

## A REVIEW/APPRECIATION OF "PERSPECTIVES ON KOINONIA"

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"Perspectives on Koinonia" is the overarching theme embracing the diverse topics considered during the third quinquennium of the dialogue between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and Some Classical Pentecostal Churches and leaders: "Communion of the Saints" (1985), "The Holy Spirit and the New Testament Vision of Koinonia" (1986), "Koinonia, Church, and Sacraments" (1987), "Koinonia and Baptism" (1988). The findings were summarized at a meeting in Rome in 1989. Unlike many of the other dialogues conducted by the Pontifical Council, the goal of this dialogue is not organic or structural union, but rather improved mutual understanding in matters of faith and practice. Furthermore, the dialogue partner is a heterogeneous group of "Some Classical Pentecostal Churches": there is no one central unified organization that speaks for all. Happily, the participation of the Pentecostal churches in this quinquennium has been expanded.

Like many of the other dialogues, however, the report adopts the ecclesiology of *koinonia/communio*, a scriptural and patristic image which has been particularly favored in the Post-Vatican II Church. *Koinonia/communio* describes the participation in the divine life of God, realized in a unique way in Jesus Christ, the one mediator between God and the human race, and continued in the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the Church and the hearts of believers and provides the foundation for fellowship in the Church. Through the Spirit, the Church is a unity of communion with God and among its members. This *koinonia* with God through Jesus Christ in the Spirit is grounded in the sacraments of baptism and eucharist (1 Cor 10:16). The remarkable agreement on a variety of issues achieved in this dialogue is indeed the work of the Holy Spirit. What follows are remarks on particular sections of the dialogue.

### I. "KOINONIA" AND THE WORD OF GOD

"Jesus Christ, the Perfect Word of God" (A) contains a very basic consensus about Christ as the fullness of revelation (n° 14), the perfect revelation (n° 15), "the ultimate and permanent Word of God" after whom there is no further revelation until the second coming (n° 16).

"The Written Word of God" (B) proceeds more

ambivalently. The disagreement with the Reformation churches on the canonical books of scripture continues (n° 19). But which comes first: the Church or the Word? Although Pentecostals are reluctant to accept the findings of biblical criticism, the Catholic assertion that the Church precedes chronologically the writings of the New Testament (n° 20) could be further enriched by reference to the 1964 statement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission. "The Historical Truth of the Gospels" acknowledges three stages in the development of the Gospel tradition: first the events of Jesus' public life, then the preaching phase or oral tradition that occurred after Jesus' death and resurrection, and finally the four written Gospels themselves. The New Testament is thus the library of the early Church which is normative for subsequent generations of believers. At the same time, by drawing on insights from *Dei Verbum* (n° 21-26). Walter Kasper has demonstrated that there is a Catholic sense in which the Church can be called a *creatura verbi*, a "creature of the word," the word being ultimately the Incarnate Word of God (*Theology and Church*, New York 1989, p. 155).

The notion of *sensus fidelium*, which is presented as a point of division (n° 25, 26), might also prove to be more a point of consensus. The Pentecostal emphasis on the personal appropriation of scripture as the true activity of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the believers could be more clearly related to the idea of the *sensus fidelium*; viz. the Holy Spirit guides the honest and sincere Christian into the truth of Jesus Christ, albeit not without the guidance of the teaching office of the Church.

### II. THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT VISION OF "KOINONIA"

Both parties agree that *koinonia* among Christians is rooted in the Trinity and has the Spirit as its source (n° 29, 30). As is often the case in ecumenical dialogues, however, while a basic agreement obtains about Christ and the Trinity, there is a divergence in the *pro nobis* character of Christian salvation: in this case, how the Holy Spirit effects this *koinonia*. For Roman Catholics, the Trinity is not only a central doctrine to be believed, it is also the mystery of the inner life of God in which we are invited to share objectively beginning with baptismal initiation (n° 31). Pentecostals for their part prefer to stress the more subjective dimension of personal conversion brought about by the Holy Spirit (n° 32).

Further attention might be given to the choice of terms used to describe the respective dimensions of *koinonia*: the Roman Catholic emphasis on the "communitarian" and the Pentecostal stress on the "personal" (n° 33). At the present time in the

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English language, "personal" seems to connote anything private or individual; by inference anything communal or social is considered impersonal. Perhaps "personal-communal" and "personal-individual" would capture more accurately what is being said.

Future dialogues can deal with the obvious issue that Catholics place strong emphasis on a unity which might tend to stifle diversity, while Pentecostals emphasize individuality to the seeming detriment of the organic unity of the Church.

Both parties agree on unity in diversity (n° 34), while lamenting the scandal of disunity among Christians (n° 38). Future dialogues also need to explore the differences between authentic and unauthentic diversity. What does this mean? Simply to applaud diversity and lament disunity will remain an empty expression unless the question of legitimate and illegitimate diversity is honestly addressed.

"*Koinonia* and Gospel Witness" (C) could benefit from a greater explication of God's redemptive plan as revealed in salvation history: namely, to form us into a people and to recapitulate all things in Christ. The Gospel witness called for might be better integrated into the Church's mission and spelled out more explicitly in terms of Christian witness towards transforming the social order. In the words of Paul VI, "evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new" (*Evangelii nuntiandi* n° 18).

### III. "KOINONIA" AND BAPTISM

This is by far the longest of the five sections of the report. The difficulty the subject of baptism presented in the dialogue is alluded to in footnote 7.

"The Meaning of Baptism" (A) refers to the types of baptism in the Old Testament (the Flood, Exodus). These are also found in the Roman Catholic prayer for blessing the waters of baptism. The phrasing "prefigured in Old Testament symbolism" could be deepened by an appreciation of the patristic typology whereby Old Testament types find their fulfillment in the anti-type which is Christ and Christian baptism. By way of passing, there is throughout the dialogue scant mention of the Hebrew scriptures and Israel's place in salvation history. The missionary command in *Mt* 28:19 is cited as the scriptural precedent for baptism; more could be made of the foundational event of Jesus' baptism by John.

The report acknowledges a fundamental difference between Roman Catholics and Pentecostals which deserves further discussion. Whereas Roman Catholics view baptism as a sacrament; Pentecostals generally prefer the term ordinance. At stake is the sacramental principle, a corollary of the Incarnation, which is so dear to the Roman Catholic tradition. By God's choice human realities

have become the place where we encounter the living transcendent God. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (*Jn* 1:14; see also *1 Jn* 1:1-4). This divinely-willed sacramentality extends to Christ as a primordial sacrament, the Church as a fundamental sacrament, and the individual sacraments themselves. Moreover, Catholic doctrine maintains that sacraments are intrinsically, objectively efficacious: they not only express but also effect and bring about the grace they signify for those who do not put an obstacle in the way.

"Faith and Baptism" (B) takes up the most intractable issue of the dialogue: the question of infant baptism. Pentecostals question not only the propriety, but the very efficaciousness of the practice; i.e. the baptism of infants is not true Christian baptism because there is no conscious faith response on the part of the recipient. To begin with, clarification of terms is in order, as suggested by the Vatican response to the Lima document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. Rather than distinguishing between *believers* and children, a more fruitful contrast would be between baptism/initiation of *adults* (those who make a personal profession of faith at the moment of baptism) and children (those who will be brought to that profession of faith subsequently by Christian nurture).

To respond more fully to this significant point of division, this reviewer sees three dimensions to the issue of infant baptism: historical (the tradition), theological, and pastoral. The *historical* question asks when did the early Church begin to baptize infants. What are the origins of infant baptism: is it an apostolic practice or a later development? The argumentation for both sides of this debate is based on analogies with Jewish practices (circumcision), inferences from New Testament texts (the famous *oikos* or "household" in Acts), other literary witnesses such as Justin Martyr (d.c. 165) and Polycarp of Smyrna (d.c. 155). Historically, the first incontrovertible direct evidence that the early Church is indeed baptizing infants comes to us at the end of the second century in the writings of Irenaeus of Lyons, Tertullian, and Hippolytus of Rome. Before this time, one may speak of a positive probability. Whatever the case, it is good to recall that what is normative for subsequent generations is not so much the concrete practices of the apostolic Church, but rather its theology. For example, there is ample evidence in the miracle accounts of the Gospel that the faith response to a healing may be supplied by a third party and not necessarily by the recipient, the cure of the centurion's servant being a case in point.

The *theological* question asks what is the meaning of infant baptism. Baptism is a sacrament of faith. What is to be said of the baptism of infants who ostensibly are not yet capable of making a personal act of faith? Here the consistent response from the early Church (Hippolytus) to medieval times (Thomas Aquinas) until today (*Instruction on Infant Baptism* 1980) has been that the faith of the Church supplies. The children are baptized into the

faith of the Church: the Church *universal*, existing in *local* communities, and realized in the *domestic Church* or family who presents the child for baptism.

Curiously absent from this dialogue is any mention of baptism and the sin of the world, especially surprising since a theology of original sin has been so much a part of the Roman Catholic theology of baptism, and conversely, conviction and forgiveness of sin has figured so prominently in the Pentecostal conversion process. Possible connecting links for future dialogues would be the Pentecostal admission that the grace of God is already operative in the life of an infant (n° 46), the need for personal appropriation of baptism (n° 48), the imperative for all the baptized to have a deep personal relationship with Christ (n° 49), and parallels that exist between the Roman Catholic baptism of infants and the Pentecostal rite of infant dedication (n° 63). Nonetheless, another basic difficulty remains. While both dialogue partners agree that faith is indispensable for salvation, Pentecostals disagree with Roman Catholic teaching that baptism is a *constitutive* means of salvation accomplished by the life, death, and resurrection of Christ (n° 51).

There is agreement in "Baptism and the Church" (C) that baptism is a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom, 6:3ff) and incorporation into the Body of Christ. The believing community is deemed important in the preparation for baptism, the celebration of baptism, and the subsequent nurturing of the faith of the one baptized. A missing piece here is the role of the Church in the sacramental process. As Richard Gula has wisely remarked:

Sacraments happen first to the community, and then in and through the community to the individual. The community is the starting point for what happens to the individual. Christian existence is always co-existence. God's love for us is made visible and tangible in and through the community. (*To Walk Together Again*, New York 1984, p. 80).

There is an important breakthrough toward the mutual recognition of baptism, although this comes about from two divergent approaches. Roman Catholics believe that they share with the Pentecostals a certain though imperfect *koinonia* on the basis of baptism (n° 54). More important to the Pentecostals than the fact of baptism is the unity which comes from a common faith and experience among believers that Jesus Christ is Lord (n° 55).

"Baptismal Practice" (D) begins with an agreement about the manner of baptism with water and the Trinitarian words, despite the practice of some Pentecostals baptizing in the name of Jesus alone (Acts 2:28). Baptism by immersion is encouraged, and most remarkable of all, is the consensus that baptism when properly administered is not to be repeated. But the issue of infant baptism continues

to be a point of contention: Pentecostals have not only theological but pastoral difficulties with infant baptism.

In this reviewer's opinion, the *pastoral* dimension of infant baptism flows from its theological meaning. Para. 61 points the way describing the restored Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults as the "primary theological model". In other words, one can say that adult initiation is a *theological* norm or standard against which a given practice is measured. Infant baptism is thus a pastoral adaptation of the theologically normative adult initiation. If children are baptized into the faith of the Church universal, local, and domestic, it is essential that the parents or guardians of the child are prepared for the responsibility they are undertaking for the future religious formation of the child. The "Instruction of Infant Baptism" (n° 28; see also the new Code of Canon Law, can. 868) speaks of assurances to be given that the gift of baptism can grow by an authentic formation in the faith and Christian life in order to fulfil the true meaning of the sacrament. If these assurances are not serious, there are grounds for delaying the sacrament; if they are entirely absent, the sacrament is to be refused.

In sum, Roman Catholics see a place for the initiation of both adults and children into Christ and his Church. Mark Searle has written eloquently of their complementarity:

Adult baptism, the economy of the "twice born", tends to draw to itself the vocabulary of regeneration as opposed to generation; of brothers and sisters rather than sons and daughters; of voluntary' decision rather than divine vocation; of change rather than faithfulness; of breaking with the past rather than growth towards the future; of death and resurrection rather than adoption and filiation. The language of infant initiation, on the other hand, is inclined to speak in terms of the womb rather than the tomb, of election rather than choice, of loyalty rather than commitment, of the preconscious operations of grace rather than of personal convictions, of nurturing the life of faith rather than of passing from unbelief to belief (*Alternative Futures for Worship*, vol. 2, Collegeville 1987, pp. 49, 50).

"Baptism and the Experience of the Spirit" (E) begins with a mutual agreement that the Spirit is given to all who belong to Christ. There is the frank admission that Roman Catholics fear that Pentecostals link the Spirit to specific manifestations, while Pentecostals fear that Roman Catholics confine the action of the Spirit to sacraments and church order. In response, the Charismatic Renewal has helped Roman Catholics to become more open to charismata such as tongues and prophecy (n° 67). The reference to "such gifts... rooted in their oldest tradition" may refer to the recovery of a legitimate and genuine religious affectivity which has often been held

suspect ever since the suppression of the Montanist heresy in the third century.

The final paragraph n° 69 suggests that "Baptism in the Spirit" deserves elaboration. An important part of any future Roman Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue might be to explore again the relationship of "baptism in the Spirit" to water baptism. For example, how much of a two or even three stage process of Pentecostal sanctification is at work here?

#### IV. "KOINONIA" IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Portions of this section appear repetitious of sections II and III. At the heart of *koinonia* is the Triune God (n° 70). The implications of this belief in a God who is three persons in one nature seem to be more consistently present in the Roman Catholic communion (n° 71). Pentecostals acknowledge they could profit from a more systematic study of the Trinity (n° 72). The Church's active response to the gift of God in service of *koinonia* requires mutuality in many dimensions (n° 73). In a revealing bit of self-criticism, Roman Catholics confess to a lack of mutuality e.g. inadequate lay participation in decisionmaking processes and insufficient involvement of women in leadership positions (n° 74). For their part, Pentecostals admit to the opposite problem of needing to recognize a legitimate authority: the Holy Spirit is given not only to individuals but to the whole community (n° 75).

Another related issue is holiness and the sins of the members of the Church. Pentecostals challenge a Catholic comprehensiveness which they find inconsistent with the discipleship espoused by Christ (n° 78). Roman Catholics in turn question whether Pentecostals have something equivalent to the sacrament of penance in dealing with the sins of members after baptism (n° 79).

"*Koinonia*, Sacraments, and Church Order" (C) for the first time brings a welcome mention of the three sacraments of initiation: baptism, confirmation, and first eucharist. This unified conception was present in the early Church and has now been restored in the revised liturgies and Code of Canon Law. In this reviewer's opinion, there is a glaring omission of any developed treatment of the eucharist, the sacrament of the unity of the Church, for which abundant evidence exists in the New Testament. The Roman Catholic view of the church order in *koinonia* — bondedness of local churches through common faith, common sacramental life, and common episcopacy — is well-expressed in para. 82. The Pentecostal position is more vague: the full ecclesial status of the churches may be ordered in various ways (ri° 84), and ordination is more the acknowledgement than a conferral of a God-given charism (n° 85).

This might be the place to comment that the New Testament data regarding *koinonia*, especially in the Pauline literature, does not imply an amor-

phous grouping but rather an organized fellowship and a disciplined community. At the same time, the current popularity of the ecclesiology of *koinonia* in the ecumenical dialogue, however well-deserved, should not blind us to other scriptural images used at the Second Vatican Council. The Church as people of God highlights the continuity with the people of Israel; the Church as Body of Christ specifies more clearly how the Church is the New Testament people of God. Both of these images also bring out the structural dimension of the Church.

The Pentecostal misgivings about a perceived Roman Catholic "mechanical" or "magical" understanding of the sacraments (n° 86) might be dispelled by a greater appreciation of the "dialogical structure of both God-giveness and human response" (n° 73), in this case applied to the sacraments. The Roman Catholic teaching about the intrinsic objective efficacy of the sacraments, first articulated in the controversy with the Donatists in the fourth and fifth centuries and expressed in the often misunderstood *opus operatum* efficacy of the Council of Trent, is a strong conviction about the initiative of God, the priority of grace in the sacramental encounter. Sacraments will reach their goal of communion with God and with one another unless the recipient puts an obstacle in the way. Moreover, the sacraments are not simply actions of individuals in the Church, but rather are actions of the Church as a fundamental sacrament. This dialogical pattern of God's gracious dealings with us embodied in the sacramental life of the Church is found in the very identity of the Church as both an institution of salvation and a community of faith and worship.

"The Church and Salvation" (D) recalls once again a divergence which has figured throughout this dialogue, viz, the contrast between a corporate and an individual approach to salvation. For Roman Catholics, the Church is a sign and instrument promoting the kingdom of God (n° 90). For the Pentecostals, the Church as a community is a sign and instrument of salvation in the same sense as each of its members is called to be (n° 94). Future dialogues might expand on the terms "eschatological unity" and "eschatological kingdom" so as to present a more encompassing sweep of God's saving plan in salvation history pressing towards the second coming of Christ.

#### V. "KOINONIA" AND THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

This section explores the manifold meaning of *communio*: a communion with the Holy One, a communion in the Body and Blood of Christ (*communio in sanctis*), and a fellowship of the saints (*communio sanctorum*). In the Nicene Creed the communion of saints has an eschatological significance: namely, the wider Church to which we belong includes the saints in heaven.

For Roman Catholics, *communio in sanctis* means first of all participation in the sacraments of

initiation (baptism, confirmation, and first eucharist), which are constitutive of the Church. For Pentecostals, the preaching of God's word constitutes the central element in worship (n° 96). Both parties wonder if they could learn from each other. For example, Roman Catholics might grow in their appreciation of a devotional reading of scripture and a more "experiential dimension of *koinonia* through spontaneous exercise of the gifts and the sharing of personal testimonies"; Pentecostals could profit from deepening their appreciation of the relationship between word and sacrament as found in baptism and eucharist (n° 97). Given the intimate relationship between *koinonia*, sacraments, and church order, there is for Roman Catholics no possibility of general eucharistic sharing at the present time. Roman Catholics ask what is required among Pentecostals for full eucharistic sharing (n° 98).

Although both parties refer to the great cloud of witnesses (*Heb* 12:1), the doctrine of the *communio sanctorum* is more developed among Roman Catholics than Pentecostals. In a dialogue so scripturally oriented, perhaps more could have been made of the Book of Revelation, where the depiction of the heavenly liturgies provides such hope for the earthly Church in pilgrimage. The Roman Catholic distinction between *latría* (God as an object of worship) and *douliá* (veneration given to the saints) fails to convince Pentecostals, who spurn any veneration of "relics, icons, and saints" (curious juxtaposition of terms!) which could possibly obscure the unique mediatorial role of Christ (n° 101).

"Holiness, Repentance, and Ministry in History" (B) addresses some wide-ranging themes. First of all, the acknowledgement that the New Testament term "saints" is predicated of all the baptized (n° 102) calls for commentary. This is a different conception of holiness from what we are used to, namely, an ethical or moral holiness. This more ontological approach highlights the giftedness flowing from baptism whereby all initiated Christians share in the life of God. Both par-

ties agree that the Church is at once holy and in need of purification; a "holy penitent" is the apt image used (n° 103). Both parties also agree on the fundamental demand for holiness in the minister. At the same time, the unworthiness of a minister does not invalidate the work of the Holy Spirit (n° 104), an insight already gained in the fifth century in Augustine's disputations with the Donatists.

In this section of the dialogue more than anywhere else, the Pentecostals admit to a stronger conviction about the need for Church order and permanent ministries in the Church (n° 105). Both Roman Catholics and Pentecostals agree that the offices and structures in the Church are in continual need of reform and renewal by the Holy Spirit (n° 106). The final paragraphs deal with divergent views of history. Roman Catholics see a continuity of the contemporary Church with the New Testament Church; Pentecostals view their recently formed communion in continuity with the New Testament Church but in discontinuity with much of the historical Church.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

An open and genuinely ecumenical spirit pervades "Perspectives on *Koinonia*" (see especially n° 68, 80). The diversity of topics covered, at times somewhat repetitiously, and the absence of an agreed upon theological system, make this report difficult to review and assess. In particular, the absence of any developed Pentecostal systematic theology on Trinity, grace, Church, and sacraments challenges Roman Catholics to find a common ground on many issues. Future dialogues could profit from the services of a Catholic exegete who could bring a biblical orientation to the group. Section III on baptism seems to have been the most substantive of the dialogue. Although disagreement remains regarding the theology and pastoral practice of infant baptism, both parties admit to a real though imperfect communion with one another. This sense of existing communion is an impetus to a desired fourth quinquennium.