

# A New Ecumenism? Christian Unity in a Global Church

Theological Studies  
2017, Vol. 78(3) 596–613  
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DOI: 10.1177/0040563917714731  
journals.sagepub.com/home/tsj



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## Abstract

The author asks if a new ecumenism might be emerging, one that can bring the burgeoning new Pentecostal-charismatic-independent churches of the Global South, most of them non-liturgical or sacramental, together with the traditional churches of Europe and North America that continue to lose members. The article assesses the recent statement of the World Council of Churches, *The Church: Toward a Common Vision*, seen by many of the new churches as too Western and Eurocentric, and asks if we need a new way of envisioning the ecumenical future.

## Keywords

ecumenism, Global South, Pentecostalism, Protestantism, World Council of Churches

**A**s we commemorate the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation and reflect on how far we have come in moving beyond our subsequent divisions, another perspective tells us that at least ecclesologically Christianity has become even more divided than it was after the sixteenth century. What does that mean for the global church? In spite of the ecumenical progress made in the last sixty or so years, not a few argue that today we are witnessing the emergence of a new form of ecumenism, one based more on a basic christological faith and common values than doctrinal agreement and the restoration of ecclesial communion. Allan Figueroa Deck is one who thinks this is true. From his study of Latino Catholic charismatics and Protestant

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Pentecostals, he suggests that “a new form of ecumenism may be in gestation, one in which the search for God and the transcendent, unity among believers, and engagement of cultures with matters of faith does not center so much on doctrine but rather on the common values, beauty, life, and nonpropositional truths expressed in action.”<sup>1</sup>

## Traditional Ecumenism

Traditional ecumenism may indeed be in trouble. The ecumenical movement traditionally traces its beginning from the World Missionary Conference that met at Edinburgh in 1910. The desire for a common Christian witness and mission led to the formation of two significant movements, Life and Work in Stockholm in 1925 and Faith and Order in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1927. Those gathered at Stockholm stressed common witness and mission, while the Lausanne meeting looked forward to Christian unity, based on a common confession of faith and basic agreement on the nature of the church, the ministry, and the sacraments. This set the ecumenical agenda for the rest of the century. The two movements were subsumed into the World Council of Churches, established at Amsterdam in 1948. The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) saw an initially cautious Roman Catholic Church come fully on board.

More than eighty-five years of theological dialogue has led to considerable progress; old questions have been seen in a new light and a basic consensus, if not full agreement, has emerged on a number of divisive questions. Among the outstanding ecumenical documents can be listed Vatican II’s Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964), the World Council of Churches BEM or Lima text, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, signed by the Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church (2000), and the World Council of Churches statement *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (2013).

Some churches have moved into full communion: the Episcopal Church of the United States and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America (2001) as well as the Anglican churches of the British Isles and later the Iberian Peninsula and the Lutheran churches of the Northern European countries, joining the Porvoo Communion of 1992. In Canada, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada entered into full communion with the Waterloo Statement of 2000, “Called to Full Communion.” Yet most churches are still far from such a picture of fellowship across ecclesial borders. In spite of some signs of progress, the traditional ecumenical movement seems to have stalled. In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries many began speaking of an “ecumenical winter,” a lack of concrete steps towards communion made more complex by new divisions over questions of abortion, sexuality, and the ordination of women. When referring to the future of ecumenism Cardinal Walter Kasper speaks of “clear signs of fatigue.”<sup>2</sup>

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1. Allan Figueroa Deck, “Latino Migrations and the Transformation of Religion in the United States: Framing the Question,” in *Christianities in Migration: The Global Perspective*, ed. Elaine Padilla and Peter C. Phan (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2016), 263–80 at 272.
  2. Walter Kasper, “Vatican II: Toward a Multifaceted Unity,” *Origins*, July 2, 2015, 153–67 at 153, <http://dc2015.ei-research.net/wp-content/uploads/Origins-45.9-July-2.-2015.pdf>.

In 2000, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith promulgated a declaration, *Dominus Iesus*, saying that those churches which had “not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery, are not Churches in the proper sense.”<sup>3</sup> In 2012 Pope Benedict XVI established a personal ordinariate for Anglicans wishing to enter into full communion with the Catholic Church. New initiatives such as the ordination of women, including to the episcopate, and welcoming active homosexuals into the ministry has seemed to put new obstacles to the search for full communion between Roman Catholics and Anglicans and Episcopalians and introduced new divisions into the Anglican Communion itself.

The Reformation churches in Europe and North America continue to lose members. According to Michael Kinnamon, those denominations that were once pillars of the ecumenical movement are experiencing diminishing numbers and resources, with a resulting toll on ecumenical organizations. Those that are member churches of the WCC constitute little more than twenty percent of world Christianity, a number that is diminishing.<sup>4</sup> A 2015 Pew Research Center report notes significant losses in the United States. While the USA is home to more Christians than any other country, the percentage of adults (18 and older) who describe themselves as Christians has dropped by nearly 8 percentage points since a similar study done in 2007. In 2007 there were an estimated 41 million mainline Protestant adults in the USA. As of 2014, there are roughly 36 million, a decline of 5 million.<sup>5</sup>

The percentage of the religious unaffiliated, the “nones,” has increased from 16.1 to 22.8 percent during the same period, while the number of Millennials (aged 18 to 24) among them has risen to 36 percent. Religiously unaffiliated adults now outnumber either Catholics or mainline Protestants; they are second in size only to evangelical Protestants. While mainline Protestant churches continue to lose members, evangelicals, who constitute a clear majority (55 percent) of US Protestants today, have remained relatively stable.<sup>6</sup> But there are some signs of slippage here also. The often heard claim that they constitute about 40 percent of Americans is a considerable exaggeration. John Dickerson cites four studies that put the number of evangelicals in the US at 7 to 8.9 percent of the population, among them University of Notre Dame’s Christian Smith who agrees that it is about 7 percent.<sup>7</sup> There is also some evidence to suggest that Pentecostals lose a large number of adherents out the back door every year.

The decline in the mainline churches is reflected in financial difficulties experienced by their seminaries, brought on by among other things, diminishing enrollments.

3. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus* (August 6, 2000), 17, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20000806\\_dominus-iesus\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html).

4. Michael Kinnamon, “New Contours of Ecumenism in the 21st Century,” *Ecumenical Trends* 42, no. 11 (2013): 11–15 at 11–12.

5. Pew Research Center, *America’s Changing Religious Landscape* (May 12, 2015), <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

6. *Ibid.*

7. See John S. Dickerson, *The Great Evangelical Recession* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 29.

Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, ceased awarding degrees in June 2017. Andover Newton, the nation's oldest Protestant seminary, is selling its campus in Newton Massachusetts and downsizing faculty and staff, with future programs still an open question. Daniel Aleshire, executive director of the Association of Theological Schools, sees this as a harbinger for 80 percent of America's mainline seminaries. He attributes this at least in part to the fallout from decades of declining membership numbers in mainline denominations. Since 2005, enrollment at mainline Protestant seminaries has fallen by nearly 24 percent, and denominational decline has been a driving factor.<sup>8</sup>

## Shift to the Global South

As the confessional churches in Europe and North America continue to lose members, Christianity is exploding in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, usually referred to as the Global South. Today, the Pew Forum finds that more than 1.3 billion Christians live in the Global South (61 percent), compared with about 860 million in the Global North (39 percent). This means that Europe no longer dominates global Christianity as it did in the past. The fastest growth in the number of Christians has been in the sub-Saharan and Asia-Pacific regions.<sup>9</sup> The Catholic population in Africa increased by 33 percent between 2000 and 2010. Much of this growth has been in the church's evangelical, Pentecostal, and Neo-Pentecostal expressions. According to Allan Anderson, studies indicate that "there were 628 million 'Pentecostals, Charismatics and Independent Charismatics,' collectively termed 'Renewalists,' in the world in 2013, 26.7 percent of the world's Christians,"<sup>10</sup> though in European countries (except for Portugal), they remain a small minority, less than two percent.

Interestingly, some scholars have begun to speculate about the future of Christianity. A discouraged Robert Jenson notes the failure of formal dialogue to produce any real progress and the fact that immediately after Episcopalians and Lutherans in the USA established fellowship with each other, they "each began to splinter into new churches out of fellowship with each other," like other once "mainline" Protestant groups. He wonders if perhaps God is not winding down the Protestant experiment, suggesting that, if things continue as they are, God "will carry on the *ecumene* with the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern churches, and Pentecostal groups."<sup>11</sup> Pentecostal scholar Cheryl Bridges Johns, who notes that

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8. G. Jeffrey MacDonald, "Oldest US Graduate Seminary to Close Campus," *Religious News Service*, November 13, 2015, <http://religionnews.com/2015/11/13/oldest-u-s-graduate-seminary-to-close-campus-denominations-secularization-andover-theological/>.
  9. Pew Research Center, *Global Christianity—A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Christian Population* (December 19, 2011), <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>.
  10. Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2014), 307.
  11. Robert W. Jenson, "The Strange Future of 'the Ecumenical Movement'," *The Living Church*, January 19, 2014, <http://www.livingchurch.org/strange-future-of-ecumenism>.

Pentecostals are closer to Pope Benedict XVI's understanding of the organic unity of the Bible and the church than most Protestants, cites with approval a 1969 projection of John Mackay: "The Christian future may lie with a reformed Catholicism and a mature Pentecostalism."<sup>12</sup> Peter Leithart in a provocatively entitled book, *The End of Protestantism*, argues against American denominationalism—which he calls the institutionalization of division—for a post-denominational "Reformational Catholicism," one that in moving beyond the "thinly biblical, anti-doctrinal and anti-intellectual Protestantism, anti-traditional Protestantism, rationalist and naturalist Protestantism, reclaims the church's liturgical and sacramental tradition."<sup>13</sup>

The exponential growth and spread of evangelical and Pentecostal Christianity has led some to speak of a third wave in Christian history. The historic churches of the first millennium represent the first wave. The churches of the Reformation constitute the second wave. The third wave is the more recent evangelical, charismatic, and especially Pentecostal churches.<sup>14</sup>

Pentecostals cannot be simply identified with evangelicals, though they share some core concerns and values. But there are also significant differences. Pentecostals stress baptism in the Spirit and the place of the *charismata* in Christian life; they are more open to experience and to women in ministry, to the spirit world, and at least in the West suspicious of the Enlightenment rationalism that sometimes leads to fundamentalism in evangelicalism. Deck sees Pentecostalism as "arguably the most meaningful development in worldwide Christianity of the past one hundred years. Along with evangelicalism the Pentecostal or renewalist movement has transformed modern Protestantism and made significant inroads in Catholicism." The historic, mainline churches that remain distant from Pentecostalism are in precipitous decline.<sup>15</sup>

Latin American Christianity in particular has been transformed by the multiplication of evangelical and especially Pentecostal churches. According to the Pew Research Center, tens of millions of Latin Americans have left the Catholic Church in recent decades and embraced Pentecostalism. In 1970 Catholics comprised 90 percent of the Latin American population; today only 69 percent identify as Catholics. Nearly one-in-five now describe themselves as Protestant, with majorities identifying as Pentecostal or with Pentecostal denominations. Andrew Chesnut attributes the success of Pentecostalism to its ability to take on a Latin American expression, to its emphasis on healing, and its ability to promote healthy lifestyles,

12. Cheryl Bridges Johns, "Of Like Passion: A Pentecostal Appreciation of Benedict XVI," in *The Pontificate of Benedict XVI*, ed. William G. Rausch (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 97–113 at 113; Mackay's statement was in his *Christian Reality and Appearance* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1969), 88–89.

13. Peter J. Leithart, *The End of Protestantism: Pursuing Unity in a Fragmented Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2016), 191. Leithart is a minister in the Communion of Reformed Evangelical Churches.

14. Walter Kasper, "The Current Ecumenical Transition," *Origins*, Dec. 7, 2006, 407–14 at 411.

15. Deck, "Latino Migrations and the Transformation of Religion," 270.

with men who join these churches giving up alcohol and substance abuse, gambling, and womanizing.<sup>16</sup> Not all, however, agree. I've heard Jesuit colleagues from Latin America confirm Chesnut's view about healthy lifestyles, while others disagree. Edward Cleary argues that not all Pentecostals are that fervent, neither going to church every week nor following the perfectionist admonitions of their pastors.<sup>17</sup>

Philip Jenkins, citing Andrew Chesnut, summarizes recent history in Latin America by saying that the Catholic Church chose the poor, but the poor chose the Pentecostals.<sup>18</sup> The impact of Pentecostalism is evident in the popularity of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, which has influenced far more Catholics in Latin America than liberation theology and the Christian Base Communities (CBC) movement. Sixteen percent of all Latin America Catholics have participated to some extent in the Charismatic Renewal, as compared to two to five percent in the CBCs.<sup>19</sup> Along with the Charismatic Renewal, Deck sees "a corresponding openness to some of the elements of lay participation and leadership, music, affectivity, and general vitality that the Renewal provides."<sup>20</sup>

Christianity is also growing rapidly in Asia, with an ecclesial diversity that leads Peter Phan to speak of Asian "Christianities" in the plural. Catholics predominate in the Philippines and East Timor; elsewhere Christians form a "minuscule" but significant minority.<sup>21</sup> The Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea, is the largest Pentecostal church, with more than half a million members. In China, the number of Christians continues to grow; Yang Fenggang of Purdue University estimates that by 2030, judging from current trends, China will have 250 million Christians, making it the largest Christian population in the world.<sup>22</sup> But precise numbers are hard to come

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16. Pew Research Center, *Why Has Pentecostalism Grown So Dramatically in Latin America?* (November 14, 2014), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/11/14/why-has-pentecostalism-grown-so-dramatically-in-latin-america/>; see also R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 1997), 108–13; Allan Figueroa Deck, "Pentecostalism and Catholic Identity," *Ecumenical Trends* 40, no. 5 (May 2011): 5–15 at 6.
  17. Edward L. Cleary, *How Latin America Saved the Soul of the Catholic Church* (New York: Paulist, 2009), 11. He says that a survey of Chilean evangelicals, most of them Pentecostals found the majority nonobservant; 52 percent did not attend church weekly and almost 38 percent seldom or never attended.
  18. Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2002), 156.
  19. See Jacob Egeris Thorsen, "Charismatic Catholicism in Latin America, in *The Cambridge History of Religions in Latin America*, ed. Virginia Gerrard-Burnett and Paul Freston (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2016), 466.
  20. Deck, "Latino Migrations and the Transformation of Religion," 270.
  21. Peter C. Phan, "Introduction: Asian Christianity/Christianities," in *Christianities in Asia*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 1–8 at 3.
  22. Cited in "Religion in China: Cracks in the Atheist Edifice," *The Economist*, Nov. 1, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21629218-rapid-spread-christianity-forcing-official-rethink-religion-cracks>.

by. Catholics, divided between the “underground” and public churches, are thought to number about 16 million, while Protestants about 39 million as of 2007.<sup>23</sup> There are also some Orthodox Christians under the Moscow Patriarchate.

The majority of Chinese Protestants belong to independent churches, characterized by conservative theology and what Allan Anderson cautiously calls “Pentecostal tendencies.”<sup>24</sup> Most emphasize the authority of the Bible, demons and spirits, miraculous “signs and wonders,” indigenous leadership, and often versions of the prosperity gospel.<sup>25</sup> Most are house churches; rather than a collective movement, each is independent, regional, closed, and lacking ties to others. They also vary in terms of theological heritage and relationship with the government and the official Three-Self Patriotic Movement, the government organization that monitors the Protestant churches. The Communist Party’s separation of religion from higher education has resulted in the inability of the church to establish its own academic tradition, to the deficit of its intellectual life.<sup>26</sup>

In Africa the Christian population is more than four times what it was in 1970. While the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches have experienced enormous growth, new churches have changed the face of African Christianity. Many are Pentecostal in its various forms as well as the independent, African Instituted Churches (AICs), especially in South Africa, Nigeria, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These independent churches seek to give expression to African religious impulses; they are pneumatological in their ecclesiology, communitarian in style, and more comprehensive in their doctrine of salvation.<sup>27</sup> Few are eucharistic communities, though some might celebrate the Eucharist at Easter. They tend to emphasize the work of the Spirit in dreams, prophecy, visions, and other spiritual gifts. Many preach the prosperity gospel or gospel of health and wealth.<sup>28</sup>

One might ask, are these new Pentecostal churches still Protestant? Kasper argues that they “originated at the beginning of the twentieth century in the milieu of the Methodist revival movement; but they have no direct roots in the sixteenth-century Reformation, for according to their own convictions they were called into being by a

23. Benoit Vermander, “Religious Revival and Exit from Religion in Contemporary China,” *China Perspectives* 4 (2009): 4–15 at 10, <https://chinaperspectives.revues.org/4917>.

24. Allan Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (New York: Oxford University, 2013), 200; Gotthard Oblau says that these Christians do not call themselves Pentecostal, many may be seen as Pentecostal in a broader theological sense; “Pentecostal by Default? Contemporary Christianity in China,” in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, ed. Allan Anderson and E. Tang, Regnum Studies in Mission (Oxford: Regnum, 2005), 333–43 at 334.

25. Hwa Yung, “Pentecostalism and the Asian Church,” in Anderson and Tang, *Asian and Pentecostal*, 30–45 at 43–45. Yung argues that indigenous Christian churches in Asia and Africa, Pentecostal or not, have invariably borne the marks of Pentecostalism (41).

26. Ying Fuk-tsang, “Mainland China” in Phan, *Christianities in Asia*, 149–72 at 159, 164.

27. Cephas N. Omenyo, “Essential Aspects of African Ecclesiology: The Case of the African Independent Churches,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 22 (2000): 231–48 at 241, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157007400x00141>.

28. See Simon Coleman, *The Globalization of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (New York: Cambridge University, 2000), 28–40.

new and immediate outpouring of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>29</sup> Some Latin American theologians argue that the neo-Pentecostalism spreading there have little connection to classical Pentecostalism or the historic Protestant tradition; few put emphasis on classical Reformation principles. Milton Acosta speaks of them as a “new form of post-, neo-Christianity” based on a convergence of popular Catholic religiosity with popular Protestant religiosity. Like José Míguez Bonino, Arturo Piedra “holds that there is a weak historical connection between Latin American Protestantism and the Protestant tradition, as there is little or no emphasis on *sola gratia*, *sola Scriptura*, or justification by faith alone.” And many have reduced the Gospel to economic prosperity.<sup>30</sup> The fact that the greatest growth is taking place in the new churches of the Global South, particularly in Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal communities, poses new challenges for traditional ecumenism. Most of these Global South communities have little concern for doctrine, confessional differences, or ecclesiology. Their denominational boundaries are often porous, and multiple identities, sometimes embracing elements from non-Christian religions, are not unusual. For the most part their churches are neither sacramental nor liturgical. Where “communion” services are held, it is “almost always a simple remembrance of the death of Christ rather than celebrating a sacrament.”<sup>31</sup> Wonsuk Ma contrasts the “modern” and “entertaining” Asian Pentecostal worship style with the “old fashioned” style of the traditional churches.<sup>32</sup> Differing strongly from churches in the Enlightenment-influenced West, these new churches stress the nearness of the supernatural or the spirit world, including healing of body, mind, soul, spirit, and society, and they are concerned with life issues such as AIDS, violence, and poverty. Many preach the gospel of health and wealth. As Peter Phan points out, numerous indigenous and sectarian Christian churches and movements in Asia are “often inspired by nationalism, biblical fundamentalism, or charismatic leadership, . . . possessing little or no relationship among themselves and with mainline Christianity.”<sup>33</sup>

## WCC Statement on the Church

If these largely independent churches of the Global South, multiple and diverse in their ecclesiologies, present new challenges for the ecumenical movement, official ecumenism has not moved far beyond the traditional ecclesiology of the West. In 2013 the World Council of Churches finally published its “convergent statement,” *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. While not as long in preparation as its

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29. Kasper, “The Current Ecumenical Transition,” 412.

30. Milton Acosta, “Power Pentecostalism,” *Christianity Today*, July 29, 2009, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2009/august/11.40.html>.

31. Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 139.

32. Wonsuk Ma, “Asian (Classical) Pentecostal Theology in Context,” in Anderson and Tang, *Asian and Pentecostal*, 46–72 at 48.

33. Peter C. Phan, “Reception of and Trajectories for Vatican II in Asia,” *Theological Studies* 74 (2013): 302–20 at 309, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056391307400203>.



earlier text, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, The Church* still reflects some twenty years of work.<sup>34</sup>

The introduction says that the text seeks to serve all the churches as they “call one another to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship.” The first of its four chapters sees the origin of the church in God’s plan for creation, manifested in the Incarnation and paschal mystery, the proclamation of the reign of God, and the empowerment of the Spirit. The church cannot be understood apart from the saving activity of the Trinity. From its origin the church has been dedicated to proclaiming the word, celebrating the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and forming Christian communities (*TCTCV* 5).

Chapter 2 stresses the nature of the church as a communion (*koinōnia*), united with Christ and with one another. Stressing that legitimate diversity is a gift of God, each local church is “a community of baptized believers in which the word of God is preached, the apostolic faith confessed, the sacraments are celebrated, the redemptive works of Christ for the world is witnessed to, and a ministry of *episcopé* exercised by bishops or other ministers in serving the community” (*TCTCV* 31). Each local church should be in communion with the local churches of all times and places, served by a ministry of unity, ecumenical councils, and consultations.

Chapter 3 argues that the journey towards God’s gift of communion requires agreement on the fundamental aspects of the church’s life, referencing the significant progress indicated by the *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* text. The churches generally agree on the importance of tradition, which different ecclesial traditions need to embody. If there are differences as to how authority is exercised, all agree on the need for a ministry of *episcopē*, to maintain continuity in the apostolic faith and hold the local community in communion. It also raises as a question the ministry of unity, citing Pope John Paul’s invitation in *Ut Unum Sint* to enter into “a patient and fraternal dialogue” concerning this ministry,<sup>35</sup> though there is not yet general agreement that such a ministry is necessary or desirable (*TCTCV* 56). But even mentioning teaching authority and a universal ministry for Christian unity moves the WCC statement beyond the 1998 study, *The Nature and Purpose of the Church*.

The final chapter speaks to the church’s missional nature. Participating in the divine mystery, the church as the body of Christ serves God’s plan for the transformation of the world. It proclaims the Gospel, celebrates the sacraments, and in “manifesting the

34. World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (March 6, 2013), <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision> (hereafter cited as *TCTCV*); also Faith and Order Commission, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (January 15, 1982), <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/faith-and-order/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text> (hereafter cited as *BEM*). Parenthetical citations of these works refer to paragraph numbers, not page numbers.

35. John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint* (May 25, 1995), 96, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25051995\\_ut-unum-sint.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html).

newness of life given by [Christ],” anticipates the reign of God “already present in him” (*TCTCV* 58). The promotion of justice and peace is a constitutive aspect of evangelization. The text makes this concrete in three areas. In light of today’s religious pluralism, Christians must respect religious freedom and be respectful of those with different beliefs. They need to be accountable to each other with regard to ethical and moral values. And in serving the world that God so loved their faith impels them “to work for a just social order, in which the good of this earth may be shared equitably, the suffering of the poor eased and absolute destitution one day eliminated” (*TCTCV* 64). Working with all people of good will, the church “seeks to care for creation, which groans to share in the freedom of the children of God (cf. Rom 8:20–22), by opposing the abuse and destruction of the earth and participating in God’s healing of broken relationships between creation and humanity” (*TCTCV* 66).

The WCC text on a common vision of the church is significant for a number of reasons. Rooting the church in the saving action of the Trinity means that the churches are called to visible unity; they live in communion with God and with one another; therefore each church should be in communion with all the other local churches (*TCTCV* 31). Second, the text points to a number of ecclesial elements required for full communion: “communion in the fullness of the apostolic faith; in sacramental life; in a truly one and mutually recognized ministry; in structure of conciliar relations and decision-making; and in common witness and service to the world,” a framework for maintaining unity in legitimate diversity (*TCTCV* 37). Third, there is a strong eucharistic orientation to the text, looking forward to visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship. The text sees the church as a eucharistic community.

From the standpoint of an ecclesiology rooted in the tradition, including from a Catholic perspective, *The Church* is a remarkable statement. At the same time, many from the new churches of the Global South will find it too Western, Eurocentric, and not sufficiently attentive to the experience of the new, largely Pentecostal churches of the Global South. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen had similar objections to an earlier, 1998, version of the WCC statement. He argues like Western ecumenism in general, the earlier WCC statement is almost exclusively based on the ecclesiologies of traditional churches in the West, ignoring the incredible growth of the largely Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in the Southern hemisphere, characterizing it as a failed effort, not helpful with today’s religious pluralism.<sup>36</sup>

36. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “‘The Nature and Purpose of the Church’: Theological and Ecumenical Reflections from Pentecostal/Free Church Perspectives,” *Ecumenical Trends* 33, no. 7 (July/August 2004): 1–7 at 5–7; the WCC text “Together towards Life” (2012), prepared for the WCC Tenth Assembly at Busan, Korea, recognizes new missiological movements emerging from the Global South and East and calls for mutuality, partnership, and interdependence within the ecumenical movement, but it does not develop the ecclesiological challenges these new churches represent for the ecumenical movement. World Council of Churches, “Together towards Life: Missional Evangelism in Changing Landscapes” (September 5, 2012), 106, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes>.

Pentecostal scholar Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., served as a member of the WCC Faith and Order Ecclesiology Working Group from 2001 on; he saw those assigned to his working group strongly slanted toward the ancient churches and those with episcopal governance. He found it difficult as a Pentecostal or representative of the Free Church tradition, or even as an “evangelical,” to make any substantive contribution. He judges it to be a penultimate document that still needs to address the concerns of the churches of the South, “independent churches, megachurches, Pentecostal churches, [and] African Independent Churches.”<sup>37</sup> And there are other voices making the same complaint. Miroslav Volf argued that many ecumenical discussions have ignored the ecclesiologies of the free churches, even though they represent the largest Protestant groupings worldwide.<sup>38</sup>

So is there a future for the ecumenical movement? Can we still look toward the WCC’s vision of a communion of churches, sharing a trinitarian faith, nourished by the word of God and strengthened by the sacraments, guided by a mutually recognized ministry with oversight and teaching authority, and living in visible communion with other churches? Is there a future for Peter Leithart’s Reformed Catholicism? Or do we need some new way of envisioning the ecumenical future?

One approach would be to simply dismiss *The Church*’s theological vision as too traditional, hopelessly Eurocentric, and ignoring the vitality of the new churches in the Southern hemisphere. But this would be to overlook the progress made through years of dialogue. Another would be to continue to maintain that these new churches or ecclesial communities are not churches in the proper sense, as the Vatican declaration, *Dominus Iesus* (2000) did. They may indeed be ecclesial communities, vital communities of faith with their own traditions, rich in gifts and ministries, enriching global Christianity even if lacking those structures of governance, sacramental life, and communion such as official Roman Catholicism and *The Church* text see as necessary for full ecclesial life. From this perspective, *The Church* report might serve as a theological *terminus ad quem* while the churches and ecclesial communities continue to work and witness together and grow in communion. A third approach would be to simply accept all Christian communities as churches on their own terms, though that suggests that there are few criteria for what constitutes a Christian community as church in the tradition. Even those who advocate a broadly inclusive “ecclesiology from below” stress the centrality of the Eucharist. Paul Lakeland says unequivocally, “without the Eucharist we have no Church,”<sup>39</sup> while Roger Haight points to *BEM*’s common apostolic understanding of the Eucharist “as the central act of the church’s worship.”<sup>40</sup>

37. Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., “Panel Presentation on the Church: Towards a Common Vision,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 50 (2015): 288-94 at 294, <https://doi.org/10.1353/ecu.2015.0040>.

38. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 20.

39. Paul Lakeland, *Church: Engaging Theology; Catholic Perspectives* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2009), 179.

40. Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History*, vol. 3, *Ecclesial Existence* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 210.

Perhaps we do need a new vision of Christian unity. Is Deck indeed right that a new form of ecumenism may be emerging, one in which the search for God, unity, and Christian faith is based not primarily on doctrines but on shared values, life, and action based on nonpropositional truths?

## A New Ecumenism?

Konrad Raiser, former deputy secretary of the World Council of Churches, suggested something like this as early as 1988 when he raised the question of a “paradigm shift,” away from a focus on visible unity and towards a Christocentric universalism transcending all differences and divisions, bringing Christians together in witnessing to justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. Some consequences of what he sees as a new paradigm are a breaking down of divisions among Christians, acknowledging the provisional nature of the truth claims for each church and recognizing that God’s work of salvation is taking place also in the non-Christian religions, with the goal of the transformation of the whole human race into the household (*oikoumenē*) of God, thus moving beyond Christian universalism. And so the church becomes, not a hierarchical, sacramental institution, but a fellowship brought about by the Spirit.<sup>41</sup>

Reiser is not the only one to suggest that a new form of ecumenism is emerging. Some today are beginning to speak of a “new ecumenism” based not on theological agreements between denominational churches, but rather on a sense of communion in the Spirit. For Dale Irvin, the modern meaning of ecumenism, present since the fourth century incorporation of the church into the Roman Empire under the authority of the pope, can be compared to a coming together of nation states with their structures of governance and authority.<sup>42</sup> He credits Virgilio Elizondo as one of the first to speak of a new ecumenism in 1993, reflecting on the experience of Hispanic doctoral candidates when they met fifteen years earlier at the Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio:

At the first social on the evening of arrival, everyone—Pentecostal, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Catholic, Disciples, Adventist—expressed how much at home they felt at MACC. Our denominations had fought each other in the field, but here on our common ground, it was more like a family reunion. There was not so much an awareness of difference, as of profound similarity and commonality. We all knew that many of our Churches had functioned as rivals and even enemies . . . Many interdenominational friendships and cooperative efforts started here. It was the birth of a new ecumenism.<sup>43</sup>

41. Konrad Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1991), 79–111.

42. See Dale T. Irvin, “Specters of a New Ecumenism: In Search of a Church ‘Out of Joint,’” in *Religion, Authority, and the State*, ed. Leo D. Lefebure (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 3–32.

43. Virgilio Elizondo, “Hispanic Theology and Popular Piety: From Interreligious Encounter to a New Ecumenism,” *CTSA Proceedings* 48 (1993): 1–14 at 11, <http://ejournals.bc.edu/ojs/index.php/ctsa/article/view/3833>.

Thomas Oden, critical of the Western churches' indiscriminate acceptance of modernity, contrasted the "old ecumenism" of the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches with an emerging "new ecumenism." He sees the old or "modern" ecumenism as oriented to the Enlightenment, bureaucratic, seeking rapid social change and a negotiated, inter-institutional unity. The new ecumenism looks back to the ancient ecumenism of the early church; it recognizes a unity already found in Christ and the Spirit; it is suspicious of modern figures like Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche, and of top-heavy administration. It "hasn't clearly decided whether or how it might engender or manifest new post-WCC expressions of the unity of the body of Christ, or whether to not focus at all on any institutional manifestation of organic unity. It may decide not to seek any structure at all at this time, but allow the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit to shape whatever structures are required."<sup>44</sup>

Pentecostals, who historically have not paid much attention to ecclesiology, also look forward to an inclusive ecumenism that stresses life in the Spirit rather than institutional structures. Amos Yong, while acknowledging that Pentecostals may be more fragmented than other Christian traditions, argues that the movement is intrinsically ecumenical. Unfortunately, he notes that a Pentecostal "denominationalism" set in towards the end of the first generation.<sup>45</sup> He sees the Day of Pentecost as an ecumenical prototype, bringing diverse peoples into a unity that cuts across all traditional divisions and finds its fulfillment in the eschatological consummation of God's saving work. Thus the ecumenical movement is concerned more with affirming difference than with making churches conform to one model. He wants to reclaim the missionary impulse that characterized the ecumenical movement at its beginning, breaking down old barriers between peoples in anticipation of the coming of the kingdom. He also wants to argue that the Pentecostal event was itself interreligious, an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh, including those outside the church.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, Miroslav Volf, commenting on the current decline of the "mainline" Protestant denominations, sees a postconfessional Christianity emerging.<sup>47</sup>

44. Tom Oden, "The New Ecumenism and Christian Witness to Society" (lecture, Institute on Religion and Democracy, Oct. 1, 2001), <http://www.ucmpage.org/articles/toden3.html>.

45. Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 180; see Anderson, who says Hollenweger "insists that the founders of Pentecostalism believed in the international and ecumenical nature of their Pentecostal experience, and that the creation of innumerable Pentecostal denominations was contrary to that nature." Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 254.

46. Yong, *ibid.*, chap. 4, "'From Every Nation under Heaven': The Ecumenical Potential of Pentecostalism for World Theology," 167–202. One of the first to address this was Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "Taking Stock of Pentecostalism: The Personal Reflections of a Retiring Editor," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 15 (1993): 35–60, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157007493x00040>.

47. Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 19.

There is much to recommend such a vision of Christians, committed to Jesus, led by the Spirit, witnessing to the Gospel in their separate churches. Its inclusivity is attractive. It privileges a common faith loosely based on the historic creeds, interpersonal relations, and shared values over doctrinal differences and institutional structures. At the same time, the Catholic Church is committed to the *visible* unity of the Body of Christ. It is not comfortable with an ecclesiology that reduces the true church to an invisible communion of the elect, or the bishop of Rome to a figurehead. Nor can it treat the sacraments and especially the Eucharist as *adiaphora*. Perhaps Robert Schreiter's call for a renewed sense of catholicity can suggest a way forward.

## A Renewed Catholicity

Schreiter's suggestion has ecumenical implications. Long concerned with rethinking the church's mission and theology in a global, post-secular world, he has focused on a renewed catholicity, one that embraces the concept both in terms of extension, with the Catholic Church now truly worldwide, and on its inner fullness.<sup>48</sup> A catholicity of extension calls on the church to engage the whole world through practices of solidarity, dialogue, inculturation, and the pursuit of justice. This means discerning where the creator God continues to be active in the world through the workings of the Spirit, finding the *semina Verba* or "seeds of the Word" in the culture, places where the *missio Dei* is unfolding. For many, the hermeneutic for discerning the *missio Dei* is Vatican II's concept of "reading the signs of the times."<sup>49</sup> Indeed, *Gaudium et Spes* is the "charter document" for this vision.

The second aspect of catholicity, its inner fullness, suggests that the church must offer to the world the revelation about God given in Jesus Christ. This aspect is more critical; it sees the Gospel as a lens to view the world rightly. The initial chapters of *Gaudium et Spes* sought to present this vision, but many found its vision far too optimistic, among them Joseph Ratzinger and Karl Rahner. Schreiter sees *Lumen Gentium* as offering a better vision, a revelation that takes concrete form in the life and liturgy of church; it recognizes the darkness present in the world and its sinfulness and the hollowness of Enlightenment optimism, countering it with the beauty and wisdom of the church's centuries-old wisdom. He acknowledges that there is a tension between the two positions, but then he argues, so is the church itself ambivalent in its attitude towards the world.<sup>50</sup>

Schreiter's concern is a repositioning of theology, sensitive to the signs of the times, in the service of the church's mission. Certainly the ecumenical movement itself is one

48. *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), 4, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html). See Robert Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), esp. 127–31.

49. Robert Schreiter, "The Repositioning of a Theology of the World in the Face of Globalization and Post-Secularity," in *The Task of Theology: Leading Theologians on the Most Compelling Questions for Today*, ed. Anselm K. Min (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014), 65–83 at 72–73.

50. *Ibid.*, 74–75.

of these signs. But if the churches are being challenged towards unity in the service of the church's mission, the ecclesial and doctrinal heritage of the tradition cannot simply be forgotten. The fullness of the apostolic faith is not dispensable. Here theology can aid in the process of discernment.

Schreiter argues that we need to learn to recognize God's working in the world, in the culture, even outside the church, or we might add, outside the Catholic Church. Appealing to the *semina Verbi*, Pope John Paul II acknowledged the Spirit's presence and activity affecting "not only the individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions . . . Again, it is the Spirit who sows the 'seeds of the Word' present in various customs and cultures, preparing them for full maturity in Christ."<sup>51</sup> Similarly, Pope Francis argues in *Amoris Laetitia* that the woman's movement should be seen as reflecting the working of the Spirit; it should not be dismissed in spite of what he sees as the inadequacy of some forms of feminism.<sup>52</sup> Here it might be appropriate to point out that the 2014 text of the International Theological Commission, "*Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church," affirms that separated Christians can be understood as participating in the *sensus fidelium* in some manner.<sup>53</sup> But not all "signs" point to the Spirit. Signs always have to be discerned. Thus Schreiter goes into a long discussion of how to read the signs of the times.<sup>54</sup>

A response to Schreiter's article by James Fredericks is noteworthy for our interest in the future of ecumenism. He suggests the most important change to be faced today is represented by the demographic shift of the Christian population from the North to the Global South. What will shape the future of Christianity is not just the tensions between Christians and Muslims in the Global South, but also the faith of the southern churches, so different from the Enlightenment-influenced faith of the more liberal northern Christians, uncomfortable with faith healing and exorcisms. With the diminishing influence of liberation theology and the dramatic rise of Pentecostalism, he emphasizes "that prophecy can come from within a part of the church that we do not know well and do not understand."<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

In an article on "A Promising New Thrust in Ecumenical Theology," Michael Fahey notes that few ecumenical agreements have been officially received by the churches

51. John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (December 7, 1990), 28, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_07121990\\_redemptoris-missio.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html).

52. Francis, *Amoris Laetitia* (April 8, 2016), 54, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20160319\\_amoris-laetitia\\_en.pdf](https://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf).

53. International Theological Commission, "*Sensus Fidei* in the Life of the Church" (June 10, 2014), 86, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti\\_documents/rc\\_cti\\_20140610\\_sensus-fidei\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_20140610_sensus-fidei_en.html).

54. Schreiter, "The Repositioning of a Theology of the World," 76–81.

55. James Fredericks, "A Response to Robert Schreiter: The Church of the Global South," in Min, *The Task of Theology*, 85–91 at 91.

and their impact on the faithful has been minimal.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, like several others writing about the future of ecumenism, Fahey points to a new term, “receptive ecumenism,” a fresh approach to ecumenical theology and practice newly promoted by Paul D. Murray of the Centre for Catholic Studies at the University of Durham (UK). Its method is to ask not what others might learn from us, but what we might learn from them to facilitate growth together into deeper communion.<sup>57</sup>

What might the remarkable growth of the new churches in the Global South suggest about the future of ecumenism? What might our Western churches learn from these churches, just as we expect them to learn from us? Should we see God working here, in these new churches, in these very different cultures, outside our traditional notion of ecumenism? Do they have something to teach more traditional churches about the priority of mission?

The Western churches need to rethink their often rationalistic theologies and give more attention to the importance of experience. Their cultures too often exclude any hint of the supernatural or the spiritual. Some need to recognize that sin is more than just structural. They have to make room for the Spirit’s power. The Catholic Church and other Western churches have much to learn from the charismatically structured churches of the South about mission and evangelization. The Orthodox churches lack a clear consensus about the ecclesial and salvific character of the non-Orthodox churches and the distinction between full and partial communion so important to Roman Catholic ecclesiology.<sup>58</sup> They might learning something from the vitality of the ecclesial life of these new, charismatically structured churches.

At the same time the new churches of Asia and Africa need to recover the church’s sacramental tradition, especially the Eucharist, and move beyond a supernaturalistic, premodern worldview without losing their sense for God’s nearness. Those Asian churches that recognize God’s power, seeing it in “signs and wonders,” are growing, but their “narrow pneumatology” prevents them from recognizing the Spirit’s work outside of the church.<sup>59</sup> They also need to reconsider their health and wealth preaching. Too often the prosperity gospel replaces a recognition of the cross and its place in the paschal mystery. There is also divide within Protestantism today, and not only in the new churches of the South, between those who see Christian unity as a value and others who reject the ecumenical movement’s vision. The independence of these churches does not obviate a need to live in visible communion with other churches.

But the ecumenical future needs more than simply learning from each other, important as that is. Ecumenism always begins in friendship. We have to learn to recognize

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56. Michael Fahey, “A Promising New Thrust in Ecumenical Theology,” in *A Church with Open Doors: Catholic Ecclesiology for the Third Millennium*, ed. Richard R. Gaillardetz and Edward P. Hannenberg (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2015), 181–96 at 190.

57. Paul D. Murray, “Receptive Ecumenism and Catholic Learning: Establishing the Agenda,” *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 7 (2008): 279–301 at 279–80; <https://doi.org/10.1080/14742250701725785>.

58. See Walter Kasper, *That All May Be One: The Call to Unity Today* (London: Burns and Oaters, 2004), 59.

59. Ma, “Asian (Classical) Pentecostal Theology in Context,” 69–70.



each other as brothers and sisters in Christ—as “ecclesial communities,” to use the language of Vatican II, as “churches” even if imperfectly so. Even more, we have to find effective ways to move forward, to walk together. Can we learn to find a common vision on moral issues? Can we witness together on questions of justice and solidarity with the disadvantaged, helping to relieve misery and working to change oppressive structures? Edmund Kee-Fook Chia suggests Konrad Raiser’s image of the pilgrimage to characterize the ecumenical movement: “This is the new context within which Southern Christianity is growing and invites a new vision of ecumenism. This new vision sees ecumenism not so much as a task to be fulfilled but as a way of being and relating across church and religious lines.”<sup>60</sup> This sounds like Pope Francis, for whom ecumenism is always more than theological dialogue. Prayer is essential; so is common witness: “Walk together, pray for each other, and do works of charity together when you can. This is ecumenism.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, bridges, not walls.

The churches need to pursue ecumenism on several fronts. First, the ecumenical dialogues since the council have led to a greater appreciation of a shared doctrinal heritage, and in some cases to an enlargement of church life. The churches could begin building on past agreements by taking positive steps toward full communion, for example, teaching together whenever possible, and finding ways to share in mission. Can we learn to pray together, even finding occasions when eucharistic hospitality might be appropriate for those who want to live in communion with us and share a eucharistic faith?<sup>62</sup> This was raised again at Pope Francis’s meeting with representatives of the Lutheran World Federation on October 31, 2016 at Lund, Sweden, to commemorate the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation’s beginning. Leithart sees Catholic and Orthodox eucharistic exclusiveness as a sign of tribalism or sectarianism.<sup>63</sup> Without visible expression of communion, common witness remains ineffective. The Catholic Church has missed opportunities in this regard. It shouldn’t be an all or nothing proposition.

In a 2013 address to CELAM, the Latin American Bishops’ Conference, Pope Francis warned against utopian and restorationist impulses which prevent one from recognizing God’s work in the present:

Every utopian (future-oriented) or restorationist (past-oriented) impulse is spiritually unhealthy. God is real and he shows himself in the “today.” With regard to the past, his presence is given to us as “memory” of his saving work, both in his people and in each of us as individuals; with regard to the future, he gives himself to us as “promise” and hope. In the

60. Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, “Ecumenical Pilgrimage toward World Christianity,” *Theological Studies* 76 (2015): 503–30 at 528, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0040563915593480>.

61. Cindy Wooden, “Ecumenical Papal Trip: Touching the Christian Heart of Secular Sweden,” *Catholic News Service*, October 20, 2016, <http://www.catholicnews.com/services/english-news/2016/ecumenical-papal-trip-touching-the-christian-heart-of-secular-sweden.cfm>.

62. Cf. Thomas P. Rausch, “Occasional Eucharistic Hospitality: Revisiting the Question,” *Theological Studies* 74 (2013): 399–419, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056391307400207>.

63. Leithart, *The End of Protestantism*, 130, 170.

past God was present and left his mark: memory helps us to encounter him; in the future is promise alone . . . he is not in the thousand and one “futuribles.” The “today” is closest to eternity; even more: the “today” is a flash of eternity. In the “today,” eternal life is in play.<sup>64</sup>

Second, the churches need to find ways to reach out to other communities different from their own. They need to find ways to overcome the strangeness and alienation of time and theological difference. All the churches need to ask, what are the implications of a shared life in the Spirit? Can they learn to recognize each other as fellow disciples in Christ? They need to learn that mission is primary. As one hears today, the church does not have a mission; the mission has a church. Pope Francis has repeatedly stressed the importance of sharing in mission, common witness, and recognizing each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Only in this way can our churches move closer to the unity for which Jesus prayed.

A final comment. Steven Bevans is one of Catholicism’s premier missiologists. He traces the birthday of the church, not to Pentecost Sunday in Jerusalem, but to Antioch, where the disciples began to see themselves, not just as Jews, but as called to continue the mission of Jesus to the ends of the earth.<sup>65</sup> How much more effective this would be if we could do it together?

### Author biography

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64. Pope Francis, “Address to the Leadership of the Episcopal Conferences of Latin America during the General Coordination Meeting” (July 28, 2013), [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130728\\_gmg-celam-rio.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130728_gmg-celam-rio.html).

65. Stephen Bevans, “The Mission has a Church: An Invitation to the Dance,” [http://aejt.com.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/197644/Bevans\\_Mission\\_Has\\_Church.pdf](http://aejt.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/197644/Bevans_Mission_Has_Church.pdf). I want to express my thanks to Professor Catherine E. Clifford of Saint Paul’s University, Ottawa who reviewed an earlier draft of this article and offered very helpful comments, particularly in regard to the way ahead.