

# THE PENTECOSTAL CURRENT A GRACE FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

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## Historical background

In the year 2021, the 120th Anniversary of the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit was celebrated, which took place on January 1, 1901 at the Bethel Bible School, on Avenue Stone in Topeka KS, directed by Rev. Charles Fox Parham, better known as the "Stone's Folly Revival".

It was an event of historic and ecumenical significance because it marked the beginning of the charismatic-Pentecostal current destined to cross most Christian denominations in the last century. He had the merit of updating the Pentecost described by St. Luke in chapter II of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles. This message is more relevant than ever.

The message of Stone's Folly speaks to us of the urgency of rediscovering the Holy Spirit in our day. The world and the Church are in desperate need of a permanent Pentecost.

For us Italians, the "Awakening of Stone's Folly" was an event of great importance and significance. At the beginning of the last century there was a certain nostalgia for the gift of the Spirit in the Catholic Church, and it was for this reason that cenacles of prayer arose through an Italian woman named Elena Guerra of Lucca, where the gift of "spiritual confirmation" and a return of the Church to the "upper floor" were invoked by the Holy Spirit through an ancient hymn of the "Veni Creator Spiritus" (Acts 1:13).

This Catholic doctrine on the rediscovery of the gift of the Holy Spirit coincided with that of the sanctification of the most ancient *holiness movements* that harked back to the founder of Methodism John Wesley.

It was this woman Elena Guerra who inspired the Pope of the time, Leo XIII, to ask God in the name of the entire Catholic Church for the gift of the Holy Spirit on the first day of the first year of the twentieth century. This happened "exactly" on the same day that the Holy Spirit "fell" on the Bethel Bible School in Topeka.

This coincidence is undeniable considering the development of the enormous charismatic-Pentecostal current that sprang from it after the Outpouring of the Spirit of Topeka, which led in a century to a growth from zero to 650 million Christians<sup>2</sup>, who experienced the same and the same grace of the "baptism in the Holy Spirit" with the same typical charismatic manifestations of Rev. Parham and his students, including the first woman Agnese Ozman.

This movement, so little studied by specialists, is today the fastest growing missionary movement in the world. It is the greatest movement of revival and renewal in the entire history of the Church.<sup>3</sup> There had never been an event similar to this charismatic/Pentecostal revival destined to reach almost all Christian denominations around the world. And this is why today there is talk of a "current Pentecostalization of contemporary Christianity".<sup>4</sup>

The spiritual phenomenon has in some respects been a "shock" even within the Catholic Church, since no man could have foreseen or planned an injection of the Holy Spirit and power into millions and millions of Catholic charismatics who are "hungry" and in search of God.

In Topeka the Holy Spirit really became the protagonist, giving life to the rediscovery of the Pentecostality of the Church. Other Revivals followed in other spiritually connected places, such as Wales in 1904 and Azusa Street in Los Angeles in 1906. After that was the birth of the Charismatic Renewal in the historic Protestant churches, with the Episcopalian pastor Rev. Dennis Bennett and the Catholic pastor of Duquesne University in Pittsburgh PA in 1967.

<sup>2</sup> DAVID BARRETT, *The 20th Century Pentecostal/Charismatic Renewal in the Holy Spirit, with its of World Evangelization*, Overseas Ministries Study Center, New Haven (Connecticut) 1988.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. MASSIMO INTROVIGNE, *La Sfida Pentecostale*, LDC Torino 1996 and *Aspettando la Pentecoste*, il Quarto Ecumenismo, Intervista a Matteo Calisi e Giovanni Traettino, Edizioni Messaggero, Padova 1996.

<sup>4</sup> KOCH KURT (cardinal), *The Bishop, Ecumenical Dialogue in Mission Territories and the Presence of New Movements*. Report to the PCUC 2018; cf. M. Eckholt, Pentekostalismus. Eine neue "Grundform" des Christseins. Eine theologische Orientierung zum Verhältnis von Spiritualität und Gesellschaft, in: T. Kessler / A.-P. Rethmann (Hrsg.), Pentekostalismus. Die Pfingstbewegung als Anfrage an Theologie und Kirche = Weltkirche und Mission. Band 1 (Regensburg 2012) 202-225, zit. 202.

After twenty centuries, Pentecost once again became a lived story, no longer just told and imagined; *the Baptism in the Spirit* became a unique and unrepeatable personal experience, the crucial moment of conversion, the turning point in a person's spiritual history.

With the birth of Pentecostalism, a new page was opened in the history of the Church, not only because the phenomenon, because of its consistency and proportions, but also because it brings to the fore new Christian subjects, who until yesterday did not exist or did not express themselves, living relegated to the margins of the Christian community.

People from urban ghettos and desolate metropolitan suburbs, crowds of poor people of all kinds, mostly belonging to the South of the world, who find in Pentecostal communities forms of communication consonant with their essentially oral culture, as the theologian Walter Hollenweger wrote: "not the definition but the description, not the thesis but the dance, not the doctrine but the song, not the book but the parable, not the concept but the banquet."<sup>5</sup>

Harvey Cox, a professor at Harvard University, observes in his book *Fire from Haven*: "Pentecostals have felt more comfortable chanting their theology, or putting it in leaflets and booklets for distribution on street corners. Only recently have they started writing books."<sup>6</sup>

However, it must be noted, with satisfaction that compared to the first decades of the last century many things have changed. Today in almost all the branches of the great Pentecostal tree there are leaders and pastors attentive both to academic theology and to theological dialogue conducted even outside the charismatic and Pentecostal world with Catholics, Reformed and Orthodox. In recent decades, a specifically

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<sup>5</sup> cf. MASSIMO INTROVIGNE, Preface in *Waiting for Pentecost*, the Fourth Ecumenism. Interview with Matteo Calisi and Giovanni Traettino, Edizioni Messaggero, Padua 1996.

<sup>6</sup> COX HARVEY, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century*, Perseus Books 1994.

Pentecostal academic culture has also emerged, worthy of note and appreciation. These are the abundant fruits that the Church and the world have reaped from this charismatic-Pentecostal revival initiated by Stone's Folly.

### **The "Italian case"**

It is well known that global ecumenical dialogue with Pentecostals, who represent three-quarters of the world's Protestants and one-third of the world's Christians, has not always been an easy task. Unlike other historical denominations, in general, our Pentecostal brothers do not participate in the movement for Christian unity. This is demonstrated by the attempts that have been made in recent years in various contexts, especially in the Anglo-Saxon world. There is much reticence on both sides, especially in the countries of the southern hemisphere and in those with a strong Catholic tradition in the northern hemisphere. For reasons of space, we do not have the opportunity to analyze the reasons for it here.

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However, in Italy the Holy Spirit has opened a door to dialogue with Pentecostals since the 1980s thanks to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, which shares with Pentecostals some ways of praying and knows how to talk to them. The first structured and significant experiences, personally followed and encouraged by Pope John Paul II, took place precisely in Italy, among Catholic charismatic communities and some Pentecostal pastors.

According to Prof. Massimo Introvigne, "The meeting in 1981 between a representative of the charismatic communities, Matteo Calisi of Bari, and the Pentecostal pastor Giovanni Traettino played a crucial role in this beginning of dialogue, which matured slowly – and not without opposition, both in the Catholic world and in that of the Pentecostals – until the establishment in the 90s of permanent structures including the Italian Charismatic Consultation, born in 1993."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> MASSIMO INTROVIGNE, *Papa Francesco l'incontro "segreto" in Caserta*, What is the Pentecostal world with which the Pontiff

In 1992 Pastor Traettino was invited to speak at a Catholic Charismatic Conference in the "San Nicola" Football Stadium in Bari. On that occasion, Pastor Traettino made a prophetic gesture, that of washing the feet of a representative of the Catholic Church. It was this gesture of humility that marked the beginning of a long collaboration between the Catholic charismatics and Pastor Giovanni Traettino.

Alberto Bobbio wrote in the Pauline weekly *Famiglia Cristiana* of July 27, 2014: "An ecumenical dialogue is born that will lead charismatic Catholics in 1996 to ask forgiveness for the fascist persecutions of the Pentecostals."

The *Italian Charismatic Consultation* (CCI) began in Terlizzi (Bari) in 1993 through the experience of encounter between the Community of Jesus (Catholic) of Bari and the Evangelical Church of Reconciliation (Pentecostal) of Caserta. The first members of the Executive of the ICC were on the Pentecostal side the leaders of the Evangelical Church of Reconciliation: Past. Giovanni Traettino (co-President), Past. Massimo Loda, Past. Ernesto Bretcher sr, Past. Emilio Ursumando; on the Catholic side: Matteo Calisi (co-president), Father Carlo Colonna SJ of the Community of Jesus, Father Ken Metz director of the International Charismatic Renewal Services (ICCRS) and Father Jacques Philippe of the Community of the Beatitudes.

The "Meetings for fraternal dialogue" promoted by the ICC were attended by experts such as Father Raniero Cantalamessa ofm capp. (now Cardinal), Prof. Gary McGee of the Assemblies of God in the USA, Bishop B.E. Underwood of the Pentecostal Churches of Holiness USA, Kilian McDonnell OSB Co-President of the Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue in the Vatican, the historian Prof. Vinson Synan of Regent University in the USA, the theologian Prof. Walter Hollenweger from

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will meet in the figure of Pastor Traettino? La Nuova Bussola, Editorial of 22.07.2014; *cf.* anche MASSIMO INTROVIGNE, *Enciclopedia delle religioni in Italia*, Centro studi sulle nuove religioni Elledici, pag. 290; *cf.* MASSIMO INTROVIGNE, *Le religioni in Italia*, Centro studi sulle nuove religioni, Elledici 2006 pagg. 306-307; *cf.* HOCKEN PETER, *Pentecost and Parousia, Charismatic Renewal, Christian Unity, and the Coming Glory* 2013, pp. 54, 55, 67, 68, 69 and 89; *cf.* NOLL MARK A., NYSTROM CAROLYN, *Is the Reformation Over?: An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism*, p. 29; *cf.* STRETTI EUGENIO, *The Pentecostal Movement*. Le Assemblée di Dio in Italia, Claudiana, 1998, pp. 78-91.

Switzerland, the theologian Father Peter D. Hocken from England, Prof. Stanley M. Burgess of Regent University in the USA and Prof. Massimo Introvigne, Director of the Research Center on New Religions (Cesnur) in Turin.<sup>8</sup>

Of significant importance was the *Meeting for fraternal dialogue* organized by the ICC at the Institute of Ecumenical Theology "St. Nicholas" in Bari from 18 to 20 February 2000, on the theme *The Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement: A Challenge for Theology and for the Churches*. They met together from all over the Peninsula, with some delegations from abroad (Switzerland, France, Romania, England, USA), representatives, scholars, pastors, theologians, and bishops: Catholics, Orthodox and Evangelicals of various denominations, from the historical Protestant Baptists, Waldensians, Assembly of Brothers, Reformed to the Classic Pentecostals, the neo-Pentecostal ones and non-denominational churches such as the Evangelical Church of Reconciliation. Some interdenominational and missionary organizations also participated. Pope John Paul II sent the participants a message of good wishes.<sup>9</sup>

This was followed in 1996 by another historic event where for the first time Catholics asked the Pentecostals for forgiveness. For ecumenists, it was a historic turning point in the dialogue between Catholics and Pentecostals in Italy.

In the spring of that year, on the occasion of the National Convention of 'Renewal in the Spirit' in Rimini, a significant number of Italian Bishops returned Pastor Giovanni Traettino's request for forgiveness and kissed his feet.<sup>10</sup> These include Cardinal Hyacinthe Thiandoum († 2004), archbishop emeritus of Dakar in Senegal<sup>11</sup>, Archbishop Giuseppe Casale, Archbishop Giancarlo M. Bregantini, Archbishop

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<sup>8</sup> cf. SCIANNONEO DONATO, *Gestures of Reconciliation*, Renewal in the Holy Spirit, n. 8 – 2014 p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> LANGIULLI NUNZIO, Press Release CCI of 19.02.2000.

<sup>10</sup> XIX NATIONAL CONVOCATION OF THE RNS 1996, "Father, grant that they may be one so that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21), a theme inspired by the Encyclical "Ut Unum Sint" of Pope John Paul II; cf. BURGESS STANLEY M., VAN DER MAAS EDUARD M. (Associate Editors), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2002, pp. 136, 138, 139, 140, 141, 509, 559; cf. SYNAN VINSON, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Charismatic Renewal*, 1901-2001 Paperback – January 31, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> In 1962 he was succeeded by the traditionalist archbishop Marcel Lefevre, who was excommunicated by Pope John Paul II on 30 June 1998.

Giuseppe Chiaretti and others.

Among the keynote speakers were the Preacher of the Papal Household, Father Raniero Cantalamessa, now Cardinal, Prof. Massimo Introvigne and Father Michael Harper († 2010), Dean of the Orthodox Church of the Patriarchate of Antioch in Great Britain and Chairman of the International Charismatic Consultation for World Evangelization (ICCOWE)<sup>12</sup> Numerous delegations from the Reformed Churches, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Pentecostal, Methodist, Baptist, Apostolic, Brethren, Waldensian, Non-Denominational, and Charismatic-Evangelical churches attended the meeting.

On this other occasion too, Pope John Paul II addressed a message to the participants: "I am particularly pleased to learn that the representatives of the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities are taking part in the meeting, and I would therefore like to greet them warmly."

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A qualified witness and scholar at the time of these events, Prof. Massimo Introvigne wrote: "In 1996, for the types of Edizioni Messaggero Padova, I published a volume entitled *Waiting for Pentecost. The fourth ecumenism. Interview with Matteo Calisi and Giovanni Traettino*. With the book interview, which had considerable resonance in Catholic charismatic circles and in the Italian Protestant world, I brought to general attention – naturally, in agreement with the interviewees – a dialogue in which I had participated in previous years, and which had taken place far from the spotlight of the media as well as from "official" ecumenism, between a significant part of the Catholic charismatic world and some Pentecostal Protestants. In the same year, the most widely read magazine in the American Pentecostal and charismatic world, *Charisma*, gave news

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<sup>12</sup> A former Anglican priest, Canon of the Church of England, he was the initiator of the Charismatic Renewal in the Anglican tradition and founder in 1964 of *Fountain Trust*, an ecumenical agency to promote the Charismatic Renewal in the Church of England and Chairman of *SOMA* (Sharing of Ministries Abroad) an Anglican organization founded in 1980. He was also the Chairman of *the International Charismatic Consultation for World Evangelization* (ICCOWE) which sponsored numerous international charismatic ecumenical conferences with leaders such as Rev. Larry Christenson, Lutheran, and Father Tom Forrest, Director of ICCRO (International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Office) in Rome (<http://www.iccove.com>).



of the dialogue in which Pastor Traettino was *the protagonist*.<sup>13</sup>

### Charismatic ecumenism in the time of Pope Francis

Charismatic ecumenism has become a topic of great interest among ecumenists. This is mainly due to the personal attention that Cardinal Bergoglio, first as Archbishop of Buenos Aires, and then as Bishop of Rome, has reserved for this dimension of contemporary Christianity. Numerous texts and specialized articles talk about it more and more. The mass media disseminate the sociological data of the spread of this "current of grace" that has reached hundreds of millions of Christians on the planet, almost ignored by the official ecumenism of the historical Churches. Ecumenical conferences and meetings between charismatics of different denominations are multiplying on a global scale.

In a sermon to the Pope and the Vatican Curia, Cardinal Raniero Cantalamessa, preacher of the Papal Household, asserted:

"We have been witnessing for some time a change that we can call epochal. For more than a century, all the Churches of the West, or those born from them, have been crossed by a current of grace that is the Pentecostal movement and the various charismatic renewals derived from it in the traditional Churches. It is not, in fact, a movement in the current sense of the term. It does not have a founder, a rule, a spirituality of its own; nor does it have government structures, but only coordination and service. It is, in fact, a current of grace that should spread throughout the Church and disperse in it like an electric discharge in the mass, and then, at the limit, disappear as a phenomenon in itself. It is no longer possible to ignore, or to consider marginal, a phenomenon that, in more or less profound ways, has reached hundreds of millions of believers in Christ in all Christian denominations and tens of millions in the Catholic Church alone. Receiving for the first time, on May 19, 1975, the leaders of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in St. Peter's Basilica, Blessed Paul VI, in his speech, called it "a chance for the Church and for the world."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> cf. MASSIMO INTROVIGNE, *Pope Francis' "secret" meeting in Caserta*, What is the Pentecostal world with which the Pontiff will meet in the figure of Pastor Traettino? La Nuova Bussola, Editorial of 22.07.2014; cf. CHARISMA AND CHRISTIAN LIFE, *Healing a divided Italy: Matteo Calisi's is reconciling Catholics and Pentecostals*, Volume 21, Editions 6-11, Strang Communications Company, 1996 pp. 60-61; cf. CHARISMA AND CHRISTIAN LIFE, *Charisma Magazine for Catholics Spirit-Filled*, Strang Communications Company, n.1 July 1995.

<sup>14</sup> CANTALAMESSA RANIERO (CARDINAL), *East and West before the mystery of salvation*, Fifth Sermon of Lent 2015, Apostolic Palace, 27 March 2015).

Ecumenical charismatic communities and platforms have been operating at the international level for several years. Some examples are the charismatic communities Alleluja Covenant Community (Augusta, Ga USA), Bread of Life Fellowship (Sydney, Australia), Fondacio (Paris, France) formerly members of the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships (now dissolved), People of Praise Community (South Bend, In, USA), Sword of the Spirit Community (Ann Arbor, Mi, USA), Communauté Chemin Neuf (Paris, France); "The Work of Christ Community" (East Lansing, MI USA), "European Community Network".

Among the ecumenical charismatic platforms are the Charismatic Leaders Fellowship (CLF), Virginia Beach, Va (USA), the former North American Renewal Services (NARSC) in the footsteps of the famous Charismatic Ecumenical Conference in Kansas City in 1977; the "Gathering in the Holy Spirit", Meetings between Catholic charismatic leaders and new charismatic (non-denominational) churches, Centro Pro Unione, Rome; United in Christ International UIC founded by Matteo Calisi in 1995 in Dallas TX (USA); the European Network of Communities (Germany 2001); Comunión Renovada de Evangelicos y Catolicos en el Espiritu Santo (CRECES) Argentina since 2004, Encontro de Cristão na busca da Unidade e Santidade (ENCRISTUS) Brazil since 2008; Empowered21 (USA) 2010; International Fellowship of Community of Jesus (IFCJ) Dallas, Tx, USA 2010; JOHN 17 Movement, Phoenix, Az (USA) 2014. In the past, the International Charismatic Consultation (ICI) UK, formerly the International Charismatic Consultation for World Evangelization (ICCOWE) and the European Charismatic Consultation (ECC), now dissolved, also operated.

In addition, there are other organizations in the USA that have sprung up in evangelical circles that have seen collaboration with Catholics grow over the years. Let us recall the main ones: Billy Graham, a Baptist preacher, summoned Christians of all denominations in his Crusades of evangelization starting in 1939; since 1997 in Colorado, Bill McCartney, founder of Promise Keepers, has gathered almost one and a

half million representatives at the ecumenical march. Hundreds of thousands of Catholics and Evangelicals participated in the historic event. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has supported the participation of Catholics in Promise Keepers initiatives; Americana Bible Society (founded in 1816 by Elias Boudinot); National Prayer Breakfast (founded in 1953 by Abraham Vereide); Campus Crusade for Christ (founded in 1951 by Bill Bright); Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowships International (founded in 1952 by Demos Shakarian); Youth with a Mission (founded in 1960 by Loren Cunningham) and "YWAM Kerygma" formed by Catholics and Protestants to reach the world with the Gospel; Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), a group of Christian leaders and evangelical jurists – including many Pentecostals – and Catholics committed to the concrete terrain of defending religious freedom, life and the family. The ADF was founded in 1994 on the initiative of thirty representatives of the evangelical and Catholic world in the United States and for five years it has based its international headquarters in Vienna, with offices in various cities in Europe where international organizations are based, starting with Strasbourg, Geneva and Brussels. Five, in particular, the founders who decide that there is a need for a "strong and coordinated legal defense against the growing attacks on religious freedom": Bill Bright (Campus Crusade for Christ), Larry Burkett (Crown Financial Ministries), James C. Dobson (Focus on the Family), D. James Kennedy (Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church) and Marlin Maddoux (inventor of the radio program "Point of View"). Since then, the goal has been the "legal defense of religious freedom, the sanctity of life, marriage and the family"; Catholics and Evangelicals Together (founded in 1985 by Charles Colson and Richard John Neuhaus) which saw the participation of the late Cardinal John O'Connor of New York and the then Archbishop of Denver, Cardinal James Stafford; Allies for Faith and Renewal, which brings together Evangelicals, Catholics and Orthodox on topics of common interest; ACT3 Network, founded by Dr. John

Armstrong, a network of relationships and collaboration between churches, missions and Christian leaders.

Famous is the organization "TheCall", founded by Lou Engle, establishes a Roman Catholic segment on the occasion of the *110th Anniversary of the Azusa Street Revival 1906-2016* of the birth of the Pentecostal Movement at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, California, USA on April 9, 2016. In the segment, Matteo Calisi and a delegation from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles are present on stage as a Catholic speaker. The segment ends with a request for forgiveness and with the mutual kissing of the feet as a sign of reconciliation by Matteo Calisi and Lou Engle. 100,000 people attended the event.<sup>15</sup> The "Reset" and "Pulse movement" founded by Nick Hall celebrated "Together 2016" at the National Mall in Washington D.C., USA on July 16, 2016. Matteo Calisi is invited as a Catholic speaker. The Archbishop of Washington, Cardinal Donald William Wuerl, sends a message to the organizers and Pope Francis transmits two video messages for the occasion (*cf.* <http://www.americamagazine.org/issue/celebrating-jesus-toge>). 350,000 people participate in the event. In Europe, the British Evangelical Alliance is worth mentioning, which also involves Catholic members in a personal capacity.

In addition, there is a growing collaboration of Catholics with some academic institutions such as the *Society for Pentecostal Studies*, *Oral Robert University*, Tulsa (OK), *Regent University* Virginia Beach (Va), *Christ for the Nation Institute*, Dallas, Tx will see a growing collaboration with Catholics both at the teaching and student levels. There is no shortage of collaborations on the Catholic side in prestigious evangelical media including: *Trinity Brocasting Network* (TBN), *Christian Brocasting Network* (CBN), *Charisma Magazine*.

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<sup>15</sup> *cf.* <http://christiannews.net/2016/04/10/lou-engle-of-the-call-prostrates-himself-kisses-foot-of-catholic-leader-as-act-of-reconciliation> .

Finally, at the international level, worthy of mention is the Forum of Christian Churches and Organizations of the World Council of Churches in Geneva where representatives of the charismatic-Pentecostal current are represented alongside Catholics and other denominations.

Meanwhile, Pope Francis continues to amaze: when a few years ago he appointed an evangelical, Marcelo Figueroa, as the "spokesman" of Francis in his country of origin, at the helm of the *Argentine edition of L'Osservatore Romano* in Spanish. Marcelo Figueroa is a Protestant radio journalist, biblical scholar and theologian and for twenty-five years director of the Argentine Bible Society. A further boost to the ecumenical character of Bergoglio's pontificate and a surprising novelty that has aroused some disappointment among conservative Catholics, as revealed by Vatican news agencies.

In Italy too, the *charismatic ecumenism* promoted by the Italian Charismatic Consultation<sup>16</sup> continues to draw attention to this "event" of the Holy Spirit, which is *Pentecostalism*, as a challenge for all the institutional Christian churches, for their theology, liturgy and pastoral care, and wants to urge them to give a critical and self-critical response to the movement itself. The charismatic and Pentecostal movements have brought to the attention of contemporary theology and spiritual practice great themes too long neglected by traditional theology, by a certain worn-out ritualism present in certain dull and encrusted institutions, as well as by a certain liberalism and theological relativism:<sup>17</sup> a new community consciousness, praise, music and spontaneous and inspired worship, gestures of the body and dance, healing of the sick and prayers of liberation, speaking in tongues and prophecy, Christian initiation of adults, *baptism in the Spirit*, reading and proclamation of the Sacred Scriptures, kerygmatic proclamation and new evangelization.

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<sup>16</sup> INTROVIGNE MASSIMO, *Waiting for Pentecost*, the Fourth Ecumenism, Interview with Matteo Calisi and Giovanni Traettino, Edizioni Messaggero, Padua 1996.

<sup>17</sup> BULTMANN RUDOLF, a German Reformer, exegete and theologian, *New Testament and Mythology*, 1941, argues about the demythologization of the Gospels.

Rather, the central theme should be highlighted, which the *Pentecostal movement* has brought back to consciousness in a particular way and which has the same urgency for all Christian churches: that of promoting a *new pneumatology*, a theology of the Holy Spirit as a theology of life, in the sense of a 'renewal in the Holy Spirit' (*Tt.* 3:5) of the whole person, of the people of God, of all creatures, of the whole earth. If this qualifies theology, dialogue and ordinary pastoral care in dioceses, parishes, ecclesial movements and new communities in the future, then the ecumenical 'healthy provocation' of *Pentecostalism* will have fulfilled its vocation and mission.

Professor Walter Hollenweger, a well-known Swiss Reformed theologian and author of a powerful ten-volume thesis on the Pentecostal Movement in the 1970s, describes the significance of Pentecostalism as follows:

"The *Pentecostal movement*... it is first and foremost a church of the poor (not only ... 'A Church for the Poor'). The poor themselves take over the liturgy, theology and politics and are not – at least in their best characterizations – dependent on imports of theology and ideology from Western centers of power. Secondly, it is a church that can no longer be understood with our theological-confessional categories... *There are more points in common between certain evangelical Christians and certain Catholics than within the corresponding confession.* Confessional families no longer correspond to today's practice of division and regrouping. This has serious consequences for the ecumenical debate, which - both Catholic and Evangelical - still considers theological ideas alone to determine confessional identification. Thirdly, the Pentecostal movement is a decisive theological and social factor in the Third World, since it gives people a face, dignity and independence... Fourthly... it confronts us with the fundamental question of what theological science really is. Is it only what is taught in our universities, that is, a rational, systematic discourse, based on Aristotelian logic, which operates with concepts and definitions? Or could it not be that, for example, the parables of Jesus, the stories of the Old Testament, the songs of the Reformation, the stories of the saints of the Catholic and Orthodox tradition are pure theology, only in other categories? If the latter hypothesis is true, what does this mean for university science and the ecumenical community?"<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> CONCILIUM, 3/1996; cf. HOLLENWEGER, WALTER J., *The Pentecostals* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1972) and HOLLENWEGER, WALTER J., *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide*, (Hendrickson Publications, 1997).

## Pope Francis and relations with the Evangelical Pentecostal Churches in Italy

Although ecumenism has received increased attention from Catholic Church authorities at all levels in the decades since the Second Vatican Council and particularly with Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, during his short period of time as Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis has approached this 'ecumenical area' with a new twist, characterized, often, by *personal initiatives* specifically addressed to the world of Evangelicals and Pentecostals and apparently without any official activity on the part of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the usual pontifical protocols such as the famous visit to the Pentecostal Church of Caserta in 2014.<sup>19</sup>

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Pope Francis, moving from his friendship with Pastor Giovanni Traettino of Caserta, whom he met with Matteo Calisi in Buenos Aires in 2006,<sup>20</sup> broke down another "wall": on July 28, 2014, he brought a "fraternal visit" to a Pentecostal church, the Evangelical Church of Reconciliation.

Upon his arrival in Caserta he was welcomed into the home of the Traettino family: *"Arriving by helicopter from Rome, Pope Francis immediately went to the house of his evangelical friend, in Via Botticelli. Near the house he got out of the car and walked to the house, with people around incredulous who ran towards him hugging him. The Pontiff also joked with a lady who*

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<sup>19</sup> We are also aware of other personal initiatives of Pope Francis. Pastor Giovanni Traettino of Caserta was received by Pope Francis at the Domus Sanae Marthae in the Vatican on Wednesday, June 19, 2013 and during the General Audience the Pope gave an account of it: *"I'll tell you something: today, before leaving home, I spent forty minutes, more or less, half an hour, with an evangelical pastor and we prayed together, and sought unity"*.

<sup>20</sup> On the occasion of the 3rd Meeting of the *Comunion Renovada de Evangelicos y Catolicos en el Espiritu Santo* (CRECES) Buenos Aires, Luna Park, Thursday, June 22, 2006; cf. HIMITIAN JORGE, *He (Francis) seems more like a charismatic preacher than a (Catholic) priest or a bishop*, 25 September 2014; cf. HIMITIAN EVANGELINA, *Francis the People's Pope: From Childhood to the Papal Election, the Life of Bergoglio in the Words of His Loved Ones*, Rizzoli, 2013 RCS Libri SpA, Milan; cf. HIMITIAN EVANGELINA, *François, un pape surprenant*, Presses de la Renaissance, ED18 24 October 2013; cf. SARACCO NORBERTO, *'Pray for me' – Pope Francis*, Lausanne Movement, Lausanne Global Analysis, June 2013, Vol. 2 n.3; cf. FORTUNATO MALLIMACI, *Guía de la diversidad religiosa de Buenos Aires*, Editorial Biblos, 2003, Volume 2, pag. 105; cf. PEIRÒ CALUDIA, interview with JORGE HIMITIAN, *Si alguien vive las enseñanzas de Cristo, no importa que sea evangélico o católico*, Infobae, 26 July 2014 (infobae.com); cf. ZENIT, *Catholics and Evangelicals Summoned to Share and Proclaim the Name of Jesus*, New Ecumenical Impulse from the Meeting of the CRECES in Buenos Aires, 26 August 2007 (zenit.org); cf. PADULA GIANCARLO, *Che tutti siano uno*, Dentro la notizia, 25 marzo 2013 (ternimagazine.it); EVANGELINA HIMITIAN, *Francisco el Papa de la gente*, Aguilar, Altea, Taurus Alfaguara, S.A., 2013; *François, un pape surprenant*, Presses de la Renaissance, ED18 24 October 2013; FLOREAL H. FORNI, LUIS A. CÁRDENAS, FORTUNATO MALLIMACI, *Guía de la diversidad religiosa de Buenos Aires*, Volume 2, Editorial Biblos, 2003 - 214 pagine; cf. IVEREIGH AUSTEN, *The Great Reformer: Francis and the Making of a Radical Pope*, Henry Holt and Company, 25 nov 2014 - 464 pagine; cf. IVEREIGH AUSTEN, *El gran reformador*, Ediciones B, 20 mag 2015; cf. IVEREIGH AUSTEN, *Time of Mercy*, Life of Jorge Mario Bergoglio, Mondadori (Le scie) 2014.

*was coming out of a supermarket at that moment and who suddenly found the Pope in front of her. Traettino welcomed him with a long hug, then they had a long private conversation. At the end they headed towards the Evangelical Church of Reconciliation in Via Feudo, where about 350 faithful of the evangelical communities were waiting for them.*<sup>21</sup> This is the "first" in the history of a Bishop of Rome.<sup>22</sup> He will say: "Some will be surprised: 'But, the Pope has gone to the Evangelicals'. He went to visit the brothers! Yes! Because – and this is what I will say is true – they are the ones who came first to visit me in Buenos Aires."<sup>23</sup>

Francis' prophetic gesture is also rich in humanitarian significance with a solid historical foundation that some ignore. It has its roots in the sadly notorious years of the Fascist regime in Italy, when, in application of the racial laws, from 1935 to 1955 the persecution against fellow Pentecostals and those from the USA was exacerbated, an unprecedented crime in the peaceful tradition of our country. The editorial of the Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, reported and commented on the event as follows:

"This morning, Monday 28 July, Pope Francis offered yet another testimony of the great respect he has for every person, regardless of religious belief, race, culture, political convictions or anything else. He is back in Caserta... to meet the evangelical pastor Giovanni Traettino, his friend, and to ask forgiveness from the evangelical Pentecostal community for the oppression suffered during the period of fascism in Italy."<sup>24</sup>

With the gesture of forgiveness on July 28, 2014, Pope Francis wanted to honor these Christian brothers of ours persecuted by a totalitarian system that also included the responsibilities of baptized people of the Catholic Church who collaborated in the

<sup>21</sup> OSSERVATORE ROMANO, 28-29 July 2014 p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> cf. CASTELLANO LUBOV, *On Ecumenical Dialogue With Pentecostals*. Friend of Pastor Traettino, Matteo Calisi Speaks to ZENIT on Wider Significance of Pope's Caserta Visit. Vatican City, August 07, 2014 (Zenit.org) In the Italian edition "The Pope and the Pentecostals: A Meeting of Historic Significance" (first part) August 7, 2014 ([www.zenit.org/it/articles/il-papa-e-i-pentecostali-un-incontro-di-portata-storica-prima-parte](http://www.zenit.org/it/articles/il-papa-e-i-pentecostali-un-incontro-di-portata-storica-prima-parte)) and "The Pope and the Pentecostals: A Meeting of Historic Significance (Second Part)" August 8, 2014 ([www.zenit.org/it/articles/il-papa-e-i-pentecostali-un-incontro-di-portata-storica-seconda-parte](http://www.zenit.org/it/articles/il-papa-e-i-pentecostali-un-incontro-di-portata-storica-seconda-parte)).

<sup>23</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Private Visit of the Holy Father Francis to Caserta for the meeting with the Evangelical pastor Giovanni Traettino*, 28.07.2014, Bulletin Vatican Press Office; cf. OSSERVATORE ROMANO, 30 July 2014, p. 8; cf. CALISI MATTEO, *POPE FRANCIS AND DIALOGUE WITH PENTECOSTALS*, A new ecumenical impetus in the light of Pope Francis' 'Fraternal Visit' to the Evangelical Church of Reconciliation in Caserta on 28 July 2014. In "The Apostolic Visits of Pope Francis to Caserta", Special Issue, *Quaerite*, Six-monthly Review of the Higher Institute of Religious Sciences "S. Pietro", Piazza Duomo, 11 - 81100 Caserta, Year V n. 1-2 (9-10) Edizioni Saletta dell'Uva, Piazza Matteotti, 3 – 81100 Caserta, December 2014 pp. 296.

<sup>24</sup> OSSERVATORE ROMANO, 28-29 July 2014 page 1.



repression of the Pentecostals, as sadly documented in the *dossier* published by Prof. Massimo Introvigne.<sup>25</sup> Here is Pope Francis' request for forgiveness: "... These laws were sanctioned by baptized people! *Some of those who made this law and some of those who persecuted, denounced the Pentecostal brothers because they were "enthusiastic", almost "crazy", who ruined the race, some were Catholics...* I am the pastor of Catholics: I ask your forgiveness for this! I ask your forgiveness for those Catholic brothers and sisters who did not understand and who were tempted by the devil and did the same thing as Joseph's brothers. I ask the Lord to give us the grace to recognize and to forgive... Thank you!"<sup>26</sup>

Pope Francis' gesture has a singular ecumenical value because it is also addressed to the *Pentecostal movement* around the world. He wished to give public recognition to these evangelical churches for their contribution to the common mission of the Gospel. He also emphasized the merit of these evangelical churches in recalling the urgency of a new openness to the work and person of the Holy Spirit and the rediscovery of adoration, a peculiarity of Pentecostal piety.<sup>27</sup>

Pope Francis, Bishop of Rome, who represents the hierarchical-institutional Catholic Church in the highest degree as Universal Pastor, has shown himself to be particularly sensitive to the prophetic and charismatic aspect of which we have dealt at the beginning of our study, not only that, but he himself is capable of making prophetic gestures, which belong more to *free prophecy* than to the *munus* hierarchical and sacramental of the Church. The prophetic exhortation "Let yourselves be guided by the Holy Spirit, with that freedom; and please, do not cage the Holy Spirit! With freedom!"<sup>28</sup> With his visit to Caserta, the Pope sends a clear message to the Catholic Church today to pay due attention to these prophetic and charismatic aspects to prevent the prophetic

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<sup>25</sup> cf. SUPREME COURT OF CASSATION, Criminal Section III, Sentence of Rome 30 November 1953, in The Buffarini-Guidi circular and the Pope's apology to the Pentecostals, Cesnur, Turin ([www.cesnur.org/2014/mi\\_scuse\\_pentecostali.htm](http://www.cesnur.org/2014/mi_scuse_pentecostali.htm)).

<sup>26</sup> POPE FRANCIS, 28.07.2014, Bulletin Vatican Press Office.

<sup>27</sup> POPE FRANCIS, 28.07.2014, Bulletin Vatican Press Office.

<sup>28</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address* to the participants in the 37.ma National Convocation of the Renewal in the Holy Spirit (Olympic Stadium, Rome, 1 June 2014).

currents and the Church-Institution from walking ignoring each other or, even worse, in disunity.

Pope Francis' ecumenical style has had numerous consensus in "evangelical" and charismatic circles in the world,<sup>29</sup> especially in the USA, less than here in Italy.<sup>30</sup> The average Catholic, unprepared for these unpredictable prophetic gestures, has found himself literally displaced both because of the lack of knowledge of the charismatic-Pentecostal movement and because of the lack of knowledge of the ecumenical directives promulgated by the ecclesial Magisterium from the Second Vatican Council to the present day. Even some from the traditionalist "Catholic" wing immediately cried out about the "scandal"!<sup>31</sup>

In reality, as new as it may appear in style, Pope Francis' gesture is inscribed in the dictates of the Council which indicated two ecumenical paths to follow: the

<sup>29</sup> cf. TUNNICLIFFE GEOFF, former International Director of the World Evangelical Alliance at the Meeting of the World Evangelical Alliance, Pope Francis and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, Rome, 6 November 2014 (<http://www.worldea.org/news/4483/wea-secretary-general-visits-pope-francis-sees-%E2%80%98new-era-in-evangelical-and-roman-catholic-relations%E2%80%99>); cf. PLAMEN TZOLOV, an evangelical pastor from Sofia in Bulgaria, is the producer of an important documentary film entitled *Visible Unity* directed by director *Peter Kristov Petrov* for Light Balloon and NGTV ([lightballon.org](http://lightballon.org)) in which he collects testimonies of reconciliation from some Catholic and evangelical leaders including Bishop Tony Palmer, Giovanni Traettino and Matteo Calisi, in the light of the new ecumenical climate established by Pope Francis (official trailer: <http://vimeo.com/channels/lbfilms/104121508>).

<sup>30</sup> In this regard, it should be noted that a large part of the Pentecostal movement and the Italian Evangelical Alliance has proclaimed a position of distance with regard to Pope Francis' 'fraternal visit' to Caserta, cf. LEONARDO DE CHIRICO, *Interview* given by the Vice-President of the Italian Evangelical Alliance, 28 July 2014; cf. ROUND TABLE, *Contemporary Catholicism in an Evangelical Perspective*, 19 July 2014, Pentecostal Faculty of Religious Studies, Aversa; cf. *The Pope's Visit to Pastor Traettino*. Interview with REMO CRISTALLO, president of the Federation of Pentecostal Churches. By the FCP Secretariat; cf. *The Pope's visit to Pastor Traettino: Pentecostals ask themselves*. Interview with SILVANO LILLI, Vice President of the Federation of Pentecostal Churches. Organized by the FCP Secretariat. Other circles of Italian and world evangelism and Pentecostalism have not shown similar reactions. The moderately open position of other Italian evangelical exponents is interesting: cf. DI GAETANO GIACOMO CARLO, *Italian Evangelism Urgently Needs to Update the Categories with Which It Interprets Catholicism*, DIRS - Department of Research and Studies of University Biblical Groups, 1 August 2014 (<http://dirs.gbu.it>); cf. BERNARDI VALERIO, *The Discourses of Pope Francis and Giovanni Traettino: An Attempt at Analysis*, DIRS-Department of Research and Studies of University Biblical Groups, 6 August 2014 ([http://dirs.gbu.it/pdf/2014\\_francesco\\_traettino\\_discorsi.pdf](http://dirs.gbu.it/pdf/2014_francesco_traettino_discorsi.pdf)).

<sup>31</sup> The positions of some Catholic thinkers are also well known who, with the election of *Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio to the papal throne*, envisaged as a priority the "taking away ground from the evangelicals" especially in Latin America. In particular, *Vittorio Messori* in the *Corriere della Sera* of March 14, 2013 and *Lucio Caracciolo* in *La Repubblica* of March 15, 2013, supposed that the election of Francis had been dictated by a precise *political choice* aimed at stemming the haemorrhage of the faithful from the Church of Rome to various evangelical realities, towards which they certainly do not use respectful language.

*doctrinal*<sup>32</sup> and the *spiritual*. Far from wanting to obliterate the *doctrinal one* that has recorded important ecumenical progress in over fifty years (even if not all the theological knots have been untied), Pope Francis simply wanted to plead the cause of that *spiritual ecumenism*, the soul of all ecumenism, also desired by the Council which is a shadow and anticipation of that perfect unity that will be achieved only in the Parousia.

We are also aware of other personal ecumenical initiatives of Pope Francis. Another episode of the line of friendship chosen by Pope Francis towards the Pentecostal movement was recorded during a visit to a favela in Rio de Janeiro, on the occasion of World Youth Day in July 2013. Pope Francis stopped at a temple of the Assemblies of God (Pentecostal) and prayed with the faithful, inviting them to recite the *Lord's Prayer together*.

On January 22, 2014, Pope Francis sent his *Chirograph* to the first meeting between Catholics and Evangelicals of the *John 17 Movement* in Phoenix, Az (USA) organized by Joseph Tosini, Giovanni Traettino, Matteo Calisi and Mike Herron.

Bishop Tony Palmer († July 20, 2014), of the *Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches* (CCEE), was received by Pope Francis in January 2014 and on the occasion recorded with his smartphone a message of reconciliation from the Pope called 'Miracle of Unity' addressed to the Pentecostal movement and shown at a *Conference of Kenneth Copeland Ministries* held in 'Texas, USA'.<sup>33</sup> In June of the same year, he revisited Pope Francis for three hours together with televangelists James and Betty Robison, and Kenneth Copeland, founder of Kenneth Copeland Ministries, accompanied by Reverend Geoff Tunnicliff, CEO of the World Evangelical Alliance, Rev. Brian Stiller and Thomas Schirrmacher, also of the World Evangelical Alliance. Also in attendance were Rev. John Arnott and his wife Carol, co-founders of the Catch the Fire Church in

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<sup>32</sup> cf. JOINT DECLARATION ON THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION *between the Catholic Church and the Lutheran World Federation 1998*; cf. DOMINUS IESUS, Declaration on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and of the Church, Vatican City, 6 August 2000 and cf. NOTE *on Some Aspects of Evangelization*, Vatican City, 3 December 2007.

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZ9Ssvs5cgY>.

Toronto, Canada. In the same month, Pope Francis met with Rev. Joel Osteen of Houston, Texas, California pastor Tim Timmons, and Gayle D. Beebe president of Evangelical Westmont College.

Among Pope Francis' meetings with representatives of the *evangelical world*, it is also worth mentioning that of the Green family, owner of the Hobby and Lobby Company. Since the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis had received in separate private audiences Pastor Giovanni Traettino and the Argentine evangelical pastors: Omar Cabrera jr, Jorge Himition, Carlos Mraida, Norberto Saracco, Humberto Golluscio, Ángel Negro who are part of the *Comunion Renovada de Evangelicos y Catolicos en el Espiritu Santo* (CRECES). On July 29, 2014, on the occasion of his fraternal visit to the Church of Caserta, Pope Francis met with Pastors Joseph Tosini of New York, Mike Herron of Houston and Bruno Ierullo of Toronto.

On October 10, 2014, another meeting took place between Pope Francis and representatives of the *Communion of Evangelical Episcopal Churches* (CCEE) where a second message called 'Miracle of Unity' was recorded.<sup>34</sup> In the following month, Pope Francis met with Rev. Rick Warren, pastor of the Saddleback Community Church in Lake Forest, California. At the same time, Pope Francis met with Loren and Darlene Cunningham, founders of Youth With a Mission (YWAM).

On 7 May 2015, Pastor Giovanni Traettino returned to visit Pope Francis at the Audience Hall in the Paul VI Hall in the Vatican with a hundred Evangelical Pastors of different nationalities, with the presence of Cardinal Kurt Koch, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

On May 25, 2015, Pope Francis sent a *Video Message* to the second meeting between Catholics and Evangelicals of the *John 17 Movement* in Phoenix, Az (USA) organized by Joseph Tosini, Giovanni Traettino, Matteo Calisi, Mike Herron, Robert

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<sup>34</sup> Part Two <http://www.cruxnow.com/church/2014/10/28/pope-francis-urges-catholics-protestants-work-together-video/?p1=emtaf>.

Briggs, Bishop Eduardo Nevares, Gary Kinnaman and Peter Poppleton and with the participation of Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted.

On June 10, 2016, Pope Francis received in a private audience another group of 55 evangelical leaders from the United States, including: Che Ann, Mike Bickle, Bonnie Chavda, Dutch Seets, Kris Vallotton, Nick Hall, Stacey Campbell, Dean Briggs, Geoff Tunnicliffe, Thomas Schirrmacher, Chris McFarland, Chris Spieman, Charles Stock and others.<sup>35</sup> Also present at the meeting was Cardinal Kurt Kock, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. At the end of the meeting, Pope Francis recorded two video messages for the Together 2016 event by the President of Mission America, Evangelist Nick Hall, held on the National Mall in Washington D.C. on July 16, 2016.

## Reconciled diversity

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With these ecumenical contacts, Pope Francis has built a great bridge towards Pentecostalism and, inspired by the great Reformed theologian Oscar Cullmann, has indicated that of "reconciled diversity" as a viable path for authentic ecumenism:<sup>36</sup> "What does the Holy Spirit do? ... The Holy Spirit creates "diversity" in the Church. The First Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12. He makes diversity! And truly this diversity is so rich, so beautiful. But then, the same Holy Spirit creates unity, and so the Church is one in diversity. And, to use a beautiful word from *an evangelical whom I love so much*, a "diversity reconciled" by the Holy Spirit. He does both: he makes the diversity of charisms and then he makes the harmony of charisms. This is why the first theologians of the Church, the first fathers – I am speaking of the third or fourth century – said: "The Holy Spirit, he is harmony", because he creates this harmonious

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<sup>35</sup> cf. LECLAIRE JENNIFER, *Mike Bickle Meets With Pope Francis to discuss Jesus*, in Charisma Magazine, Life in the Spirit, 11 June 2016 <http://www.charismanews.com/world/57751-mike-bickle-meets-with-pope-francis-to-discuss-jesus>; <http://hrockchurch.com/blog/meeting-pope-francis-and-christian-unity>.

<sup>36</sup> CULLMANN OSCAR, *Unity through Diversity, Its Foundation and the Problem of its Realization* (1986), *Giornale di Teologia* 187, Queriniana, Brescia 1987.

unity in diversity. We are in the era of globalization, and we think about what globalization is and what unity in the Church would be: perhaps a sphere, where all the points are equidistant from the center, all equal? No! This is uniformity. And the Holy Spirit does not make uniformity! What figure can we find? Let's think of the polyhedron: the polyhedron is a unit, but with all the different parts; Each has its own peculiarity, its own charisma. This is unity in diversity. It is on this path that we Christians do what we call by the theological name of ecumenism: we try to ensure that this diversity is more harmonized by the Holy Spirit and becomes unity."<sup>37</sup>

In this *new method* of ecumenical dialogue, Pope Francis invites Christians to overcome mistrust, to draw closer, to esteem each other, to forgive each other, to collaborate, to recognize the existence of diversity and to celebrate it, in order to welcome the gift of unity:

"To this end, we must entrust our hearts to our fellow traveller without suspicion, without mistrust, and look first of all at what we are looking for: peace in the face of the one God. Relying on the other is something artisanal, peace is artisanal. Jesus told us: "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Mt 5:9). In this commitment, even among us, the ancient prophecy is fulfilled: "They will break their swords and make them plowshares" (Is 2:4)".<sup>38</sup>

For the future of Christian unity, I think that the words that inspired Oscar Cullmann's vision, when he invited the churches to live differences in a reconciled way, can really help us. He invited the churches to love each other despite differences, to love each other with differences. In his work *Einheit durch Vielfalt* (Unity through Diversity), he proposes the search for an understanding between Christian confessions: *the diversity of the churches is seen as a gift of the Spirit* not to be dispersed in a general unification that would end up canceling out that spiritual richness. All Christian churches are conceived as different planets that revolve around Christ, here seen as "the

<sup>37</sup> POPE FRANCIS, Audience with the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships, Vatican City, 31 October 2014.

<sup>38</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation n. 244.

sun from which they receive light".<sup>39</sup>

We must welcome difference as *kenosis*, accepting diversity as a grace for communion. To see diversity in a healed, reconciled way, not as an obstacle, but as a necessary process that passes through purification and suffering. Christ died to reconcile us to the Father. This is the paradox of the Cross of Christ.

As Catholics of the twenty-first century, we feel with particular intensity the need for ecclesial communion to be expressed in a pluralistic way. The belonging of a Christian to another confession other than ours must be able to rediscover the form of ecclesial *koinonia*, but it must also appear legitimate: neither absolutized nor demonized. It is a matter of learning that what unites is much more than what differentiates us, and that the great good of encounter and communion can require the renunciation of non-essential riches. Pope John XXIII warned: "There are many more things that unite us than those that divide us".<sup>40</sup> John Paul II wrote in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*: "I express the hope that the Jubilee will be a propitious occasion for fruitful collaboration in the sharing of the many *things that unite us and that there are certainly more that divide us*." However, there is still much to be done to achieve that unity that Jesus proclaimed to us: "The approach of the end of the second millennium calls everyone to an examination of conscience and to appropriate ecumenical initiatives, so that at the Great Jubilee we can present ourselves, if not completely united, at least much closer to overcoming the divisions of the second millennium".

Pope Francis said that: "Uniformity is not Catholic, it is not Christian. Unity in diversity. Catholic unity is different but it is one."<sup>41</sup> We must learn to accept the other in his or her diversity. Not all differences are necessarily divisions! We must *see a church as a gift for other churches*. True ecumenism is *an exchange of gifts*. Pope John Paul II's

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<sup>39</sup> CULLMANN OSCAR, *op. cit.* Pag. 66.

<sup>40</sup> POPE JOHN PAUL II, *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 16 and 34.

<sup>41</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *ditto* (Audience with the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships, Vatican City, 31 October 2014).

encyclical on ecumenism *Ut unum sint* significantly emphasized the importance of exchange through dialogue, which is much more than an exchange of ideas: it is an "exchange of gifts":

"On our pilgrimage towards Christian unity, we meet our brothers and sisters from other Churches and ecclesial communities. Ecumenical visits foster not only a theological exchange, but also create a culture of friendship in a spirit of brotherhood and evangelical fraternity. Ecumenical meetings offer the possibility of welcoming others and being welcomed by others."<sup>42</sup>

On several occasions Pope Francis has warned Catholics against the temptation to want to standardize diversity. It often happens, even unconsciously, that, out of a misunderstood sense of "communion", some in the Church are led to homologate, absorb, and then control, manipulate and finally destroy the richness of the *diversity of* gifts that the Holy Spirit inspires in the Church: "This is the danger of uniformity. Unity is knowing how to listen, accepting differences, having the freedom to think differently! With all due respect to the other who is my brother. Don't be afraid of differences!"<sup>43</sup>

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Pope Francis' teaching becomes above all a concrete gesture on the occasion of his visit to the Patriarchal See of Constantinople on November 30, 2014. A touching moment of the meeting with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople was Pope Francis' bow to Bartholomew, with the humble request to bless him and pray for him. It is the gesture of *Peter* who asks his brother *Andrew* for his blessing for himself and for the Church of Rome, followed by the gesture of *Andrew* who embraces him and gives him the kiss of peace.

For the Pope, these prophetic and ecumenical gestures are usual, as he has shown on previous occasions. One of these gestures was made for the first time in 2006 in the Luna Park of Buenos Aires during the meeting of the *Communion Renovada de Evangelicos*

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<sup>42</sup> POPE JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical on Ecumenism *Ut Unum Sint* n. 28.

<sup>43</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *ditto* (Audience with the Catholic Fraternity of Charismatic Covenant Communities and Fellowships, Vatican City, 31 October 2014).



y *Catolicos en el Espiritu Santo* (CRECES). Cardinal Bergoglio knelt on the stage and received the blessing with the laying on of hands by Pentecostal and Catholic leaders.<sup>44</sup>

He had made another similar gesture when he bowed for a minute, which seemed to never end, from the Loggia of Blessings in St. Peter's Basilica, on the day of his election to the papal throne, to ask the People of God to pray that the Lord would bless the Bishop of Rome:

"And now I would like to give the Blessing, but first... First, I ask you a favor: before the Bishop blesses the people, I ask you to pray to the Lord, so that he may bless me: the prayer of the people, asking for the Blessing for their Bishop. Let us silently pray to you about me."

He repeated it on 1 June 2014 in the Olympic Stadium in Rome on the occasion of a Conference of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, when he humbly knelt and invoked the Holy Spirit in the presence of evangelical and Pentecostal leaders and on 16 June 2014 he was blessed by the Anglican Primate, the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby. A gesture that he then recalled by bowing his head, once again in the Vatican, in front of a group of a hundred evangelical pastors of Pentecostal orientation from different parts of the world, on May 7, 2015, led by Pastor Giovanni Traettino.

In the light of the teaching of the Bishop of Rome, who forcefully reiterated that "the Catholic Church does not intend to impose any demand, except that of the profession of the common faith", we could apply by analogy the concept of *welcoming and exchanging gifts* to the entire Christian family, for example: recognizing and appreciating the faith that the variegated Pentecostal world and the new charismatic churches communicate to us, who contributed considerably to the birth and development of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal.

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<sup>44</sup> The evangelical pastors Carlos Mraida, Jorge Himittian, Norberto Saracco, Angél Negro, Giovanni Traettino and the Catholics Father Raniero Cantalamessa, Matteo Calisi and Father Fernando Giannetti prayed for him: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnMsXm9DMK8&feature=player\\_embedded](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnMsXm9DMK8&feature=player_embedded); cf. EVANGELINA HIMITTIAN, *Francisco el Papa de la gente*, Aguilar, Altea, Taurus Alfaguara, S.A., 2013; *François, un pape surprenant*, Presses de la Renaissance, ED18 24 October 2013.

We could recognize the value of the Eastern tradition of the Orthodox churches regarding the liturgy and respect for their faith sorely tested by persecution and martyrdom. We could appreciate how much the Protestant Reformation contributed to the rediscovery of Sacred Scripture, to the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, to the baptismal priesthood of believers, to have given rise to the ecumenical movement, to the rediscovery of charisms. These are all spiritual movements that have also contributed in a certain way to the spiritual renewal of Catholics desired by the Fathers at the Second Vatican Council.

When this and more happens, when we remain available to one another, in legitimate "diversity" and allow ourselves to be continually purified of one another, then the differences are fruitful in their own way, certainly more than a superficial unity such as that made by written doctrinal agreements.

### **Spiritual Ecumenism**

According to Cardinal Walter Kasper, at the present moment in history when there is talk of an 'ecumenical winter' among the historic Churches,<sup>45</sup> "the greatest danger for the ecumenical movement comes from rhetoric, from the thousands of declarations and documents that do not find practical application. For Cardinal Kasper,

"The documents are undoubtedly important, but the Holy Spirit at Pentecost did not arrive in the 'paper', but in the 'fire'. And fire burns the cards. It is necessary to make friends, to meet face to face, to talk. And in friendly dialogue one discovers one another's riches, one learns to appreciate one

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<sup>45</sup> The Geneva Council brings together only a minority of world Christianity. In fact, most Pentecostal churches, evangelical churches and communities, independent churches in Africa and Asia, and, of course, the Roman Catholic Church, are not members of the WCC. Can the WCC continue to be a more representative and global ecumenical structure, if, in reality, it represents only a minority among the Christian churches in the world? The need that arises is to broaden the ecumenical table" (Konrad Raiser, Secretary General of the WCC, Waldensian Faculty, Rome Nov. 1998). At the 8<sup>th</sup> Assembly of Harare (Zimbabwe) of the WCC, from 3 to 14 December 1998, all those who had never joined before were invited to participate, among others, 29 authoritative exponents of the classical Pentecostal world took part such as: Rev. Harold D. Hunter (Holiness Church), Rev. Dr. Cecil M. Robeck (Assemblies of God). Some exponents of the Charismatic Renewal have also been invited, among others we point out the participation of Fr. Kilian McDonnell OSB (Catholic), Fr. Michael Harper (Orthodox) and the leaders of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship. During the work of the Assembly, a Forum of Churches and Christian organizations was created, which could lead to the creation of an "ecumenical table", open to Catholics, Pentecostals and Evangelicals.

another and initiates a fruitful exchange of gifts, which is fundamental. It is the ecumenism of life that is concretized in greetings, in prayer made together, in attention to the needs of the other. Small steps taken in the daily fabric of existence, but indispensable steps to encourage encounter. In this sense, ecumenism is not only a task of experts, not even a form of diplomacy: it is the task of all Christians."<sup>46</sup>

We have been divided for centuries and it will certainly not be a document that will bring us together definitively, instead we need an inner change: a 'third way'".<sup>47</sup>

This 'third way' that Pope Francis indicates to us is *spiritual ecumenism*:

"In all communities there are good theologians: let them discuss, let them seek theological truth because it is a duty, but let us walk together, praying for each other and doing works of charity. And so we make communion on the way. This is called *spiritual ecumenism*: walking the path of life all together in our faith, in Jesus Christ the Lord... He asks us not to fix our gaze on what divides us, but rather on what unites us, seeking to know and love Jesus better and share the richness of his love."<sup>48</sup>

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Pope Francis has repeatedly confirmed this ecumenical journey. Speaking to journalists on the return flight to Rome from Turkey, he began that "If we have to wait for theologians to come to an agreement, that day will never come! I am skeptical: theologians work well, but Athenagoras said: "Let's put theologians on an island to discuss, and we go on!" Unity is a journey that must be made and must be made together, it is spiritual ecumenism, praying together, working together. Then there is the ecumenism of blood: when they kill Christians, the blood is mixed. Our martyrs are crying out: we are one. This is the ecumenism of blood. To go courageously on this path, forward, forward."<sup>49</sup> tag

In light of the aims of *spiritual ecumenism*, the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement

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<sup>46</sup> KASPER WALTER (CARD.), *Consecrated Life and Spiritual Ecumenism*, in Consecration and Service, USMI Union of Major Superiors of Italy, October 2006.

<sup>47</sup> On the occasion of a *Symposium* of theologians and ecumenical leaders gathered in Geneva for the 25th anniversary of the Leuenberg Concord. *Avvenire, Catholica* p. 20, Thursday 19 November 1998.

<sup>48</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *General Audience*, Wednesday, 8 October 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Interview on the Istanbul-Rome flight of 30.11.2014.

could really represent one more hope for the rapprochement of Christians. Pope Francis is fully convinced of this when on several occasions addressing the Catholic Charismatic Renewal he expressed the desire "That you give a witness of *spiritual ecumenism* with all those brothers and sisters of other Churches and Christian communities who believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour"<sup>50</sup> urging it again thus: "Share the Baptism in the Holy Spirit with everyone in the Church. Spiritual ecumenism and ecumenism of blood. The unity of the Body of Christ. Preparing the Bride for the coming Bridegroom! One Bride! All (Rev 22:17)."<sup>51</sup>

## Conclusion

Pope Francis in his visit to Caserta highlighted how division is also ruinously conveyed by sectarian attitudes and verbal expressions:

"The one who makes the division is precisely the Envious, the king of envy, the father of envy: that sower of weeds, Satan. He meddles in the communities and makes divisions, always! From the first moment, from the first moment of Christianity, there has been this temptation in the Christian community. "I am of this"; "I am of that"; "No! I am the church, you are the *sect*"... And so the one who gains is him, the father of division. Not the Lord Jesus, who prayed for unity (John 17), prayed!"<sup>52</sup>

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With the request for forgiveness from the Evangelical Church of Reconciliation in Caserta, the Holy Father Francis confirms that there will be no true unity if there is not first sincere mutual repentance of the sins of the past and sincere reconciliation.

Therefore, I would like to offer a suggestion that could foster a new climate of ecumenical dialogue: that of the "purification of language". Even the slanderous language of a certain 'evangelical proselytism'<sup>53</sup> and a misunderstood 'Catholic anti-cult

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<sup>50</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Speech*, Olympic Stadium in Rome 1 June 2014.

<sup>51</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *ditto*.

<sup>52</sup> POPE FRANCIS, *Address* at the Olympic Stadium in Rome, 1 June 2014.

<sup>53</sup> cf. PALMIERI LORENZO and TESTA STEFANO, *One Hundred Questions for Catholics of Good Will*, Edizioni Centro Biblico, via Padova, 15 – 80026 Casoria (Na).

campaign'<sup>54</sup> must be purified on both sides, starting with our ecclesial circles. This is the cause of very unpleasant and reciprocal reactions that are a counter-witness to the Gospel, especially in Latin America and Africa.

As a result of this historic visit of Pope Francis to the *Evangelical Church of Reconciliation* in Caserta and following his example with other churches, Catholics could and should make similar sincere gestures of reconciliation and asking forgiveness for any wrongs against other Christian confessions.

We Catholics could also join Pope Francis' example towards the Pentecostals, the Waldenses, the Hussites, asking the Holy Spirit for the ability to forgive and to want to heal those wounds that have been caused in the past. In this way the desires that are in Christ's heart for a rediscovered brotherhood, His disciples, in this third millennium would be fulfilled.

## Love letter

*To the brothers and sisters of the Pentecostal current*

Dear loved ones in Christ,  
all those who have accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior are our brothers and sisters in Christ. At this crucial hour in human history, the Lord invites us to make every effort to renounce our atavistic divisions and embrace each other anew as brothers and sisters in Christ, members of His own family of God. We are Catholics, evangelicals, non-denominational, Pentecostals, charismatics... Whatever our denomination or Christian background, we must have this awareness that we have not chosen one another, just as we have not chosen Christ. He chose us, and he chose us to be his, together not only to be part of this spiritual awakening, but all of eternity (John 15:16).

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<sup>54</sup> cf. AMATULLI FLAVIANO VALENTE FMAP, *Apriendo a dialogar con la sectas; No a las sectas; Chiapas, sectas y evangelización; La Iglesia y la sectas Pesadilla o reto?; La Nueva Evangelización y la sectas; La Sectas: A pastoral problem*; organized by the Movimiento Laical Católico Familia Misionera Apóstoles de la Palabra, Mexico.

This contemporary Pentecost has shown us the urgency of being united in one Body.

Because we have "*drunk of the same Spirit*" (1 Cor 12:12-13), this same Spirit impels us to bear witness to our unity in Christ in one body: Catholics, Evangelicals, Pentecostals, non-denominationals who have never been separated again!

Our differences do not hinder our path towards the unity willed by Jesus. And today we are entrusted with a responsibility and a commitment to be "one, that the world may believe" (Jn 17:21).

However imperfect our unity may be, yet our differences are not irreconcilable. Not all differences do not necessarily represent a division. On the contrary, diversity reconciled through prayer represents a richness. Today there are so many ecumenical events that eloquently demonstrate this.

We all recognize that there is only one Church of Christ: One, Holy, Universal and Apostolic. There is only one Church because there is only one Christ and the Church is His Body.

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Therefore, we are called by God to a fuller realization of our unity in the Body of Christ, for there is "*one body, one spirit, just as you have been called to one hope, that of your calling: one Lord, one faith, one baptism. One God the Father of all, who is above all, acts through all and is present in all*" (Ephesians 4:6)"...

As Christians of the whole globe we must pray and strive that our unity in the love of Christ will become ever more evident as a sign to the world of God's reconciling power and that the world will believe in him: Father, let them be one, that the world may believe" (cf. Jn 17:21).

We must be honest: today the "Body of Christ is broken", it presents itself to the separated world, and because of this, the revival and evangelization of the world are suffering a setback. Today we Christians in the world are just over 2 billion out of a population of 7 billion and despite 2000 years of Christianity the Gospel has not yet

been known by about 5 billion men and women. What will become of them? Some Christians feel powerless and are as it were paralyzed by the tide of secularization and paganism rampant even in the continents of ancient evangelization.

Some will tell me that the mystery of iniquity is to blame for rejecting the light of Christ and turning to the idols of this world. Right! But I believe that a grave responsibility also falls on us Christians who have not loved one another according to the Lord's command: "By this they will know you that you are my disciples".

Today the Holy Spirit still offers us an opportunity to advance the Kingdom of God on this earth. Under some conditions. Scripture says, "If my people, upon whom my name has been called, humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, I will forgive their sin, and heal their land" (*2 Chronicles* 7:14).

Therefore, let me suggest a few steps:

Recognize that division among Christians is a "diabolical" sin of *diabolos* (divider). There are many Christians who are not aware of this.

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Confess with sincere repentance to the Lord, saying, "Lord, forgive us for our divisions, for when we have not honored our brothers and sisters in your Body, we have dishonored you. We have broken the covenant of love that you wanted each of us with the sacrifice of your cross."

To ask forgiveness from our brothers and sisters in Christ. Asking Jesus to give us the grace to recognize that we are all sinners and to know how to forgive one another. Jesus says: "If before presenting your offering at the altar you remember that you have offended your brother, let go of your offering at the altar and first go and be reconciled with him. Then return to present your offering at the altar." Jesus asks for pure worship that comes from a church cleansed by His precious blood shed for our salvation. Therefore, let us say to one another, "Forgive me, brother and sister, if we have offended you and have failed in the command to love one another... if we have

resentments, prejudices, closures and even mythologies towards you that did not represent reality. From the bottom of our hearts we sincerely ask you to forgive us!

Let us ask the heavenly Father to purify our slanderous language that has wounded our brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ and to give us a new language of men and women clothed in the love of Christ capable of communicating peace and unity.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit for the healing of the wounds in our memory because of the divisions of our fathers throughout the centuries of Christianity.

We receive a fresh new anointing of the Holy Spirit to be ambassadors of reconciliation. The ministry of reconciliation is a personal initiative of God. Scripture says that God reconciles us to himself through ambassadors of reconciliation. Let us ask the Holy Spirit for a powerful and fresh anointing to be ambassadors of reconciliation.

God never resigns himself to man's sin. Today he opens new ways to live our fraternity in Christ, and we cannot escape this.

Therefore, as a Catholic, I humbly ask your forgiveness. I ask your forgiveness also on behalf of those who have manifested attitudes of closure, division and non-Christian, even non-human behaviour towards you. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us!

May God have mercy and forgive us, pour out His Spirit and deign to manifest His Glory on the face of the earth.

May the Lord now renew a new Pentecost even greater than the previous ones and "pour out His Spirit upon all flesh ... before His great and glorious day comes" (cf. *Acts* 2:17 and 20).

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