

PASTORAL PAPER Ecumenism (Part 1)

When in Rome.....

An “unofficial” guide to finding your place in the new “Global Church”, and the progression of the Assemblies of God from voluntary cooperative fellowship to denomination as reflected in the rise of the “reverter clause”

By

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(Revised December 13, 2006)

INTRODUCTION

In the brief study that follows, I will attempt to share with you a journey that began for me when I opened the resolutions packet for the August 2005 General Council of the Assemblies of God. I pressed in, hoping to discover the thought processes and Biblical reasoning behind the proposed changes in the Fellowship's Bylaws relative to the Global Ecumenical movement. As the process unfolded, I became more concerned and headed for the mile-high city with prayerful anticipation. This odyssey led me to a brief but life changing relationship with the late Dr. Opal Reddin (a true mother in Israel), as well as e-mail exchanges with denominational officers, professors, pastors and a variety of other figures. The purpose of sharing these with you, as well as the accompanying commentary, is to provoke discussion and hopefully bring a new level of understanding and action to the beloved movement known as the Assemblies of God. I am purposefully including only portions of the mail written to me by different individuals, and have removed direct references to their identities. The originals have been printed out and preserved for accuracy and accountability purposes. The first and most important thing I have learned by studying church history is that the brightest and most sincere men are still susceptible to the pitfalls and errors that have been common to every movement ever raised up by God. "When I am weak, then I am strong" must always be our battle cry until the Lord returns, putting an end to temptation and every other device of the Wicked One. The revisions to this paper include the insertion of another study originally titled "From Hot Springs to Hot Water", a study of the progression of our movement from its humble beginnings to a full fledged denomination as evidenced in its legal positions towards local autonomy and private ownership of church properties. Why combine the two papers? Because of the claims of "unofficial" doctrinal relationships and the "local autonomy" of certain individuals addressed in my ecumenical correspondence went unchecked and unexplained by leadership. This position stood in stark contrast to the very deliberate (yet subtle) insertion of the denominations' "rights" when local church properties are involved, always couched in the most spiritual language possible. How can leadership cry "local autonomy" and "unofficial" status when serious doctrinal questions are asked, thinking that this absolves them of their spiritual responsibility as overseers, while at the same time demanding that adamant lines be drawn when real estate is involved. Truly our Pentecostal founding fathers cared more for the doctrinal purity of our fledgling movement than the value of the buildings it possessed. May the Spirit of Truth guide us all on our quest to do His Will in these most challenging days.

WHEN MARY CAME TO TOWN

I was on my way to a hospital call in South Bend, Indiana, when I decided to take a short cut through the campus of the University of Notre Dame. I often do this to pray blessings on the campus, to get around that "college atmosphere", and sometimes merely for diversion. This day would prove to be different than most. When I passed between the Joyce Center and the storied football stadium known affectionately as "The House that Rockne built", I noticed something I had never seen before in all the years I've lived in this region. To my surprise, standing erect on the back of a tractor-trailer was a 33-foot stainless steel statue of "Our Lady of Fatima". This particular figure was designated "Our Lady of the new Millennium" by Pope John Paul II, and was being taken around the world so that Mary's actual presence could inspect the condition of her faithful followers.

I proceeded to burn a roll of film taking several pictures of the huge personage, returning to my office to prepare a teaching about the apparitions attributed to Mary around the world, along with the abhorrent doctrines that have been accepted as canon law by the Vatican due to the exhortations of the Mother of God. Living so close to the University, I have contact with Roman Catholic friends on a weekly basis at least, and try to be prepared to lovingly share with them, as well as equipping my local congregation to deal with their friends. It was while in this mode that I received my resolutions packet for the Denver Council. And it was this urgency and passion that motivated me to write my first letter to my denominational leadership, seeking understanding as to where we as a fellowship were going relative to Global Ecumenism.

June 18, 2005

Dear "Brother Superior",

First of all, please allow me to say hello and thank you for your ongoing ministry to our Lord first, and also our great fellowship....

My question pertains to the packet of information I just received last week that contained the proposed amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws; specifically number 14 dealing with the Ecumenical Movement. I grew up from childhood, and have now pastored for nearly 11 years just minutes from the University of Notre Dame. It took several overseas missions trips to appreciate the true nature of the Roman Church compared to that of the Evangelical/Protestant movement. In other nations where there is no "Bill of Rights" in existence, the RCC is very aggressive and antagonistic. I have been personally threatened both in the Philippines and Haiti by agents of Rome who are continuing to work in a confusing, syncretistic manner in the same field where we are trying to preach the true Gospel of Grace through faith in our Lord Jesus. Back here in the "Michiana region" (Michigan/Indiana border area), all attention is focused upon whether or not the Irish will beat Michigan in football. I have now become painfully aware that the battle is much more involved, subtle, and costly. I have had priests court some of my church members (especially former Roman Catholics), and have just finished over 5 years of interaction with an aged Polish Priest who actually studied with John Paul II. Overseas the tools may be intimidation and violence, but here in America it is the velvet glove of Ecumenism. I need understanding as to why the General Presbytery felt moved to delete the very clear language of our documents in favor of more generalized, nonspecific terms. The unaltered closing paragraph (lines 65-69) is very clear about differentiating between the two forms of cooperation in both versions, but in the proposed amendment it seems redundant. Also, the interdenominational label actually makes the Church of Rome sound like just another evangelical denomination instead of the historic enemy of the truth since at least 1517. I defer to your wisdom and experience, and anticipate your answer.

Your servant,
Pastor Jeff Whittaker

June 18, 2005

Dear Pastor Whittaker,

Thanks for your note.... I don't have the proposed resolution before me, so my answer may not be complete.

I think the main reason for the change has to do with the idea that what confronted the AG in the 1950s and 1960s is no longer the case today. At that time, it was believed that all denominations were uniting into a world church--through the National and World Council of Churches. If I remember correctly, this was proof-texted into the harlot of Revelation. Actually, the ecumenical movement in the NCC and WCC is now pretty much dead. The liberal churches may get together, but not the evangelicals and Pentecostals. In fact, the National Association of Evangelicals (of which we are a member) forbids its members from belonging to the NCC.

I think the present language really had more to do with Protestant unification than the Catholics. When this resolution went into the bylaws decades ago, there was little dialog at all with the Catholics.

Some of our pastors feel that the present language inhibits them from cooperating with other religious groups on social and political issues such as: abortion, stem cell research, assisted suicide, etc. It's kind of hard for an AG pastor to work with Catholics and others on these issues when our official language may create unnecessary barriers to such cooperation on a local level dealing with political and social issues.

I trust this helps give some perspective on the proposed change.

Blessing to you, and thanks for your kind comments.

"Brother Superior"

June 28, 2005

Dear "Brother Superior",

Hello again, this is Jeff Whittaker from Niles, MI (Michiana Christian Embassy of the AG). I mailed you some time ago in reference to the proposed Constitutional change proposed in relation to the ecumenical movement that is going to be considered at the General Council in Denver. I appreciated your answer and have been meditating on its implications. However, as time has passed, there have been others who have been doing more research relative to our position and whether or not there has been any activity on behalf of The Assemblies of God within the active ecumenical movement. One name which has resurfaced time and again is (that of) a Professor of Church History and Ecumenics in the School of Theology at Fuller Seminary. He is listed as a participant in the global ecumenical "summits" dating back to 1996 and as recently as 2002 when Pope John Paul II called over 200 religious leaders to Assisi, Italy for a global meeting. I understand from the source (Ecumenical News International), that he did not represent the AG by name, but is considered a spokesman for "the Pentecostal Church" in general. In the article mentioned, it was discussed that he has been involved with dialogue that included a mutual

“proselytizing” agreement whereby Pentecostals would not pursue Roman Catholics evangelistically, considering this an insult to them as if they were not already “saved”. It is this similar position that Evangelist Benny Hinn has recently been working under during his time at the Vatican during the memorial celebrations after the death of Pope John Paul II. "The Professor" is also listed as an attender/participant at a World Council of Churches meeting as a member of the “continuation committee”, as well as helping to lead a dialogue with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches about ecumenical efforts. This provokes one to wonder if the WCC and ecumenism are not still a threat to sound doctrine and fellowship, rather than a “dead issue” left over from the 1950s and 60s. Thank you once again for your leadership and kind consideration.

In the fear of the Lord and love of the AG,

Pastor Jeff Whittaker

June 28, 2005

Dear Jeff,

Thanks for your note.

“The Professor” has made it clear in all his work with various Protestant groups and the Catholic Church that he does not have official status to represent the Assemblies of God. He has never represented that he does. The officers of the General Council, including the former general superintendent G. Raymond Carlson, and Brother Trask have made it clear to (him) that in those settings he does not speak for the Assemblies of God nor does he represent the Assemblies of God; but neither Brother Carlson nor Brother Trask nor the General Council officers have forbidden “the Professor” to be present in such settings.

In the spirit of Matthew 18, I suggest you express your concerns directly to him.

“The Professor” has been a long-time friend of mine, and is the leading authority on the Azusa St. Revival. His new definitive book on Azusa should be out later this year. On several occasions, “the Professor’s” contact with Catholics in the hierarchy has helped to back off persecution of Pentecostals in several different countries. (I think it amazing that we are now negotiating our way out of persecution. Perhaps if the Apostle Paul would have negotiated with the Jewish leaders of his time, he could have found some common ground and avoided many of the painful “difficulties” he suffered at their hands! [emphasis mine])

(The letter continues)

He is essentially doing what David duPlessis did a number of years ago. He has felt called to bear the Pentecostal witness in settings where normally others have not gone. Obviously, there are many who feel the Lord could not have called him to do that, even as many felt the same way about duPlessis.

Blessings!

“Brother Superior”

June 29, 2005

Dearest “Brother Superior”,

Thank you for your reply, as well as for your counsel. I wanted to refer my first question to you, gain understanding from a leadership perspective, and then to send “the Professor” a note directly. I didn’t want to do so unadvisedly, or based upon faulty information. From a credentialing standpoint though, I know as Presbyter (just finished 5 year term), we deal with “disapproved practices” on occasion, and when there are individuals working amongst our churches sowing discord (a recent case in Michigan saw a handful of churches “jump ship” under the encouragement of a former credential holder, so we authored a statement to the entire District discouraging contact with the party). With the current prohibitions in place concerning the ecumenical movement, doesn’t this place “the Professor” on shaky ground, let alone his being recognized as a member of the AG, if not an official emissary?

Working it out,

Jeff Whittaker

Here is where we stumble over perhaps the most-used term in our ecumenical church world today; "unofficial". There is so much activity being carried on in the name of the church (fellowships and denominations) that is questionable, yet whenever someone does raise a question about it, the word "unofficial" comes out like a sanctified 5th Amendment. Later on in my correspondence with other leaders I press

this question again and again, yet never receive a comprehensive or clear answer. Local churches are referred to as "autonomous" when uncomfortable situations arise that need definitive leadership, and when someone is acting in direct contradiction to the stated beliefs or standards of the movement, their activity becomes officially "unofficial". This constant blurring of lines and ill-defined ministry is leading us to a crossroad that will demand decisive action. If certain parties have been given special dispensations by denominational leaders to pursue "unofficial" relations with Rome when our bylaws call for the contrary, that is wrong. When knowledge of such arrangements become known, trust is shaken and cynicism can begin to set into the heart of the rank and file of the movement.

June 29, 2005

Dear Jeff,

Thanks for your note and question.

Section 11 of Bylaw Article IX indicates disapproval for ministers or churches "participating in any of the modern ecumenical organizations on a local, national, or international level in such a manner as to promote the ecumenical movement..."

The Professor's involvement with the Roman Catholic Church and WCC has NOT been to promote the ecumenical movement. He has felt called by the Spirit to bear witness to Pentecostal doctrine and experience, and to participate in dialogue. To my knowledge, he has never promoted the ecumenical movement (we will deal with this misunderstanding in a later section).

The Professor has the support both of his district (Northern California/Nevada) and the district in which he resides (Southern California) in what he is doing. One of the dilemmas that the Assemblies of God and Pentecostals have faced worldwide is that much of the Catholic and Orthodox world have branded us as a "sect" and this has often inhibited or ability to work freely (or work at all) in countries dominated by the Orthodox or Catholics--and especially the Orthodox. His efforts have resulted in the growth of a different perception by many Orthodox and Catholics and State Protestant Churches of both the Assemblies of God and Pentecostals in general--a realization that we stand within the historical stream of orthodox Christianity rather than being a cult (like Mormons or Jehovah's Witnesses).

The Roman Catholic/Pentecostal dialogue that both David duPlessis and now the Professor have been involved with has brought the Catholic hierarchy a different perception of who we really are and has, on the whole, been helpful to the Pentecostal movement.

If we don't dialogue with these people, then they are free to form impressions of us that are not accurate. So, the Professor feels his burden and calling has been to assist the Pentecostal Movement by bearing witness to the real nature of the Pentecostal faith. He has been able to do that as an individual and not as a representative or appointed spokesman for either the Assemblies of God or the Pentecostal Movement.

Additionally, his testimony and involvement has had a personal spiritual impact on those he has met and dialogued with. Many of these leaders realize how spiritually empty their personal experience is, as well as that of the churches they lead--and have been open and receptive to the work of the Spirit as he has borne witness. He has never pulled punches or softened his very clear commitment to Biblical doctrine and Pentecostal experience as he has carried out the mission he feels the Spirit called him to do.

I trust this helps as you assess the issue,
Blessings!

Brother Superior

So the Professor is in good standing with all District and National leadership, and his ministry is to stand for Scriptural truth and the integrity of genuine Pentecostalism. That is wonderful and very commendable. However, the public writings and activities of the Professor paint a different picture. An article from the spring 2000 edition of the "Fuller Focus" magazine published by Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California states,

"Cecil M. (Mel) Robeck Jr. (M.Div., '73; Ph.D., '85), professor of church history and ecumenics and Fuller's "ambassador to the church worldwide", participated in two historic meetings during the Christmas and New Year holidays, one in Israel, the other at the Vatican. As co chair of the International Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue, co chair of the local Evangelical- Roman Catholic Dialogue, and consultant to the Commissions on Faith and Order of the National and World Councils of Churches, he is an apologist for all evangelicals as well as for the Pentecostal tradition."

I am amazed that this Professor is lauded around the world as such a key figure in Vatican relations and international ecumenism. According to the Fuller Seminary article, "he is an apologist for all evangelicals as well as for the Pentecostal tradition."

He is recognized by Fuller as their ambassador to the world, but yet our own credentialing body "disavows" any OFFICIAL recognition of his activities. It also appears that there is a great deal of misunderstanding amongst our leaders as to the true nature of the Professor's work since in his own writings he clearly states that evangelizing Catholics is actually proselytism, and that the Assemblies of God needs to go even further in normalizing relations with Rome for the purpose of common ministry. It doesn't sound like the WCC and NCC are the dead

issue of the 1950s as some are supposing.

Are we now looking for the Pope's approval so that we can minister in Catholic dominated countries? This appears to be the case. And we can be assured of the Pontiff's continued goodwill as long as we don't evangelize Catholics, as "unofficially" agreed to by the Professor in his ecumenical non-proselytizing agreement that he "unofficially" signed with the Vatican in the name of Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches worldwide. If the Professor's role is not as an "official" representative or appointed spokesman for the Assemblies of God, what weight do his words and works truly have? If his opinions and negotiations do not represent those of his denomination, he must therefore be considered out of sync and his work merely symbolic. However, since he is in good standing with all denominational authorities, it would appear that he is a special emissary sent on a highly sensitive mission. Also, according to our national executives, being someone who "has never pulled punches"; the Professor must be constantly debating Rome's scholars about the vital doctrines recovered during the 16th Century Reformation.

I followed the advice of my superior and started a dialogue with the Professor. I was forbidden by him from disclosing any of the information he shared with me in his correspondence, but the content of my responses will give a clear sense of what was discussed.

June 29, 2005

Dear Professor,

My name is Jeff Whittaker and I pastor and AG church in Niles, MI, roughly 15 minutes from Notre Dame University in South Bend, IN. Your name recently crossed my desk in connection with the changes proposed to the General Council Constitution and Bylaws slated for discussion at this August's meeting in Denver. Ecumenical News Intl. has listed you as a participant in many meetings with Vatican authorities (as well as other groups), including the famed meeting in Assisi with Pope John Paul II. Having been raised in the Southwest Michigan region for most of my life, I was ignorant of many spiritual dynamics involved with encountering the Roman Church at home and abroad. It took my getting out of the United States to see the true nature of what inspired the reformers to action. We have had our Gospel outreaches attacked; physical violence threatened (and in a pastor friend's case, carried out), and converts bullied and intimidated. The level of syncretism and open idolatry practiced takes one's breath away. Just recently here in the "Michiana region" (the border area of Michigan and Indiana), I visited the 33 foot tall "pilgrim statue" commemorating our lady of Fatima, as well as other apparitions from around world. How do you see your role as it relates to the AG? Are you wanting to mainstream that movement into the move for global ecumenical unity, and how does that work relate to our fellowship's current stand on such efforts? Did you aid in constructing the current language that is being considered for change in August? My sincerest wish is not to be contentious, but rather to seek understanding of this most crucial issue. Many have paid a dear price in the past, and many are still in the midst of wrestling around the world.

Sincerely,

Jeff Whittaker

The following letter is the one I sent to my superior, reporting to him that I had indeed followed through with my correspondence to "the Professor".

July 13, 2005

Dear Brother Superior,

I just wanted to write you a short note to let you know that I have indeed been able to correspond with the Professor, and have had some enriching exchanges. He furnished me with many of his articles, as well as official position papers released under the auspices of the Roman Catholic/Pentecostal dialogue. He is very passionate about bringing visible unity to the church, and very compassionate towards his friends and colleagues in Rome. I wanted to forward a copy of the reply I sent him just today, so that you would know what I said. All of his work is public domain via the internet, but I will not send any of his personal correspondence to you out of respect to his wishes. Here is the copy of my answer.

Dear Professor,

Again I want to thank you for your in-depth replies and personal attention. I can see why you have had such a successful tenure as a Seminary Professor! As I stated in my brief reply just days ago, I wanted to take the time to thoughtfully read over the articles you attached (they came through fine). My heart burns with the desire to indeed see Christ's High Priestly Prayer of John 17 answered fully and visibly in my generation, and I continue to attempt to obediently play my part in its fulfillment, as I know you are. As I think back over my own limited and brief experiences, I am stirred to fresh commitment to maintaining relational contact with everyone placed in my path by God's providence. I traveled in music ministry with an old group called "The Spurrilows" back in the 80s, worked for four years at the Billy Graham Association while studying at North Central University (starting as a second shift janitor and finally being offered a crusade coordinator's position), and have always found myself "outside the lines" so to speak. I have been serving now for a number of years as the President of our local Ministerial Association, and have seen the institution of what we call "The Church of Niles", that has been worshipping together

monthly for nearly three years. I believe that our public unity is a testimony in the face of a world that is sharply divided in so many ways; my heart beats with yours. In reading the report from the fourth phase of the International Dialogue (1990-1997) between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and Pentecostal leaders, in which you were such a noted participant, I was struck by some key thoughts. First of all, I was touched by your call (which you state so well in all your papers and articles that I have read) to common civility and gentleness when dealing with our Roman Catholic friends, and to not launch into harmful and antagonistic rhetoric which serves only to divide and deepen existing gulfs that exist between us. The believers under our leadership should be encouraged to engage in friendly relations at every possible level, trusting the Holy Spirit's ability to touch hearts and minds. I have countless Catholic friends with whom I have daily contact in our community....

However, my thoughts were arrested when I came upon paragraph 94 within section V of the Dialogue entitled "Proselytism" which reads: "All Christians have the right to bear witness to the Gospel before all people, including other Christians. Such witness may legitimately involve the persuasive proclamation of the Gospel in such a way as to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ or to commit themselves more deeply to Him within the context of their own church (emphasis added)... Both the Pentecostal and Catholic members of this Dialogue view as proselytism such "selfish actions as an illegitimate use of persuasive power." I began to meditate on a few situations where Roman Catholics have asked me questions relative to key doctrines which have been points of "non-negotiation" amongst Catholics and Protestants for 500 years; one account stands out above the rest.

A friend of many years had the unthinkable happen when his mother was struck by cancer and died. One day in our afternoon mail we received a letter from our friend which contained a mass card with the usual appeal that we would pray that a few drops of the precious blood of Jesus, shed from His immaculate heart, would extinguish some of the tormenting flames of his mother's suffering in Purgatory. My heart nearly burst, and I couldn't restrain myself any further. To see the anguish in my friend's note at the vision of his mother's suffering for an indefinite period of time in flames to cleanse her of her temporal sins was more than any Christian heart of compassion could stand. I immediately sent him an e-mail filled with the wonderful Scriptural promises of Christ's "once for all" atonement, and the glorious reality that for the one who trusts in His substitution...; "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord". I wasn't thinking quickly enough at the time, or I would have asked him if his mother was faithful to wear Our Lady of Mt. Carmel's brown scapular, with its "sabbatine promise" of deliverance from purgatory on the first Saturday following death. Today my friend is worshipping in a Lutheran congregation and his spouse is being affected by the growth of their two young children.

I truly agree with the philosophical position calling us to maintain cordial relationships with all people of any faith, but I also believe that there are key doctrines in existence which cannot be ignored at the crucial moments of "witnessing". I have also experienced the advances of an experienced, older Polish priest in one of our local parishes who studied in Poland with John Paul II as a young man. He has attempted to call some of our members "back to the Mother Church". In reading the documents from Vatican II entitled "Decree on ecumenism, Unitatis Redintegratio", I found a clause related to ecumenical relation and baptism which reads, "Baptism, therefore, envisages a complete profession of faith, complete incorporation in the system of salvation (emphasis added) such as Christ willed it to be, and finally complete engrafting in Eucharistic communion (emphasis added)." The "complete engrafting in Eucharistic communion" reflects the ultimate goal, as well as the huge impasse that the perpetual sacrifice of the transubstantiated mass still proves to be. This huge doctrinal issue shouldn't affect our relationships with Roman Catholics as fellow human beings who deserve every courtesy and kindness, but it does place a significant road block to true "communion". Pope Benedict XVI (Cardinal Ratzinger) wrote in the famous "DOMINUS IESUS", paragraph 17, "Therefore, there exists a single church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter (another major doctrinal issue) and by the Bishops in communion with him. The churches which, while not existing in perfect communion with the Catholic Church, remain united to her by means of the closest bonds, that is, by apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist, are true particular Churches.... On the other hand, the ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery (the major doctrinal issue of TRANSUBSTANTIATION), ARE NOT CHURCHES IN THE PROPER SENSE;"

When I see these statements put into practice on a local level amongst the believers in my church, I know that the road to "oneness" is a one-way street. These major, historic doctrines are the barrier to complete communion. Until these are addressed in the context of meaningful, cordial friendship, there will continue to be significant distance theologically, as well as the tangible, visible unity that we all desire. As I have stated before Brother "Professor", I appreciate your tireless labors and your passion for these noble ends, and you will have my prayers that the Holy Spirit continues to grant you wisdom and boldness to speak into whichever heart He sovereignty opens to you.

God help us all,

Jeff Whittaker
(Continuing on with the same letter...)
"Brother Superior",

I have also come into possession of articles authored by our own Dr. Opal Reddin which are very direct and, I believe, reflective of our historical and theological position. I was forwarded the articles by a fellow AG minister from a web cite call the Discernment Newsletter. I had already retained one of her articles on ecumenism from the spring 2000 edition of the CBC Bulletin magazine, and have read it from the pulpit as well as citing it in written work. These are indeed vital days to be alive! See you in Denver.

Your Servant,

Jeff Whittaker

July 13, 2005

Dear Jeff,

Your concerns are very well stated, and the spirit in which you stated them is commendable. You have clearly identified major roadblocks that arise in Catholic theology to our witness to Christ based on Scripture. I suppose that my response is that these barriers should not prevent dialogue, but they should not prevent persuasion and the setting forth of Biblical truth. I cannot agree personally to the statement on proselytism—your “friend’s” situation being a classic example of the need for evangelism. When I pastored, I was blessed with many persons coming out of the Catholic Church because they could not square Catholic teaching on some subjects with the Bible. These were persons who simply could not follow Christ within the context of the Catholic Church. At the same time, I had excellent relationships with those who remained in the Catholic Church. It seems to me that dialogue, if done rightly, is a precursor to evangelism. You cannot win anyone unless you are talking to with them.

Blessings!
Brother Superior

Why didn’t the Professor ever answer me after my last letter? I am a small Bachelor of Arts Degree holder that cannot possibly hope to match wits with such a traveled Doctor of Letters as he. Why didn’t he reply in order to correct my misinterpretation of church history or to offer strategic counsel as to my friend’s change of life and faith?

The Professor is not considered an official representative of the Assemblies of God, yet he has crafted and signed official documents putting forth guidelines for Pentecostal/Evangelical behavior on the mission field. Remember his statement that Roman Catholics, within their existing system, are just fine and not in need of the true Gospel! We must ask ourselves, Are we to only pursue Catholics who are disgruntled? Is the Roman Catholic system wrong because it is unscriptural and corrupt, or simply if it becomes unbearable to select individuals who “(can) not follow Christ within the context of the Catholic church”? The implication is that those who are “happy” within Rome’s dungeon should be left alone! This reflects the posture of the new Constitution and Bylaw passed in Denver, which makes it appear that Popery is simply another denomination amongst all the other evangelical groups with whom we live and serve each day. If we have any true Christian love for our Catholic friends, we should be praying that the Holy Spirit will give us daily opportunities to witness to them so that they can be rescued from an oppressive system of error.

I recently discovered a report of the Catholic News Service written by Cindy Wooden that contains very enlightening revelations about the official ecumenical strategy of the Vatican.

“Cardinal Walter Kasper, The German cardinal, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said an “ecumenical spirituality” focused more on prayer and less on strategizing must underlie all efforts for Christian unity. Cardinal Kasper spoke March 27 at Rome’s Salesian University, which was marking the 40th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council’s document on ecumenism.

The cardinal said that in the 40 years since the council huge strides have been made, not only in reaching agreements on important points of faith, but especially in how Christians relate to and interact with each other. “Separated Christians (Vatican II term for Heretic—emphasis mine) no longer consider each other strangers, or competitors or enemies,” he said. At the same time, Cardinal Kasper said, the last decade has been marked by “signs of tiredness, disillusionment and stalemate.” The cardinal said that at the center of the difficulties lie questions about identity—with the danger of either heightening the importance of one community’s distinctiveness or of pretending the differences are not important.

The point of ecumenism is not to negotiate a way around differences, but to engage in a process of continual conversion and fidelity to Christ, who wanted all his disciples to be one, the cardinal said. “The closer we draw Jesus Christ, the closer we draw to one another in him,” he said. The big question is how Christians can become one without losing differences they have experienced as gifts of the Holy Spirit, Cardinal Kasper said. While Pentecostal Christian communities can be difficult dialogue partners, especially if their focus is Proselytism (Evangelism in our view), the cardinal said they can teach the mainline churches about the gifts of the Holy Spirit being poured out on each Christian for the good of the entire Community.

Cardinal Kasper said a greater focus on the Spirit acting in each of the baptized makes it possible to envision a church “in which the magisterial, for example, has an undeniable and irreplaceable role,” but one that does not exclude consideration of the consensus of the faithful, the input of theologians and the centrality of worship. “Such a vision would maintain all of the essential Catholic positions on ministry and magisterial, but at the same time would respond to criticisms made by or separated brothers and sisters” about the Catholic Church being too centralized and hierarchical, he said. Cardinal Kasper said the only way forward seems to be through the development of an ecumenical spirituality and a readiness to respond after praying the words ‘Come, Holy Spirit.’”

You can see through this article published by Catholics for Catholics, that the goal of the ecumenical directives of Vatican II are to bring the “separated brethren” back to the true church embodied in the RCC. This will be cleverly done by diverting discussion away from the concrete issues of Scripture and doctrine, and directing everyone’s attention to the subjective, experiential dynamics of the charismatic renewal. The final desired result of this tack will be to focus on signs and wonders, dreams, tongues, or other common ecstasies, instead of a serious discussion about TRUTH. This is the nefarious nature of what is happening in our church world today.

In the Wednesday, February 15th edition of the South Bend Tribune newspaper, there was a report from the World Council of Churches summit that is meeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The story states,

“Speakers and messages to open the WCC meeting repeatedly urged Christian Churches to look beyond the differences that undermine unity within the faith, such as intense disputes over homosexual clergy and tolerance of same-sex blessing ceremonies. WCC members include mainline Protestants, Anglicans and Orthodox churches representing more than 500 million followers. The Roman Catholic Church is not a member but cooperates on many levels. Cardinal Walter Kasper (remember him?), head of the Vatican’s council for Christian unity, read a letter from Pope Benedict XVI noting “spiritual closeness” with the WCC’s goals.

Does this trouble anyone else, or is it just me? Do you see this silken thread of “unofficial” relationships that leads from the Vatican to our Professor, to the WCC, to the General Council? When our honored leaders see the ecumenical movement in the WCC and NCC as a dead issue, where will we end up?

The Impossible Dream: Evangelicalism’s Quest for Union with Rome

Ian H. Murray’s introspective book, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950-2000*. (The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000. 3 Murrayfield Road, Edinburgh EH 12 6EL, UK; P.O. Box 621, Carlisle, Pennsylvania 17013, USA.) confirms the agenda of Rome when he writes,

In the past thirty years numerous Catholic-Protestant groups, official and unofficial (such as our AG credentialed Professor), have sought a resolution of theological differences. The only real ‘success’ has occurred where supposedly Protestant negotiators have given way to Roman Catholic teaching.... The Pope underlined the same lesson in his encyclical letter *Ute Unum Sint* in 1995 when he warned all Roman Catholics engaged in ecumenical dialogue to ‘stand by the teaching of the Church’. What Rome has said she can never unsay (This statement is indescribably huge!!). This had been spelled out so many times, apart from ecumenical dialogue, that one can only suppose that some evangelicals never read or took seriously such books as Cardinal Bea’s *The Unity of Christians*. The infallibility of the Roman Church and her head, the successor of Peter; the inherent efficacy of the sacraments; the final authority of her teaching (both Scripture and later revelation) ‘by virtue of the very special help of the Holy Spirit’-- all this was clearly set out by Bea, head of the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity. ‘The evangelical side rejects all these tenets’, he noted in his book of 1963 (The same year our General Council passed the original resolution defining AG relations to the Ecumenical movement)... If, then, all the committees of the past thirty years have got nowhere in obtaining any doctrinal change, it is not unworthy to suppose that an inability on the part of ECT (Evangelicals and Catholics Together) supporters to make effective doctrinal progress was perfectly predictable (pp.245-246).

The ECT document mentioned at the close of the previous paragraph was crafted and signed by many notable Evangelical and Catholic personalities back in 1994. Amongst the list of luminaries who signed it, one name that stood out to me in particular was that of Rev. Jesse Miranda, Executive Presbyter of the General Council of the Assemblies of God. Here are some quotes from the ECT document that reveal its questionable nature.

“This statement (ECT) cannot speak responsibly for our communities (meaning that it is already considered UNOFFICIAL by any OFFICIAL credentialing body or denomination)... We affirm together that we are justified by grace through faith because of Jesus Christ. Living faith is active in love that is nothing less than the love of Christ.... All who accept Christ as Lord and Savior are brothers and sisters in Christ. Evangelicals and Catholics are brothers and sisters in Christ (as defined by the Catholic Catechism or the Scriptures?).... Three observations are in order in connection with proselytizing. First, as much as we might believe one community is more fully in accord with the Gospel than another, we as Evangelicals and Catholics affirm that opportunity and means for growth in Christian discipleship are available in our several communities. Second, the decision of the committed Christian with respect to his communal allegiance and participation must be assiduously respected. Third, in view of the large number of non-Christians in the world and the enormous challenge of our common evangelistic task, it is neither theologically legitimate nor a prudent use of resources for one Christian community to proselytize among active adherents of another Christian community [This is again blurring the lines drawn 500 years ago. Lines that have clearly shown the true nature of the RCC, and demonstrated its distinctive place outside of the Evangelical Gospel] (Killing the Gospel Softly: An Analysis of ECT. Rob Zins. www.angelfire.com)”

As such a high level and respected figure, why would Brother Miranda set his pen to such a shaky document, especially in light of the prohibitive language of the AG’s Constitution and Bylaws that, at the time of ECT’s signing, were still eleven years from being amended? Perhaps he too was laboring under a special dispensation from the national office as a strictly “unofficial” representative of the fellowship, or even as an “autonomous” agent beyond anyone’s influence or control.

The Charismatic Renewal: How Can This be Wrong When it Feels so Right?

One of the most significant events to appear on the ecumenical horizon this century is what we have come to know as the Charismatic Renewal, a manifestation of spiritual activity which hit two major Catholic Universities beginning in January of 1967. In her testimonial book, *As by a New Pentecost* (Franciscan University Press, Franciscan University of Steubenville, Steubenville, OH 1992), author Patti Gallagher-

Mansfield records some startling insights that should give any student of Protestant Pentecostal Orthodoxy cause to stop and reflect. She states in the opening section that at the beginning of the 20th Century,

"Sister Elena felt inspired to write to Pope Leo XIII urging him to renew the Church through a return to the Holy Spirit.... (Blessed Elena further stated) Oh, if ever the 'Come Holy Spirit' which, since the Cenacle and after, the Church has not ceased repeating, could become as popular as the 'Hail Mary' (p.7)!" Mansfield further records, "Pope Leo XIII invoked the Holy Spirit on January 1, 1901 - the first day of the first year in the Twentieth Century. He sang the hymn 'Veni Creator Spiritus' (Come Creator Spirit) in the name of the whole Church. On the same day, an event took place in Topeka, Kansas, that marked the beginning of a great revival in the power and gifts of the Holy Spirit destined to sweep throughout this country and around the world. Rev. Charles Fox Parham and his students dedicated themselves to prayer and the study of God's word concerning the Baptism in the Holy Spirit.... This event is generally accepted as the beginning of Pentecostalism. In 1906, a continued outpouring of the Holy Spirit occurred in Los Angeles, and is commonly referred to as the Azusa Street Revival (p.8)."

So, official Catholic Charismatic History according to Mrs. Gallagher-Mansfield, that the great Pentecostal Revival of the 20th Century arrived because Pope Leo XIII invoked the Holy Spirit on behalf of the entire church (over which he is the supposed head). We owe everything we have experienced since Topeka to the proclamation of the Bishop of Rome. I wonder if the Professor, reputed to be "the greatest expert on the Azusa Revival" by our national leaders, will share this insight at the centennial celebration this summer in Los Angeles? Allow me to share some additional quotes that I believe are very significant.

"Friday night (of the Duquesne weekend in 1967) in the chapel, our other faculty advisor held up a statue of Our Lady which depicted her with her hands lifted up in prayer. He described Mary as a woman of faith and prayer.... I believe it was significant to have our attention drawn to Mary at the beginning of our retreat.... In God's plan, it was necessary for Mary to 'with us' in an explicit way as we experienced a sovereign move of the Holy Spirit that Weekend. The Fathers of the Church call Mary 'the Spouse of the Holy Spirit.' How can she fail to be present when the Holy Spirit is at work? (Ibid p.35)

These statements are foundational to understanding of those involved in the renewal. I am not saying that the Holy Spirit was totally absent from all Charismatic Renewal services that have ever taken place, or that it is impossible that souls could be saved or changed by them. My own journey in Pentecost began at a Kathryn Kuhlman service at Notre Dame University in the 1970s. My point is: What is the theological foundation of the movement? Tongues and other phenomena cannot be the only standard for defining true doctrine and fellowship. If that were the case we should also start endorsing the so-called apparitions of Mary around the world simply because they are periodically accompanied with miraculous "signs". Even Benny Hinn stated on an interview with Larry King that God's desire to heal takes many forms, including Fatima, Lourdes, etc. Brother Benny, you can't be serious! We must never forget what the Apostle Paul said to the Church in II Thessalonians 2:9-11 about the appearance of "lying signs and wonders" that would characterize the end times, deceiving multitudes who did not have a love and passion for the truth! Please allow me share one more set of quotes from As by a New Pentecost that reflect the Ecumenical perspective held by the Roman Catholic Authorities that were involved in 1967, and still are.

"Of the four of us who attended this first meeting (prior to the "big" weekend of Jan. '67, emphasis mine), for a number of reasons only Patrick Bourgeois, a fellow instructor in the theology department, and I were able to make it to the next meeting. We returned to find the prayer and discussion centered this time upon the Epistle to the Romans. The only way I can express the way we felt about the discussion was that it was not all clouded up by Reformation issues (pp.17-18). Another man writes, "I would relate the Baptism of the Spirit to Confirmation as follows. Our Sacrament of Confirmation is identical to the New Testament Baptism of the Spirit.... If a confirmed Catholic is later transformed in a context such as we have experienced, this is simply a revival of the grace of the sacrament.... in an ecumenical perspective, this could be the Spirit's way of leading us into unity with one another. All of the people we have met in the group are active in their own churches; we have found no sectarian spirit, no repudiation of the larger institutional church.... I find myself becoming more and more committed to the Catholic Church.... It is well to remember that to many Pentecostals and Evangelicals, we represent at best a dead institutionalism, and at worst the Anti-Christ. Unless they know and respect real Catholics, they will not direct fringe Catholics back to their own Church. Formed Catholics, I think, will find their Catholicism enhanced by contacts with these groups; but they will also serve their Church by creating a climate of understanding and love, and by retrieving the strays (pp.21-22).

Do you see how the material from Murray's book as well as the other sources demonstrate the incremental strategy of the Vatican to re-assimilate all peoples back into the bosom of the "Mother Church"?

Upon returning to the church in which I grew up in as its Senior Pastor after some sixteen years of absence, I received a rude awakening when I tried to contact the Charismatic Student Fellowship at Notre Dame. For two years I called and left enthusiastic messages, hoping to build bridges and to see what was happening on campus after the "glory days" of the 1970s. I came to understand that the Charismatic hold-outs (now middle-aged) were meeting in a small structure off campus, and I was explicitly warned not to call the campus anymore because the President, along with priests on the faculty, had frozen them out of the official life of the University. You see, many of these precious souls found Christ through the Evangelical Gospel, and received an insatiable hunger for the Scriptures after receiving their Baptism in the Spirit. This is what Mrs. Gallagher-Mansfield referred to when she spoke of the "strays" that were finding their way out of the Roman system. Do you see that I truly believe that the Spirit, in His great love, is willing to baptize our dear Roman Catholic friends as well and anyone? I do! But when these new saints begin to devote themselves to the Word of God more than the traditions of the Magisterium of Rome, they each have their own "Reformation experience" and quickly find themselves at odds with the powers that be. The charismatic renewal has now become a faint memory on Notre Dame's campus, and the remnant is tolerated more than encouraged. True Pentecost will always lead people to the True Gospel. But if we follow the counsel of Cardinals Kaspar and Bea, we will lay down the Scriptures, pick up the guitars and start singing until we all feel better. Tongues are not an adequate measure of Biblical truth in the vital points of salvation. Too many Catholic Charis-

matics continue to seek deeper relationship with Mary as the Mother of God, the Mother of the Church and the Spouse of the Holy Spirit, venerating occultic and unscriptural apparitions of her instead of the Scriptures.

What Was, Is, and (Maybe yet) to Come

At this point in our discussion I believe useful to reproduce the two versions of the Assemblies of God Constitution and Bylaws Article IX, Section 11 (Resolution 19) which were presented and eventually approved in Denver, CO.

Section 11. Article IX The Ecumenical Movement.

The General Council of the Assemblies of God disapproves of ministers or churches participating in any of the modern ecumenical organizations on a local, national, or international level in such a manner as to promote the ecumenical movement because:

- a. We believe the basis of doctrinal fellowship of said movement to be so broad that it includes people who reject the inspiration of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the universality of sin, the substitutionary atonement, and other cardinal teachings that we understand to be essential to biblical Christianity.
- b. We believe the emphases of the ecumenical movement to be at variance with what we hold to be biblical priorities, frequently displacing the urgency of individual salvation with social concerns.
- c. We believe that the combination of many religious organizations into a world super church will culminate in the religious Babylon of Revelation 17 and 18.

(This is not to be interpreted to mean that a limitation may be imposed upon any Assemblies of God Minister regarding his or her Pentecostal witness or participation on a local level with interdenominational activities.)

This statement, originally adopted as Resolution 13 at the 1963 General Council, was reaffirmed in 1995, was amended by the General Presbytery and presented in Denver in August 2005 in the final form that follows. *NOTE* The original version mailed to credential holders did not contain the underlined words "or Ecumenical". A supplementary resolutions booklet was given to the delegates when they arrived at the Council.

Section 11. Interdenominational or Ecumenical Relationships.

The General Council of the Assemblies of God encourages ministers or churches to fellowship with other Christians of like precious Faith who hold to the inspiration of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the universality of sin, the substitutionary atonement, the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and His second coming.

The General Council of the Assemblies of God shall not belong to any interdenominational or ecumenical organization that denies the evangelical beliefs stated in the above paragraph, and urges its ministers and churches to avoid entanglement with such interdenominational or ecumenical organizations except as opportunity may arise to support Biblical values in the culture or provide opportunity to bear witness to our evangelical and Pentecostal faith and experience.

I would like to briefly encapsulate some of the comments that were made from the floor in favor of Resolution 19.

First of all, when reading the original from 1963, one can discern a clear line of reasoning that sets forth, in prohibitive language (a no-no in today's politically correct world), the inherent dangers of the modern "unity movements" in whatever form they may appear. Subparagraphs a, b, and c gave a logical AND SCRIPTURAL explanation of said dangers. Also, the Scriptures cited did not offend in any way by irresponsibly setting dates, but rather established a philosophical foundation that warned against the universal trends of political/ecclesiastical unity already proven to be false throughout history. Finally, the parenthetical statement at the end of the original resolution addressed the issue of localized community ministry between people of "like precious faith" as being encouraged and permissible. What then was the problem that necessitated the change?

One notable figure who spoke in favor of the new bylaw was Brother Rhoden of the Potomac District, who set forth two basic arguments. The first was that it would "open up more opportunities for ministry to men such as Dick Foth" (a respected "minister at large" to the D.C. area), and, he went on to say, "How many of us had to change our eschatology when the Berlin Wall came down?" (Remember, I already stated that the old language made no embarrassing predictions or time related prognostications). This comment was met with scattered laughter from the delegates. Dr. Don Argue, past President of North Central Bible College, the National Association of Evangelicals and, according to the June 15th issue of the Washington Post is now an "informal adviser to Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton", requested that a written statement be read from the Council Floor, but his request was denied by the Chair.

Those speaking against Resolution 19 ranged from pastors of local congregations (myself included), a retired missionary who labored under a death sentence from a Bishop in Ireland, and a retired Professor from Central Bible College, the late Dr. Opal Reddin. Dr. Reddin pre-

sented a very systematic line of reasoning that was supported by copious amounts of Scripture stating why the proposed changes were neither necessary nor desirable. The Chairman politely cut her off before she could finish.

The question was called for and a vote taken by secret ballot. The measure passed by a vote of 899 to 767.

A few important questions arise when one considers the rationale for changing the 1963 resolution to its current form. What additional ministry opportunities will our Potomac Brother now have that he did not have in the past? I have personally had meetings and very in-depth discussions for years with everyone from Muslims to Mormons, and yet never violated the 1963 bylaw. What was meant when Brother Rhoden spoke of these "new opportunities"? And when comparing the specific, scriptural language used in 1963 to that of 2005, one can see that the criteria of "the inspiration of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the universality of sin, the substitutionary atonement, the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and His second coming" could be (and are) interpreted so broadly that Pope Benedict XVI himself could sign off on them due to their vagueness and breadth. Also, when Resolution 19 removed subparagraph c, an actual doctrinal position relating to eschatology was simply done away with by a majority vote! Do we as the Assemblies of God no longer believe in a progressive movement towards the ultimate revelation of the Beast State and the False Prophet? We should have a position paper prepared, giving systematic exegesis of the Scriptures and open discussion of this issue before we glibly cast it aside because the Berlin Wall is no longer standing!

Before Denver, the parenthetical statement at the end of the 1963 Resolution gave me the liberty to accept an invitation from local "Pro-Life" groups (both in Wisconsin and Michigan) to pray the invocation at their annual banquets. The last of these events that I participated in was held in the fellowship hall of a local Roman Catholic Church with the priest present, and featured a Lutheran keynote speaker. I was there connected with the Pro-Life effort, but never shared in an Ecumenical Mass where the transubstantiated "host" was offered as a bloodless sacrifice for my continuing salvation within the "true church" under the valid Episcopate in good standing with Peter's successor in Rome! (Please forgive my tone as well as my run-on sentence). I am simply stating that we did not need to completely revamp a strong statement that left no doubts as to where the AG stood, for one that is ambiguous and full of loopholes. Perhaps with the already mentioned "special dispensations" granted to select individuals under the old 1963 language, the General Council felt it was time to bring our Constitution into line with what we were already practicing.

This post-Council letter reiterates the question.

August 12, 2005

Brother Superior,

I just wanted to write you a short note now that council is concluded and ask a question. With the limited discussion from the floor relative to the overall philosophy of the ecumenical resolution (I refer to Brother Rhoden's brief remarks and Dr. Argue's not being able to read his prepared statement), could we see a new strategic position paper on how to conduct ourselves in local outreach to Roman Catholics that would reflect the General Council's philosophy? Perhaps some of the published materials could be included in a column or interview section of an upcoming "Enrichment". My personal correspondence with The Professor (which were incredibly enlightening) along with the statements of the New England brother about one of their congregations celebrating an ecumenical mass under the leadership of a priest leads me to believe that more grass roots discussion would be beneficial. Thanks again for your leadership and any help you can give in this area....

Asking, seeking, and knocking...together,

Pastor Jeff Whittaker

August 12, 2005

Jeff,

I'm on a two-week vacation right now, so my response will be short! I try to keep up my emails daily or by the time I get back, it would be overwhelming.

I'll forward your note to the editor for Enrichment and see if they would like to do this.

Blessings,

"Brother Superior"

The next message I received was from The Editor of the ministers' journal of the Assemblies of God, and also marks the end of my conversation with Brother Superior. Some day I pray we will be able to finish it.

August 12, 2005

Dear Jeff,

I would be most interested in considering this and will work with our editorial staff. However, please know I have had an ongoing situation with some who want me to print some strong articles against any contact with the Catholics. I certainly do not want the Enrichment Journal to become a battleground over this issue. We have considered a place on the Web where these issues could be discussed and views exchanged.

Jeff, please keep in touch!

Editor

August 12, 2005

Dear Brother Editor,

Thank you so much for your prompt and kind reply! I am greatly encouraged by the promise of some sort of constructive discussion. Your idea of providing someplace on the web for such discourse could serve the desired purpose well! I also firmly believe at the same time that some strong leadership from our national executives or appointed representatives on this issue could aid tremendously in diffusing unnecessary and potentially damaging exchanges. Defining the difference between cordial social intercourse with a clear understanding of our "reformed" position, and that of all out ecumenism characterized by joint worship services with transubstantiated masses or other confusing gestures. I truly do believe that all in leadership are agonizing over these questions, and I pray for all of us that we will receive the Holy Spirit's leading in this crucial hour.

Your Servant,

Jeff Whittaker

This concludes the first section dealing with the issues stemming from the Ecumenical Resolution presented at the General Council in Denver Colorado, August 2005. In the next section, I will present the surprising turn of events that quickly followed.

GOING GLOBAL: A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME....

In this section I will relate the events and communications that followed the General Council of August 2005 and the amazing dynamics of what is happening amongst evangelical churches relative to the quest of establishing a global entity. The most striking thing to me is the timing of my introduction to the movement, as well as the striking similarities between their goals and those of the Vatican with regards to reuniting the Church. Even as I type these words I am painfully aware of how paranoid and conspiratorial this sounds. But upon further examination, it can be seen that many of the figures at the point of these new movements are very enthusiastic about pursuing a true Global Church, and are not afraid to imply (subtly or not) [ShareThis!!](#) | [Bookmark](#)