

# **World Council of Churches` Relationships with Pentecostalism. A Brief Historical Survey and Some Recent Perspectives Regarding Membership Matters**

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## **Abstract**

This article approaches the problematic of relationships between the World Council of Churches (WCC) and Pentecostalism, mainly from the perspective of membership of Pentecostal churches in WCC. It contains a brief presentation of some prejudices regarding Pentecostals in the ecumenical movement and a historical survey of the relationships between WCC and the Pentecostals as well as a more detailed analysis of the actual status of this relationship from the perspective of membership of Pentecostal churches in WCC. The last chapter assesses possible future scenarios in this regard. It is underlined that the Pentecostal movement is already represented in WCC by a few small Pentecostal churches and that all the debate on accepting or not new Pentecostal member churches in this ecumenical organization should have as starting point this very reality that Pentecostalism is already part of WCC. After presenting in details the last debate within the Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration (PCCC) on the matter whether WCC shall open or not the doors for Pentecostal churches, this article concludes that WCC should follow its previous policy, analysing individually each application for membership according to its actual criteria for accepting new members. While most of the Pentecostal churches would agree with the basis of WCC and some of them might increase their ecumenical engagement at all levels, in the near future at least, Pentecostal churches might have still a long way to go for integrating themselves in a genuine ethos and desire for unity.

**Keywords:** WCC and Pentecostal movement; prejudices regarding Pentecostal churches; historical survey of WCC – Pentecostal churches relationship; membership of Pentecostal churches in WCC.

## **Introduction and problematic**

Pentecostalism requires special attention from anyone interested in World Christianity, even for the simple fact that it became the largest Christian tradition after Catholicism and, according to some statistics, is the fastest growing group within

Christianity. It means therefore that the role and influence of Pentecostalism within Global Christianity shall grow in the next decades. WCC as a global ecumenical fellowship of member churches which claims to play a leading role in the ecumenical movement gave in the last decades appropriate attention to Pentecostalism which became a global movement especially in the decades after WCC` own foundation and development. After a period when Pentecostalism was ignored by WCC, some Pentecostal churches have been accepted as WCC members. Later on, the question: “Do we open the gates of WCC for Pentecostal churches?” became a leading one in terms of membership policy of the Council. This article will briefly present the history of relationship between WCC and the Pentecostal movement. Before this however, it will try to address another question: why this problematic even exists within WCC? Is it not possible to simply apply WCC rules and regulations for accepting new member churches also to Pentecostal churches? Therefore, some of the prejudices existing among historical churches about the Pentecostals will be presented and explained.

The third part of this article will present in details the last debate on the question “Do we open the gates of WCC for Pentecostal churches?”, as it was debated in PCCC between 2012-2014. The last part contents a few thoughts on possible future perspectives regarding WCC – Pentecostal churches relationships.

### **Some Prejudices regarding Pentecostals in the Ecumenical movement**

*Proselytism* remains one of the main issues which hinder normal ecumenical relationships between Pentecostal churches and WCC and its member churches. Especially, but not exclusively, the Orthodox Churches keep complaining that Pentecostal groups practice a wild proselytism among their own believers. After the fall of the iron curtain from Eastern Europe, former communist countries were perceived by Pentecostal and evangelical groups as *terra misiones*. In many cases they came with the completely wrong idea that people in former communist countries are not anymore Christians, due to decades of aggressive communist-atheist ideology. Such “missionaries” tried to take advantage of the vulnerable economic situation of people living in the early years of post-communist time by offering different material goods or other advantages (visa for USA or other countries; scholarships, working places abroad etc.) as stimulation for conversion. Nowadays there are similar reports of the same behaviour of such “missionaries” in the Middle East: one takes advantage of the terrible situation of the Christians in the region. Visa for certain countries or a chance for escaping the region are granted instead of conversion. Vulnerability of those Orthodox living in diaspora, like the lack of parishes and other organized forms of pastoral or spiritual care are also used.

The Orthodox also complain that the way of making mission by some Pentecostals is very much anti-Orthodox: they preach that Orthodoxy is just a strange mixture of dubious traditions and superstitions with some biblical principles; in fact, a hidden form of paganism, a confession for ignorant and not genuine Christianity. Only Pentecostalism, and no other Christian confession, possesses the truth and provides a secured path to Jesus Christ`s

salvation. Often *la raison d'être* of Pentecostal communities founded in majority Orthodox countries is to contest Orthodox doctrine and/or values which are in fact part of the Pentecostal values in other parts of the world. For instance, while Pentecostals in North America have the cross as a specific Christian symbol, in Eastern Europe the cross is portrayed as an idol. In response to such an aggressive proselytism, the Orthodox clergy warn their believers that the Pentecostals are a sect, falsifiers of Gospel's truth and intruders in the canonical territories of Orthodox Churches where the only ones allowed to make mission are the Orthodox. Rhetoric of some priests would include words like „wolves dressed in sheepskin” whose purpose is simply to destroy the real Church of Jesus Christ which is the Orthodox Church.

It is also part of the reality the fact that in those parts of the world where Christianity is in minority or is not formed by a church with a large majority or there is a high percentage of agnostics and secularized people, Pentecostal churches collaborate with other churches. There is a place for mission for every church. In such places it is more important to be Christian than to which confession someone belongs to. In Orthodox majority it is not only important to be Christian, but also to which confession someone belongs to. Pentecostal or any other mission among Orthodox Christian is perceived as an aggression and a non-sense. Even if some Pentecostal would claim that their mission in Orthodox countries is addressed to those who are not part of the Orthodox Church or to those who just formally belong to it and are not practicing Orthodoxy, such mission is still consider an aggression by the Orthodox. This is because the Orthodox put emphasis on the principal of canonical territory which functions between Orthodox national churches, but is extended to other churches. For example, Romania is the canonical territory of the Romanian Orthodox Church. No other church is allowed to make mission among Orthodox Romanians in Romania than the Romanian Orthodox Church. If there is a desire from some churches to support the internal mission of an Orthodox Church, such a support is welcomed.

Proselytism or ship stilling between churches is incompatible with ecumenism and with membership in WCC fellowship or in any other ecumenical organization. When Orthodox hear about Pentecostal churches willing to become WCC member churches they react in most of the cases negatively, based on their own experience with Pentecostals, without having in mind the large diversity of Pentecostalism and the reality that some of Pentecostal churches in other parts of the world might be ecumenical.

Proselytism of Pentecostal is a reality in many parts of the world, however it would be a mistake to generalize. In some parts of the world there is real collaboration between historical churches and Pentecostal churches and proselytism is not an issue of polemic and dispute.

Another prejudice is that *Pentecostals are ignorant and not interested in ecumenical movement* and in membership in ecumenical organization of any kind. The „ecumenical hesitations” of Pentecostals could be summarized as the following: lack of direct ecumenical experience; the conviction, founded very often on immediate and incredible missionary success and on internal growth, that the future belongs to Pentecostalism while the so called

„historical churches” will continue to decrease and eventually die out; moral relativism practiced, in Pentecostals` opinion by some of the historical churches. Pentecostal scholars acknowledge that on the side of Pentecostal, there is a lot of ignorance regarding ecumenical movement and institutions. Most of the Pentecostals, affirms a Pentecostal scholar involved in ecumenical work mostly on personal level, have little knowledge of ecumenism, sufficient only to condemn it.<sup>1</sup> Some of anti-ecumenical discourse which is circulated in the media and in virtual reality is of Pentecostal origin. It is bizarre that such a discourse is sometimes taken over by Orthodox anti-ecumenists without any discernment.

The hostile attitude of some Pentecostals vis-a-vis ecumenism of historical churches determines a mixed and therefore confused attitude of the latest: on the one hand, they would like to see the Pentecostal churches excluded from the ecumenical movement and especially from ecumenical institutions; on the other hand, however, most of the historical churches realize that Pentecostalism as Christian family or movement cannot be longer ignored as a reality of global Christianity. It would be therefore better to collaborate with Pentecostal churches and to have them part of ecumenical organizations than to be in permanent competition with them.

It is of course good that both sides (Pentecostals and historic churches) are committed, at least from time to time, to find a solution able to define the confusion which dominate since decades the relationships between Pentecostals and historical churches. Several bi-lateral dialogues of the Pentecostals with the Roman-Catholic Church<sup>2</sup>, Reformed<sup>3</sup>, Lutheran<sup>4</sup>, Ecumenical Patriarchate etc. started in the last decades. Their fruits are yet to come. In some part of the world, historical churches realized that coherent collaboration with Pentecostal churches is possible especially against radical secularization or in field of diaconia, social engagement or in programs to combat anti-social phenomena. In countries where Pentecostal mission target those individuals or groups with no confessional belonging they are not perceived as competitors by historical churches and therefore ways of collaboration are quite often found. Therefore, one may ask: is it not possible to extend this kind of collaboration to other regions and countries and have more Pentecostal churches members in ecumenical bodies, including WCC?

Another prejudice is that there is impossible to find an organization or a group which is really representative for global Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism is considered as being diverse and fragmented in many churches and groups which often compete each other and do

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<sup>1</sup>Cecil M. Robeck Jr., *Approaching Ecumenism from a Pentecostal Perspective: Some Methodological Considerations*, (unpublished), accesible in WCC File CER „Pentecostals” vol. 4, 5.

<sup>2</sup>Jeffrey Gros FSC, Harding Meyers & William G. Rusch (editors), *Growth in Agreement II: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level, 1982-1998*, (Geneva, Switzerland/Grand Rapids, MI) 2000, 713-779.

<sup>3</sup>*Word and Spirit, Church and World: The Final Report of the International Dialogue between Representatives of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders* in *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 23:1, 2001, 9-43; republished in *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 4:1 (2001), 41-72 and *Reformed World* 50:3 (2000), 128-156 under the title *Word and Spirit, Church and World: Final Report of the International Pentecostal-Reformed Dialogue*.

<sup>4</sup> Cecil M. Robeck Jr., *That They May Become One in My Hand: Pentecostals and the Ecumenical Movement Today*, (unpublished), in WCC File, CER, JCG Pentecostals 2007-2012, 9-22.

not recognize each other as genuine Pentecostal. One can find Pentecostal churches which are organized in congregational, presbyterian or even in episcopal form. Pentecostal theologians seem to struggle with the question: What makes an individual or a church being Pentecostal?

It is really truth that Pentecostalism is very diverse and somehow fragmented. One should not forget that Pentecostalism is a young movement which still needs time for organizing itself at regional and global level. A first organization which has tried to bring together the multitude of Pentecostal churches in North America was the Pentecostal Fellowship of North America. Founded in 1948, this fellowship is called since 1994 Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches of North America. Since 1947 a gathering of Pentecostal World Fellowship takes place every third year. This fellowship however is underrepresented in the so-called third world. Nowadays it has 58 Pentecostal member churches and associations of Pentecostal churches from 36 countries.<sup>5</sup> More and more Pentecostal churches join Pentecostal World Fellowship; however, this organization is far from being *the* Pentecostal global organization.

### **Pentecostal Churches in the World Council of Churches**

WCC was founded in 1948 by 147 Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox churches, along with churches belonging to other Christian traditions. No Pentecostal church can be identified among WCC founding member churches. Furthermore, Pentecostal movement was in that time against any own involvement in the ecumenical movement. The great Pentecostal leaders of that time perceived the ecumenical movement and WCC as a step towards a politically instrumentalized „global church” or „super-church”.<sup>6</sup> *Toronto Declaration 1950*<sup>7</sup> which explicitly highlighted the fact that WCC is not a super church and it does not intend to become one determined some Pentecostals to look at WCC with a certain interest. David Johannes du Plessis (1905-1987) is considered as being the Pentecostal leader who prepared the way of Pentecostals engagement in the ecumenical movement. He attended the Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council (1952) and WCC Assemblies from Evanston (1954) to Vancouver (1983).

In its first years, WCC did not try to establish any contacts with the Pentecostal churches. In the '50s of the last century WCC` dominant perception on Pentecostals was that they belong to the evangelical conservative movement and therefore a dialog with them is heavy imaginable and useless.<sup>8</sup> However, some contacts with East European Assemblies of God churches have been established and collaboration in field of diaconia has been initiated.

In 1961, two Pentecostal churches from Chile joined WCC. The first one was Pentecostal Church of Chile (in Spanish *Iglesia Pentecostal de Chile*) founded in 1945 by a

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.pentecostalworldfellowship.org/>

<sup>6</sup> Cecil M. Robeck Jr., *Approaching Ecumenism ...*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> “*What the World Council of Churches is not*” in Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, 463-470.

<sup>8</sup> Cecil M. Robert Jr., *Approaching Ecumenism ...*, 4.

bishop named Chavez who broke away from the Pentecostal Methodist Church and registered some missionary success in the surroundings of the city Curoco, situated about 200 km from Santiago which is the headquarter of this church. Today the church has around 125.000 members.<sup>9</sup> The second one was Pentecostal Mission Church (in Spanish Misión Iglesia Pentecostal) founded by a group of 120 people who decided to leave the Evangelical Pentecostal Church which is one of the two big Pentecostal churches from Chile with origins in the revival movement from 1909. This church has today around 9000 members.<sup>10</sup>

It is well known that the year of 1961 was an important momentum in the life of WCC. Many Orthodox Churches joined WCC as well as the first two Pentecostal churches. Some hoped that WCC will get many other Pentecostal churches and will become in this way more representative for Global Christianity. However, the optimists were awakened to reality. In the same year several North American and European Assemblies of God churches distanced themselves from WCC and the ecumenical movement by adopting an anti-ecumenical and anti-WCC position, at the pressure of some evangelical leaders. This attitude was supported by other Pentecostal churches affiliated with the Pentecostal World Conference.<sup>11</sup>

In 1969 a big Pentecostal church from Brazil named Brazil for Christ Pentecostal Church (in Portuguese Igreja Evangélica Pentecostal `O Brasil Para Cristo) joined WCC. This church was founded by Manoel de Mello (1929-1990), a former construction worker who converted firstly to Pentecostalism in an Assembly of God Church and moved later to the Healing movement named National Evangelist Crusade in Brazil (today Foursquare Gospel Church). He founded his own church in 1956. In spite of the fact that he had no theological or any other education, Mello was an efficient preacher. He used radio broadcasting for spreading his message. His church was very successful among the poor and working-class milieus of eastern Sao Paulo.

During the years of military dictatorship in Brazil, Mello understood the importance of ecumenical cooperation on issues such as human rights, and became close to the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Sao Paulo, Paulo Evaristo Arns (1921-2016; Cardinal between 1973-1998) and to WCC General Secretary of that time, Philip A. Potter (1972-1984). Many hoped in that time that other big Pentecostal churches will follow its example and will join WCC. However, in the years following Vancouver Assembly (1983) under the leadership of Mello's son, Paulo Lutero de Mello, Brazil for Christ Pentecostal Church withdraw membership from WCC.

In 1972, International Evangelical Church and Missionary Association, a Pentecostal church founded at the beginning of `70s by two American Pentecostal leaders, one of them involved in mission in Italy and the other founder of a Pentecostal church in Washington DC, joined WCC in 1972. The name of the church today is just International Evangelical Church

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/pentecostal-church-of-chile>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/pentecostal-mission-church>

<sup>11</sup> Cecil M. Robert Jr., *Approaching Ecumenism ...*, 5.

and has around 21.000 members.<sup>12</sup> It was for the first time when a Pentecostal church from another region than Latin America joined WCC.

In 1980, Association The Church of God (in Spanish Asociación „La Iglesia de Dios”), a national Pentecostal church from Argentina founded in 1952 joined WCC. From the beginning this church defined itself as charismatic, ecumenical and prophetic. This church has today around 8000 members.<sup>13</sup>

Evangelical Pentecostal Mission of Angola (in Portuguese Missão Evangélica Pentecostal de Angola), founded at the beginning of `50s by American missionaries to whom Portuguese misionaries from Portuguese Assemblies of God joined later, became a WCC member in 1985. It has around 75.000 members.<sup>14</sup> This church is also considered as being part of the African Independent Churches family as it combines Pentecostal elements with traditional African values.<sup>15</sup>

Free Pentecostal Missions Church of Chile (in Spanish Iglesia de Misiones Pentecostales Libres de Chile) founded in 1974 by bishop Victor Labbe Dias and officially registered as a church in 1977 became a WCC member in 1991. Today it has around 13600 members.<sup>16</sup>

In 1997, Christian Biblical Church (in Spanish Iglesia Cristiana Bíblica) joined WCC. It is a Pentecostal church founded in Argentina at the beginning of 20th Century by members of Italian Christian Assembly, a Pentecostal missionary organization from Chicago, USA, which sent missionaries to Italian communities in Argentina. It has around 30.000 members.<sup>17</sup>

A simple enumeration of Pentecostal members of WCC makes clear that they are rather small in size and not very representative for Pentecostalism as a global Christian confession. I met once a leader of a Pentecostal church from Chile who was interested in WCC. He told me that his church alone is bigger than all three Pentecostal churches from Chile which are WCC members taken together. According to this leader, the three Chilean Pentecostal churches members in WCC are far for being representative for Pentecostalism in this country. With one exception, Pentecostal member churches of WCC are from the global south and with two exception they are from Latin America. One of them (International Evangelical Church) is completely inactive in WCC. It could be added that the Latin American Pentecostal member churches of WCC represent the so-called “historic Pentecostalism” and are not in line with the new trends in Pentecostalism nowadays.

One fact needs in any case to be underlined: WCC has Pentecostal member churches and any discussion regarding WCC – Pentecostalism relationships, application for membership included, need to start from this reality.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/international-evangelical-church>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/association-the-church-of-god>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/evangelical-pentecostal-mission-of-angola>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/evangelical-pentecostal-mission-of-angola>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/free-pentecostal-missions-church-of-chile>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/member-churches/christian-biblical-church>

## Other ways of Dialogue between WCC and Pentecostalism

The 5<sup>th</sup> WCC Assembly (Nairobi, 1975) decided to initiate dialogs with the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Lausanne Committee. Between 1978-1983, WCC sub-programme Renewal and Congregational Life was in charge for encounters with different charismatic movements. The highpoint of this process was a consultation which took place in 1980 in Bossey.

In 1991, the 7<sup>th</sup> WCC Assembly (Canberra, 1991) proposed for the first time in WCC history a pneumatologic theme: „Come Holy spirit – Renew the Whole creation.” This was for some the sign that WCC` constituency really acknowledged the growth of Pentecostalism especially in the southern hemisphere. One of the concrete results of Canberra Assembly was that Faith and Order Commission was mandated to initiate more concrete contacts with Pentecostalism. Ten specific recommendations aimed to initiate dialogue and studies between WCC and Pentecostals were formulated.<sup>18</sup>

The famous document *Common Understanding and Vision of the Church*<sup>19</sup> which emerged from the process of discernment initiated in the middle of `90s by WCC general secretary of that time, Dr. Konrad Raiser (1993-2003), indicates three ways of relating with Pentecostalism: (1) initiation of small consultations between some Pentecostal leaders and WCC; (2) establishing of a Joint Consultative Group with the Pentecostals; (3) creation of Global Christian Forum.<sup>20</sup> Raiser managed to convince the leadership of WCC member churches that the ecumenical table needs to be enlarged in a more creative way. Everyone understood that this meant eventually opening WCC for more Pentecostal churches. As an internal WCC document from that time comments, this proved to be a quite uneasy task.<sup>21</sup> It seems that Raiser realized that if WCC keeps being reluctant vis`-a-vis Pentecostal churches, it will become less representative for global Christianity in comparison with the Roman Catholic-Church and the charismatic-Pentecostal and evangelical movements.

Canberra Assembly decided that an office for church and Ecumenical Relations be established. Its responsibilities included also organizing several consultations between Pentecostals and representatives of WCC member churches. Between 1994-1997, the following consultations took place:

- 14-19 November 1994, Lima, Peru;<sup>22</sup> The first meeting of this kind was intentionally organized in Latin America, the origin of most WCC Pentecostal member churches. Representatives

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<sup>18</sup> “*Spirit of Unity – Reconcile your People*,” in Michael Kinnamon (ed.), *Signs of the Spirit, Official Report Seventh Assembly*, (Geneva, WCC and Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1991), 107-108.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us/self-understanding-vision/cuv/towards-a-common-understanding-and-vision-of-the-wcc>

<sup>20</sup> Diane Kestler (ed.), *Together on the Way: Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches* (Geneva, Switzerland, WCC Publications, 1999), 168-170.

<sup>21</sup> *Pentecostals and the World Council of Churches*, p. 23 (WCC internal document), WCC file: CER/Pentecostals/ 2000-2007.

<sup>22</sup> *Consultation with Pentecostal Churches*; Lima 14-19 November 1994, WCC (Geneva, Switzerland: Office of Church and Ecumenical Relations, 1995), 45.



of these churches attended the meeting as witnesses of the role of WCC for Pentecostals. Majority of Pentecostal representatives were from Latin America.<sup>23</sup>

- 4-8 June 1996, San José, Costa Rica with participation of Pentecostals from USA. The main purpose of the meeting was to present WCC to Pentecostals, but also to debate issues like evangelisation and proselytism as well as prejudices from both sides. Short reports regarding experiences of historical churches with Pentecostals at local level were presented.<sup>24</sup>

- 14-17 November 1997, Bossey, Switzerland, with a global participation. The program included a visit to the Ecumenical Centre and an encounter with WCC general secretary Dr. Konrad Raiser. It was decided the creation of a JCG;

- 30 November-2 December 1995 Leeds, Anglia with participation of Afro-Caribbean and African Pentecostal leaders and representatives of African Instituted Churches, both active in Great Britain.<sup>25</sup>

The 8<sup>th</sup> WCC Assembly (Harare, 1998) officially approved the creation of a Joint Consultative Group (JCG) between WCC and Pentecostals and formulated guidelines for its work.<sup>26</sup> This JCG is formed by 50% representatives of WCC member churches and 50% representatives of Pentecostals. It is co-moderated by a Pentecostal moderator and a representative of WCC member churches.

JCG met between 2000-2006 as the following:

- Hautecombe, France, 19-23 June 2000. The meeting has an introductory role. WCC has been presented to Pentecostal representatives and the Pentecostal movement to representatives of WCC member churches;

- Quito Seminary, Ecuador, 2001. The theme of this meeting was Perceptions of one another. It was a good opportunity to know closer the realities of Latin-American Pentecostalism;

- Kwang Lim Methodist Centre, Seoul, Republic of Korea, 2002. The theme was: Unity of the Church presented both from Pentecostal and WCC perspective;

- Lee University, Cleveland, Tennessee, USA 2003. Participants tried to develop a dialogue on unity using as starting point Biblical references;

- Kempton Park Conference Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa, September 2004. The emphasis was on biblical studies. 1 Corinthians, chapters 11, 12 and 14 were analyzed and debated;

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<sup>23</sup> *Pentecostals and the World Council of Churches*, WCC internal document, WCC file, CER/Pentecostals/2000-2007, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> *Consultation with Pentecostal Churches in the Americas: San José, Costa Rica 4-8 June 1996*: (WCC, Geneva, Switzerland: Office of Church and Ecumenical Relations, 1996), 88.

<sup>25</sup> Roswith Gerloff & Hubert van Beek (eds.), *Report of the Proceedings of the Consultation between World Council of Churches (Office of Church and Ecumenical Relations at the General Secretariat) and African and African-Caribbean Church leaders in Britain at the New Testament Church of God, Harebils, Leeds, England, 30 November – 2 December 1995*, (Geneva, Switzerland, 1996), 70.

<sup>26</sup> Diane Kessler (ed.), *Together on the Way: Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, (Geneva, WCC, 1999), 167-168.

- *St. Mark Centre, Cairo, Egypt, June 2005*. The theme was the work of the Holy spirit in us and through us as human beings.<sup>27</sup>

After every meeting of this kind, a report was presented to WCC Executive Committee. A report of the JCG has been presented to WCC 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre.<sup>28</sup> This Assembly received the report with appreciations and decided that the work of JCG needs to continue. It also formulated a series of additional recommendations, including progressive involvement in WCC programmatic work of Pentecostals.<sup>29</sup>

JCG met between 2007-2012 as the following: <sup>30</sup>

- *Baar Focolar Centre, Switzerland, 2007*; with an introductory purpose. The venue facilitated an encounter with roman-catholic charismatic movement;

- *Sophia Orthodox Conference Centre, Helsinki, Finlanda, 2008*. The theme was „Oneness of the Church”;

- *Hong Kong, China, 2009*; The theme was: „Holiness of the Church”;

- *Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, 2010*; The theme was: Catholicity of the Church”;

- *Riga, Lethonia, 2011*; The theme was: Apostolicity of the Church. This meeting coincided with the meeting of the European Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Association;

- *Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, 2010*. The main task of this meeting was to finalize the report of the JCG for WCC Assembly in Busan.

The 10th WCC Assembly (Busan, 2013) accepted the report of JCG and mandated the continuation of its activity.<sup>31</sup>

### **Recent Perspectives Regarding Membership of Pentecostal Churches in WCC: Debate in the Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration, 2012-2013**

A recent debate about the relationship between the WCC and Pentecostal churches with particular attention to membership matters took place within the Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration (PCCC) in 2012 and 2013. PCCC was the right place for such a debate, since it is described by WCC Constitution and Rules as a saved space for discussion “matters of common interest” for WCC.<sup>32</sup> The debate regarding the question how

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<sup>27</sup> Sara Speicher Compiler, *From Harare to Porto Alegre: 1998-2006: An Illustrated Account of the Life of the World Council of Churches*, (Geneva, World Council of Churches, 2005), 24-25.

<sup>28</sup> *Report from the Joint Consultative Group between the WCC and Pentecostals, Policy Reference Committee*, Doc. 6.2, 9th Assembly, 14 to 23 February 2006, Porto Alegre, Brazil, WCC file CER/JCG 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>30</sup> WCC file, CER, JCG Meetings 2007-2012.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/report-of-the-programme-guidelines-committee> , 3.

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2013-busan/adopted-documents-statements/wcc-constitution-and-rules> , Rules IX, 6d).

Pentecostal churches shall be accepted in WCC was launched again in 2012 for two reasons: (1) a high number of application for membership in WCC coming from Pentecostal churches, even though many of them did not fulfil the criterium of size (at least 50.000 church members); (2) the speculation that after Busan Assembly some Pentecostal churches from Asia, especially from Korea might apply for membership in WCC.

The PCCC, 4-6 November 2012, Paralimni, Cyprus, had a discussion about the relationship between the WCC and Pentecostal churches with particular attention to membership matters. A report prepared by the Department of Church and Ecumenical Relations informed PCCC that (1) currently seven member churches describe themselves as Pentecostal; (2) the WCC includes members in its commissions from Pentecostal churches (although not necessarily from its member churches), which means that Pentecostalism is treated as a confession which is not part of WCC even if in fact WCC has Pentecostal churches; (3) recently WCC has developed some contacts with the World Pentecostal Fellowship.<sup>33</sup>

The report was followed by a vivid discussion. Members of PCCC shared experiences from their own countries and ecclesial contexts of contacts with Pentecostal churches and the Pentecostal movement. An Orthodox PCCC member presented in details and with the support of photos and other evidences the aggressive proselytism of some Pentecostal groups among members of his Church. Some other members shared more positive experiences with Pentecostals.

The final report of this PCCC meeting “affirms that the WCC is open to receive any application for membership in the fellowship of churches; recognizes that current rules addressing applications for membership, including theological criteria, provide adequate procedure for reception into membership; considers that, in any interaction with Pentecostal churches, the constitutional Basis of the Council must be emphasized, with particular attention to ecclesial self-understanding and doctrine; recognizes the need for the WCC to clarify with Pentecostal churches their understanding and practice of baptism, and their ecumenical commitment at a local level, particularly when their mission is perceived as proselytism; and invites to a session or sessions of its next meeting representatives from the Joint Consultative Group with Pentecostals, in order to continue this discussion and explore possibilities for further interaction with Pentecostal churches related to membership issues.”<sup>34</sup>

One year later, the PCCC meeting, 23-28 August 2013, Marburg, Germany continued the debate on this issue. A new report of the Department of Church and Ecumenical Relations has been presented. After a brief history of Pentecostalism, the report reaffirmed the hypothesis presented also in previous PCCC meeting that, given the flow of application for membership in WCC from Pentecostal churches and the rate of fulfilling WCC criteria for admission, *most probably in the next 15-20 years WCC will not admit more than 4-5*

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<sup>33</sup> PCCC Report, Paralimni, Cyprus, (WCC file, PCCC meeting/2012), 5

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 5.

*Pentecostal churches.*<sup>35</sup> Such a prognosis managed to calm down those who were afraid that WCC will be invaded by Pentecostal.

The same report also analyzed the admissibility of Pentecostal churches in WCC in case that the criteria for admission in WCC are strictly applied to potential applications coming from Pentecostal churches. The *first criterium* „to express agreement with the basis of the Council” which is: “The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit”<sup>36</sup> is fulfilled by most of the Pentecostal churches. Only Pentecostal churches which belong to the group of Jesus-Only-/Oneness Church, which are since 1945 grouped in United Pentecostal Church, International<sup>37</sup> are not trinitarian in doctrine. They also baptize only in the name of Jesus Christ and not of the Holy Trinity, which is against one of the theological criterium that an applicant church „baptizes in the name of the one God, „Father, Son and Holy Spirit” (WCC Rules 3,a,iii).

The *second criterium*: ecumenical engagement at local, national and regional (continental) level. Some Pentecostal churches meet this criterium, some have really a difficulty to be engaged ecumenically at local and national level, but would like to be members in regional or global ecumenical organizations. There are also ecumenical organizations, especially of national character (national council of churches) which refuse accepting Pentecostal churches as members.

The *third criterium*: an applicant church should „have at least fifty thousand members” (WCC Rules 3, b, iii) depends from church to church.

The PCCC noted “the growing presence and influence of the Pentecostal movement, the potential for applications for membership—particularly post-Busan—from Pentecostal churches, and underlined the need for careful consideration of the ecclesial and pastoral implications an influx of Pentecostal churches might present to WCC member churches.”<sup>38</sup>

Acting upon its decision in 2012 to invite “to a session or sessions of its next meeting representatives from the Joint Consultative Group with Pentecostals”, the PCCC welcomed two members of the JCG with Pentecostals, one representing WCC members of JCG and one representing Pentecostal churches. Their inputs engaged PCCC in a further discussion of the trends in the Pentecostal movement. PCCC heard of the “huge growth” of Pentecostal churches in size and numbers, as well as the diverse and constantly changing Pentecostal landscape that includes “(1) churches that self-identify as Pentecostal, (2) the phenomenon—predominately in the south—of the “Pentecostalization” of mainline churches, that is, the process experienced by some churches recognized as mainline churches that have assimilated practices of worship and leadership identified with Pentecostalism, and (3) the new (post

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<sup>35</sup> Daniel Buda, *Membership report, Meeting of Permanent Committee for Consensus and Collaboration, 3-7 November 2012, Agia Napa, Cyprus*, (WCC file: PCCC/Cyprus/2012).

<sup>36</sup> Vezi <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us/self-understanding-vision/basis>

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.upci.org/>

<sup>38</sup> *PCCC Report, Marburg, Germany*, (WCC file, PCCC meeting/2013), 5.

1980) Pentecostal churches (“Neo-Pentecostalism”) that for the most part derive from the influence of the “Prosperity Gospel.”

PCCC recognized “the need to support continuing efforts by the WCC to engage in serious dialogue with Pentecostal churches despite challenges posed by the diffuse and diverse ecclesial self-understanding, doctrinal estrangement between Pentecostal churches and the WCC, and disparity of representativity among dialogue participants. This engagement should be undertaken without expectations or design that such dialogue would lead necessarily to an interest in membership in the WCC.”<sup>39</sup>

In conclusion, PCCC reaffirmed in 2013 “its recommendations included in the PCCC Report from its meeting in Cyprus 2012 with respect to applications from Pentecostal churches.”<sup>40</sup>

### **Possible future perspectives**

Without trying to be a prophet, I will try to express here some thoughts regarding possible future perspectives regarding relationships between WCC and Pentecostalism.

Looking at the brief history of the relationships between WCC and Pentecostalism which was presented in this article, one can say that they developed constantly in the last decades. Therefore there are signs of hope that also in the future these trend will continue. Apart of the elements preseted so far, there are other tools which are aimed to bring WCC and Pentecostalism closer together. These are: (1) Global Christian Forum as a „safed space” for dialogue was created for those who are not part of WCC but would like to be increasingly involved in ecumenical discussions. Meeting organized by the Global Christian forum in Pasadena, California, USA; Hong Kong; Lusaka, Zambia; Warburg, Germany; Santiago, Chile; Limuru, Kenya, New Delhi, India etc. brought Pentecostals and WCC member churches closer together.<sup>41</sup> This role is atributed to Global Christian Forum also by Pentecostal participants. Cecil Roback Jr. Affirmed that the Forum found an efficient way to deal with the concerns of these „ecumenical outsiders;”<sup>42</sup> (2) Ecumenical Institute in Bossey constantly educated Pentecostal students. Ecumenical Theological Education established partnerships with several Pentecostal theological instituts. Academic theological cooperation between Pentecostal educational institutonas and institutions of other churches increased in many parts of the world; (3) WCC - Pentecostal World Fellowship relationships increased. WCC general secretary attended the 22nd assembly of this organization, Stockholm, 24-27 august 2010;<sup>43</sup> (4) Pentecostal churches are increasingly accepted in National Council of Churches, Regional Ecumenical Organizations and other ecumenical organizations.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>41</sup> Richard Howell (ed.), *Global Christian Forum: Transforming Ecumenism* (WCC, Geneva), 1-57.

<sup>42</sup> Cecil M. Robeck Jr., *Approaching Ecumenism...*, bibliographical note 2, 32.

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/general-secretary/speeches/greetings-to-the-22nd-pentecostal-world-conference>

In spite of all these signs of hope, there is no guarantee at all that in the future Pentecostal churches will be more ecumenical. Specialists in Global christianity affirm that the general trend within Pentecostalism is rather fundamentalization and not openness for dialogue and cooperation with other churches

After Busan Assembly no Pentecostal church from Korea or Asia applied for membership in WCC. Presently there is no application from any Pentecostal church which reached an advanced stage in order to be presented to WCC governing bodies. These facts are evidences that the fear of those who thought that WCC will be invaded by Pentecostal churches has no support in reality. Ecumenical realism is very important. Neither those who hoped in 1961 that many Pentecostal churches will join WCC nor those who were constantly afraid that WCC will be assaulted by applications for membership coming from Pentecostal churches based their assessments on evidences, but rather on unrealistic hopes and fears.

However, WCC has to continue the process of discernment what it would mean to continue opening itself to Pentecostalism which could eventually lead to an increase of the number of Pentecostal member churches. Such a scenario would raise two major questions: (1) How would be the Pentecostal churches perceived: as part of the Protestant family or rather as a separate tradition? In case that Pentecostals will form a separate tradition, the entire WCC structure will radically change. Nowadays one speaks about „Orthodox” and „non-Orthodox” WCC member churches. WCC would be very different in case one Pentecostal WCC member churches.

(2) The debates around the moral values of Christianity will most probably intensify in the future. Which position will adopt Pentecostals in this matter, in case the number of Pentecostal churches will increase in WCC? It is quite realistic to predict that they will join the side of Orthodox and other churches which defend the traditional values of Christianity. This would bring again a totally new dynamic within WCC.