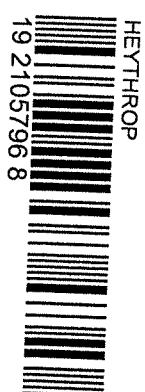


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# *Ecumenism and Ignatian Spirituality*

Proceedings of the  
22<sup>nd</sup> International Congress of Jesuit Ecumenists

Bethany Center, Tampa, Florida, 15-21 July 2013

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2016

## Where is Ecumenism Today?

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Almost fifty years ago, the bishops of the Second Vatican Council passed the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio*) by an overwhelming vote of 2,137 to 11, and Pope Paul VI promulgated the decree on November 21, 1964. The decree marked a significant change of course for the Catholic Church, which had initially resisted the ecumenical movement, thinking that it led to an ecclesial relativism. Indeed, Pope Pius XI's 1928 encyclical, *Mortalium animos*, forbade Catholic participation in the ecumenical movement, arguing that "the union of Christians can only be promoted by promoting the return to the one true Church of Christ of those who are separated from it, for in the past they have unhappily left it" (no. 10). The principle of an "ecumenism of return" could not have been stated more clearly.

Though Pope Pius XII had approved of some Catholic participation in ecumenical meetings with other Christians in 1949, it was Vatican II that committed the Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement. To symbolize his desire to make Christian unity one of the two primary goals of his Council, Pope John XXIII took a number of dramatic steps. First, he invited the other Christian churches to send official observers to the Council. Second, he gave them first class seats in the basilica, at the head of the assembled bishops, across the nave from the cardinals. Third, he put his newly established Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity at their disposal. But perhaps the real business of the Council took place in the coffee bars, religious houses, and seminaries of Rome, where the observers, theological experts or "*periti*," and bishops heard lectures, got acquainted, and shared a glass of wine in the evening; for many

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it was a life-changing experience. The Council was the beginning of the Catholic Church's ecumenical engagement that has continued down to the present day and resulted in innumerable dialogues with the various churches and ecclesial communities, not to mention all the personal relationships.

## Ecumenism Today

Where is the ecumenical movement today? For many, official ecumenism seems stagnant, even dead in the water. Some fifty years of dialogue have resulted in an institutional or doctrinal fatigue, with finely crafted statements but little real progress in sight. In spite of significant agreements like the 1998 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification between the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church, the issue over which the churches divided in the sixteenth century, there has been little movement forward. Cardinal Kasper has acknowledged that ecumenism is "unfortunately stagnating" in Germany. Some see institutional Christianity as simply irrelevant, as their churches continue to lose members. One thinks of Cardinal Martini's remark shortly before his death, that the Catholic Church is 200 years behind the times.<sup>2</sup>

In the United States the mainline Protestant churches continue to diminish. Between 1972 and 2012 in the United States, for instance, and by their own accounting, the American Baptist Convention has declined by 12%, the Lutheran groups now represented by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) lost 25% of their membership, the United Methodists dropped some 3,000,000 members or 28%, the PCUS and PCUSA, now the Presbyterian Church - USA dropped 34%, the Episcopal Church fell by 41%, the United Churches of Christ lost over 46%, and the Christian Churches (Disciples of Christ) have plunged 56%. One must wonder

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about the reasons for such declines in their membership. If things continue along the trajectory of the past 40 years, it is clear that whatever social and ecclesial influence these historic Anglican and Protestant churches may have exercised in this country in the past, will soon be lost. At the same time, reported statistics from the three largest Pentecostal groups in the US suggest that the Church of God in Christ expanded by over 274% to over 6 million members, the Assemblies of God increased by 184% to over 3 million, and the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) gained 394%. The Southern Baptist Convention, an evangelical group, grew by 39%.<sup>3</sup>

And there are new obstacles, as Cardinal Kurt Koch, Prefect of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity recently observed. In many places today there is a new emphasis on denominational identity at the cost of unity. This was perhaps expressed most clearly in 2007 in Protestant Bishop Wolfgang Huber's notion of an "ecumenism of profiles," emphasizing again differences rather than what unites us. The goal of the ecumenical movement itself has become less clear, with a new concern to recognize the various churches simply as churches, parts of the one body of Christ, thus with a kind of peaceful co-existence rather than visible unity, not unlike Konrad Reiser's "new paradigm" that minimizes agreement in faith in favor of solidarity and fellowship with all.<sup>4</sup> The cardinal also mentioned "massive tensions and diversions" in the field of ethics, new bio-ethical and socio-ethical challenges, including abortion, the question of homosexuality, and blessing same-sex unions.<sup>5</sup> Thus the cardinal sees that one of the great tasks ahead is precisely that of developing a common ecumenical Christian anthropology.

<sup>3</sup> These figures are self-reported by the denominations in question in the *Yearbook of American Churches* and the *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches* published by the National Council of Churches in 1972 and 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?* (Geneva: WCC publications, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Address of Cardinal Kurt Koch in Trondheim, Norway (29 July 2011) "Developments and Challenges in Ecumenism Today," <http://www.katolsk.no/to/tema/ekumenikk/artikler/developments-and-challenges-in-ecumenism-today>

<sup>1</sup> Christa Pongratz-Lippitt, *The Tablet* (9 March 2013) 32.

<sup>2</sup> "Cardinal Martini's Last Interview," <http://www.commonwealmagazine.org/blog/?p=20556>

There are also new differences about sacramental practice. Some Orthodox churches today rebaptize converts from other churches and some Protestant churches here and abroad no longer see baptism as a prerequisite for participating in the Lord's Supper. Nor is ordination always required for eucharistic celebration. Recently (2012) *The Tablet* reported that Methodists in England will begin authorizing annually lay "Pioneers" who work in areas without churches to preside at the Eucharist. The article also noted "widespread indifference and even negativity towards ecumenism" on the part of seminarians,<sup>6</sup> which is true not only in Great Britain.

### Unofficial Ecumenism

But if official ecumenism seems to be stalemated, in many places unofficial ecumenism is flourishing. Indeed, there has been a sea-change in inter-church relations. The ecumenical atmosphere is simply different. In many places Catholics and mainline Protestants look upon each other as brothers and sisters in the Lord and cooperate whenever they can. Many hear the same biblical readings on Sundays, thanks to the use of a common lectionary, derived ultimately from the 1969 *Ordo Lectionum Missae*, produced by the Roman Catholic Church after the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. They are frequently working together for the poor and the disadvantaged.

Catholic and Orthodox relations also have improved, in part driven by Orthodox concerns about an increasing secularism in Europe and the growth of Islam. And perhaps most surprising are the warming relations between Catholics and evangelicals, Pentecostals among them. A book by evangelical historian Mark Knoll, a faculty member at Notre Dame, and Carolyn Nystrom asks, *Is the Reformation Over?*<sup>7</sup> In the end, they leave open the question posed by the book's title, noting the progress made and expressing the hope that God might do even more.

It is not unusual to find evangelical students enrolled in Catholic graduate programs today, reading the Fathers of the Church, or courses in Catholic studies at more progressive evangelical seminaries. The Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians (ACTUS) has brought Catholic and Protestant Hispanic theologians together, many of them evangelicals, as has the Hispanic Theological Initiative at Princeton. And a host of new evangelical scholars are contributing books that call for a return to the Tradition in evangelical theology. I think of the fine studies on tradition and the Bible, challenging biblical interpretation that is without reference to the historic Tradition of the Church by Baylor's D. H. Williams, and those of Gordon Conwell's John Jefferson Davis and Regent College's Hans Boersma, lamenting the devaluing of the Eucharist and the loss of the sacramental and liturgical imagination among evangelicals.<sup>8</sup> Another excellent book is Tim Perry's "evangelical assessment" of John Paul's pontificate, with fourteen essays examining his encyclicals and apostolic constitutions.<sup>9</sup> It shows evangelical theologians reading and drawing on John Paul's philosophy and social teaching with remarkable sympathy; they are able to be appreciative without failing to point out where they see major differences still remaining between the two traditions.

### Catholics and Pentecostals

In April 9–11, 2013, I attended an international conference on Pentecostalism, sponsored by the German Bishops' Conference. The conference brought to Rome scholars and representatives

<sup>6</sup> *The Tablet* (August 11, 2012) 18.

<sup>7</sup> Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom, *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Roman Catholicism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Daniel H. Williams, *The Free Church and the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003) and *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005); include John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010); Hans Boersma (Regent College), *Heavenly Participations: The Weaving of a Sacramental Tapestry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2011) and his *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> *The Legacy of John Paul II: An Evangelical Assessment*, ed. Tim Perry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007).

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of the churches, including 15 bishops and two cardinals; Cardinal Koch was present for the entire conference. Koch spoke of the "Pentecostalization of Christendom" as a new way of being church, and called for a dialogue, focused on an "exchange of gifts" as well as a more critical reflection on our own Church, including an emphasis on becoming more missionary.

Globally, charismatics and Pentecostals constitute the second largest family of Christians after the Roman Catholic Church. Over 70 percent are non-white, with 66 percent located in the developing world.<sup>10</sup> According to David Barrett, there are over 126 million charismatics and Pentecostals in Africa, over 140 million in Latin America, and over 134 million in Asia.<sup>11</sup>

In China, it has been estimated that the overwhelming majority of Christians are at least charismatic, but also Pentecostal in their theological orientation; this includes 90 percent of house-church Christians and perhaps 80 percent of the total Christian population. Classical Pentecostals represent a minority, but still 25 percent of house-church Christians.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately I am not aware of any efforts to build bridges between these house-church Christians and China's Roman Catholics, a situation made worse by the fact that the government considers Catholicism and Protestantism separate religions.

While many evangelicals and Pentecostals remain suspicious of ecumenism in Latin America, there are some signs of Catholics and Pentecostals taking tentative steps towards each other. In 1989 the ecumenical commission of the Episcopal Conference of Chile invited Chilean Pentecostal Juan Sepúlveda to participate in

<sup>10</sup> Vinson Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001) 383.

<sup>11</sup> David Barrett and T. M. Johnson, "Global Statistics," in *New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, ed. Stanley Burgess and Edward M. Van der Mass (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002) 287.

<sup>12</sup> Luke Wesley, "Is the Chinese Church Predominantly Pentecostal," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 7/2 (2004) 251. See also Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge, U.K./New York, Cambridge University Press, 2004).

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a discussion on "Pentecostalismo, Sectas y Pastoral," leading to a commitment from the Catholic bishops to refrain from derogatory comments about Pentecostals and to begin working toward better relationships. In 1997 Sepúlveda received an invitation to attend the Synod for America as a Pentecostal observer, and in 2007 he gave a plenary address to the bishops of Latin America when they gathered at Aparecida, Brazil with Pope Benedict XVI for the Fifth General Conference of the Latin American Bishops (CELAM.). Still, the first meeting between Catholics and Pentecostals in Brazil did not take place until 2008; one of my highly respected Pentecostal friends says that the initiative has come largely from the Catholic side.

Recently, my colleague Dr. Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. has suggested that much of the anti-ecumenical feeling within the Pentecostal movement stemmed from their close association with evangelicals who were less open to ecumenism, and that with the growth of Pentecostal churches in the U.S., Pentecostals are approaching readiness to take an official position in greater ecumenical engagement. Pentecostals now have the dominant voice within the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). There is a good possibility of a Pentecostal-Catholic Dialogue in the U.S. between the USSCB and the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches of North America (PCCNA) according to Robeck.

### Charismatic Renewal

One also hears of the "Pentecostalization" of the Latin American Catholic Church, particularly through the widespread Catholic Charismatic Renewal (CCR). By the early twenty-first century the Renewal has grown to nearly 120 million participants, with more than sixty percent of them in Latin America. While they "report holding beliefs and having religious experiences that are typical of Pentecostal or spirit-filled movements," they appear able to incorporate renewalist or charismatic practices without displacing their Catholic identity and core beliefs and most do so without formal participation in Catholic charismatic organizations.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Pew Forum Survey, "Changing Faiths: Latinos and the Transformation of

The Charismatic Renewal is an underutilized resource for the Catholic Church. A popular movement, especially among the poor, it has also touched members of the hierarchy. The fifth conference of Latin American bishops (CELAM) at Aparecida (2007), in launching a "Continental Mission," adopted to a considerable extent evangelical/ Pentecostal language in its documents. In them "words such as 'mission' (140 times), 'Spirit' (149), 'encounter with Jesus' (47), 'conversion' (46), 'experience' (44), 'joy' (73), and 'fire' (7) strike the reader as uncommon within a Catholic context, and as a possible sign of the influence of Pentecostal and Charismatic theology."<sup>14</sup>

The strengths of the Renewal include a more energized laity, missionary zeal, and an emphasis on transformation of life, in a decidedly Catholic framework. Less positively some say "too many hal-lelujahs," an overemphasis on the empowering Spirit at the expense of the crucified Christ, and a lack of language for the absence of God, the dark night, doubt, and social justice. Thorsen notes that prosperity theology has begun to spread into some Catholic charismatic groups.<sup>15</sup> In countries with a strong and often hostile Pentecostal presence like Guatemala, the Renewal is often not ecumenical.

Far more Latin American Catholics have been involved with the Renewal than with Christian Base Communities: 73.6 million have participated to some degree in the Charismatic Renewal, 16 percent of all Catholics in Latin America; Christian Base Communities have engaged only 20 to 30 million, 2 to 5 percent of the Catholic population.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, there is some evidence that a growing number of these Pentecostal and charismatic congregations and their

American Religion" [pewforum.org/newassets/surveys/hispanic/hispanics-religion-07-final-mar08.pdf](http://pewforum.org/newassets/surveys/hispanic/hispanics-religion-07-final-mar08.pdf), 32.

<sup>14</sup> Jacob Egerts Thorsen, "Charismatic Practice and Catholic Parish Life: A Qualitative and Theological Study of the Incipient Pentecostalization of the Church in Guatemala" (Ph.D. diss., 2012 Aarhus University, Denmark, 2012) 192.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 74.

<sup>16</sup> Thorsen, "Charismatic Practice," 7-8; see also Edward L. Cleary, *How Latin America Saved the Soul of the Catholic Church* (NY: Paulist Press, 2009) 53.

leaders are moving in the direction of a greater social engagement.<sup>17</sup>

According to Gastón Espinosa, there are actually more Latino Catholic Charismatics than Protestant Pentecostals in Latin America and in the U.S.,<sup>18</sup> a fact confirmed by my Pentecostal friends. Estimates at the high end are 5.4 million Latinos in the US who self-identify as Catholic Charismatics, versus 3.8 million Pentecostals. It's been estimated that at least one-third of parishes engaged in Hispanic ministry in the U.S. have charismatic groups or activities. But the Charismatic Renewal is an underutilized resource, especially for Hispanics. It's possible that part of the episcopal disinterest may be attributed to fears about an empowered laity.

### Pope Francis

Nothing has been more encouraging for me than the election of Jorge Maria Bergoglio as Pope Francis. Here is a man, from the southern hemisphere, Latin America, an outsider who counts evangelicals such as Argentine Pentecostal evangelist Luis Palau, now living in Portland, Oregon, among his personal friends. Southern Baptist Timothy George wrote an article in *Christianity Today*<sup>19</sup> entitled "Our Francis, Too," urging evangelicals to make common cause with Francis on prolife issues and evangelization.

The Anglican Bishop of Argentina, Bishop Greg Venables called Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio's election "an inspired choice." He said that after Pope Benedict XVI created a separate ordinariate for Anglicans, then-Cardinal Bergoglio reached out to him. "He called me to have breakfast with him one morning and told me very clearly that the Ordinate was quite unnecessary and that the church needs us as Anglicans."<sup>20</sup> In mid-July Pope Francis approved a modification

<sup>17</sup> Timothy Wadkins, "The Postwar Path: A New Spirit is Alive in El Salvador," *America* 207/17 (December 10, 2012) 14.

<sup>18</sup> Gastón Espinosa, "The Impact of Pluralism on Trends in Latin America and U.S. Latino Religions and Society," *Perspectivas* 7 (Fall 2003) 16.

<sup>19</sup> *Christianity Today* (June 2013) 65.  
<sup>20</sup> <http://www.uscatholic.org/blog/201303/will-pope-francis-revitalize-ecumenism>

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to the ordinariate that allows some Catholics to join: "A person who has been baptized in the Catholic Church but who has not completed the sacraments of initiation, and subsequently returns to the faith and practice of the church as a result of the evangelizing mission of the ordinariate, may be admitted to membership in the ordinariate and receive the sacrament of confirmation or the sacrament of the Eucharist or both." This means that the ordinariates are not just for former Anglicans, but participate in the wider mission of the Catholic Church and its New Evangelization. And Francis has already made significant gestures towards both the Jewish and Islamic communities.

### Spiritual Ecumenism

One area in which there has been significant progress is spiritual ecumenism, meaning a profound personal renewal, a conversion to the Lord and the Gospel, a sharing of our own faith experience with those who dwell in different churches or constitute the religious "other." Both Cardinals Walter Kasper and Kurt Koch, former and current prefects of the Pontifical Congregation for Promoting Christian Unity, have stressed its importance.

At the same time, there has been a significant interest in spirituality among Protestants. At a meeting of the International Congress of Jesuit Ecumenists a few years ago, I was amazed to hear how many Jesuits from around the world were involved in the spiritual direction of, and giving the *Spiritual Exercises* to, Christians from other churches and even to those of non-Christian religions. The *Spiritual Exercises* of course are highly Christological, focused on the call of Christ the King and the ways of following him. But they also can open retreatants to the mysterious movement of grace and the Spirit in their lives.

Not all examples of ecumenical togetherness are positive. Ecclesial walls today are more porous than they used to be. Young

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adults, often unfamiliar with the protocols of division, frequently ignore them. They are comfortable with women or gay pastors, even if their elders are not. Unofficial eucharistic sharing takes place frequently. Some speak of "double-belonging." Young Catholics, unable to have the "garden" marriage they want under Catholic auspices, turn to Episcopalian or Methodist pastors, without considering themselves any less Catholic for that. Church authorities too often labor under the illusion that the faithful always follow their directives, and a sense of Catholic identity is sometimes at risk. But the easy crossing of denominational lines may itself be a sign of how much the ecumenical landscape has changed.

Finally the line between official and unofficial ecumenism should not be drawn too finely. In his encyclical *Ut unum sint*, Pope John Paul II stressed that reconciliation and communion are the fruit of baptism (no. 6), and thus, that all the faithful are to participate actively in the work of ecumenism (no. 8). What I've called unofficial ecumenism is evidence of how successfully this is being realized. Increasingly ecumenical leadership is coming from those in the ranks, from priests and pastors, academics, and lay leaders. The challenge is to remain always open and welcoming, without losing a sense for the gifts and convictions of our Catholic tradition.

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