number of member churches at all levels. A scenario of this kind raises two important questions that await concrete answers. Firstly, how would the Pentecostal churches be perceived at the ecumenical table, as a part of the Protestant and evangelical family, or rather as a separate tradition? Once this first point had

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<sup>37</sup> Oikoumene.org, Joint Consultative Group Between the WCC and Pentecostals date of access: 18 October 2019

<sup>38</sup> Christianitytoday.com, WCC and Pentecostals continue ecumenical dialogue in Switzerland. Date of access: 18 December 2019

<sup>39</sup> Oikoumene.org, WCC and Pentecostals discuss discipleship and formation in California. Date of access: 18 October 2019

been clarified, it was necessary to question the given internal objective and that is, if the entire structure of the WCC would be ready to change radically in order to receive such churches. This is because within it there are still ecclesiastical churches and organisations that certainly are not enthusiastic about the idea of finding themselves together with the Pentecostals within the council. The second point is if Pentecostals are ready to open dialogue around the moral values of Christianity about which they have constructed positions and ethical principles that they consider, even now, an integral part of their very identity and faith (Buda, 2018: 97). Finally, it's necessary to ask if the majority of Pentecostals are ready to cooperate with some churches that have been and maybe still are, historically hostile towards the model of charismatic spirituality.

#### 4.4.3 The Global Christian Forum

In the last century, amongst the most significant trends within Christianity is that of the birth and growth of new churches. These are usually of an evangelical nature but above all, of a pentecostal spirituality. Unfortunately, few of these have a real contact with traditional, historic Protestants, not to speak of those who are members of the Ecumenical Council of Churches. Therefore, faced with this evident fact, the challenge for the ecumenical movement, in which the majority of the historical churches are involved, was and is, how to find a way to invite these new bodies into a global ecumenical conversation. In which way could the Pentecostal churches participate in the ecumenical discussions and contribute with their presence, both in their own countries and on the mission field, to the political, ethical, and communitarian preoccupations, that trouble persons of faith? One possible answer was developed through the Global Christian Forum, which is and *open space* in which the emerging churches were able to judge, by themselves, their own needs and their ability to participate with other Christians. In this way the greatest contribution of the Forum was that of allowing Pentecostal churches to grow in awareness, through fellowship with other Christians, and to face realities such as discrimination and persecution and by asking itself some serious questions about missions and proselytism.<sup>40</sup>

The cradle of the Global Christian Forum and its beginnings are tied to the WCC. The Council realised quite quickly that churches and Christian ecclesiastical communities existed that were not yet willing or ready to enter and become an integral part as members of the WCC. When this became clear, the then general secretary Rev. Konrad Raiser, threw out the idea of creating a neutral space, a kind of forum where representatives of charismatic institutions, Pentecostal and Evangelical

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<sup>40</sup> Gribben, R. and Miller, L., Global Christian Forum, in: <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com>. Date of access: 18 September 2019

churches, other Christian realities like the WCC, and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the Unity of Christians, could discuss issues amongst themselves. The proposition was received very favourably by the VII assembly of the WCC at Harare, Zimbabwe, and immediately encouraged the realisation of the “GCF”. This process led to the organisation of two important meetings of worldwide Christian leaders. The first in Limuru, Kenya, in 2007 and the second at Mandaio, Indonesia, in 2011. In the first meeting, there were 140 church leaders present from 72 countries, while at Mandaio, there were 290 participants from 81 countries.<sup>41</sup>

The “GCF” intends to be a neutral space in which the representatives of the churches can meet freely to reflect upon the wide spectrum of global Christianity in all its extension and depth. The aim of the GCF is to be an open space for all Christian churches and ecclesiastical organisations who confess God to be one and triune and Jesus Christ as true God and true man. Its intention is to encourage reciprocal respect in order to face up to *all Christians together* which is the common challenge that history proposes. It has a flexible structure in which all Christians with their churches of origin are invited to recognise one another.<sup>42</sup> Personally the researcher believes that what favoured the entry of the Pentecostals within the GCF was, apart from the space for freedom that was offered, above all the intuition of the founders in not requiring an official membership but only to ask each church and organisation a simple participation. This meant that Pentecostals felt more at ease in a kind of Forum that respected the roots of their movement, which is based more as a network, and not asking them to make a formal adhesion. This allowed the Pentecostals to put aside their original prejudices that is against every form of organisation and institution. For the occasion of the meeting in Bogota, Colombia, in April, 2018, Billy Wilson, president of the Oral Roberts University, member of the executive committee of the Worldwide Pentecostal Federation (PWF), during his intervention on the work of the forum said, “When you know someone and you already have a relationship with him, it is difficult to fight against him; in this sense the GCF is becoming an ever more important platform for the worldwide leaders of the faith in which Christians come together to share their various perspectives and learning more one from another.”<sup>43</sup> Amongst the Pentecostal churches present, there was also the: “Federazione delle Chiese Pentecostali Italiane” that has participated in the work of the GCF since 2006. In the last meeting held in Tirana, Albania, from November 2-4,

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<sup>41</sup> <http://ilsismografo.blogspot.com/search?q=Global+Christian+forum>. Date of access: 18 October 2019

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.globalChristianforum.org/Default.aspx?PageID=11324154&A=SearchResult&SearchID=163477803&ObjectID=11324154&ObjectType=1>. Date of access: 30 October 2019

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.globalChristianforum.org/BlogRetrieve.aspx?PostID=728039&A=SearchResult&SearchID=163484434&ObjectType=55>. Date of access: 18 December 2019

2015, the Italian Pentecostals had a delegation within the group that represented the World Pentecostal Fellowship.<sup>44</sup>

#### 4.4.4 Conclusions to paragraph 4.4.

As regards the relationships amongst the member churches of the WCC and Pentecostal churches through the various activities which saw Pentecostals involved, firstly with this organisation, then with the GCF, the good work carried out both by the Pentecostal churches and those that make up the WCC and the GCF can be recognised. In spite of this, there are places in the world in which no dialogue is taking place and it is to be hoped that all of these *gaps* in other nations will soon be overcome, thanks to the encouragement of the churches in those places where an effective, ecumenical activity is missing, seeking to promote the value of these dialogues and every ecumenical activity. The hope of everyone is that in the near future, both the church members of the WCC and the Pentecostal churches will strengthen their relationships, developing a genuine and mutual interest to know one another and, above all, to open up to one to another. One objective was to construct relationships through conversations and actual theological studies (concentrating on the themes of the nature of the Church; on missions; of the understanding of charismatic gifts; of the sacraments; the nature of Scripture; and many others as the need arises) with the hope of digging deeply into the respective theologies and the education of the respective electoral colleges. The JCG should also make a deep commitment in its work to respond and cooperate with the commissions of the WCC and other areas of policy wherever possible (Vondey, 2013: 48-49).

The GCF is probably a moment where, for the first time such a vast range of churches and organisations can come together. For some participants, especially Pentecostals, it has been their first meeting with representatives from other churches and groups. For many participants, it has been a new experience, that of giving a personal testimony of their walk of faith and to listen to that of others. Many Pentecostals realised that it was a significant way to begin a path of meetings with other Christians. The logic upon which the Forum is based is that of sharing and listening. It is a widespread procedure in Pentecostal churches and it seems that the Forum has adopted it, especially to favour this kind of spirituality. In fact, to apply the logic of sharing and listening in a meeting where some traditional Christians present have only rarely met together, or maybe never before this moment, is a help for the participants to recognise one another in Christ and to construct a strong sense of fellowship and belonging (Vondey, 2013: 70-72).

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<sup>44</sup><http://www.fcpitalia.org/2015/11/18/global-Christian-forum-discriminazione-persecuzione-martirio-seguire-cristo-insieme/>. Date of access: 18 October 2019

## 4.5 Conclusions.

In conclusion, as can also be seen from the dialogues between the Pentecostals and the other Christians, the greatest success achieved by the dialogues was the attestation that communion is the work of the Spirit and it is achieved only through an authentic conversion of all. Conversion to this special communion is the indispensable condition to overcome every element of fracture and to foster dialogue and brotherhood (Bassi, 1996: 57). In fact, the nature of the Church, as it was understood in the first century, is represented and summed up in communion. The church of the first century was a Church of churches, a fellowship of communion, a communion of local churches throughout the world, each of which is itself a communion of the baptised gathered into community by the Holy Spirit, on the basis of their baptism and in the eucharistic syntax. This entity of communion constitutes its essence. These dialogues have shown that greater understanding and cooperation between the different Christian traditions, even as different as the Pentecostal ones may be compared to others, are a hope and not an unattainable utopia. The dialogues have brought out with an ever-greater conviction that the initial interpretation of unity in terms of uniformity cannot really contribute to and improve Christian unity. In fact, being one in the Spirit of God does not require a uniform way of being Christian, indeed, precisely because of the very nature of the Spirit, Christians all today, also thanks to the comparison with the Pentecostals, have discovered that their spiritual pluralism and structure is good and not a misfortune. The variety of Christian traditions is a blessing and a reservoir of creativity, especially today when believers live in a multicultural and polycentric world (Jeanrond, 2012: 241-242).

Unfortunately, even though the dialogues have shown a substantial fact, ecumenical theologies as well as common projects, if they are not reflected in a practice for ecumenism within the churches with a profound conversion of each individual believer to it, like a fire that has no more wood to burn they will die. The problems that prevent unity are solved only if they give rise to a practice that pushes the Pentecostal churches and the others to come closer and share together the gifts and the Christian faith. Communion must also be visible. It is necessary for the human condition, because the person is turned towards his centre and, at the same time, he is oriented towards others (Tillard, 1995: 47). The search for unity should not be a novelty in the Christian sphere. Rather, it should be a direct consequence of what one professes to believe and witness to being a Christian. Unity is not a job that needs to be done, but the awareness of what God has already given through his Spirit. Christianity cannot be divided because it is one body and one body in Christ. The problem of division is, in fact, a lack of faith in Christ and apostasy to his work done through the Spirit. The divisions are a consequence of the sin that men, who even if they profess to be men of God, have

caused because of their not entirely spiritual aspirations. The division is a consequence of the lack of knowledge of the charisms of the Spirit which are manifested through the diversity of one's members which, as well as in a body, make them active and at the same time united.

The ecumenical movement, today, is certainly not going through one of its best moments. The causes are varied and, at times, even not related to each other. It seems that the hope and enthusiasm of the early years are fading. The achievements are now a distant memory and it seems that the prospects are not the rosier. The dialogues between the churches that still resist remind that believers must never despair, on the contrary, they must never forget that times of twilight or fog are the best ones to sow. They must not stop and while waiting for the seed to grow, they must be ready and prepared to reap the fruits. "The state of the arrangement is in itself already a contradiction that wants to be resolved; it is the unsustainable, fearful and happy state of not being what our nature is according to its most real tendency, and of being just what it is not yet", as theologian Bloch argues (2005: 144). So, in these difficult times for a true ecumenism, churches must continue, without ever giving in to discouragement, to be willing and available, recognising that this is willed by God. All Christians must have hearts predisposed, ready for when the Lord will manifest the times for such an end. A provision that does not make the church a surrendered people, but a people who continue to fight to win what has been promised. The people of God must be animated by a hope that will never make them passively accept the state of things, but will always give them new strength to continue to create and grow a future of unity, that future desired by God for his Church, that it will certainly one day, if not now, be fulfilled in God's Kingdom.

## CHAPTER 5: LESSONS TO BE LEARNT BY ITALIAN CLASSICAL PENTECOSTALS

### 5.1 Introduction.

After more than a hundred years from its birth, pentecostalism is still in a phase of growth as regards the full awareness of the importance of unity with other confessions. However, it is beginning to recognise the movement for unity amongst believers thanks to its active participation in dialogue with other churches and this is bringing about, from within, a slow but gradual transformation towards a pentecostalism that is more open to ecumenism. Even though many ecumenical principles among Pentecostals have not yet been completely accepted, the Pentecostals who took part in the international dialogues took it upon themselves to make, without fear, their special contribution to the movement for the unity of the Church. The Pentecostals of the *first hour* had a theology of restoration and therefore could not be in agreement with those who considered the unity of Christians as a good practice to be followed with vigor and commitment. Consequently, the Pentecostal pioneers did not manage to give a certain priority to the movement for the unity of the Church above many important things to do. This happened also because the first Pentecostal leaders were still inexperienced and confused. Today the researcher believes that things have improved and that the international dialogues seem to demonstrate this progress, above all, in the field of ecumenism.

In this chapter, the author will attempt to present a pentecostal manner and form with which to understand ecumenism, upholding meanwhile that the long arc of pentecostal thought is leaning towards ecumenism rather than turning away from it (Vondey, 2010: XXI-3). The awareness that the Spirit is the basis of the unity of the Church, is the first step that brings Pentecostals towards a decision to begin a pathway of ecumenical dialogue, hoping that in the near future they might increasingly take on the role of protagonists.

### 5.2 The unity of the Church.

The unity of the Church, despite being one of the necessary conditions for being and witnessing to belonging to Christ, from the very first birth of Christianity, even before it was transformed from a movement into an institution, was a problem to be solved, a scandal or rather a wound to be healed. What has made and makes any care ineffective, are the positions and the various proposals that the individual churches have had and have around the concept, or rather, the category that should make it possible to be together, unity. In fact, every single church has its own idea of unity

and therefore only seeks and accepts that model, believing that it is the only one possible to guarantee and constitute the true and unique Church of Christ. If a core drilling is done within individual churches, it can be noted that from the proposal of an official unit, the problem shifts to the individual group, theologian or leader who inspires the group, because everyone has a model, regardless of the one proposed by the organisation to which it belongs.

The Pentecostal churches, a galaxy of the Christian universe, are no exception. The Pentecostal galaxy, being among the largest in Christianity, is composed of many planets, which almost all have their own life, so the diversity between them is even more evident, even if it is no longer marked compared to other churches. However, it is known that where the planets enjoy less autonomy, the diversity is less apparent. For the Pentecostals the problem of the unity of the church begins precisely with how and what is meant by unity. As was the case for Christianity, the pentecostal movement, from its origins, has also posed the problem of unity. The Christianity of the first century had to solve the problem of how to be able to be together, despite the fact that there were Christians of various ethnic groups and different cultures. So too, the first problem for the Pentecostals to be solved was that the experience of the Spirit carried out initially in a transversal way in the various churches of the revival led Christians of different denominations, with different theologies and above all ecclesiology, to find themselves together, because they share the experience with the Spirit despite their differences; they had to start building a church. This was only the first level of the problem; the second, concerned how to be united not only among themselves, but with all the other Christians. Faced with these types of problems and difficulties, the early Pentecostals began to reflect on whether it was necessary for the search for unity to be sought at all costs or whether it should be among the things to be done, but only in time and only in and under certain conditions. In other words, not having sufficient preparation and above all experience, the original Pentecostals, in a sense, tried to procrastinate the problem to future generations. However, as the first Pentecostal theologians, they limited themselves to reflecting and presenting their own proposal on the concept or category of unity.

The Pentecostal churches, also with regard to the reflection on unity, from the beginning, have as their presupposition the dimension of the Spirit, that is, the reflection always finds its beginning in a pneumatic/charismatic principle. Therefore, the pentecostal proposal for Christian unity proceeds from the fact that the same Spirit is present in every person born again and binds them together. The Holy Spirit is the basic bond of unity for Christians, making them all open to others, provided they are Christians, and it is precisely this that binds them in a church. What unites the church, then, is found in the plurality and diversity of its members. They are made the body of Christ by the Spirit

who, through the charisma, gives that diversity and ensures that the body can be one in the diversity of its members and functions. It can thus be said that, from the beginning, the pentecostal proposal of unity is of a *dynamic unity* (the Pentecostal churches are not united *a priori*, but are united through the work of the Spirit, who, when they experience it, makes them so in respect of their diversity, and especially in the development of his gifts for the common good). Like an organism, it grows and renews itself together with the body, which develops, is formed and falls into contexts. For this reason, the unity of the church requires the presence of the Holy Spirit as a real presence within it, in its power and in its ordinary and extraordinary action. Unity is a gift of God made by Christ's disciples through the Holy Spirit through the redemptive work of Christ on the cross. The unity of the Spirit is not the same as that in which the members strive to live it as an institution at the expense of the truth. The unity of the Spirit is the reflection of the being of God, who, being triune, is completely one (Jambrek, 2008: 21). The glue that the Spirit uses for Christian communion is the revelation of the Word of God, experiencing life (seeing and feeling), and communion with the Father and with Jesus Christ. Without this understanding of the Word or without experiencing life and communion with the one and triune God, believers cannot speak of Christian unity nor of communion. Moreover, unity can only be achieved among believers who have realised and lived according to the example of Christ, revealed as true man and true God by the Spirit in the life of the believer. Therefore, praxis as a witness to the *new birth* is also an important element, so that unity can be sought and guaranteed. People can call themselves believers, they can agree with the beliefs of the church to which they belong, receive properly shared sacraments and claim to have communion with God, but if they walk in darkness, they lie and do not live for the truth, therefore, there can be no unity with them and between them. As with most evangelical Christians, even for the Pentecostals it is an insurmountable obstacle to pray for unity with a church in whose followers the statements of the Bible about being a new creature are not clearly testified to, in order to manifest the life of Christ in their own present. Without such assumptions, the Pentecostal churches ask themselves: *Unity in what? Friendship around what?* It is worth remembering that the unity of Christians is enduring to the extent that they love the Lord. It only makes sense if they love his children, who become, through the love that unites, brothers and sisters. God gives unity through love which, as Augustine of Hippo said, "It is the Spirit who unites God among Him and with his creature" (Moltmann, 1994:346). This is a unity that transcends the earth and is so only when it is part of what begins with and in God, among those who love him and wash themselves from sin in the blood of Christ. In this work, however, Christians must recognise and maintain unity, through fidelity and always seeking to remain in it. Pentecostal believers and churches love communion and often create different networks of contact with other Christians and churches. This testifies to their conviction of seeking and finding the invisible unity,

which already exists among believers, but which is made visible through the Holy Spirit. Surely, however, the local churches are not willing in the name of a certain unity to lose their autonomy. Then, returning to the initial paradigm, for the Pentecostals the only possible unity is that in the diversity of the *chàrisma*, in the awareness and esteem of their own autonomies, in spite of any uniformity. Moreover, they have always been opposed to the idea of creating a single great church, with a single common summit.

Charismatic is the whole life when lived in faith, because the promised Spirit spreads to vivify it. Certain individual forces are charismatic when they are used in relationships that structure a common life project. Often, they are made visible and believers are aware of them only when they become or are realised as structures of vital relationships. Believers place their natural gifts at the service of the community, where they take on a new character, even though the boundaries remain weak, as happens in real life. This leads to an indivisible bond, just like a unity already in itself, between being Christian and being human. The Christian is, in fact, a person new to the power of the Spirit and everything of it is the fruit or gift of the Spirit, even the vital gifts take part in this pneumatic being. Social life, as well as worldly life, is all one; life in the Spirit. Therefore, for the community of Christ there is only one type of unity, in the diversity or variety of gifts, certainly not in uniformity. The Church is founded on the acceptance of others in their otherness and specificity and needs only the free fullness of individual charisma in all their variety. Every restriction and uniformity in thought, word and deed has devastating consequences for the Pentecostal communities, while only unity in variety gives the community the features of the Church of Christ, which within a uniform society demonstrates its capacity for healing. "Life is pluralistic, and even more so is life re-created. Those who are not willing to accept it choose death and are already stiffened in the flattening of all differences" (Moltmann, 1994: 54). Everywhere there are people who gather in the name of the Lord, they form the Church, that of Christ. They may be of different nationalities, languages and cultures, but they represent a single Church, therefore there is a uniqueness of believers throughout the world. Therefore, unity is a fact for whoever is in Christ, but with the awareness that it must be improved. After Pentecost, from the book of Acts, can be learnt that the three thousand people, although they did not yet have a theology or even knowledge of the Scriptures, became already part of the Church, of that unity which comes from Christ and is worked by the Spirit, thanks to the experience of salvation, confirmed and consolidated by the next one with the Spirit. It follows that, to be part of the Church, theological formulations are important, but not as important as the main event of salvation, which allowed thee believers to become part of that one and true Church of Christ. The unity of the Church is not uniformity, but unity in the one Lord who has redeemed his people. This unity exists and coexists, also through the numerous denominational and confessional expressions, because it is

everywhere; people who have had the experience of salvation come together. This spiritual unity must take on an increasingly visible expression. The Church has an empirical and social dimension, in which she must express her own spiritual unity, recognising that each church is part and reflection of the one Church of Jesus Christ (Rodman, 2009: 227). Part of the fascination of pentecostalism comes from the conviction that the Spirit of God does not need any mediator but is available to anyone who believes and makes himself available to God's redemptive work, an intervention or rather an event that makes every believer part of a *spiritual humanity*. This makes it clear that pentecostal spirituality should be better understood as a fundamentally experiential type of spirituality. Unfortunately, the experience of the Spirit for some Pentecostals, especially among those believers closest to a type of popular spirituality, becomes a justification for a faith and a practice that leads them to excessive triumphalism, resulting in a kind of religious elitism and deep schisms, not only towards other Christians, but also among themselves. In reality, the experience of the Spirit should introduce a healthy humility and recognition of the contextuality in which the development of doctrine and orthopraxis emerges. This recognition could lead to a greater openness towards the assumption of a new form of being Pentecostal, on the part of some separatist and exclusivist doctrines, determining the assumption of a more significant role of pentecostalism in the wider Christian tradition and in the world. Moreover, Pentecostals should develop a broader appreciation for other Christians and, as the people of the Spirit, they should learn to recognise, even more than others, the work of the Spirit throughout the Christian tradition. This would lead the Pentecostals to a greater openness to ecumenical dialogue, discovering that in reality it is probably in harmony with many aspects of pentecostal identity. At the same time, through dialogue and openness, other Christians could also discover and appreciate Pentecostals better (Neumann, 2012: 58).

### 5.3 The Ecumenical Movement and the WCC (World Council of Churches).

One of the topics that has occupied the discussions of the church, to which theologians and fathers have always dedicated themselves, is that of unity. However, it must be emphasised, the problem and the priority of such a subject have varied over the centuries. The main problem is to have a common understanding about the category of unity to have a common intention of how to achieve it within the Church. Especially during the twentieth century, the discussions and perspectives of the churches around it, paradoxically have generated and procured deep rifts for Christianity. In fact, although agreement has been reached on the desire and need for the Church of Christ to be united, the same cannot be done with regard to its nature and form; the substantial differences are due, above all, to the very nature of the churches. In short, each church has its own idea and form of unity, because it is linked to its truth or proposal to be a church or worse, for some, like the Vatican

one, linked to the conviction of being the one and only true church of Christ (Erickson, 2013: 98). The good example was given by some churches that, while living in division, confessing the unity of the Church, wanting to manifest it and it then gave rise to the ecumenical movement for the unity of the Church. Through this initiative they have come out, in different times and ways, from their secular isolation and have begun a journey of renewal, which hopefully will lead them, as and when God wills, to the goal of the full Communion. For the moment, the basic divisions and reasons remain, ecumenism cannot ignore them and does not trivialise them, but assumes them in a fraternal dialogue, in the light of the Word of God. Even though they are divided, one can think that rediscovered communion, even if very partial, can grow. Moreover, when Pentecostals meet other Christian churches, they can understand that none of them exhaust in itself all the fullness of the gospel; each church has its limits, defects and sins, but together all can reach a greater fullness, in mutual respect (Ricca, 1998: 35).

The WCC is a *fellowship* of churches worldwide, which expresses a common faith in Jesus Christ, striving to respond together to their common vocation, to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It was born on a Protestant initiative in 1948 in Amsterdam, in its first assembly, in which one hundred and forty-seven churches were represented. Its last assembly was held in 2013 in Busan, Republic of Korea, where three hundred and forty-five member churches, representing more than one hundred and twenty countries of the world, were gathered, although theological reflection and the first organisational steps date back to the previous phase of the Second World War. Not surprisingly, the strong Christocentric orientation during the initial stages, elaborated by the council, is expressed in the thought of the assemblies of Evanston (1954) and Vancouver (1983). The rigorous Christo-centrism proposed by Barth's theology, in that phase, was the main way to overcome the differences and the scandal of division and above all, to reconcile and keep together the particularism of the individual ecclesial traditions. In addition, the Christo-centrism of the CEC is supported by the missionary and revivalist soul of most of the churches that gave rise to the movement (Ferrario, 2008a: 129). The entry into the Council of the Orthodox component determined a shift in the theological balances. There was a need for a balance in the theological elaboration in a Trinitarian perspective, through a new accentuation of pneumatology. This factor was instrumental in entering the WCC of a type of Christianity above all charismatic, which in those years went through its Spring through a charismatic flowering. Indeed, the churches of the third world propose a Christianity that does not care so much about the problems of dogmatic theology, but elaborates a theology of experience, strongly pneumatological. The inclusion in the WCC of this type of Christianity has served as an icebreaker to start a dialogue with the Pentecostals who, until that moment, had considered the WCC as incompatible with their spirituality. Now, through a pneumatological

perspective, the Pentecostals find a common basis on which to discuss and dialogue. In this way one arrives at 1991, with the assembly in Canberra, where the theme was, "Holy Spirit, renews all creation". But Canberra also highlighted the great differences in perspective around the pneumatological subject. In fact, if on the one hand the Eastern churches wanted to bring a classical type of pneumatology back to the centre of the discussion, taking up the dogmas of Trinitarian doctrine, on the other hand the Western and Third World churches had in mind a different type of pneumatology, based on experience, that was born into ethnic contexts and inherited traditions and customs from their own environments. Surely the effect was explosive. The importance of Canberra is given precisely by having managed to free themselves from an exclusive Christo-centrism in favour of a more balanced theology that rediscovered the role of the Spirit, and then open to all others. In fact, while the speech of the Orthodox Patriarch Parthenios of Alexandria tried to make the doctrine of the Holy Spirit current, starting from the first pneumatological statements of Christianity, the professor of theology, the Reformed Chung Hyun Kyung from South Korea made a provocative speech, highlighting how in history the carnal man has always tried to suffocate the Spirit of God and also that of man and creation. As a solution, a rediscovery and enhancement of the creative Spirit of life and communion and of every good relationship was proposed. From these presuppositions the very concept of *koinōnía* was rethought, beginning to discuss communion from a pneumatological perspective, that is, as a gift and vocation. From this is understood unity as a variety of communion, rejecting monolithic and centralistic models. It is not a single great unitary church that is the goal that is sought, but a communion of churches, that remain churches because they retain their own characteristic as gift and originality of the Spirit, but they come together as if they were one Church. From this comes a new way of understanding ecclesiology; no church that participates in the council must give up its own church, but each individual church must consider the others as real churches in the true sense of the word. In each member church the substantial elements of the true Church are realised, but at the same time, each individual congregation and Christian confession must recognise that the boundaries of the Church of Christ are wider than its own church. On the basis of this ecclesiology the churches are in a spiritual relationship with one another, in which each individual is seen as a *gift*, enrichment for one another, so that the Body of Christ may be built up and the life of the church renewed. From this moment on, on this common basis, the Pentecostal churches, through some of their representatives, are finally discovered and can offer their contribution to the ecumenical movement (Neuner, 2011:72-73).

The Ecumenical Council of Churches is not the ecumenical movement, but part of it. The ecumenical movement, like the Pentecostal movement, recognises the full paternity of the Spirit of God. This is also confessed and attested to by the WCC who feels like a child of this movement,

wanted by the Holy Spirit. Within this field of action, the WCC understands itself as an instrument of the churches and has no authority over the Christian confessions. At Uppsala (1968) and Nairobi (1975), its temporariness was declared, with a view to a greater end. It was recognised as a necessary instrument to undertake a path that will lead the churches to an ever-greater unity of communion, so great that they no longer need means and models, but only when the Spirit will realise it in its fullness. The WCC has as its driving force two departments that constitute the mainstays of the Council that collect and produce all the documents that are produced in the various ecumenical meetings, also dealing with their reception in the churches and among scholars. These bodies are "Life and Action" and "Faith and Constitution". The first was promoted by the Lutheran bishop of Uppsala, Nathan Soderblom, to address in a coordinated way the problems concerning the responsibility of the churches towards society. While the department of Faith and Constitution was promoted by the Anglican bishop Charles Brent, to address the theological concepts that divide Christians. The two bodies obeyed two different logics: the first favoured the unity of the churches through the practical service to which to render society, while the second had the task of clarifying the doctrines of the individual churches. There were also different theological assumptions, while "Life and Action" drew inspiration from the liberal theology of the American Social Gospel, which relativised dogmatic problems, the other, "Faith and Constitution" was inspired by dialectical theology, which places its emphasis on revelation and its doctrinal content. In reality, the two commissions Faith and Constitution and Life and Action, which later became Church and Society, were not born with the CEC, but merged into it as two departments, coordinated by a central committee; on the contrary, they were the tracks on which the Council would then arrive and walk. These two departments were born at the conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910, which marked the official beginning of the ecumenical movement. It was mainly a missionary conference, where the young churches that had received the gospel through the missions, especially the European ones, denounced that, together with the gospel, the missions of the churches had brought with them the divisions that were in Europe in their countries of origin. From this denunciation, the churches made amends and decided to set up a permanent commission for the coordination of ecumenical activities. The projects were implemented and developed through the commissions mentioned above, which then flowed into the WCC (Gibellini, 2007:458).

At the first world conference in 1927, the programme of "Faith and Constitution" to eliminate the scandal of division was already decided: the confession of faith, the nature of the Church, the sacraments, the ministry and unity of believers. The participants approached the topics in a comparative way, tending to accentuate diversity rather than agreement. This helped the churches to understand and know each other but did not produce a dynamic to reconcile differences. Rather, there

was a tendency to strengthen membership. In the seventies the commission declared the need for some necessary requirements to achieve the visible unity of believers, namely, the confession of the apostolic faith, sacraments, common ministries, and common principles of discernment. But it soon realised that the attainment of such intentions brought a great effort, but never obtained the desired result. The department of "Faith and Constitution", aware of this, realised that unity and renewal cannot be fired, they go hand in hand. Renewal is part of the work of the Spirit, which creates life and promotes the dynamics that sustain and protect it. Then, it is recognised as a work of the Spirit, which unites the church for the well-being of the place where it is placed for the liberation of men, the struggles and social demands and the struggles for the liberation of life and creation which were soon included in the churches' project. In fact, the Department of Faith and the Constitution argued that only as free men can we join the movement for the search for the unity of the Church. Therefore, believers are challenged to enjoy, through the action of the Spirit in the world, the unity hoped for and desired by Christ. The programme on justice, peace and the protection of creation has led to a new way of thinking about the Church as a moral community and unity has been understood as unity at a high price. It is a price to be paid also through the commitment of each individual church and believer. "The new course of study has produced perspectives that have seemed to instill new life into the understanding of the unity that God calls us to live in the world and for the world" (Tanner, 2004: 45). In addition, the methodological approach of the department has also changed over time. "Faith and Constitution", after Montréal (1963), through the study of hermeneutics, examines some challenges that have been proposed by some new theologies, such as that of liberation and beyond. This has allowed the value and necessity of experience to find space within the theological discourse. This stimulus also comes from the Latin American theologians who asked "Faith and Constitution" for a deconstruction of the classical method, highlighting the need to begin to reflect starting from the experience of the grassroots communities, which read and witness to Scripture. In response, the department proposed, in seeing diversity no longer as an obstacle to be overcome or a problem to be solved, but as an enrichment, a gift of the Spirit to be cultivated. The diversity is a gift to be valued and encouraged, because the originality of the Spirit is recognised in diversity and true communion can only be achieved through the charisma of each individual church. Indeed, diversity blossoms when faith is authentically embodied in different cultural and human contexts, which bring the gifts celebrated and preserved by all the churches into a true communion. They manifest themselves and enrich believers as if they were all in one Church. Once again, even within one of the departments, a common pneumatic path is beginning to be traced, a charismatic opening for a more ecumenical dialogue, so that even the Pentecostals can find in this a common front and their place to offer their contribution for the near future in the search for unity.

In addition to the WCC, it is important to mention another ecumenical body that is the Global Christian Forum, with regard to the participation of the Pentecostal churches. It is less institutional in character and more aimed at analysing the existing situation and has facilitated the entry of numerous Pentecostal churches where they feel more at ease in it than previously had been hoped for in the WCC (Napolitano, 2015a:70). Its beginnings are linked to the WCC, which in the last decade, through its leadership, recognised the need to create a neutral space, a kind of forum where representatives of institutions such as the WCC and the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity could dialogue with representatives of Pentecostal, Evangelical and Charismatic Churches. This process led to the organisation of two important meetings: Limru, Kenya, in 2007 and the second in Manado, Indonesia, in 2011. The GCF is a useful platform, where relations of understanding and mutual trust are created between participants and between their ecclesial communities. Thanks to its initiatives, communities such as the pentecostal ones, which for many years had no relations with the historical churches, are now involved in common projects (Choromanski, 2015:5).

## 5.4 Pentecostal principles for ecumenism.

In this paragraph the researcher will try to outline, in summary, what the principles or those theological and biblical categories are that the Pentecostals may propose or consider useful to help the Christian churches in the search for unity. Those assumptions and objectives to be kept in mind and to be achieved in order to arrive at a form of unity, which can include all Christians.

The title reveals a methodological choice in exposing the theme, that is, not to present an idea of Pentecostal ecumenism, but to expound the principles matured within the pentecostal experience which, in their application, can contribute to the communion between believers and the churches. The Pentecostals, like all other Christians, through their originality, can contribute to achieving and maintaining the goal of unity, not by imposing, but by giving their contribution to the common cause and above all to satisfy the desire of Christ through the Holy Spirit

Gathering around the topic of conversation is the principal and the necessary step to build any dialogue. So, in order to form a common table where the other churches decide to dialogue together with the Pentecostals, a need exists to distribute the invitations to theologians who, while representing some aspects of their tradition, have something special to say about the experience of the Spirit, because if the contribution of Pentecostal churches are welcomed within an ecumenical group, it can only be in such a positive direction. This does not mean that all have a positive view of the importance

of the discourse on the Spirit and above all a unique idea, but simply that each of the selected voices will have something significant to say in order to contribute to the conversation.

Bringing the reflection on the Spirit back on the ecumenical table, as the first topic of any discourse on unity, is the first great contribution that Pentecostal churches can and must make to the movement for Christian unity. However, any discourse on the Spirit cannot fail to open up to a new reflection, devoid of traditional and confessional prejudices, on the category of experience. A new reflection that takes up and reformulates, on both sides, some of the central issues surrounding the concept of experience in general. Including, among other things, the challenge of defining the concept of experience and the relative relationship that sustains it with a discourse of theological epistemology

As far as pentecostalism is concerned, there is a need to demonstrate how the experience of the Spirit, better understood as an encounter, has worked within one's own theology and spirituality and how they have understood and realised the traditional triple mediating work of the Spirit between Scripture, tradition and experience. This exploration should lead the Pentecostals to a considerable reflection, that is, not to make the experience with the Spirit a justification for faith and practice. Furthermore, Pentecostals are called to self-criticism, so that the experience of and with the Spirit does not end with the event, relativising and even neglecting the work of sanctification and, above all, the responsibility that this experience requires. An appreciation of the mediated nature of the Spirit should introduce a healthy humility and recognition of the context in which the development of the pentecostal doctrine emerges, and then build around it an orthopraxis, which can indicate the path and be recognisable, in its Christian substance. Moreover, the Pentecostals, in order to be heard and then understood, must reconfigure some of their doctrines, so that they can be made more relevant in the broader Christian tradition and in the world. In view of such an end, the Pentecostals should be able to develop an appreciation for the wider Christian tradition, considering how the Spirit actually works through the transmission of the saints. In such a way that the Pentecostals have a greater openness to ecumenical dialogue, in harmony with some aspects of their tradition and also, through dialogue, there is a new appreciation for the pentecostal tradition on the part of all others, especially for the emphasis on the encounter with the Spirit, placed as the foundation of every pentecostal principle. This should happen, since an openness to the pentecostal ways of living the Spirit can introduce, for other Christian traditions, a fresh and effective enthusiasm and a new hope for how it is able to interrupt secularism, now an unstoppable force that seeks to absorb all Christians, so that He may lead to a reform and transformation of the Church at the global level. In fact, by recognising the experience of the Spirit as an event in the Church and in the individual believer, new ways of discerning the activities of the Spirit in the Church, in the world and in individual life can be opened;

suggesting innovative ways to discern the work of the Spirit in the Church, in the world, and in individual life. By suggesting innovative ways of discerning the work of the Spirit in the world, including the possibilities of discerning it in other religions and the profane sciences, this makes it possible for all Christians to use these possible resources for a new configuration of Christian theology and practice (Neumann, 2012:65).

Among all the theological badges, baptism in Spirit has the greatest connection with other traditions, towards the formation of an ecumenical pneumatology. In fact, all Christian communities accept the category and have interpreted it consistently, according to their understanding of the Church and Christian initiation. In reality, the doctrine of the Holy Spirit can function as a lens for discussion with different ecclesiologies and as a basis for comparison. The ecumenical challenge for the Pentecostals will be to develop their distinctive core, so that, while preserving what is most important to their understanding of Christian life and the Church, on the other hand will contribute to a broader ecumenical pneumatology. They do not serve other Christian families if they do not preserve and preserve the substance and the sign of their revelation, because only in this way can they build and make others, with them, part of a single blessing. The ideal would be a reworking of the Pentecostal badges, in a way that preserves the unique accents, but presenting them as a response from the wider contours of the biblical proposal, for a diversity of voices around the ecumenical table. The challenge in this broader reworking of the doctrine of the baptism of or with the Spirit will be to remain at the same time within the Pentecostal experience, but succeeding in making it understood by all others, without ever giving up and giving in to any of the theological badges or accents (Macchia, 2006:43).

It must not be believed that baptism with the Holy Spirit is a magical power that God has given to Pentecostals to be better than other believers. This has been and always will be the mistake of some Pentecostal preachers and of some groups that aim at exclusivity to preserve their own conviction of superiority, linked to the charismatic experience. Do not forget that the Spirit acts by establishing contacts and relationships. Baptism has the power to intensify relationships to strengthen communion between believers and between churches. He opens the Pentecostals up to the others and vice versa, making them see the other as a brother and sister, part of them, bound by a spiritual current, which is precisely the Spirit of God. Power for all Christians, who recognise themselves only through the power of the same Spirit. From the beginning the power of the Spirit, manifested by the *chárismata*, had to be a natural fact for those born again, according to God's plan. They are ordained for the common good and so that God's purpose can be realized together with all those who have received it. "To say that the pentecostal movement represents a rediscovery of the supernatural

dimension is only true if we mean the rediscovery of the truth that every particle and every process of material existence bears witness to God's activity" (Taylor, 1975: 113). In fact, as in the pentecostal traditional conception Spirit and individual are in close relation to each other, so Spirit and body are complementary. This is evident for the Pentecostal churches, since it is the action of the Spirit that creates the community; this is undeniable also for all Christianity, because it is a fact within the New Testament writings and in particular in the Pauline ones. The union of different groups of believers within a single body is the most vivid testimony of a reconciling and creative action of the Spirit and is an example in the world in which He, in the Body of Christ, overcomes all national, social, sexual and racial barriers, as well as those traditionally distant and in some ways adverse. This Body, which transcends all-natural affinities and differences, stands in the world as a great sign of the unifying and creative power of the Spirit. It is both an event and a prophecy of the way of life that God chose for mankind, as the initial fulfilment of the end of humanity, of freedom, fraternity, equality and above all unity of the kingdom of God (Berkhof, 1971:60).

A pioneer of the early Pentecostal movement, Seymour, said, "If we are not one in doctrine, we can still be one in Spirit" (Vondey, 2010:8). He said it, despite his awareness that not all Christians have the same doctrine. He said it, despite being convinced that believers with a different doctrine from his, had to be expelled from the community. Seymour was a realist in ecumenical matters. In fact, he was aware that it would not be possible to achieve Christian unity without the churches being prepared to pay a high price, that of giving up some particular doctrines and historical positions. At the same time, however, although they were aware that some differences in doctrine might be a valid cause for division, Seymour and the other leaders of the Azusa mission believed and preached that many aspects of the difference should be tolerated and accepted in the bonds of Christian love. The strength of Seymour's ecumenical commitments is demonstrated when he spoke of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and its signs of accompaniment. While speaking in languages was an important sign of the Pentecostal experience, Seymour considered love as a more fundamental trait of the Spirit-filled life. So, once again, the pioneer could see in the experience of the Spirit the only way forward for a true unity of the Church, because the Spirit is love and love comes from God. Only in the name of and through love can indivisible bonds and the foundations on which to build true unity be built and received from it the right ways and the holy perspective for a journey together, for all dialogue and ecumenical desire (Jacobsen, 2010:9-10). The *koinōnía* provides the theological currency to locate the baptism of the Spirit as a concept of mediation between pneumatology and ecclesiology. The *koinōnía* has a dualistic function, it serves as an instrument to give space to the Pentecostals at the table of ecumenical dialogue and as a place of development of pentecostal ecclesiology. To this end, its capacity for mutual information has led the biblical concept of communion to find its way to the

centre of ecumenical language, which was created to express the nature of the church and its unity. As far as Pentecostal ecclesiology is concerned, they are still finding their place and as a result have not yet officially established a clear ecumenical programme. However, through the category of communion, the Pentecostal churches around the ecumenical table find and testify that it is the very substance of the baptism of the Spirit. Also, because spiritual baptism offers the link between the kingdom and the church, because both spiritual baptism and *koinōnía* are conceptually linked, they determine the structure that allows ecclesiology to reach the other. Pentecostalism speaks and has in its ecclesiology the announcement of an *intra* communion and is the *koinōnía* in the local churches and the announcement *extra* is the *koinōnía* between different ecclesiastical traditions, denominations and global communities. The *extra* announcement also demonstrates the need to include pentecostal ecclesiology in the current ecumenical conversation, because the baptism of the Spirit goes beyond the pentecostal experiences of the *chárisma*; it is an expansive metaphor that touches the redemptive activity of God as present in the world (Harris, 2017:25).

The Pentecostals consider the flow of faith throughout the world as due to the global outpouring of the Spirit; the quotation of Peter on the day of Pentecost well expresses it. However, although it should not be excluded that the spread of Pentecost throughout the world seems to depend on a combination of favourable elements, pentecostalism finds space almost everywhere, generates an army of enthusiasts and can start almost without anything, with a street sermon or with a biblical study in an assumption in the poorest part of the city. This makes pentecostal spirituality suitable for various contexts, in which, spontaneously, it acts as a leaven to transform them and then make them Christian. From this can be understood that Pentecostal theology exists on three levels. The ordinary theology is that of men, women and children who attend pentecostal congregations. This theology is not systematic, but personal and practical. It is the theology of the common believer without formal theological formation, whose convictions are formed by personal biblical reading, the sermons of the local pastor and religious experience. At a certain distance from this theology there is that of the ministers who have received an education in the seminary. Finally, there is the theology of those who work in educational institutions and whose orientation is probably academic, technical, professional and abstract. These three levels are represented within the pentecostal community, from the minister to the academic theologian, and are not necessarily in conflict with one another. In fact, it may be that the three levels are complementary, as the academic version simply expresses in a more sophisticated way what ministers and church members believe. The academic theologian is, to some extent, probably the minister who has an understanding of the historical origin and development of the theological position they hold and, if they have travelled or read widely, an understanding of the cultural diversity that shapes pentecostal beliefs in different parts of the world. From this the

complexity of a reception within the community of an ecumenical theology can be understood. In fact, it can easily happen that within a pentecostal group there is a different sensitivity to the desire for unity, according to the formation and conscience of the individual believer or minister. This also makes it difficult, in some cases, to participate as groups or federations of Pentecostal churches within the ecumenical world (Kay, 2011:65). Despite these real and objective difficulties, traditional churches for their theologies tend to consider the Pentecostal movements as a provocation, a stimulus for their own repentance and a sense of challenge for themselves. Because the growth and confluence of a large mass of Christians within these churches show a fundamental fact, namely that the pentecostal movements have revitalised and rediscovered a dimension of Christianity that has been forgotten by the institutional churches. The Pentecostals have brought to the attention of the theology and spiritual practice of the fundamental Christian categories of churches which, for too long, have been forgotten by many churches; these have been secularised and transformed into pure institutions. One example is the strong community awareness that is fundamental within each individual pentecostal group, as well as the healing of the sick and the exorcisms; a forgotten legacy, which is an integral part of the great mandate that Jesus entrusted to the apostles. For the Pentecostals, speaking in tongues is the foundation and the first ecumenical sign of the church, as well as prophecy and spontaneous prayer. These karstic manifestations are the moments of the liturgy in which the cult event is experienced as a protagonist by the individual believer and is no longer limited to suffering it as a simple listener. Then, baptism in or with the Holy Spirit is realised as an experience or as a clear sign of the descent or fulfilment of prayer. It is as if it were, for the believer who experiences it at that moment, an *epiclesia* of all Christianity gathered from always and all over the world. It is the response to the invocation for the descent of the Spirit over the entire assembly of believers. Moreover, the establishment of universities and seminaries, the creation of journals and the production of theological literature, represent on the part of the Pentecostal world an offer of dialogue and cooperation in the conflicting spheres within the Christian ecumenism. It must not be forgotten that the central theme that all the Pentecostal churches have brought to the attention of all Christianity, namely, that of the theology of the Spirit as theology of life, in the sense of a renewal operated by the Spirit of the people of God, of all creatures, of the whole earth. If this becomes the priority of all other Christians, then the ecumenical provocation of the Pentecostal movements will have realised its meaning (Hollenweger, 1996:117).

After all, the objective of ecumenical conversations is to produce an ecumenical document, with the vision and hope that the churches will receive this document and that through it a clearer understanding of the traditions on the path of reconciliation and unity will be obtained. The Pentecostals face particularly deep-rooted challenges in these areas, as they lack not only the

ecumenical formation and teaching of churches, but also the infrastructure and support for articulating long-term commitments and receiving results. Ecumenical conversations with pentecostal participation face the dilemma of having produced a mass of literature, which is still waiting to be received by the pentecostal community. One of the main reasons for this dilemma is that the reception, discussion, response and implementation of ecumenical documents among the Pentecostals are drastically limited; most documents find little public recognition. There is no infrastructure in the pentecostal movement that allows ecclesiastical leaders, scholars, pastors and congregations to obtain information on ecumenical conversations, to discuss the common conclusions of dialogues or to engage in ecumenical discussion without fear or pressure. The construction of ecumenical infrastructures between Pentecostals begins with an awareness of the existing conversations and their implications for Christian life. The first step in building these institutional resources is the availability of ecumenical conversations and a witness of ecumenical friendship that allows Pentecostals to discern for themselves the meaning of counting and building new relationships. In turn, the availability of these resources will also help the wider ecumenical community to dismantle stereotypes and engage more deliberately in conversations with the Pentecostals (Vondey, 2013:24-25).

## 5.5 Conclusions: chapter 5.

If, for the majority Christians, the unity of the Church is of great importance, this is not always obvious for all Pentecostals. In spite of this fact, with this last chapter the researcher has tried to demonstrate that in reality the unity of the Church is important for a only a section of Pentecostals; those who have reflected on, and continue to question themselves about the role and the work of the Spirit within the Christian community. Through some pentecostal principles, it is possible to indicate an ecumenical path for the Pentecostal churches who, in turn, can offer the ecumenical movement its own contribution towards the reaching of Christian unity. The reflection on the Spirit makes believers aware of the importance of the movement towards unity through the consideration of the dynamics of the Spirit in Christianity. The first step is the confession that the unity of the Church is important, but goes beyond simply being together, and that the unification of the Church is much more than any kind of organisation or structure. Certainly, unity is not reached through joint but ambiguous declarations from persons in ceremonial dress. The pentecostal reflection has brought to light the truth that one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is unity, but it must be reached through the liberty of worship in every single church and through the individuality of every single believer. The diversity of every single believer, as with every single church, does not separate but unites the Body of Christ because it springs from an experience with the Holy Spirit. The ecumenism of the Spirit seems to be

spontaneous, dynamic, and centred on Christ. Instead, the ecumenism of the meticulous work of committees of various organisations, based on the exchange of particular doctrines and theologies, seems to advance the churches just one centimeter at a time.

In spite of their worries and reservations towards some forms of ecumenical activities, sometimes led and accredited by institutional bodies, the Pentecostals, by presenting a reflection on the practical life of the Spirit, have tried to find ways that would allow a greater cooperation between churches. In the last century, the ecumenical tradition was more concerned with stating their differences, while today, maybe thanks to the contribution of the Pentecostal churches, the emphasis is no longer upon what divides the churches, and maybe not even on what they share. The thoughts and reflections have moved towards a recognition of the work of the Holy Spirit in every community and what the Spirit can do through the gifts that He bestows upon the various Christian confessions. (Kay, 2009:264-265).

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND THEMES FOR FUTURE STUDY

### 6.1 The pentecostal ecclesiological question in ecumenical dialogues.

As pentecostalism has grown in the world, it has begun to be noticed and has learned to respect and be respected by other Christian denominations as well. From this arose the desire on the part of some guides of the churches of classical Pentecostals to compare themselves with other Christians, especially with the Catholic church. A formal dialogue between classical Pentecostals and Roman Catholics, internationally, took place in six stages: 1972-76; 1977-82; 1985-89; 1990-97; 1998-2006; 2011-2016. While, there was a two-phase dialogue with AMCR (World Alliance of Reformed Churches), 1996-2000; 2001-2011; and with the LWF (World Lutheran Federation), 2005-2010. During the dialogue the representatives of each church met regularly to elaborate a theological programme in which each party presented, among other things, its ecclesiological position and commented on the institution of the other party. The Pentecostals in dialogue were forced to consider the nature of the church and this, as expected, was theologically complex. International dialogues have been important for Italian Pentecostalism because they have served as a model for those that took place in Italy between the Pentecostals and the other evangelical churches (Dialogue: Pentecostal / Waldensian: 1996-2000; 2002-2009; 2009-2016; Federation Pentecostal Churches / Adventist Church: 2008-2010; 2011-2013), unfortunately still the Italians have not undertaken a dialogue with Catholics. In its simplest form, the questions that have emerged regarding ecclesiology from international dialogues are: How can we decide when a group of people is a church? To do this, do we have to look at their beliefs or their characteristic practices? If we look at their beliefs and practices, can there be some that are fundamental and others that are optional? Could a church exist without baptism when it is not intended as a sacrament? In fact, within an ecumenical confrontation with other Christian confessions, the need arises to find a consensus on which to then be able to build a dialogue table that can help to understand and make understand pentecostal ecclesiology. This consensus is able to clarify or better try to reflect on the process that makes an ecclesiology genuinely pneumatological before even pentecostal. The key is not the simple number of theological or scriptural references, but whether pneumatology must be recognised as an essential part of the church and its structure. In fact, an ecclesiology that reflects only on its *status quo*, that is, only on what it believes to be and above all on what its history has been through its purely institutional phases, becomes necessary for itself; but it does not lend itself easily to constant and dynamic expansion, open to the action of the Spirit, reaching new areas and groups of people. Therefore, it is not well

disposed to confront itself with the environments and contexts in which it is located; this is a factor that finds clear confirmation in the apostolic church of the New Testament. One of the side effects of this negligence is that of limiting to being a church only that category which composes it at ministerial level, not fully appreciating the role of all the people of God, the laity, not giving them due attention even if moved by the same Spirit who called others to the ministry. The real challenge is instead the continuous process of theological and ecumenical reflection on the church, its nature and its purpose. Unfortunately, despite having discussed the various theological resources, even when the task of building a convergence text on ecumenical ecclesiology has been set, in the midst of all this work, surprisingly little has been said, especially about the ecclesial nature of the Church; that is, what is meant when a group of believers is recognised as a church. The question of ecclesiality concerns the very essence of the theology of the church, that is, the conditions for being itself the Church, in other words, what makes the church *Church*. The bilateral dialogues between Pentecostals and Catholics were discussed above on how to find inspiration to present a certain unity within the Christian tradition, finding in the Trinity the excellent paradigm of being related within the church and among the churches. Talking about this through biblical images from which the different perspectives on the church were born, therefore, essentially the meetings talked about the church as a communion of saints, but never explored how and when this relationship of communion becomes or is, whether this was enough to be a formal church and not just a free congregation of friends. In fact, within the dialogues, and especially in the BEM (the document of Lima, 1982, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry), the very important question of the minimum conditions for being a church has never been raised. In fact, this researcher believes is the consensus that churches must reach before even thinking about proposing ecclesiologies to be in dialogue with each other. Think about the different understandings of ecclesiality between episcopal churches and free churches. The way in which the sacraments are spoken of, the Eucharist, as well as the office of the bishop, does not seem to take into account at all the urgency of this question. Episcopal churches recognise in the bishop's office not only a conventional way of leading the church, but a key condition for the ecclesiality of the church.

The same applies to the celebration of the Eucharist. It is not only a commemoration of the death of Christ on the cross, but, in line with the Eucharistic ecclesiology of Catholic churches, it is an event that makes the church a true Church. These two, Episcopate and Eucharist, are therefore interconnected events, since it takes a bishop who is in apostolic succession to preside over the Eucharist and therefore to define that communion of believers as a true church. Personally, the researcher believes that it is necessary to insist on looking at this type of problem, especially now that many elements that identify for some Christian, Catholic and Orthodox confessions in the first place, that the church does not seem to be relevant at all for most of the non-traditional churches, especially

for the Pentecostal ones. The reason is simple, the new churches, Christian communities that already consider themselves churches, especially Pentecostals, are multiplying everywhere in the world. Faced with this fact, the concept of ecclesiality, its true being as a church, can no longer simply be ignored by the official ecumenical apparatus promoted by traditional Western churches. The evaluation that is actually ignored seems to be a realistic ecumenical observation. From the various dialogues that took place at international level first and then nationally, help was expected to tackle this fundamental problem, but unfortunately what has been produced so far as a text does not offer much. Perhaps a study process should be started to begin to address this thorny question: How can the Church arrive at some minimum understanding of the conditions of ecclesiality that can be embraced by traditional and non-traditional churches, especially for Pentecostal ones? It can therefore be believed that the ecumenical dialogue between the Pentecostals and the other Christian churches can no longer avoid confronting and above all reflecting on this type of issue (Karkkainen, 2010: 241-242).

Basically, two fundamental positions emerge from the dialogues. The first strongly Christological, the church as exclusively centred on Christ. In technical terms, Christology determines ecclesiology historically speaking; usually this church is the Roman Catholic one. In fact, for it the church is the historical presence of God, implemented in social dimensions with the permanent mediation of the man Jesus currently glorified. The church is the community of faith that generates the communication that God makes of himself, in Christ, to some men, in history. The church is the Body of Christ on earth as a: "Primordial sacrament" (Van de Walle, 1966: 100). It is of a hierarchical nature in which ministers or priests obtain their authority from their closeness to Christ. At the same time, the second is a completely alternative model to the institutional and sacramental one, and it is the congregationalist pentecostal model. It focuses on the community / church made up of people and on the role of the Holy Spirit who works in each of them and among all of them. Here the church, as a body of autonomous people, gather together with a common purpose and in a common life to be carried out within the dynamics of the Spirit. In other words, this type of church is based on the belief that it was certainly established by Christ through the comparison and inspiration of the New Testament texts, but it is created by the Holy Spirit through his charismatic action. The church is where Jesus is through the person of the Spirit between men and women gathered in his name (Matthew 18:20). Therefore, where two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus this is a sufficient description of the Church and nothing essential is missing. Essential for the church is not the hierarchy and not even the ministries, which are very important and in the New Testament and there are several, but they do not belong to the being of the church but to its well-being. Already Tertulliano claimed that whoever gathers in the name of Jesus, regardless of number, are a Christian community, even if

they are all lay people in the absence of an ordained ministry. Nothing is essential to the church, except that Jesus presents in the Word through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Certainly, Matthew's verse has a great revolutionary significance and pentecostal congregationalism is so aware of it that it has always adopted it as the theological cornerstone of its ecclesiology. It is a word that nullifies any religious system built on priestly mediation. "In light of this word, the ancient criterion of identification of the church proves unsustainable: *ubi episcopus, ibi ecclesia*" (Ricca, 2010: 113). These two models of church, one Christological and the other pneumatological, imply many differences regarding the relationship between a local church and the universal church. The pneumatological model considers the local congregation formed by the Holy Spirit to be the full manifestation of the life of Christ. For this reason, it is a particular version of the totality of the church that is in the world. For other types of ecclesiologies, especially for the Catholic one but not only, the local congregation is nothing but a small cell of the entire Body which is the universal church. In fact, for the latter if the local church is disconnected from the universal one, it cannot be considered a church. Without an adequate connection with the universal body of the church, local congregations are not valid, they are not a church (Kay, 2009: 244-245). The congregationalist vision is diametrically opposite, in that it recognises in the local church the complete form and manifestation of the church as such.

## 6.2 What will become of Ecumenism?

The growth and dynamism of pentecostalism constitutes the vector that, more than anything else, will push the growth of Christianity on a worldwide scale; it's a given fact that is calmly accepted by all those involved in the work. This, however, brings pentecostalism to a crossroads because of its widespread fragmentation and its heterogeneity. On one side there is the so-called classic pentecostalism that continues to have points of contact with reformed theology, flowering from that trunk of those Evangelical churches, but grafting a new form of strongly charismatic spirituality. The perspective is that of a dialogue based on common themes and shared by the fundamental, theological categories, and hopefully more complex and rugged ethical themes. On the other hand is found almost as an alternative to the classical, a pentecostalism that can be defined as a fourth-Christianity, that which has developed and is growing continually in the developing countries, but is also making its presence felt in the West, also because of the massive immigration of believers that come from those countries. This second type of pentecostalism is always less connected to the world of the Reformation and the historic churches in general, proposing itself as antagonists towards Protestantism as well as towards the Catholic and the Orthodox churches; a kind of anti-denominational Christianity, more experiential than dogmatic, flexible in its formulations and tending

towards a syncretistic approach (Naso, 2012: 164). In spite of this awareness, the numerical relevance of the pentecostal movement and the charismatics, together with their theological propositions no longer allow themselves to undervalue the impact that they have within the entire world sphere, above all, the Christian one. In fact, pentecostalism is in all probability the most extensive religious phenomenon to manifest itself in the bosom of Christianity, certainly the most note-worthy since the 1900s. Together with the ecumenical movement and the Vatican II Council these are the events that have most categorised the last century (Napolitano, 2015a:120). However, now pentecostalism generally finds itself at a pivotal point in its history, because it must most certainly decide in which part of the Christian galaxy it finds itself and above all, if it has any desire to sit around a common table or not, with those sharing a single Christian faith because its dimension and continual expansion could justify a truly autonomous choice. This, though not denying its own evangelical roots could, for its international importance and its global numbers, attempt to make a clear division from the so-called historic Protestantism and move itself away completely from the other churches. A temptation that could arise and certainly not to be undervalued if groups of other traditional Christians, above all, Catholics join together with pentecostalism. This evidence has certainly led to a pentecostalism that presents itself as an alternative to other Christian churches. A new spirituality in respect to the other Christian traditions because it is based on a language and communication capable of drawing, above all, the younger sections of society, who are tired and disillusioned with the rigid dogmatism and cast-iron liturgies of their churches of origin. Faced with this new phenomenon and its exponential growth, the other churches seated around an ecumenical table ask themselves: "Is the Pentecostal universe a threat or an opportunity for dialogue and confrontation?" (Perrin, 2007: 26). The answer to this question is to be sought, reconsidering and taking note of the true aims of ecumenical dialogue. The aim of such ecumenical conversations cannot principally be that of seeking doctrinal agreement or an organisational unity because this would effectively undermine the success of such efforts. The movement for the unity of the Church should rather be to seek a shared understanding and communication amongst all Christians to give an answer to these churches. The movement should aim at eliminating those stereotypes that have determined past attitudes and undermined the ecumenical efforts. To act in a way that the participants would not lose themselves in the agreements and discussions of only certain questions that work on the periphery of the Christian faith without focusing on the true problems and misconceptions. Different dialogues as noted above, should allow each group to develop its own programmes aimed at affronting the real problems and seeking concrete solutions that would allow the churches to speak and not to separate themselves in the indifference of superficial meetings. What is important is to create ample opportunity for personal meetings but also between churches, between believers, and if possible, also at a parochial

level, in order to promote relationships. In this way the Church would perform a prophetic function and work towards the unity of the Church and would be a means by which the congregations begin to co-operate beyond their borders. The impact of the local church would be empowered, the social-economic worries and social-cultural positions on social justice and the historic inequality that they have faced would have, as an objective, the creation of just and sustainable communities (Nel, 2018: 6). The researcher believes that it is necessary to seek a humble theology together and a spirit of learning from the communal past; a historic conscience on the ecumenical story on which to lay the propaganda of an organic or missionary ecumenism. This new proposition should not be seen as a substitution for traditional efforts aimed at reaching those theological discoveries that acted as icebreakers within the movement, to which, maybe, the western church is well adapted. It should have in itself the *novum* of the Spirit but not minimise the importance of the work performed by those who preceded it, towards a visible and strategic unity. All must now be aware that even if it is less shared at an international level, it must be an approach that finds its correct applications in its ecclesiastical procedures, procedures that reflect that which for years the churches have said about an ecumenical table; a new ecumenical age that can demonstrate a pragmatic approach to Christian unity. This could be a powerful call for many visions regarding the whole world, particularly the Southern Hemisphere, and for many classic Pentecostals to see in this the desire to integrate traditional approaches and institutions with those that are more purely experiential that are realised together through a shared ecumenical procedure. The unity of the Church cannot begin only with theological affirmations, but also and above all only through a life, a worship, a service, a studying together is it possible to recognise and experience the true unity of the Spirit because it is manifested in a visible unity (Wonsuk Ma, 2018: 48).

In fact: “Dialogue is an exchange of gifts at different levels” (Gomez, 2002: 6). It is not a battle, much less a challenge thrown at the other party, so that the other’s faith is put down while the own faith is shown off. Dialogue is a meeting that lays the very basis for a reciprocal readiness and the will to open up to the faith of the other, recognising in the other truths of the Gospel, but above all, making it possible to recognise brothers and sisters in Christ (Gomez, 2002: 6). Dialogue is a spiritual experience that frees the Christian from a faith that is based solely on its own reference. The visible unity of the Church cannot be reached through a diplomatic strategy, but certainly through a shared experience of conversion. Maybe the first step towards churches that do not have an ecumenical past such as the Pentecostals, is the responsibility of those who have a rich history in such. In fact, the ecumenical opening can also be unilateral whenever the interlocutor withdraws from a confrontation for various reasons, or simply from prejudices where such an affirmation should be

received and realised amongst those who today punctually sit around an ecumenical table.<sup>45</sup> It is necessary for there to be a plurality of concepts of unity, maintaining an essential base to allow the arrival of new partners in the ecumenical dialogue, as may be the case of the Pentecostal churches. The fact that the objective of the ecumenical movement has become less clear over time than maybe how it was when it started, requires all of the historical churches to become aware of their responsibilities both to receive and to seek over time, models of unity that do not reflect only the vision of a few, forgetting that the success of the ecumenical movement, in the meantime, is bringing within its circle many people to work towards the initial objectives, born already in the sign of diversity, have been necessarily further pluralised. This process happens simply because of the growing number of individual Christians, some of whom Pentecostals, that demonstrated through their own walk of faith, an interest in ecumenism, desiring to offer their own contribution to it while maintaining their own propositions and deals of unity to follow (Koch, 2018).

By now it is plain for all to see that pentecostalism, because of its huge numerical impact, is modeling Christianity. Christianity is by now turned upside down from within and its central fulcrum is no longer the West, but rather the Southern Hemisphere. Rather should a kind of reverse missionary movement be noticed with missionaries that come from developing countries evangelising the by now secular West. In this way pentecostalism, rather than appearing to be an anti-world phenomenon is revealing itself at the cultural frontline. The sense of this last affirmation is the fact that pentecostalism maintains a certain unity between body and Spirit within the religious experience. In fact, only if it preserves this kind of unity and the body in all its dimensions and in its dynamics reflect this, only then is the Pentecostal experience realised in the Spirit and has its meaning. This finds, today, a large consensus in the postmodern world that refuses any kind of separation and seeks always to have a single meaning to its existence and its own procedures. The pentecostal worship meeting combines beliefs and experiences in a world that gives authority and value to individual interpretation.<sup>46</sup> It is therefore necessary that the other churches, starting from these presuppositions help Pentecostals to present and formulate their proposition of unity, to sit beside and confront those who are already in existence. The researcher believes that this has to be the future priority of ecumenical dialogue, not so much to present individual doctrinal lines, but to manage to find an

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<sup>45</sup> Ecumenical dialogue in our time, Document on ecumenism (Synod 1982) and the papacy and ecumenism (Synod 1995), <https://www.chiesavaldese.org/documents/dialogo-ecum-ns-tempo.pdf> date of access: 12 December 2019.

<sup>46</sup> The New Face of Global Christianity: The Emergence of Progressive Pentecostalism, in: Pew Research Centre, April 12, 2006, p.6, <https://www.pewforum.org/2006/04/12/the-new-face-of-global-Christianity-the-emergence-of-progressive-pentecostalism/> date of access: 12 October 2019.

agreement that can, in its pluralism, inspire all Christians towards what must be the unity of the Church and the way to arrive at this.

If on one hand Pentecostals represent a challenge for all Christianity, as has been mentioned, that for its extraordinary expansion represents about twenty-five percent of Christians in the world, with an exponential growth that renders Christianity always more of a charismatic type, (Christianity that lays the accent on the Spirit and aspires to the first Christian communities, spreading energy amongst its own members with a dynamic worship that aims at transforming the entire existence of the believer); on the other hand, they themselves will be challenged, through ecumenical meetings, to renew their own lives and ecclesiastical structures (Rausch, 2012: 25). They will have to find a way that their fragmentation takes the form of an element of strength, avoiding the fractures of so many separations, learning instead to live their heterogeneity as a richness of gifts to offer to all of Christianity. They will have to learn to respect others, above all, in their diversity, considering themselves as the other part that sits in dialogue. Above all, they must learn to speak with those they've never spoken to before and to say those things that they have never wanted to say, maybe because sometimes it is too painful to admit to them. The researcher believes that the ecumenism of the future must be an instrument of all of the Christian churches to a conversion, maybe no longer to a faith, but of a conversion one to another. This does not signify that each one must lose their own individuality and become like the other, but rather only by knowing those who are different can one consolidate one's own identity of faith, but conversion one towards another means approaching one another. In a walk that no longer proceeds along parallel paths without ever meeting neither making much progress or even staying behind, but walking side by side, listening to the voice of the Spirit as He indicates the direction; enriching oneself through reciprocal knowledge; examining oneself. It is possible to learn from the other how to be better or rather, how to be more Christlike. Pentecostals must begin to ask themselves about the real and true meaning of ecumenism beyond their own experiences with the "ecumenical movement" which without doubt is part of ecumenism but does not represent its entire dimension and expression. They must come to an awareness that ecumenism in its wider sense pursues the unity of the Church as the Body of Christ and it is not a diabolic invention, but a divine gift. Only then will it understand that ecumenism is nothing other than a means to reach that unity that is qualified biblically and to be pursued with conviction (De Chirico, 2016: 9).

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